

# Marden Annual Parish Meeting

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2024  
at 6.00pm in the Community Centre.

Present: Cllr David Bennett (Chair)

In Attendance:

Richard James (Clerk)

Mr Keith Price (AGE UK)

Chris Wathen & Jess Tidball (Marden Village Trust)

Mike Williams (Marden Recreation Ground)

10 x Members of the Public

## 1. Welcome by the Chair.

Cllr David Bennett welcomed the speakers and members of the public to the meeting.

## 2. Receive Apologies.

Apologies were received from Cllr's Paula Barrett & Michael Blake.

## 3. Approved the Minutes of the last Annual Meeting 16<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

The Minutes of the Annual Parish meeting held on the 16<sup>th</sup> May 2023 were adopted and signed as a true record.

## 4. To receive a talk from AGE UK.

The Chair welcomed Mr Keith Price of AGE UK Herefordshire & Worcestershire to the meeting. He then made a presentation about the services provided by AGE UK Herefordshire & Worcestershire.

AGE UK was formed in 2009 by the amalgamation of Age Concern and Help the Aged. It is there to help people over the age of 50 years, with things like.

- Helping individuals find the benefits they are intitled too.
- Filling in Benefit forms as some forms can take between 1½ to 3 hours to complete.
- Online training
- Digital support with things like online shopping, banking, booking doctors' appointments etc.
- Dementia Support group where you and your family can discuss needs, Age UK provides lunch for those attending the support group.
- Respite care for family members.
- Give advice on Energy saving devices and do Energy checks.

### Home Services.

They also provide other payable home services at £23 per hour.

- General cleaning.
- Laundry
- Shopping, be that doing it or taking the individual shopping.

Handyman services at £35 per hour, but do not work with gas or electric.

- General maintenance.
- Putting up shelves, key safes etc

- Changing light bulbs, moving furniture etc.
- Gardening.

Age UK has helped 15529 people, allowing them to stay in their homes.

Age UK relies on Volunteers, and they would welcome more. Age UK has already visited Marden Links as part of its outreach scheme. It will be holding another outreach session on the 12<sup>th</sup> June at the HUB, everyone is welcome.

## **5. To receive a report from the Chair of the Parish Council.**

Cllr David Bennett Chair of the Parish Council gave his report.

I will start this year's report on the subject at the top of most parishioners "to fix" list, the general infra- structure of the parish and in particular roads drains and flooding. It is clear, and recognised by all, that the roads and drainage system are in a very poor state and getting worse as the months and years pass. A combination of farming practices, excessive rainfall, lack of investment in repairs are not helped by the significant increase in heavy machinery within the parish. Often it appeared that Marden has been cut off completely from the rest of the world!

As the lasting solutions to many of these issues lie with Herefordshire Council it is most unfortunate that our new Ward Councillor has remained largely elusive, his support has been sorely missed regarding a number of key issues faced by the Parish, examples being planning, enforcement, general infrastructure, and flooding.

As a Parish Council we have tried to minimise the effects and improve the parish through our maintenance contract with the Lengthsman. The Parish Council again received a small drainage grant, and only enough to allow the clearance of drains and gutters once in the year. The current year grant from Herefordshire council, while larger than last year, clearly will only scratch the surface of the issues facing the Parish.

Bridge strikes continue, and when they happen can cause further road closures. Herefordshire Council's report into bridge strikes was finally received (after a 9-month delay) but only confirmed that there is limited action that can be taken. The Lengthsman's contract has been expanded to include keeping the white lines on the bridge clear as this was the only recommendation made.

### **Moving on to items where the Parish Council has made much more of a difference:**

A significant highlight of the last year has undoubtedly been the many well supported parish events such as the Coronation Tea, Parish Summer Fete, the 2nd Christmas Cracker, Race and Quiz nights. All have been well received with

many very positive comments. The Events (& Fundraising) Group work very hard to put these events on and should be congratulated.

As a special mention on behalf of the Parish Council, and all parishioners, I would like to thank Sally Postlethwaite, our footpath Officer, for her continued dedication to maintaining and improving the Public Right of Way network in Marden. Our extensive footpath network is a real credit to the parish and a major asset.

