



MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 18TH APRIL 2017 at 7.30pm IN MARDEN MEMORIAL HALL.

PRESENT: Chairman Cllr Tippen (in the Chair), Vice-Chairman Cllr Adam, Cllrs Boswell, Brown, Cowin, Harvey, Mannington, Newton, Robertson and Turner. Also in attendance were Alison Hooker (Parish Clerk); Erika Lock (Asst Parish Clerk); Peter Hall (Marden Wetland Project), Linda Sinclair (Neighbourhood Watch), Andy Gray (Environment Agency) Borough Councillors Annabelle Blackmore & David Burton, PCSO Nicola Morris and Community Warden Mira Martin. Approximately 25 members of village organisations & societies and residents were also in attendance.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Apologies were received from Parish Councillor Childs and Mr Michael Collins (Marden Bowls Club).

The Chairman, Cllr Tippen, opened the meeting by welcoming all in attendance and thanked everyone for coming along.

MINUTES THE PREVIOUS ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of meeting held on 5th April 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

Cllr Tippen gave her report on the Parish Council for the last 12 months: Marden is going through unprecedented times of change and residents' lives are often being changed in ways they never thought would happen 10 years ago. We have a vast amount of development with over 500 new properties being built within a 5 year time span which will increase the number of dwellings in the village by c32% by 2020.

The Parish Council's aim is to ensure we are getting the best possible outcome for the village from the developments. We are trying, with varying degrees of success, to hold regular meetings with developers and to ensure they understand residents' concerns be that highways, flooding, noise, hours of working, mud on the road and anything else that arises. Of note has been the area at the back of the Playing Field where there has been a problem with fly tipping and rubbish and we were very grateful to Millwood for agreeing to clear the Parish owned land as well as their own. Although it is very disappointing that the area is again in a disgusting state and as bad as it was before the clearance took place. The developers at the solar farm in Plain Road have supplied and fitted, free of charge, solar panels here at the Memorial Hall. Redrow agreed to reinstate the off road parking for residents of Spring Grove Cottages, after we met with them, having applied to have it removed from the plan. We hope there will be further good news stories in the months to come.

Section 106 monies have been allocated to the Playing Field from both the Highwood Green development and the Parsonage. Our first priority has been to replace the outdated and scruffy children's play equipment in the Napoleon Drive Play Area, now that we own it, with equipment suitable for the under 5's. Following a public consultation a contract has been placed with Wicksteed, a major supplier of play equipment, and work is due to start in May. We have plans to install an adult gym, a much improved youth shelter and a new sports wall. We are also looking at the possibility of installing a walking/running track round the perimeter of the playing field and improving, enlarging or replacing the changing rooms so that they can become a more inclusive village facility.

Parking and road safety is a very major concern to residents, not least outside the School. We have worked with Kent Highways and the Planning Department at Maidstone Borough Council to push the case for a controlled crossing, which has been specified as a planning condition on three of the major developments. We understand that one of the developers will be installing a puffin crossing but as yet we do not know when that will be.

The Parish Council sent out a parking survey last summer to residents and the results have shown us that there's no easy solution. Undoubtedly the improved train service to London has made Marden more attractive to commuters from outside the village and we will be pushing the case with Southeastern to increase the car parking capacity at Marden Station, but finding the right person to speak to, and who can make a difference, is a challenge.

It was very gratifying that around 60 adults and many children took part in our annual litter pick on 18 March. Whilst it is very disappointing that we have to do this to keep our village and surrounding countryside looking beautiful there's always a great deal of community spirit on the day and I know that those residents who participated gained a great deal of satisfaction from it. If more people are willing to take part next year then we can have an even greater impact.

The normal work of the Council continues, my colleagues Anne, Chairman of Amenities and Chris, Chairman of Planning will update you on the work of these committees.

I would like to thank all my colleagues on the Parish Council who voluntarily put in a great deal of time and effort on your behalf. What you see at meetings is only a tiny proportion of what they are doing behind the scenes. I particularly want to thank our very hard working Clerk, Ali and Assistant Clerk, Erika. They often work above and beyond their contracted hours, deal with a huge variety of issues, have exceptional knowledge of all things Marden and remain cheerful, welcoming and unflappable. We are truly lucky to have the services of two such exceptional people here in Marden.

