



Marden Parish Council

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting at 7.30 pm on 17th March 2026 at
Marden Community Centre Hall.

Minutes

Present:

Cllr David Bennett (Chair), Cllr Chris Morgan, Cllr Rod Lees, Cllr Lesley Hayward, Cllr Richard Paske and Cllr Mike Blake.

In Attendance:

Mr Richard James (Clerk)
2 x Members of the Public.
Ward Member – Cllr Peter Hamblin.
PCSO Adam Westlake – West Mercia Police.

1. To receive Apologies.

To Note – There were apologies from Cllr Kate Ryan, Cllr Paula Barrett.

2. To receive declarations of interest and written requests for dispensations.

To Note – There were no declarations of interest and written requests for dispensation.

3. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on the 17.02.26.

Resolution – The draft minutes of the 17.02.26 were adopted and duly signed by the Chair.

4. Open Session.

(West Mercia Police)

PCSO addressed the meeting and reported the following incidents within the Parish over the last quarter.

January.

- Person hunt after a person had been found wandering on the train tracks.
- Seizure of an untaxed vehicle.
- Fallen tree in Ash Grove.

February.

- Motorbikes stolen in Wallsend.

March.

- Anti-Social Behavioural.
- Two people arrested for fighting.
- Several vehicles' tickets for illegal parking.
- The poaching task force has been active locally.

PCSO encourages residents to sign up to the “Neighbourhood Matters”.

Questions from Councillors.

Q1. The Chair said that the Parish Council used to get a monthly police report, is it possible for this to still obtain this.

A1. This had to be stopped as it was too time consuming and now to have to do it for 22 parishes this would be nit best use of time.

Q2. Is it possible for the Police to attend more Parish Council meetings.

A2. The PCSO said that their hours have all been cut making more than one visit per year difficult unless there is a major problem within the area.

Q3. Is there anything which can be done about the illegal and bad parking around the school at drop off and pick up times.

A3. The Police have attended a few times and have cautioned and ticketed some residents.

The Chair thanked PCSO Adam Westlake for attending the meeting with an update.

PCSO A Westlake left the meeting at 7.50pm.

To Note – *The West Mercia Police report was noted by the Council*

(Ward Member)

The Ward Member presented his report, which can be found on the Parish Council Website. Highlighting the following.

- *The Herefordshire Council have managed to set a balanced budget for 2026/27 following the reduction in Government funding.*
- *The Herefordshire Council has managed to find more funding for potholes and resurfacing works.*
- *All residents of Herefordshire should be encouraged to report potholes on the Herefordshire Councils website.*

Comments from Councillors.

C1. Why have the Herefordshire Council repaired potholes but have not addressed the route cause which 9 times out of 10 is flooding.

C2. Why do they only patch up some potholes, and leave nearby one unrepaired, this cannot be financially prudent.

C3. The whole stretch of road from Sutton St Nicholas to Small Ashes needs completely resurfacing.

C4. Why are most of the pothole repairs so poorly done, it's like the tarmac is just thrown in the hole and stamped down. Professional repairs where the edges are sealed as got to be more cost effective in the long run.

C5. It would be nice to know if there was a priority list of resurfacing works and where was Marden in this list.

To Note – *The Ward Member noted the comments made by the Council and the Council noted the Ward Members report which will be published on the Parish Council website.*

(Members of public)

Q1. A Resident asked why parts of the hedge had there been cut out along the new development site.

A1. This was always going to be the case; the removal of the hedge is for pedestrian entrances and exits.

Q2. How much money is the Parish Council short of, to complete the build of the New Parish Hall and has this amount been secured by resident loans.

A2. The residents have been supportive in helping with short term loans for the New Parish Hall and we have now secured the amount to finish the building.

To Note – *The Council noted the questions.*

5. Finance Matters.

5.1 – Account Summary – February 26

Resolution – *The Council approved the Account Summary.*

5.2 – Bank Accounts – 28.02.26.

5.2a – Unity Main – February 26- £12,407.04

5.2b – Unity Saver – February 26- £288,059.20

To Note – *The Council noted the bank statements*

5.3 – HUB Accounts – February 26

Resolution – *The Council approved the HUB Accounts.*

5.4 – VAT Reclaim – February 26- £8,747.18

To Note – *The Council noted the VAT reclaim.*

5.5 – Appoint Internal Auditor

- Parish & Town Auditing Service – Mr Paul Russell.