**The Marden Links Hub** and associated activities has been a significant success.

**Marden Links Parish Hub** began in October 2022 offering a free, volunteer led community café for parishioners to meet and socialise. We received a start-up grant from Herefordshire Council with the primary aim of developing a supported internet access point for those without it at home,

to ensure that no parishioner was digitally excluded, (the driver being the reduced level of information and support parishioners without home internet could access during Covid).

We use the Marden Links Parish Hub unit to meet in person. The rental being paid by the Parish Council, the utility bills are now paid from the generous donations made by the attendees. The hub continues to operate on 2 afternoons per week with an aspiration to offer more sessions as our volunteer base expands. The computer internet component remains an important function, but our experience is that the social aspect of the café is its most valued service.

A further service offered by other volunteers in our group, on an ad-hoc basis is, collecting prescription and shopping, taking to Hereford for appointments, assistance with home admin, D.I.Y. and gardening work etc. This is well utilised and an often-invisible service for which we, and the parishioners who benefit are immensely grateful.

The volunteer list is administered by an active and supportive WhatsApp group. New volunteers are very welcome.

**Marden Links** (01/05/23 – 30/04/24)

Number of regular café volunteers -12

Sessions 101 (Closed December 27th, 29th and Good Friday)

Ad hoc volunteers active (shopping, transport, prescriptions, DIY, PC repairs, help with paperwork etc) 5

Garden volunteers - 5

**The Repair Café** was again started with a grant received from Herefordshire Council and is one of 6 running currently within Herefordshire (South Herefordshire (Dinedor), Marden, Leominster, Ledbury, Golden Valley & Archenfield (Llangrove)). We are part of the international repair café organisation and have adopted their ethos, management processes and structure. The aim is to prevent as much broken or damaged items from ending up in landfill, using local knowledge and skill to repair, and most importantly passing on repair skills to others. We are currently hampered by a lack of space for the Repair Café and have big plans to grow, develop and streamline as we are able. The first opportunity will be the delivery of a storage unit to be sited in the community garden. This unit will allow the safe, secure storage of tools and equipment for both repairs and loan to parishioners.

**Repair Café** (June 2023 – to date)

10 volunteers (8 Core, 1 x qualified PAT tester, 2 others currently undertaking on-line training)

Sessions offered x 12 (1st Saturday in the Month)

Repair jobs booked 206 - Most through our online booking system.

Successful repairs 175 (85%)

**Community Garden** – This is slowly progressing and while little has been done in the last year other than clear the site of brambles and general rubbish parishioners will see some significant changes in the coming weeks and months as this project progresses.

**Other Uses for the Hub.** We use the hub for meetings of PC working groups and offer the hub rooms free of charge to other groups and organisation at other times and consider any request providing they are free to all, and open to access by any parishioner.

**Other uses**

Working groups of the PC (Finance, Hub, RC, Fund-raising, Environmental & Sustainability (now amalgamated with the Hub, Neighbourhood Development Plan, Parish Hall planning)

Polling station 2

Social prescribing x6  
Talk community area team Meetings x 2  
Dementia team x1  
Age UK x1

The Hub, Repair Café, and Community Garden demonstrate just how vibrant, supportive, and inclusive Marden is. We are frequently early adopters of social developments and have assisted and advised other groups to develop similar endeavours in their community. We are working hard at developing cross boundary links with our neighbouring parishes to further share resources, knowledge skills, and volunteers.

The Parish Council is grateful to have so many wonderful volunteers that help to ensure that all activities are run successfully and safely.

## **Planning**

This year has seen a significant reduction in planning applications for Parish Council comment (17 vs 27). Of the 17, 8 were supported and 5 with objections and 4 no comments. 2 of those objected to went to the Planning Committee with both applications being approved by Herefordshire Council.

As a Council we continue to try to ensure the planning process is upheld. The Parish Council has raised a number of issues with enforcement with mixed success. Unfortunately, the enforcement process is very slow and at times appears non-existent.