Questions/Comments from Floor:

There is an intimidating group of young people congregating at the far end of the playing field: The PCSO reported that the Police are looking into task forces being sent to the village.

Question raised as to the difference between zebra, pelican and puffin crossings – this was explained briefly but full details would be in the next newsletter.

Local businessman explained that a lot of litter is picked up regularly along Pattenden Lane. He was happy to work together with the Parish Council and developers to try and reduce this problem.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

AMENITIES COMMITTEE

Cllr Boswell, Amenities Committee Chairman, have her report on the work of the Amenities Committee over the last 12 months:

The Amenities Committee is responsible for the open space in the village owned by the Parish Council along with the Cemetery, Rookery Path and Public Toilets. We also organise the annual village Christmas celebrations, the Summer Play Scheme and other ad hoc Events. As Kate has already mentioned, another very successful Village Litter Pick took place in March and many thanks to all those residents, the Scouts and Walking Groups who participated – a great village engagement.

It certainly helps to tidy up the Parish. Many thanks also to those residents who regularly litter pick around the village - it is such a community-minded thing to do. Sadly, however there has been an increase in fly tipping particularly in Tilden and Underlyn Lanes.

Marden Playing Field

Our main priority is to maintain this vital area of village open space to a high standard. The maintenance, including the mowing and landscape management, is undertaken by our village caretaker, Colin Judge. Monthly tree inspections are carried out at both the Playing Field and Rookery Path (along with Southons Field and the Cemetery) to ensure they are safe and remedial work undertaken if necessary. We also maintain the changing rooms which are owned by the Parish Council and used by Marden Minors Football Club. We are looking to replace the white fascia boarding, which has been broken on a couple of occasions, with wooden fascia.

Of upmost importance is the maintenance of the play equipment and regular safety checks are carried out and corrective measures taken where necessary. CCTV has now been installed to monitor any anti-social behaviour in the playing field which our PCSO Nicola Morris and Parish Clerk continue to monitor. Kate has already mentioned the area at the back of the playing field but it is hoped, with Community Warden funding, to position a litter bin at this end of the field in the near future.

As ever the problem with dog mess continues, and whilst the field is covered by Maidstone Borough Council Dog Control Orders, they do not clear up the mess in the field. They will respond if dog owners are reported of allowing their dogs to foul the field and they will then visit to monitor and view. Our Community Warden Mira Martin monitors the situation and it is such a shame that a few irresponsible dog owners spoil things for others.

Southons Field

The Parish is very fortunate to have an additional open space at Southons Field with its numerous species of trees and both the 'Kent Men of Trees' and the Hadlow Tree Warden were very impressed on their village walkabouts last year. Usage of the field has certainly increased particularly by families as a peaceful and safe haven to run around, have a picnic on the benches, or play on the Play Trail – a great piece of equipment for balance and co-ordination and can be used by adults as well as children. For these reasons the field is kept 'dog free' (apart from guide dogs). Hopefully at some point, the Parish Council will be able to install a few additional pieces of Trim Trail equipment to help residents continue with their fitness campaign!

Opening hours of the field vary slightly depending on the season but is currently open for the use of anyone in the village between 7.00am to 8.00pm.

The field is available for hire by any organisation in the village and various village celebrations take place there. This year there will be a 'What Marden Does Best' event on Saturday 17th June from 2pm and a Firework Display organised by the School PTA on the 3rd November. Colin also maintains the field and I am sure anyone who has recently visited will agree that it is looking magnificent – it is a wonderful village asset.

Parish Office, Goudhurst Road, Marden : 01622 832305

mardenpc@btconnect.com / www.mardenpc.kentparishes.gov.uk

Parish Office opening times:

Mondays, Tuesdays & Fridays: 10am to 12noon

Cemetery

Again the Parish is lucky to have such an attractive and well maintained Cemetery with a convenient footpath running to it from the village centre. I would like to record our thanks to Ian Jones, our groundsman, for all his effort and hard work he puts into maintaining it to a very high standard. I am sure you will all agree it is a delightful, peaceful and important facility. Last year the South & South East in Bloom judges thought it was a wonderful open space and encouraged us to enter it into the 'Cemetery' category of this year's South & South East in Bloom competition. Fingers crossed we do well!