The Clerk said that the Parish Council must appoint an internal auditor for the AGAR. The Chair explained that Mr Paul Russell had been used previously and was very good.

The Chair proposed the appointment of “Parish & Town Auditing Service” and this was seconded by Cllr L Hayward the motion was carried.

Resolution – *The Council approved the appointment of “Parish & Town Auditing Service”.*

5.6 - Approve the Asset Register.

The Clerk presented the Asset Register and explained that there had been not purchases over £100 so there is no change in the asset register.

Resolution – *The Council approved the Asset Register.*

5.7 - Approve HUB Risk Register.

The Chair explained that this item should be withdrawn as Marden Links HUB had not had a chance to review this register.

To Note – *This was noted by the Council, and the Clerk was asked to put the item on a future agenda, once the Marden Links have had time to review the document.*

5.8 – End of Year Account review.

The Chair said that the Finance and administration Working Group needs to have a meeting to finalise the end of year accounts.

To Note – This was noted by the Council, and the Clerk was asked to send out several dates for the meeting.

6. Payments.

	Payments	Net	Vat	Total
6.1	Clerks Salary – March 26	As per Contract		
6.2	S J Roberts – Invoice 5	80,028.37	16,005.67	96,034.04
6.3	Signworx - 10199	252.00	0.00	252.00
6.4	Signworx - 10313	252.00	0.00	252.00
6.5	Signworx - 10316	94.00	0.00	94.00
6.6	Signworx- 10317	146.00	29.20	175.20
6.7	C A Skyrme- Water	54.93	0.00	54.93
6.8	eUKhost- Marden Village Hall	9.99	2.00	11.99
6.9	S Lewis- HUB Electric	125.12	0.00	125.12
6.10	A Sasso- Quiz Night	91.57	13.31	104.88

Resolution – Council agreed to pay all the invoices.

7. Payment made under emergency policy and regular payments.

		Payment	Net	Vat	Total
7.1	D/D	BT – Broadband & Phone - Feb 26	47.41	9.48	56.89
7.2	S/O	HUB Rent - Feb 26	450.00	0.00	450.00
7.3	S/O	Community Garden- Rent - Feb 26	15.00	0.00	15.00
7.4	DD	Unity Trust- Service Charge - Feb 26	6.00	0.00	6.00
7.5	BACS	Defib Store - New Defib	735.00	147.00	882.00

To Note – The Council noted the payments made under emergency policy were Approved and the Direct Debit and Standing Order.

8. Planning.

	Application No	Address	Permission sought
8.1	P260435/L	Tudor Barn Marden Herefordshire HR1 3HA	Repairs to address fire damage to roof, walls and ceilings.

Resolution – The Marden Parish Council SUPPORTS this application.

CLlr L hayward left the room for this application.

	Application No	Address	Permission sought
8.2	P260445/FH	3 Hawkersland Cottages Marden Herefordshire HR1 3EP	2 storey side extension

Resolution – The Marden Parish Council SUPPORTS this application.

Cllr L Hayward returned to the room.

	<i>Application No</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Permission sought</i>
8.3	260109	Land to the West of Ashdown House Marden Herefordshire	Variation of condition 2 of planning permission 201300 (Proposed erection of 5 no. dwellings and associated works (AMENDED PLANS and ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS))- alternative proposal drawings for plot 5 to replace the approved drawings

Resolution – *The Marden Parish Council Objects to this application on the following grounds.*

- *Real concerns that the summer house overlooks several properties as it is located in a raised location.*
- *The Foul Water Drainage.*
- *The removal of well-established hedgerow.*
- *The building materials are not in keeping with nearby property.*

8.4- Enforcement.

- a) Farmer John's Signage.
- b) Small Ashes. Both a planning and footpath issue.

The Ward Member spoke on these items, say that he had raise issues about both these enforcement concerns.

9. New Parish Hall.

9.1- Update.

The Chair gave the following report.

The weather has finally relented a little and construction work has started at a pace.

Over the last four weeks the drainage piping has been installed, the external wall cladding and internal blockwork has largely been completed. The target for the next month is to complete the blockwork, install doors and windows along with 1st fix M&E.