## **Finances**

The Parish Council finances remain in a healthy position and are able to meet known current and future requirements. It ended the financial year with a deficit £38k. This was mainly due to the payments made to the Architect for RIBA (Stage 4) associated with the New Parish Hall design and build tender. As has been the plan, the current year shortfall has been funded from ring-fenced reserves. The Parish Council currently still has over £74k in reserves, £59k of which has been earmarked for the continued development of the Parish Hall and village green. General reserves stand at a little over £11k.

The parish Council has moved from NatWest to Unity Bank. We have opened two current accounts (Parish Council Main Account & a Marden Links account) and a deposit / savings account for reserves, The deposit account is now taking advantage of the current interest rates available.

The Parish Council endeavours to be as transparent as possible with its communication to parishioners. Apart from the legal requirements of posting meeting agendas, draft, and approved minutes as well as the annual accounts.

(AGAR) councillors have agreed to publish a detailed expenditure against budget report on a quarterly basis.

In November last year the Parish Council produced and delivered a Budget Newsletter to all households. This provided an update on progress made against the latest plan along with proposals for the next year's budget and Precept. This allowed time for parishioners to make comments in general and specifically on the proposed £4K increase in general precept before finalisation and submission to Herefordshire Council at the end of January this year.

Looking to the future

There are two major additional activities, both of which will last a few years.

## **1. Neighbourhood Development Plan**

While the Parish Council & Neighbourhood Development Group reviewed and responded to a number of consultation papers released by Herefordshire Council in 2022, Herefordshire Council put on hold the Local plan while it reviewed the key objectives for 2021 to 2041 and thus little work was carried out by the NDP Working group last year.

The update / revised Local plan, Regulation 18 Consultation ran from late March to yesterday. For those who have read the very detailed and comprehensive consultation paper, there will be many differing opinions. There has been a major shift in how Marden has been seen. It has gone from being seen as one of the most sustainable rural parishes with anticipated housing growth to a parish with recognised issues of flooding and limited access to the major road network and thus a requirement for limited to no housing over the plan period.

Much thought and consultation with parishioners will be needed in order to update our current Neighbourhood Development Plan. The current plan should carry weight until late 2025 but we need to develop a strategy and plan in the coming months to update it so that a Parish referendum can be held in 2026.

## **2. Community Facilities – New Parish Hall**

A more detailed review of the Parish Hall project will be given under Agenda item 9 of this meeting.

In summary, this remains a key project for the Parish, it is important for the Academy, Pre-School, and the Marden Village Trust and therefore the Parish Council target is still to provide a new facility by September 2025

### **In conclusion**

I would like to thank councillors and other working group members who give their time voluntarily, the Clerk for ensuring the Council runs smoothly and lawfully and putting up with me! A special thank you to those parishioners who continue to volunteer to be part of the Parish support network, our footpath officer and her helpers, the Tree Warden and, finally, you, our parishioners, for your ongoing support, we have a busy year ahead.

## **6. To receive a report from the Marden Recreation Ground Trust.**

Mr Mike Williams presented the report for the Marden Recreation Ground Trust.

2023/24 was a quiet year for the Recreation Ground Trust.

The use of the football facilities was consciously reduced in the last year to minimise the potential for parking problems when the pitch and Community Centre were in use simultaneously. This decision proved to be successful. The pitch was hired out, predominantly on a Sunday afternoon only.

The facilities do occasionally fall victim to low level vandalism, and we have unfortunately had incidents of graffiti on the multi-use court surfacing. The dilapidated tennis hut which was due for demolition was destroyed by fire and we were lucky that no wider damage was suffered. The play equipment receives a formal inspection annually and Trustees undertake interim inspections. The equipment remains in generally good condition but will require some minor repairs in the near future.

The play equipment is well used, and we have the exciting opportunity of adding to the existing equipment when funds become available from the new housing development next to the School.

We anticipate this to be our priority project for the forthcoming year. Insurance cover for the facility is provided. A small operating profit of just over £200 was recorded for the year. The current balance at the bank is £14,160 with £140 of football pitch hire fees due.