We have received a number of kind donations from residents of shrubs, perennials and bulbs helping to create some new flower beds, and the Parish Council is more than thankful to receive further contributions particularly if they are 'rabbit-proof'!

We have already started to create a new area which will come into use over the next few years. A central flower bed has been created and gradually being planted up, and we will be starting the layout of this area shortly lining the new pathways with shrubs etc. Again any donations kindly received.

Public Toilets

We recognise that the Public Toilets are an important public facility which the Parish Council has responsibility for although they are owned by Maidstone Borough Council. Thankfully, there have only been a few anti-social behaviour incidents there recently. A cleaner services them daily and Ian regularly checks and locks them daily, and Colin deals with any maintenance that is required.

Christmas Celebration

Once again another great village Christmas celebration took place last December and the well tested formula seems to work with Carols and Morris dancing at The Allens then a Christmas Fair at the Memorial Hall, complete with Father Christmas in his grotto. So many of the village groups now take part, including the Parish Church and Scouts, making it such a great community event. This year's event will take place on Saturday 9th December and our grateful thanks go to our Assistant Clerk Erika Lock and Parish Clerk Alison Hooker whose hard work and planning always ensure the day is a huge success.

The Christmas trees were once again erected around the village which I hope you agree helps to make the village centre look so festive.

Summer Play Scheme

Because of the success of running the scheme again all day last year, it will run from 9.30am to 3.30pm from Monday 24th July to Friday 4th August at Marden Scout HQ for 5-11 year olds. Registration forms will be available from the Parish Office from the 1st June. The Play Scheme is able to take place due to funding from Marden Parish Council and hopefully Maidstone Borough Council. Further details will be available in the next edition of our Newsletter and from the Parish Office.

Amenities Committee

The Amenities Committee meets monthly on the 4th Tuesday of the month in the Parish Council meeting room and all are welcome to attend. I would like to extend my thanks to my fellow councillors on this Committee – Richard Adam, Jane Cowin, Sean Harvey, Ian Newton, Jean Robertson, Kate Tippen and Andy Turner - for all the work they have undertaken over the past year.

PLANNING COMMITTEE

Cllr Mannington, Vice-Chairman of Planning Committee, read out Cllr Childs (Chairman) report on the last 12 months:

The Planning Committee has been kept busy with close to 100 residential applications during the past year. It is often not realised that the Parish Council can only make recommendations to Maidstone Borough Council (MBC), but the Planning Committee has a mix of experience that is much respected by the decision makers at MBC.

The Highwood Green development by Redrow has now completed and has integrated into the Parish in a seamless manner, and the Council is endeavouring to ensure that the remaining housing developments are equally as sensitive to the needs of our village.

Industrial developments such as the new Solar Farm off Plain Road, has needed careful oversight and the committee is most diligent in reviewing traffic plans. Within the larger housing development plans are commitments to provide village facilities under the S106 scheme, and the Parish Council is assiduous in ensuring the developer's commitments are neither overlooked nor forgotten. The Pedestrian crossing located near to the school rate as extremely important in this context.

The compound effect of the new housing developments on the village parking and traffic flow is a constant concern and the Parish Council is taking an holistic approach to problem and has taken full note of the views expressed by parishioners in the recent parking survey. Many of these views reflect directly on planning applications.

The Marden Primary School is undergoing a reconfiguration to accommodate the larger numbers expected from the additional housing being built. Twice a day the traffic conditions outside the school along Goudhurst Road are at a peak if not at a standstill, and the Parish Council is looking for a solution.

The Marden Neighbourhood Plan (MNP) and the MBC Draft Local Plan are all progressing well and will be welcome tools for the committee in exercising the planning responsibilities.

Councillors cannot see everything and just by ignorance planning conditions or regulations may be flouted, but the Planning Committee would like to know, as it is our aim to keep the character of the village intact. A quiet word by the Parish Council to MBC enforcement is a tool that can be used.