While about 3 weeks behind schedule, the target remains to be complete for handover in early July. The project cost remains at £976,460 with a spend to date as of 28th February of £452,695 (46%).

The Design and Build contract remain at £746,425 with a spend of £257,969 (35%). Retention at 5% of spend is now £13,577.

Areas of cost reduction are still being calculated and agreed by our QS and SJR. Examples being Tarmac Surface £22.2K, service connection to site £10k, lower sub-structure costs £5k and reduced sub-base thickness £2k. These potential savings will be offset by an improved kitchen design £7.4k, additional solar panel costs £8.8k and an entrance canopy £15k.

We will now require interim funding from April through to October 2026, at which time we will receive monies from the management lease purchase.

The Parish Hall Transition group met on 10th March. Some of the topics covered were:

1. Again, top of the list was the need to finalise the management lease at the earliest opportunity. The Parish Council has assigned a solicitor based in Leominster.

2. Suggested colour schemes for walls, floors, doors, chairs etc. were agreed.
3. Both the MVT Trustees and the Marden Links Hub will develop detailed inventory lists. These will be analysed to confirm items that are appropriate to use in the New Hall and the gaps that need to be filled and funded. Potential funders are being identified and grant submissions made.
4. Due to the lead time for furniture requirements a tender list has been made which will be sent to a number of suppliers.
5. There has been a good response to the questionnaire distributed with N&V with many valuable suggestions and support made. There is still time if you have not submitted yours yet.

The March Site meeting with SJR took place on 12th. The main focus being on current progress and the updated work schedule going forward, agreeing the internal wall and floor coverings and reviewing potential contract savings. The external lighting (LUX) review remains outstanding.

To Note – The Council noted this report.

9.2- Newsletter No 13



Project Progress and Financials

- **Groundwork and Construction:** The weather has been kinder over the last few weeks, allowing the completion of the slab & drainage piping, internal blockwork and external walls are well under way. The overall project remains about 3 weeks behind schedule.
- **Council Approvals:** The planning application for the temporary entrance (required while the main site construction continues) has completed its consultation period and now awaits a decision from Herefordshire Council. A further planning application, not submitted yet, is being developed for minor changes to the original approved application covering the site entrance and outside lighting.

- **Payments:** The latest (4th) payment was made to SJR bringing the total paid under the design and build contract to £257,969, 36% complete (£271,546 less retention of £13,577). All payments quoted exclude VAT, which the Parish Council claims back on a monthly basis.
- **Project Meetings:** A transition group meeting was held on 10th March with discussion around key internal design decisions required by the contractor, mainly associated with wall and floor coverings throughout. Additionally, the group continued developing a list of potential furniture and equipment requirements. Final requirements will be determined once an inventory of the current Community Centre and the Marden links Hub have been completed. Potential grant applications will be completed to help fund additional requirements.
The latest site meeting took place on the 12th March. Good progress is being made and while still behind schedule the contractor remains confident that the early July handover target will still be met.
- **Online Systems:** A dedicated website is near completion, and a Facebook page will be developed when the Parish Hall build is further advanced and pictures can be shared. The online booking and invoicing system can be viewed on the Marden-Links website now but will also be available on the Parish Hall website once complete. Initial training of trustees has now been completed.

Current Project Milestones

Task	Completed By
Foundations incl. holding bolt for frame	19 Nov – complete
Steel frame erected	19 Dec- complete
Christmas Break	
Install roof cladding	16 Jan- complete
Install wall cladding and blockwork	20 Mar – in progress
Fix windows and doors	21 April – on order
1st fix mechanical and electrical	21 April – in progress
Drylining and plaster to walls	28 April
Install suspended ceiling grid	06 May
Hard Landscaping	14 May
2 nd fix mechanical and electrical	20 May
Fit out toilets and kitchen	11 June
Decoration	18 June
Floor Finishes	25 June
Fixtures and fittings	29 June
Soft Landscaping	02 July
Handover	03 July

Next Steps and Funding.

- **Parishioner loans:** There is a short-term gap in funding while the MVT/MPT await the clawback funds from Herefordshire Council. These funds will be received in mid-September. To bridge this gap the Parish Council is progressing parishioner loans.

- **Car Park Materials:** The Parish Council has requested materials from Tarmac for the car park top dressing, potentially reducing costs by up to £22,135. The initial response has been positive, and it is hoped that final decision will be made in the near future.
- **Additional Funding:** National Lottery grant applications have been made by the Parish Council. The application to cover an entrance canopy has been rejected and we await a decision on the second application to help fund external solar lighting. The MVT will be looking for other grant funding as appropriate.
- **Fundraising to date:** Since 2016, the generosity of parishioners through direct gift or donation at Parish Council events has raised over £12,000. This has enabled the project to include items that might otherwise have had to wait. While it is impossible to be specific with regard to what has been acquired with these funds it is certain that without them the enhanced kitchen design and additional solar panels would not have been possible. Many thanks to all those who have contributed.
- **Legal Review:** The MPT solicitor is working on a draft management lease for review and agreement by both the Marden Parish Trust and Parish Council. The Parish Council has now engaged a solicitor, and it is anticipated that this lease arrangement will be finalised by the end of March.
- **Transition Planning:** Ongoing meetings aim to ensure a seamless transition and opening of the new facility, there is much to discuss and plan.

Budget Status
Summary of costs to date. (net of VAT)

PROJECT COSTS	2025/26 Budget	Revised Budget	Actual Cost to date
RIBA stages 1 to 4 - architect fees design	116914	116914	116914
RIBA stages 5 to 7 – architect fees project management	35906	35950	35950
Design & Build Contract – S J Roberts	750000	746425	257969
Land survey fee	4870	5270	5270
Solicitors fee for land transfer and licence for S J Roberts to occupy prior to main site completion	2000	4484	4483
Negotiation with Citizen – architect fees	3130	9388	9388
Retender cost – architect fees		12100	12100
Temporary entrance required until main site finish – drawings and two planning applications		16551	16551
Citizen Housing contribution		-5930	-5930
Contingency	63640	35308	
TOTAL	976460	976460	452695

Contingency Rundown		
Approved budget contingency		63640
- Additional land survey cost prior to tender	-400	
- Re-tender costs	-12100	
- Improved final tender value	3575	
- Minor increase in RIBA stage 5 to 7 fees	-44	
- Increased solicitor fees for licence to use	-2484	
- Additional fees for Citizen liaison	-6258	

- Temporary entrance fees and 2 x planning applications (first application rejected)	-16551	
- Citizen contribution to temporary entrance	5930	
Total rundown to date		-28332
Contingency Remaining		35308

Additional notes

1. Retention on design and build contract (5%) to date £13577
2. Actual costs are those incurred to the 28th February 2026
3. The above excludes solicitor costs associated with the development of the operational (management) lease with the Marden Parish Trust.





To Note – *The Council noted the latest newsletter which can be found on the Parish Council website.*

10. Working Group Reports.

10.1 - Marden Links.

The Chair said due to the apologies from Cllr K Ryan there is only a short update on the Marden Links.

a) Hub activity update

The HUB continues with its core locals enjoying its weekly sessions.

b) Repair Café Update

The Repair Café has become a very busy and well used community asset and goes from strength to strength.

c) Community Garden

The Community Garden is going to holding a working party day on the

To Note – *These reports were noted by the Council.*

10.2 – Neighbourhood Development Plan update.

This continues to be on hold, until the draft Core Strategy has been received from the Herefordshire Council.

To Note – *This was noted by the Council.*

10.3 – Finance & Administration Working Group.

There had been no meeting, but one was required before the end of the financial year.

Resolution – *Council agreed for the Clerk to send around several dates for the working group to meet to discuss the end of year accounts.*

10.4 – Events Group.

There is going to be a tabletop sale to help raise funds for the new Parish Hall on the 9th May between 10 at 12.

To Note – *This was noted by the Council.*

10.5- Transport Working group

The meeting had to be cancelled as it was not possible to get the whole group together.

To Note – *This was noted by the Council.*

11. Community.

11.1 - HGV Signage – update

Both the Clerk and the Ward member have been chasing up this matter and have received no updates.