**7. To receive a report from the Marden Village Trust.**

Mrs Jess Tidball presented the report for the Marden Village Trust.

Report on the Year 2023 for the Annual Marden Parish Meeting.

There were 7 meetings held in 2023 where matters of a CIO, cleaning, housekeeping, Centre bookings, deteriorating toilet matters and Marden Academy safeguarding policies with related issues were discussed and recorded. These minutes once approved at the subsequent meeting were then placed onto the Marden Parish Links website for public viewing. In spite of rising costs and bills the MVT accounts have held up well throughout the year with the MVT committed only to necessary spending.

An extraordinary meeting was held in November where the MVT presented the proposal: 'That the Trustees are authorised to give 12 months' notice, under the Cessor Agreement, to Herefordshire Council to terminate the Lease and Joint Use Agreement covering the Community Centre'. The action in the proposal was approved and will be instigated at the discretion of the MVT when they think the time is right. For example, when they are certain the new facility will be built, and the necessary leases and agreements are in place.

The AGM was held in November where all 6 previous trustees were re-elected with no other offers of new trustees nominated. Since that meeting one trustee has resigned leaving only 5 to continue into 2024. No meetings have been held so far in 2024 due to illness and holiday clashes.

**8. To receive a report from the Marden Consolidated Charities.**

In the absence of Mrs Jane Keating the Chair read out the report.

Marden Consolidated Charities is a very old charity established in the 17th century to provide grants and one-off help to parishioners in sudden or specific real financial need.

We did not make any grants during the year.

I attach our accounts for the year which have been independently examined by Mrs Eileen Lloyd to whom I am very grateful.

We had £2,474.92 in the bank on 30.11.2023. Our income for the year was £173.31.

The charity is administered by village trustees and the chairperson is Rev Paul Roberts. The other trustees are Mr John Ashcroft, Mrs Jean Price, Mrs Janet Hewlett, Mrs Jenny Thomas and Mrs Jane Keating.

Mrs Jane Keating has been the secretary to over 20 years but now live in Weobley so she will not be able to continue in this role. It does need a local person to take on this position. Our chair, Rev Paul Roberts is on sabbatical until June so I would propose to liaise with him on his return regarding my replacement. If anyone on the Parish Council is keen to take on this role, please let me know. I am happy to advise on what is involved. I was a Parish Councillor when I took on the position.

**9. Presentation about the New Marden Parish Hall.**

The Chair presented an update on the New Marden Parish Hall.

**Brief History**

While the desire to acquire a new Parish Hall (not shared and owned by the Parish) commenced almost as soon as the current facility was opened the latest project began in earnest in late 2015 when it became clear that the Parish Council would be gifted a parcel of land as part of the New House Farm development for the expressed purpose of providing a new Parish community building and village green.

Between 2015 and 2022 significant analysis and design work supported by parishioner consultation was undertaken. This enabled the Parish Council to establish a suitable design within a restricted funding scheme. Finally, a planning application was submitted. A Parish Poll was held throughout February 2022 on the proposed funding strategy, unfortunately the outcome meant a rethink was required.

(for those interested - further background, design and planning application documentation can be found on the Parish Council Website)

### **Where we are today**

- Over the last eighteen months a cross team group with representatives from the Academy, Pre-School, Marden Village Trust, and the Parish Council developed a strategy that would allow the Academy and Pre-School to grow and through the clawback clause in the current community centre lease agreement help fill the funding gap for the new facility.
- The planning application for the new Parish Hall was finally approved late last year with limited conditions.
- To support the project through to completion, a working group of the Parish Council was set up which includes representatives of the Parrish Council and Marden Village Trust.
- The approval of the planning application allowed the Parish Council Architect to proceed with the next stage of the project, the design and tender (RIBA stage 4).
- This involved the preparation of tender documentation, in line with the planning approval, a number of the drawings associated with this are displayed at the back of the hall.
- The tender document was posted on the Government Contract Finder website in late March with the process running through until midday on the 10th of June 2024. As of today, we have a wide range of contractors, local and further afield, who have expressed an interest.
- The outcome of the tender process will establish both the final design and fix the project cost.
  