Finally, many parishioners keep themselves abreast of Parish Council matters by reading the agendas/minutes on the various notice boards scattered around the village, but remember you are welcome to attend any planning committee meeting.

Thanks to Erika for clerking at the Planning Committee.

Questions/Comments from floor:

Observation on the parking along Howland Road. Could an extension of the single yellow lines be made to Roundel Way?

How often does the Parking Enforcement Officer visit Marden? Unfortunately this is part of MBC's remit and the Parish Council is not aware of the frequency of these visits.

Concern over comment in the Planning report of "parishioners ignorance" – this has been amended within the report above.

REPORTS

PAROCHIAL CHARITIES:

The village charity reports were in the pack.

PARISH CHURCH – ST MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS:

No representatives from the Parish Church were in attendance.

OTHER VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS

All village organisations had been contacted and some had provided a report on their activities since the last APM. These were contained in the handout.

Village Organisations Speakers:

Sian Burr, Chairman of the Patient Reference Group: Every medical practice has to have a "participation" or "reference" group. The main objective is to communicate between patients and medical staff and assist with information being passed to both staff and patients. All patients are eligible to become members of the Group and all information and copies of Committee minutes are sent via email. A health fair was held last year and several surveys were held with patients in regard to surgery extensions/improvements. Marden PRG is looking to set up a network group of patients assisting other patients to join village groups to benefit their health and life style known as "social prescription". The AGM is to be held on 27th April at the Vestry Hall.

David Brockis, organiser of Marden Fun Day: This is being held on 17th June at Southons Field and is entitled "What Marden Does Best". Village organisations are being invited to take part to showcase what they do and to encourage parishioners to join. There will also be a Marden's Got Talent competition. Everyone is welcome to go along from 2pm to 8pm.

David Burton, Chairman of Marden Business Forum. MBF is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. The Forum consists of approx. 100 businesses from Marden parish although there are many more which aren't members. Current members range from single person businesses to international companies. Regular networking events are held and the 2017 business directory has just been published and will be delivered shortly to all houses. Another Business Showcase is being planned for later in the year and the AGM is on 27th April at 6pm.

Bev Reid, Marden Village Club: There are many improvements being proposed to the building. This year, following the success of the running of the club with an increase in profits, the improvements include new windows, all ground floor being redecorated and toilet areas refurbished with another 4 to 5 weeks of work to be undertaken. An open day was held earlier this month and a lot of people, both members and non-members, went through the door to see what is being proposed for the Village Club. Anyone who is not a member but wishes to be so can pop into the Club during opening times to pick up an application form.

GUEST SPEAKER: PETER HALL – MILL FARM WETLAND PROJECT

So we have had a prolonged period of heavy rain and it coincides with spring tides and a full moon; the confluence that is Yalding will, for sure, be flooded again attracting the usual bevy of politicians and journalists in designer wellies wringing their hands and demanding action.

The Environment Agency has spent many hundreds of thousands of pounds modelling weather systems and has decided that there is nothing that can be done to help Yalding. We live upstream in Marden so although we may be sympathetic, we do not have filthy, freezing flood water pouring through the bedroom.

What we do have however is thousands of acres of the largest flood plain in southern England and a great deal of land of marginal agricultural value to enable us to help our friends downstream.

Together with Kent County Council planning and funding and RSPB equipment, we started work in autumn 2016 on a prototype scheme on farmland at the end of Pattenden Lane to 'park' excess water during such extreme weather events; once completed, we hope to have created twenty thousand cubic metres, or 2 million litres, of water storing wetland.

This wetland will fill up and drain during extended periods of rainfall to buffer the flow of water into the Teise and Beult thereby reducing the surges that are so devastating downstream for both people and wildlife.

On its own this project will not solve the problem, but there are dozens of farms within the catchment upon which similar schemes could be developed; we have already hosted visits from interested farmers and landowners.

Our project will cost approximately £20,000 and require almost zero maintenance, so for the cost of the flood modelling for example, one could have 40-50 such schemes which certainly would have an effect on water management within the catchment.