To Note – *This was noted by the Council.*

11.2 - Dog Mess

Cllr P Barrett had asked for this item to be discussed as the dog fouling in the Parish is getting worse. Council said this has been an ongoing issue for many years, irresponsible dog owners is the problem.

The last time this came to a head, the Council purchased Pink Spray paint and labelled all the General waste bins that dog mess can be deposited in them.

Resolution – *Council agreed for the Clerk to purchase Pink Spray.*

11.3 - Police Charter

The Clerk reported that it was time for fill in the quarterly Police Charter to list the policing priorities within the Parish.

- 1) Speeding.
- 2) Anti-Social Driving.
- 3) Anti-social behaviour.

Resolution – *Council agreed these priorities.*

11.4 - Gift Vouchers.

The Chair asked if the Gift Vouchers had been purchased yet, which Council had previously agreed, the Clerk reported that sadly not as when they called the establishment the member of staff was unsure on whether they were still doing them.

Resolution – *Council agreed for these vouchers to be purchased ASAP and if the suggested place no longer did them, to look at similar places.*

11.5 - S & A meeting.

The Chair report following a meeting with S & A and the odd complaint about MR12 bridleway.

The Hedge will be maintained on both sides of the entrance which belongs to them, but the middle hedgerow is owned by the Herefordshire Council.

S & A said they are going to hold an open day for the Councillor's where they can see all the progress which had been made and alleviate any concerns Councillor's or the public may have had. This will be at 6pm before the next Parish Council meeting on the 21.04.26.

S & A were looking to have additional seasonal staff accommodation consisting on around

20 new homes across both of their sites. As in the height of the season, they employ around 1000 temporary staff.

To Note – This was noted by the Council.

12. Action Log.

Council went through the action log line by line and one or two alterations were made.

To Note – The Council noted the few alterations.

13. Parish Summit – Update.

The chair gave the following summit report.

1. Parish Charter.

Briefing given by Simon Hairsnape, Parish Councillor leading this work along with others. It was confirmed that the Parish Charter Reference Group was set up and operational. Parish Councils still had an opportunity to nominate members onto the reference group if they wished. Council to consider whether it wants to nominate a member onto this group. At the meeting we stated that we welcomed the Charter and Reference Group, however we felt that while the Parish Charter was full of nice words and intentions, it needed something about funding for a Parish Council Liaison Officer/Function to enable Parish Council's to interface with Herefordshire Council Officers effectively. We suggested that the Parish Councils could help fund this. Jonathan Leicester Leader of Herefordshire Council suggested we should have direct contact with Senior Officers in the Council and not need a Liaison Function. We asked if we could have a 'Directory of Senior Officers and Contact Details' to support these proposals. Whilst he said yes, we believe we will need to follow this up as we felt this was placation rather than commitment.

2. Devolution and Spatial Development Strategy – Local Government Reform.

The Chief Executive of Herefordshire Council, Paul Walker, gave an overview of the work on going in relation to the above. Herefordshire Council have been invited to comment on the Gloucestershire and Worcestershire proposals for local government reform within both counties by the 26th March 2026. Worcestershire had put forward 2 options for local reconfiguration, being the maintenance of a single Unitary Authority or the formation of 2 geographic Unitary Authorities, covering North and South Worcestershire. Gloucestershire had similar proposals to retain a Single Unitary Authority or to move to either a 2 or 3 geographic Unitary model ie North, South and Gloucester. Herefordshire Council because of their financial 'stability' do not need to formally be involved in Local Government restructuring, however they are required to be part of a Foundation Strategic Authority. A Foundation Strategic Authority would cover populations of not less than 1.5 million people and those Authorities within the Foundation Strategic Authority would be expected to share economic, transport, infrastructure, skills and employment, regeneration, environmental, wellbeing, public services reform, public safety and housing opportunities. Local Authorities in a Foundation Strategic Authority need to have contiguous boundaries. A Foundation Strategic Authority is seen as a stepping stone to a Mayoral Authority, as the government wants local authorities to work within Mayoral Authorities. Herefordshire Council have been asked to consider joining a Foundation Strategic Authority with Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Warwickshire and/or Shropshire. Herefordshire Council could join with all or any of these, but they arrangement needs to cover a minimum population of 1.5 million people. Herefordshire Council has to submit an expression of interest by the 20th of March 2026 Herefordshire Council needs to contribute to a Spatial Development Strategy, which requires Foundation Strategic Authority's to have an overall 20-year plan for housing, infrastructure, economic growth, environment and climate improvements across their local authorities. The Development of the Strategic Development Strategy sits with the Mayoral

Authorities to lead, while the local Unitary Authorities it covers are responsible for the development of local plans. Herefordshire Council needs to comment on the proposals for the Development of Spatial Development Strategies by the 26th of March 2026.

3. Child Friendly Hereford.

The Director for Children's Services spoke to tell us that Herefordshire Children's Services had moved out of special measures as they are now rated as good.

4. Budget.

Councils are now receiving three-year allocations rather than the previous one-year allocation from Central Government. The Government's planning for funding Local Authorities is based on Local Authorities being able to increase local council tax by up to 5% per year. Central Government has reviewed how they allocate funding to local authorities as part of a fairer funding review. Sadly, through this review Herefordshire Council has lost a significant amount of funding. Herefordshire Council have also lost local support funding and adding local cost pressures, Herefordshire Council start 2026/27 facing a circa £20 million revenue gap. Herefordshire Council say they have a plan for how they will bridge this gap! 5 Public Realm Provider Update.

Balfour Beatty's contract ends on the 31st of May 2026. From the 1st of June 2026:

- a) Herefordshire Council will take on responsibility for Roads and Highway Drainage, Green Spaces and Verges, Street Lighting and Cleansing and Winter Services and Rights of Way
 - b) M Group Highways will be appointed as the new public realm contractor and will have a requirement to TUPE the Balfour Beatty's staff not transferring to Herefordshire Council to support them in their direct service provision.
 - c) The majority of Balfour Beatty's staff that will transfer to Herefordshire Council will be the senior staff such as Locality Stewards, Drainage and Highways Engineers etc.
5. Herefordshire Council will also support the work of **M Group** through various public realm contract frameworks they have developed for commissioning work through third-party contractors such as Tarmac etc
 6. They will also be able to use national/regional framework contracts for works that are also in place. Herefordshire Council suggested there was a lot of work they would be undertaking between now and implementation of the new contract to ensure that Parish Councils understood how they should work within the new arrangements a establish effective relationships with the likes of their Locality Steward, etc. We watch with bated breath.

7. Grants.

Herefordshire Council confirmed that the Lengthsman and PROW scheme would continue to run in 2026/27. The scheme would provide up to £25,000 in grants plus matched funding. Herefordshire Council also confirmed that the Drainage Grant would be continuing in 2026/27 and would provide for smaller schemes, up to £4,000 and to be part of the £25,000 funding, to be managed by Parish Council's and bigger schemes beyond that by themselves. We need to look at this as we have previously obtained supportive funding for our Lengthsman services and been able to undertake a number of improvements on our PROW's and limited improvements on our drainage. Herefordshire Council highlighted that the deadline for submissions for funding is by the 3rd of May with applications approved by the 12th of June 2026, such that all works will be completed by the 31st of March and invoices to Herefordshire Council by the 7th of April 2027. Herefordshire Council recognise that this is an early date for bids and approval of funding, but they have adopted this in recognition of recent years funding being significantly delayed in implementation because of the poor winter/early spring weather we have experienced in recent years. Page 3 of 3 Herefordshire

Council confirmed that any works included in the 2025/26 grants that was not completed in 2025/26 would need to be resubmitted for funding in 2026/27 and would form part of 2026/27 allocation.

To Note – This report was noted by the Council.

14. English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill.

HALC sent through a paper to put pressure on the Government about reducing the Parish Council's powers especially the power to comment on local planning applications.

Resolution – Council agreed for the Clerk to email MP's and Members of the House of Lords.

15. Herefordshire Local Nature Recovery.

The Chair had written the following report on the Local Nature Recovery.

Response to the Herefordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) Consultation

Marden Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft **Herefordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy**. As a large rural parish with an active agricultural landscape, valued village green spaces, watercourses, hedgerows, orchards and areas of semi-natural habitat, the Parish Council recognises both the importance of nature recovery and the practical realities of land management in a working countryside.

General Support

The Parish Council supports the overall aims of the LNRS to protect, enhance and reconnect habitats across Herefordshire. We particularly welcome the emphasis on:

- A **strategic, county-wide approach** to nature recovery.
- The use of **evidence-based mapping** to identify opportunities.
- The clear statement that proposals are **voluntary rather than mandatory**, which is essential for maintaining trust with landowners and farmers.

Local Context and Rural Considerations

Marden is a predominantly rural parish where farming (large and small scale), small holdings and private land ownership shape the landscape. Any nature recovery measures must therefore:

- Be compatible with **viable agricultural businesses**.
- Recognise the cumulative pressures already faced by rural communities, including planning, transport and infrastructure demands.
- Avoid unintended consequences that could disadvantage smaller landowners or tenants.

The Parish Council considers it essential that the LNRS continues to be presented as an enabling framework rather than a prescriptive tool, particularly in relation to future planning or funding decisions.

Hedgerows, Field Margins and Orchards

The Parish Council strongly supports the protection and enhancement of:

- **Hedgerows**, which are a defining feature of the local landscape and vital wildlife corridors.
- **Traditional orchards**, which are characteristic of Herefordshire and of particular relevance in and around Marden.
- **Field margins and buffer strips**, where these can be introduced in ways that are practical and locally appropriate.

We encourage the Strategy to explicitly recognise the biodiversity value of well-managed farmland features, not only designated sites.

Watercourses and Flood Management

Local watercourses and drainage ditches play an important role in both biodiversity and flood management. The Parish Council supports measures that:

- Improve **water quality** and habitat connectivity.
- Contribute to **natural flood management**, where this does not increase flood risk to homes, farmland or infrastructure downstream.

We would welcome clearer guidance on how nature recovery proposals interact with existing flood risk responsibilities and land drainage arrangements.

Community Engagement and Parish-Level Action

The Parish Council welcomes the recognition of community involvement within the LNRS. We suggest that:

- Parish councils be identified as **key local partners** in implementation and communication.
- Practical guidance be developed to help parishes identify **small-scale, deliverable projects** (e.g. village green management, churchyards, roadside verges);
- Support be provided to avoid placing additional administrative burdens on parish councils.

Mapping and Local Knowledge

While the interactive mapping is a valuable tool, the Parish Council emphasises the importance of:

- Incorporating **local knowledge** to refine mapped opportunities.
- Allowing ongoing updates where parish councils or land managers identify inaccuracies or constraints.

Funding, Incentives and Long-Term Support

Successful delivery of the LNRS will depend on:

- Clear links to **funding streams and incentives** for landowners and communities.
- Long-term commitment rather than short-term pilot schemes.
- Transparent communication about how the Strategy will influence future decision-making.

Conclusion

Marden Parish Council supports the vision and direction of the Herefordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy and welcomes its collaborative and voluntary approach. We encourage Herefordshire Council to continue working closely with rural parishes, landowners and communities to ensure that nature recovery is achievable, locally relevant and balanced with the needs of a living, working countryside.

Resolution – *Council approved this report and agreed for this report to be submitted.*

16. Future Agenda Items.

Parish Plan – 2027/30

Secure Area on Website.

To exclude the members of the public & the press from this part of the meeting to discuss items of a confidential nature.

17. Project Solicitor.

The Clerk said that we have now found a new Parish Council solicitor for the lease works for the New Parish Hall. A Mrs Lucy Rea a Senior Consultant Conveyancing Solicitor from Leominster.

The Chair put this to the vote.

Cllr R Lees proposed that the Parish Council engage the services of Mrs Lucy Rea.

Cllr M Blake seconded the motion.
The motion was passed unanimously.

Resolution – *Council agreed for the Clerk to write to Mrs Lucy Rea and engage her services.*

18. Community Loans- Update.

The Chair said that the Parish Council had received a good response for residents and 90% of the funds required had now been secured. A local resident said they were confident that the other 10% would be covered.

The Clerk asked if it was now ok for the lease agreements to be sent out to the residents who had offered to help.

Resolution – *Council agreed for the lease agreements to be posted out and noted the Chairs comments.*

Date of next Council Meeting **21st April 2026** at 7.30pm in the Marden Community Centre.

The Chair closed the meeting at 9.40pm.

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of the Chair of the Council.

Signed:
Chair of the Council
21st April 2026