- Alongside this work, representatives of the Parish Council and Marden Village Trust have been working with a solicitor to develop a long tern operating lease for the charity to run the new facility once complete.
- Our architect (who will also project manage the build) has developed a drainage design that Citizen Housing has agreed to incorporate in their overall site design, saving the Parish many thousands of pounds.

### **Future Plans**

- Following the conclusion of the tender period on the 10th June a quantifying period will be undertaken, tender evaluation with a contractor announced around the end of June.
- This quantifying period will allow time to select the appropriate contractor, negotiate any design changes within our target budget and finalise the funding plan.
- The Architect has also been working with Citizen Housing to ensure the transfer of land takes place at the earlies opportunity. This might involve allowing Citizen Housing the use of what would become the village green area as the onsite compound. In exchange they would landscape the village green upon completion.

- Citizen Housing are currently preparing construction details to be submitted to the local authority to discharge the conditions attached to their planning approval.

### **Our Target**

Our target is to complete the project prior to September 2025 in order to allow the Academy to take over the current facilities in time for the September 2025 term. It is hoped that the completion will allow the Marden Village Trust activities to move to its new home without interruption.

### **10. Open Session for the Parishioners.**

The chair opened the meeting to the parishioners for questions.

Q1. Why are the tractors and trailers going through the village leaving mud or its load on the roads.

A1. The Parish Council has been trying very hard to get this issue sorted.

Q2. The bridge has been hit and damaged again, can large vehicles be stopped from using it.

A2. This was not possible as this was a highway which was deemed fit for large vehicles.

Q3. Sat Nav's are bring large vehicles into the village, because they are using the cheaper car sat nav rather than the HGV Sat Nav's. Can anything be done.

A3. Not really as many of the large vehicles had foreign drivers who did not know the area.

Q4. When is the Marden Village Trust going to give notice, it is going to relinquish the community hall to the Herefordshire Council.

A4. When the time is right, and what was reported in their earlier report.

Q5. When will the Marden Village Trust get its money from relinquishing the community hall.

A5. It will receive payment 1 year to the day after giving written notice to relinquish.

Q6. Why do the Marden Village Trust hold the majority of its meeting via zoom.

A6. It is easiest way to get the Trustees together to discussion issues. The AGM is always held in person.

Q7. Why are the Repair Café accounts not on the website.

A7. No, they are not on the website, but if any resident asks for a copy they are available.

Q8. Why is the repair café not self-funding.

A8. It is, the monthly sessions of the repair café are self-funding with donations from satisfied customers exceeding operational costs. The initial setup costs were funded by a grant from Herefordshire Council Repair Café fund supplemented by a budgeted and approved amount by the Parish Council.

Q9. The repair café received a grant of £2102.68 from Herefordshire Council so why have they spent £2106.05 which is an overspend.

A9. The slight overspend of £3.37 was approved by the parish Council and was funded from the agreed budget.

Q10. A resident complained that he did not want his council tax supporting a repair café.

A10. The Chair said that the majority of the residents welcome the repair café, the HUB, the community garden and other community activities, all the sorts of things which brought communities together. The parish council would continue to use small amount of funds to support these community activities.



At this point a resident got up and addressed the meeting stating the Parish Council was doing a fantastic job within the community, and the one lone voice should not be listened too.

Q11. Why has the Parish Council spent so much money on an architect and associated professional services getting the new Parish Hall to this stage and what was the cost of RIBI stage 5,6,7, etc.

A11. The Chair said that the total project cost was outlined during to February 2022 poll, however the best current estimate was that the total project cost would be around 20% more (both build and therefore fees). Once tenders have been received and opened the true project cost will be known.

Q12. Can the building of the new Parish Hall start before the housing development.

A12. No, as the building developer has to put the access roadway in first.

There were no more questions and the Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting and closed the meeting at 7.20pm.

Signed  
Cllr David Bennett  
Chair of the Parish Council