Plans are now afoot to continue the excavation later this summer.

Once complete, the surrounding meadow will be restored and a shelter belt of mixed species tree planting will be created on the bank along the north east side of the field.

The KCC & RSPB design is such that whilst the wetland will fill right up in flood situations, it will not drain fully out thus ensuring that under most circumstances, there will be a body of water with gently sloping banks all the year round. Such habitat will enable the land to hold a greater and more diverse number of species, particularly of birds.

The intention is that once established, 'hides' will be positioned to enable 'birders' to watch the comings and goings around the water; it is hoped that these facilities may also be used for educational purposes as well as providing invaluable wildlife habitat for such endangered 'red list' bird species as the Turtle Dove.

A win for Yalding and a win-win for the tax payer.

GUEST SPEAKER: LINDA SINCLAIR (NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH)

The local Neighbourhood Watch Team is looking to increase number of email addresses of residents who would be able to receive emails relating the crimes and notifications. Communication includes information to everyone on the email list from a crime point of view. Items covered may not be reported to the police but may be relevant to residents of the village (ie lost cat/dog). Also interested in recruiting Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinators especially on new developments. A co-ordinator would be asked to forward the emails onto other residents/groups.

Linda promoted the Countryeye App which can be downloaded onto mobile phones and residents can also sign up for Kent Trading Standards alerts which will send out latest scams etc.

GUEST SPEAKER: ANDY GRAY (ENVIRONMENT AGENCY)

An overview was given on what is being planned for Marden. The scheme covers eight different parishes, Marden being one of them, dealing with properties with the possibility of a 1:20 flooding. Phase 1 will be looking at properties which meet a specific criteria for flood measures and Phase 2 being to undertake any flood defence work. It is envisaged that approx 40 properties in Marden may be eligible. The EA is currently looking at feasibility studies and what funding is available for possible options.

It is envisaged that letters will be sent out to residents in the next few months inviting them to attend an exhibition giving them the opportunity to understand what is being proposed and to sign up to the scheme. The next stage would be to survey the properties concerned to ascertain whether they are eligible and this was hoped to be in June.

BOROUGH COUNCILLOR: CLLR ANNABELLE BLACKMORE

Cllr Blackmore spoke about MBC's Local Plan which had now gone through the inquiry and was back with MBC with a few modifications. This was out to consultation with Parish Councils and residents and the closing date was 17th May. This was the last opportunity to comment. The 20 year plan explains where development can take place and the infrastructure, it also puts Parish Councils and the Borough Council more in control of planning. There will be a review period in 2021 to make sure the plan is still sound.

MBC has a statutory duty to house homeless people and there has been a significant increase in the numbers therefore the finances have had to be adjusted to accommodate this.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR

Not in attendance.

RAIL REPORT: PARISH CLLR RICHARD ADAM

Marden Parish Council acts as the local rail user group and regularly attends South Eastern Stakeholder Forums and the KCC annual rail summit. Cllrs raise issues at these which are relevant to Marden. MPC also holds meetings with South Eastern representatives on site at least once a year but struggles to get responses on items raised but this is being worked on.

The Department for Transport has put out a consultation on South Eastern Railways – Rail Franchise consultation and Network Rail Kent Route Study – consultation and both of these will be discussed at Full Council meeting on 9th May. Some of the options in the SE Franchise consultation may not be palatable to Marden and the surrounding areas. The most important items of concern involve the removal of stops to increase the speed of trains to other stations further down the line; possible changes to the split of trains to Charing Cross and Cannon Street at peak times. Residents are encouraged to comment on these consultations.

Marden station has the most increased usage compared to neighbouring villages/small towns.

There are talks that the power of the Mayor of London will extend to cover more stations but currently only covers stations to Sevenoaks.

OTHER PARISH MATTERS

Other comments from the floor:

Robin Judd thanked the Parish Council for all the work that it does.

There were no further comments or questions from the floor.

There being no further business the Chairman the meeting closed at 9.30pm

The meeting was followed by a wine and cheese evening where members of the public were able to meet with their local councillors.

Signed:

Date: