



**MARDEN ANNUAL
PARISH MEETING
TUESDAY 8TH APRIL 2025
MARDEN MEMORIAL
HALL
GOUDHURST ROAD
MARDEN**

**(IF YOU WOULD LIKE THIS HANDOUT IN LARGER PRINT
PLEASE CONTACT THE PARISH CLERK)**

PLEASE FIND ATTACHED REPORTS FROM:

PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT

By Cllr Kate Tippen, Chairman, Marden Parish Council

PARISH COUNCIL AMENITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

By Cllr Anne Boswell, Chairman of Amenities

PARISH COUNCIL FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

By Cllr Andy Turner, Chairman of Finance

PARISH COUNCIL PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

By Cllr Andy Turner, Chairman of Planning

PARISH COUNCIL CLERK'S REPORT

By Alison Hooker

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

By Cllr Lottie Parfitt

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

By Cllrs Couch, Russell and Summersgill

MARDEN ORGANISATIONS AND CLUBS

Little Fishes Baby & Toddler Group
Marden Bowls Club
Marden Community CIO
Marden Community Lunches
Marden Cricket & Hockey Club
Marden Dementia Group
Marden Foodbank
Marden History Group and Heritage Centre
Marden Horticultural Society
Marden in Bloom
Marden Library
Marden Medical Centre
Marden Memorial Hall
Marden Motor Club
Marden Neighbourhood Plan (included in Planning Committee report)
Marden Oddfellows
Marden Parish Church
Marden Patient Participation Group
Marden Primary Academy
Marden Society
Marden Sporting Memories
Marden Station and Public Transport (verbal report given at the meeting)
Marden Village Club
Marden Walking Group
Marden WI
Marden Wildlife
Men's Breakfast
Safe Anaesthesia

ANNUAL PARISH COUNCIL REPORT

By Cllr Kate Tippen, Chairman, Marden Parish Council

All of us Parish Councillors, and our Clerks, would agree that our work for the Parish Council is often frustrating, dependent on others and can take a long time to achieve even the smallest benefit for the community. However, to start on a positive note I was beyond proud to receive the Quality Gold Award from the National Association of Local Councils on behalf of Marden Parish Council last November. The Gold Award is the highest award of the Local Council Award Scheme and Marden is one of the very few Parish and Town Councils in Kent to be awarded the accreditation. The award recognises that the Council achieves good practice in governance, community engagement and council improvement. We are not resting on our laurels and will continue to strive to improve our offer to the community doing as much as we can to deliver services whilst continuing to be efficient and cost effective.

The allotment saga at Highwood Green continues. As I said this time last year and the year before the Redrow wheels continue to turn slowly and sometimes it feels like they are in reverse. Again, as I said last year and the year before we will persevere and maybe there will be better news later this year!

Highway issues continue to be a cause for concern for us and our residents. We have a Highways Improvement Plan, which finally is starting to see some benefits. We have long been concerned about pedestrian safety at the top of Pattenden Lane where the very wide road mouth meant that pedestrians were often taking their life in their hands when crossing the road. Kent Highways produced a carefully measured plan to widen the pavement and put in much needed dropped kerbs all of which have been installed since January. We asked Highways to widen the pavement on the shops side of the junction, as well as the other side, but they said this was not possible as it would restrict the width of the junction too much. I am sure those of you who use this crossing will agree that it is now much easier. It is of course not helped by those motorists who feel it is ok for them to flout highway regulations and routinely park on double yellow lines, they clearly do not appreciate or care about the danger their selfish actions have on pedestrians and other motorists. Other highway improvements that are now in progress include the continuation of single yellow lines along Goudhurst Road, which should help to reduce all day parking and provide more space for parents to park at School drop off and pick up. Double yellow lines in Albion Road around the junctions of Seymour Drive and Stanley Road are also in the pipeline. We will shortly be deciding on or next five highway improvements to put to KCC Highways for implementation. I am grateful to those residents who attended our open morning on 22nd March and gave us their input.

As residents will be aware the Primary Academy has submitted an application for a significant extension to accommodate 2 form entry. The Parish Council was supportive of the application but has serious concerns about highway safety at drop off and pick up times. As yet we have not heard if the application has been approved.

The finger post at the Thorn Road/Plain Road junction, which was demolished in December 2022, has been a source of immense frustration to us. Having secured a contractor to remove the post and a contractor to repair it we were then advised at

the 11th hour by Kent Highways that we are not permitted to reinstall a cast iron signpost on safety grounds. We see the signpost as an important heritage asset which must be preserved, we will continue to seek a solution to this issue.

The Parish Council also has an Infrastructure Spend Plan, which identifies all the improvements we would like to see in the village. Some of the small items the Parish Council will be able to fund, but large, more ambitious plans such as a new pavilion at Southons Field are longer term and will require a greater level of funding. We have developed plans to redevelop the old changing rooms at the Playing Field into a community facility and the planning application has recently been submitted to Maidstone Borough Council. Much of the funding for this project will come from S106 money from the Highwood Green, Windsor Meadow and Parsonage developments. If further funding is needed to complete this project then we will seek grants from outside bodies and will not be taking money from the Council Tax precept.

Flooding has continued to be high on our agenda. We were pleased that Southern Water has invested over £800,000 to improve the sewer network in the village. However, the heavy rain at the beginning of January resulted in the Maynards Sewer overflowing yet again, despite the extensive work undertaken by Southern Water, we are still awaiting an explanation from them as to why this happened.

At times Marden feels very isolated and unsupported especially by Kent County Council. Their budgetary problems are well publicised but for our community it means we no longer have a community warden, a Children's Centre or any youth support services. Police reorganisation also means we no longer have a PCSO. The vulnerable members of our community therefore have to rely on other services such as the excellent voluntary work undertaken by the Food Bank and puts more pressure on our already overstretched Medical Centre. Yes, we could have access to a Community Warden if the Parish Council was prepared to pay for it and the same for a youth worker but with an already overstretched budget this is not something we can contemplate. If you lived in the town you would have access to these services, without any additional cost.

We have two Community Police officers who we share with the rest of the Marden, Yalding, Collier Street, Hunton and Nettlestead Ward, all of Staplehurst Ward and all of Headcorn Ward. From west to east their patch is at least 16 miles, along country lanes so it's not surprising we see little of them. Having said that we have a good relationship with our PCs and they are committed to do what they can to support Marden. We recently held a Police surgery at the Village Club which a number of residents attended and raised concerns which will be taken forward. We plan to hold further surgeries with the Police.

During the past year we have held a number of community events including the beacon lighting last June to commemorate 80 years since VE Day, the Children's Summer Play Scheme and Marden at Christmas. All were well attended and much enjoyed. We hope that many of you will join us on 8th May this year for a beacon lighting to commemorate 80 years since VE Day. The Summer Play Scheme will run for 8 days from 23rd July to 1st August, once more run by Jen Ward and her team,

plans are well underway. Marden at Christmas will of course take place on 6th December, Father Christmas will be in his grotto with his elves as usual. Our annual litter pick took place on Saturday 29th March. More than 60 residents were joined by 15 Police Cadets who collected over 200 bags of rubbish from within the village itself and from the surrounding lanes. A huge thank you to everyone who took part and to those who regularly litter pick around the parish. It's a shame we have to do it but reassuring that we have so many committed members of our community who are prepared to give up their time to do a dirty job.

We are committed to maintaining regular communication with residents through a number of different channels. We have continued to produce the newsletter 3 times a year and we are grateful to Cllr Anne Boswell who does such an amazing job compiling it and to Deputy Clerk Rachel Weeks who typesets it and gets it ready for print. Thanks also to Councillors and volunteers who hand deliver to all properties in the village centre. We post to properties in the rural parts of the parish. I hope you find the newsletter useful; we have received very positive feedback about it. We are also very active on social media and regularly use Facebook to update on events, road closures and many other issues. We know that many people do not use social media and we have introduced a weekly e-newsletter that is delivered via e-mail to recipients on a Friday, this contains all the information we have posted that week on social media. If you haven't signed up to receive it then please let Deputy Clerk Rachel know. We also have a network of notice boards which are updated weekly.

Thanks to all my council colleagues for all the hard work and long hours they have put in over the year. During the last year Councillor Matt Besant stood down as he has left the area – we are very grateful to him for the work he did for the Parish during his time in office. We co-opted 2 new councillors, Paul Dobinson and Jon Goda, both of whom have hit the ground running and are making valuable contributions to the Council. We still have one vacancy for a Parish Councillor, if you want to make a positive contribution to your community please come and talk to any of us after the meeting. This will be my last report to you as Chairman of the Council. Our terms of reference state that Chairman should be in post for no more than three years, and I have done four years. Council will vote for a new Chairman in May.

Finally, a huge thanks to our staff, without whom we could not function. Deputy Clerk Rachel throws herself into Parish Council work and her energy and enthusiasm for the role shows itself every day especially in her commitment to communication and all the work that goes into managing the work of the Amenities Committee. Ali, our Clerk, and font of all Marden knowledge, steers the ship and it's not easy with 11 (when we are at full complement) Councillors to contain, but she makes sure that we do what we have to and nothing slips through the gaps. Lisa Stevens is our Administrative Assistant, who supports all aspects of our office work. All of us here tonight are grateful to Ali, Rachel and Lisa for your hard work, dedication and constant good humour.

Ian Jones, our Cemetery Caretaker, retired on 31st March after 38 years looking after the Cemetery. He will be much missed. We are now recruiting for a new Parish Groundsperson.

We are very grateful to Chris Prince, our Village Caretaker, who looks after all our open space and many other jobs that need doing around the village as well.

KALC Community Award to be presented after the Chairman's report.

AMENITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

By Cllr Anne Boswell, Chairman of Amenities

The Amenities Committee oversees the lovely green spaces in the village - the Playing Field, Napoleon Drive Play Area, Rookery Path and Southons Field, as well as Marden Cemetery and Public Toilets. Both the Environmental Sub-Group and the Village Events Sub-Committee also report to Amenities.

Southons Field

This is a lovely dog-free haven with many specimen trees for residents to enjoy and children can run around in a safe and peaceful environment. As well as the Play Trail there's a bay of swings and picnic benches which are inspected weekly by the caretaker. It's great to see so many children and adults using the football goal and the Rugby Taggers run a couple of sessions on the field on a Saturday morning. When funds permit, we are hoping to install another piece of equipment.

There are various memorial trees in the field including a 'Roots of Remembrance' tree to acknowledge those who were affected by Covid in the Parish and memorial trees for HM the Duke of Edinburgh and HM Queen Elizabeth II. A Wild Service/Chequer tree will be planted to commemorate HM King Charles III. The Wildflower Meadow, which Marden in Bloom created, has been overtaken by grass, but some work will be undertaken to remove some of the grass and replace with seeds.

The field also hosts the Village Beacon and is where most of the large village events take place. This year the Beacon will be lit on Thursday 8th May to commemorate VE Day 80, the Marden Motor Club Show on 24th May and the Rude Mechanicals Theatre Company will perform again on 27th June.

Opening times: April-August 7am to 8pm, September-October 7am-7pm, November-January 8am-4pm, February & March 8am-6pm (or dusk if earlier).

Marden Playing Field and Rookery Path

The children's playgrounds in Napoleon Drive and the Playing Field are popular and well-used. As well as the play equipment, there's an adult gym, sports wall and youth shelter which are inspected weekly by the caretaker and a Dog Bag Station.

A new spinner has been installed which is proving popular along with a parish notice board as there's a lot of footfall in the field. More CCTV will be installed shortly to monitor these areas.

At the request of a resident, two fixed football goals will be in place shortly for those keen footballers to sharpen up and practice their football skills. At some point, there may be a junior football team playing in the field and we are trying to arrange for some training sessions in the summer by Charlton or Maidstone football club/s.

As the Chairman has already mentioned, after public consultation, we are hoping the old changing rooms will be refurbished and used as a small community space with storage areas, a WC facility, small community room and kitchenette area. The planning application has been submitted to Maidstone Borough Council and will be mainly funded with S106 monies left to spend at the Playing Field which cannot legally be spent elsewhere.

Our caretakers spend many hours keeping our green spaces in good order, and it is unfortunate that some of these hours are spent removing litter and graffiti.

Marden Cemetery

The cemetery is a tranquil place of rest with a plethora of wildlife. As already mentioned, our long-serving and dedicated caretaker Ian Jones has now retired – Ian looked after the cemetery so well and kept it looking beautiful. We will be employing a new caretaker shortly.

In the new Section 4 only headstones are permitted in the burial areas. For ease of maintenance, tended, fencing or the placing of other items on plots are not permitted. There is a small area for the scattering of ashes under a tree where wildflower seeds have been planted and a memorial stone placed. A sign has been installed at the beginning of the permissive path in Maidstone Road by the bend leading to the cemetery.

If you are visiting a loved one, please do remember to remove any plastic wrapping from flowers and think sustainably about your tributes. We would also like to remind cemetery visitors that when there is a funeral taking place, we would appreciate you visiting another time.

Parish Council Trees

The Parish Council is very proud of its trees on our open spaces and has a duty of care to protect them. We have a robust and sustainable Tree Management Policy as well as a new Hedgerow Policy, and our caretakers check them on a monthly basis and after high winds. A more detailed survey is carried out twice a year by the Tree Warden Charlie Edwards on a voluntary basis and a detailed Tree Audit is undertaken every three years by an external contractor.

As part of the Parish Council's environmental responsibility, last year we planted 1,000 whips to form a hedgerow in the field behind the Cemetery which Marden Parish Council owns, and we hope to extend the hedgerow next winter. Another 1,000 whips were planted to create a new mini woodland for Marden with the potential in the future for woodland burials as part of an expansion to the Cemetery. Fortunately, most of the saplings have survived.

Public Toilets

Whilst the building is owned by Maidstone Borough Council, the Parish is fortunate that the Parish Council can maintain this important facility and we are lucky to have a contract with an excellent cleaning company who checks them regularly and keeps them cleaned to a very high standard. We have obtained grants to install solar panels on the roof of the building and are also exploring installing a water fountain at the front of the building.

The Amenities Committee carries out site visits to all these areas on a regular basis and in between our caretakers keep us posted.

Environmental Sub-Group

The Parish Council now has a statutory duty to exercise all its functions regarding the purpose of conserving biodiversity and this includes raising public awareness of biodiversity issues in the community.

The Environmental Sub-Group endeavours to provide information on sustainable initiatives and has created an Estate Management Plan which looks at realistic and manageable ways in which the Parish Council operates such as recycling, energy, purchasing and has agreed a sustainable Maintenance Strategy for its open spaces. We also have an Environmental and Biodiversity Policy. The group has been extended to any residents and businesses who are interested in helping with the project. Some of the Councillors have attained Carbon Literacy status and exploring other initiatives such as achieving Earth Charter status, running a Retrofit session for residents and looking at EV chargers being installed. There is now a Plastic Free Marden Campaign where 15 community allies, 3 businesses and the Parish Council sign up to pledging to eliminate three single-use plastic items from their operations. At the recent Village Litter pick they undertook a plastic audit and some of the items will be made into a sculpture.

Health & Wellbeing

Marden Parish Council strives to provide as much information as possible on health and wellbeing particularly in the parish newsletter. We are part of the Marden Community Engagement Group which is a very useful collaborative liaison group who link up and share information to try and tie up missing links. Members include Marden Medical Centre, the PPG, the Parish Church, Involve (Social Prescribing), the Marden Dementia Community group, the Primary Academy etc.

Many thanks to our Clerks, Ground Maintenance staff and Amenities Councillors for all their hard work and continuing support.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

By Cllr Andy Turner, Chairman of Finance

Marden Parish Council Finance Committee meets at least four times a year to discuss the financial aspects of the council.

The Clerk, acting as Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), reports to the Committee on the income and expenditure incurred each quarter and the Committee discuss this along with comparing to the budget set the previous year.

On 29th October 2024 the Finance Committee met to receive the RFO's report to Councillors providing the income and expenditure forecast to 31st March 2025 along with a draft budget for the forthcoming financial year. Councillors reviewed this along with any requests for additional expenditure, revenue and/or capital, and started to prepare the document ready for agreement in January when setting the precept and finalising the budget for 2025/26.

The precept is an amount set by Parish Councils which is added to the annual council tax bill and collected by Maidstone Borough Council on behalf of Marden PC.

The Parish Council makes every effort to maintain the existing level of service as well as staying on a sustainable financial footing. We always strive to be prudent and diligent with our finances. Councillors have once again undertaken a thorough review but due to inflation and increase in employer's National Insurance contributions, a need to start rebuilding the council's reserves to a more sustainable level and a general percentage increase in the cost of various services, the Parish Council has had to make the difficult decision to make an increase in the amount of money collected from residents to be spent in Marden in the next financial year from April 2025 for a Band D taxpayer will be £99.45 per annum or £8.29 per month. This is an increase of £16.73 per year or £1.40 per month for a Band D property. We understand how difficult it is for residents in the current financial crisis and hope you understand our decision to make the slight increase.

Other forms of income include play scheme fees, cemetery fees, external grants and parish services grant. The Parish Services Grant is set and paid to us by Maidstone Borough Council for services that are received by residents living within the urban area of Maidstone Borough who are not charged an additional Precept payment. In Marden PC's case this is for maintenance of open spaces.

The Parish Council accounts are audited twice a year by an Internal Auditor who is independent from the Council and an external audit undertaken at the end of the financial year by an auditor agreed by Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments (SAAA). All financial information is available on the Parish Council website.

Thanks are expressed to Alison and all Cllrs on the Finance Committee.

PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

By Cllr Andy Turner, Chairman of Planning

2024/25 saw business as usual for the Marden Parish Council's Planning Committee.

Meetings continue to be held in the Parish office twice monthly and occasionally in the Old School Room for some of our larger applications or where large numbers of the public wished to attend.

The Planning Committee this year has been, as ever, reviewing and commenting on planning applications that have come forward within the parish. The scope of application varies greatly from small scale domestic extensions/loft conversions to strategic houses sites to large scale infrastructure projects like solar farms and everything in-between! This has involved keeping on top of all the policy requirements both locally and nationally, and all the changes that have occurred alongside. Biodiversity and habitat have featured heavily in these changes with Bio-diversity Net Gain (BNG) being the big one! I would like to thank all my colleagues, both on the Planning Committee and our Borough Councillors for keep the MPC abreast of all these changes and developments.

Alongside, this the Planning Committee has been involved in liaising and working with MBC on the Marden Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP). This has involved the Planning Committee and MPC working with MBC's conservation officers to re-assess and carry out an appraisal on the conservation area(s) within the Parish of Marden. This included carrying a public consultation on the appraisal. The information has been collated, and MBC has issued the final edition of the CAAMP which has shown no changes to the current document.

The Marden Neighbourhood Plan (MNP) review is still on going. Last month an open morning was held and part of this was to showcase the policy changes (under Regulation 14). Details can be viewed at the rear of the hall and the consultation is open until 25th April. If you require further details please speak to any Cllr or contact Ali in the parish office. Following the closing date the responses will be reviewed and any amendments made before re-submission to MBC for Comment.

The other major task undertaken by the Planning Committee is reviewing and commenting on planning applications within the Parish. This year 108 planning applications have come before the Council, which is slightly more than last year, some of which have been controversial. I hope that all residents' views have been considered and we endeavour to listen to all concerns in formulating a response to the Borough.

As always, I would like to thank my fellow Councillors on the Planning Committee, who bring passion and drive to do the very best for their community. These Councillors bring a vast array of knowledge and skills to all meetings. In particular, I would like to thank the Parish Clerk, Alison Hooker. It is not an easy job translating a range of Councillor comments into a coherent and concise format. I know that Ali puts in a huge amount of preparation time, and for this we should all be grateful.

PARISH CLERK'S REPORT

By Alison Hooker

This past Council year (May to April) we welcomed new Councillors onto the Parish Council following the elections in May 2024 and we will have covered 11 Full Council meetings; 3 Extra Ordinary Full Council meetings; 10 Amenities Committee meetings; 3 Finance Committee meetings and 18 Planning Committee meetings along with Neighbourhood Plan, Sub-Committees, Sub-Groups and external meetings. These involve not just preparing the agendas, taking and typing up minutes but obtaining information and gathering papers ready to send to Cllrs prior to the meeting.

Along with the meetings we have organised the Summer Play Scheme, village litter pick, Marden at Christmas and the Open Morning in March.

I am also the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) alongside my clerking role and many of the day to day roles for the RFO include budget preparation, providing spreadsheets on current income and expenditure to the Finance Committee along with reviewing future years forecasts, meeting with the Internal Auditor twice a year and submitting the Annual Return to our External Auditor prior to which there is the closure of the financial year accounts to be undertaken.

Together with other members of the Parish Council I was very proud to be awarded the Local Council Award Scheme Quality Gold. This was an extremely long process of ensuring that our website contained all relevant information and was up to date, drafting new policies and liaising with the National Association of Local Councils as to what was required. This award lasts four years but we continue to strive to meet all the criteria of this especially in regard to being open and transparent and sharing as much information as we can with residents.

As the Chairman reported some things are frustrating and take a long time to resolve as we are required to obtain agreement/funding etc from third parties, these include additional CCTV at the playing field, solar panels on the public conveniences and obviously the Highwood Green allotments – we continue to chase/push these through and hopefully we will soon be able to complete these projects and start on new ones.

I Clerk the Full Council, Planning and Finance Committees and Rachel, as Deputy Clerk, prepares and attends the Amenities Committee meetings as well as undertaking all the social media involved with informing residents of what the Parish Council is doing, advertising events and circulating information provided by other agencies. Rachel also prepares the weekly e-newsletter and the newsletter three times a year, following the drafting by Cllr Boswell, ready for printing – a mammoth task.

2025/26 sees a new employee taking up the full time role of Parish Groundsperson; the submission of the planning application for the refurbishment of the changing rooms, along with the work involved if this is successful; lighting of the beacon on VE Day (8th May); another Summer Play Scheme and Marden at Christmas; as well as the regular work involved in running the Parish Office.

My role would be even harder without the help of Rachel and Lisa and my thanks go to both of these, along with Ian and Chris (our caretakers) and the 10 (currently) Parish Councillors and we were sorry to see Ian retire from the Parish Council at the end of March but wish he all the best in his retirement.

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

By County Cllr Lottie Parfitt

Lottie.parfitt@kent.gov.uk / 07919 360000

Unfortunately County Cllr Parfitt was unable to submit a report in time for publication of this handout.

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

By Borough Cllrs Grace Couch, Claudine Russell and Mike Summersgill
Ward Councillors - Claudine Russell (Marden) (claudinerussell@maidstone.gov.uk);
Mike Summersgill (Hunton) (michaelsummersgill@maidstone.gov.uk); and Grace
Couch (Yalding) (gracecouch@maidstone.gov.uk)

The Borough Election last May saw Claudine Russell re-elected as a Borough Councillor for the Ward, and two new Councillors elected from the Green Party, Michael Summersgill and Grace Couch. With a change in overall control at the Borough for the next four years (the Council is now being led by a Green & Independent Alliance and Liberal Democrat coalition), Cllr Russell assumed leadership of the Conservative group on the Council after the election and became Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, holding the Cabinet to account on its policy directions; the topics that O&S have worked on this year have included assessing the Borough's Infrastructure provision via S.106 funding & Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) monies and reviewing the direction of Planning Enforcement.

Cllr Summersgill was appointed as Vice-Chairman of the MBC Planning Committee, and also then took on a role as a Cabinet member, with a portfolio covering Climate Transition and Nature Recovery. Mike has spent much of this first year taking forward some pre-initiated projects on the Borough 'estate', looking at solar panels and biodiversity net gain sites, plus scoping some natural flood management projects on tributaries of the Beult (he was also appointed to the Upper Medway Drainage Board). In March, a review/update of the Council's existing Climate & Biodiversity strategy was agreed, being halfway through its ten year 'lifespan' and now being more firmly targeted to what can be achieved.

Cllr Couch has brought her youthful expertise as a council officer (in Swale and London Boroughs) to bear in her role as Vice-Chairman of the Policy Advisory Committee (PAC), dealing with climate themes, corporate matters and environmental services. Grace has also been speaking out about Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), working with our Ward police officers on incidents, and visiting local venues to ensure that their 'Ask Angela' and similar policies are up to date and protecting vulnerable citizens. She has also contributed directly to new local initiatives like Plastic Free Marden and the new Yalding Repair Café, as have Claudine and Mike.

Across the Borough and Ward, all three of us have been involved closely in dealing with individual issues and problems of many constituents, which have covered a wide range of issues, as well as matters affecting the wider community like last year's 'Bin problems' and concerns over Traffic. We have liaised closely with the five Parish clerks and numerous councillors, to facilitate or assist queries that they have brought up, and that may need MBC action. It has also been great to support Borough-wide initiatives such as 'Shaun the Sheep' last Summer, the new Museum extension, the third Eco-Hub last Autumn, various Arts events and the Covid memorial tree-planting last month.

MARDEN ORGANISATIONS AND SOCIETIES

LITTLE FISHES TODDLER GROUP

No report received

MARDEN BOWLS CLUB

By Colin Smith (Secretary) Colin Smith (Mardensecretary24@gmail.com)
High Street, Howlands Road, Marden. TN12 9DT

We have a really good green to play on which is maintained to a high standard and is one of the better surfaces in the area, looked after by a dedicated team of volunteers.

We had quite a successful season last year, our A team won the Maidstone & District 1st division Triples league, which we had not won in over 10 years! We also won the M&D 4's League with a game to spare.

We had two teams competing in the semi-finals of the M&D Knockout competition, 44 teams had entered. We came 2nd & 3rd which for a small club was a good result.

We had two members reach the quarter finals of the Kent County Pairs competition (170 bowls club in Kent).

Finally, we also manage to win the M&D Pairs and Fours Finals held at Marden in September.

Sadly, over the past two years we have lost some of our members through poor health and relocating to other parts of the country.

We are planning two open sessions in May to attract new club members; for this there we are also offering Free membership for the first year to encourage more people to try out and hopefully take up our great game. We play friendlies, League bowls, internal and external competitions and scheduled roll ups used for practice and socialising.

We have good facilities, bar, comfortable seating, and all the usual facilities.

Membership is open to everyone over 12 years old and we are disability friendly.

Bowls is a very social game, all abilities welcome.

MARDEN COMMUNITY CHARITABLE INCORPORATED ORGANISATION (CIO)

By Kate Tippen

Registered with the Charity Commission 1183743

The objective of the charity is the relief of financial hardship, either generally or individually, of people living in Marden Parish by making grants of money for providing or paying for items, services or facilities.

There are 3 strands to the charity

- Support individuals who are suffering financial hardship by making grants of up to £100 available towards the purchase of specific items
- Grant of up to £500 to village organisations to assist with specific projects for the benefit of the people of Marden
- Grant of up to £100 towards the support of education and training of the children and young people of Marden.

Over the past year we have worked in conjunction with the food bank to make a number of grants to residents who are suffering severe financial hardship. We have made contributions to Marden in Bloom for new planters, Sporting Memories for an outing and Marden Memorial Hall towards the cost of the defibrillator.

We supported the concert held in Marden Church on 21 April 2024, given by the choir of the Chapels Royal HM Tower of London. The proceeds from the concert were split between the food bank and Marden History Group.

We rarely see applications for grants to support education and training and would encourage residents to submit applications for any aspect of education and training.

Full information about the charity can be found at: <http://www.mardenkent-pc.gov.uk/community/marden-parish-council-13394/marden-cio/>

MARDEN COMMUNITY LUNCHES

No report received

MARDEN COMMUNITY DEMENTIA GROUP / LIVING MEMORIES

No report received

MARDEN FOOD BANK

No report received



MARDEN HISTORY GROUP & HERITAGE CENTRE

By Richard Adam, Chairman

The Group has had another active year with meetings and events, as well as regular exhibits in the Heritage Centre at the Library.

We have been able to use various venues around the village, including The Village Club, the Vestry Hall, the Church, The Unicorn pub, as well as the Library. Depending on the type of event being staged, it has been particularly helpful to have a variety of venues in the village.

We again participated in the national Heritage Open Days event in September 2024 when the theme was Transport and Communication.

The WW2 warning siren was again fired up for Remembrance Sunday on 10th November 2024 thanks to Nigel Jenner and David Elphick, with Mo Gillis-Coates playing the Last Post. The siren has been refurbished and is in good working order!

The Group has an interesting forward diary for events during 2025 – keep a lookout for what's on.

The Group also continues to expand its range of interesting historical publications about various aspects connected to Marden. And on 25th March Philip Day presented his latest WW2 film, Before the Few.

Work on surveying Wealden timber framed houses continues. As does liaison with the local school which is working well, with classes coming to the library and Heritage Centre.

Following an insert in the Parish Council Newsletter, calling for more volunteers, we have been joined by Ellie Bramhill and Steve Dunkley, who both bring their talents to the work of the Group. We also have some other interested participants who are interested in helping. Our next Volunteers gathering is on Sunday 13th April at 2.30pm in the Library. Do join us if you are interested in becoming involved in the work of the Group and the Heritage Centre.

My thanks go to all our volunteers, speakers, my Steering Group colleagues, and everyone who supports our work for the Marden community, past, present and future.



MARDEN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

No report received



MARDEN IN BLOOM

By Anne Boswell (Chairman) & all the 'Blooming' team

Marden in Bloom had another busy and successful year in 2024 both with its projects and fund-raising activities. Around 34,000 daffodils have now been planted around the village giving another stunning display to welcome Spring as well as crocus and snowdrops.

Fund Raising/Events

The Fashion Show last March was another success, the Garden Safari attracted many visitors last summer, the Bulb Sale in September went well as well as the Scarecrow Safari in October.

Sponsorship

Once again Golden Hill Nursery kindly supplied most of the Summer plants for the planters. Peter Hall, Stanley's Garage and Marden Village Club sponsor 3 of the planters in the village, Marden Parish Council sponsor the troughs/bike rack in the High Street and Marden Horticultural Society look after the planter at Highwood Green.

Planters

Quite a few of the village planters were replaced last spring with the help of a generous grant from the Marden CIO charity. The planters last summer made a lovely show as well as this spring.

Watering

This is always an issue and we do struggle with this task particularly in hot dry summers. We have tried to overcome this issue, but it is always difficult.

Projects

The flower beds at both the Memorial Hall and Library area continue to be tended. We planted another 3,000 naturalising bulbs last Autumn on the open space areas at Windsor Meadows, the Parsonage and the Cockpit play area.

Wildflower Meadow in Southons Field

Whilst numerous wildflowers bloomed last summer, it is now being overtaken by grass. It is a difficult and time-consuming task and we should shortly be undertaking some clearing and re-seed some bits.

Activities in 2025:

Our first fund-raiser was in April with a hugely successful quiz in Marden Village Club – thanks to everyone who attended and the generous donations we received for raffle prizes. We are not holding a Garden Safari this year but are hoping to run a Dog Show in August in Marden Playing Field, another bulb sale in September and of course the ever-successful Scarecrow Safari in October.

Dependent on whether we receive any funding from South Eastern, we plan to plant up the two beds at the entry to Marden Railway Station with low-maintenance plants.

We always need help with our projects, so if you can spare a little bit of time, even if an hour or two, please email: anne.boswell@ymail.com Also check out our Facebook page and give us a like.

MARDEN LIBRARY (KENT COUNTY COUNCIL)

Marden Library, High Street, Marden TN12 9DP 01622 831619 Fax 01622 831619

Email: mardenlibrary@kent.gov.uk

No report received

MARDEN MEDICAL CENTRE

By Dr Julie Morgan

Church Green, Marden, Tonbridge, Kent TN12 9HP

Tel: 01622 831257 Fax: 01622 832840

www.mardenmedicalcentre.nhs.uk

No report received

MARDEN MEMORIAL HALL

By Marden Memorial Hall Treasurer

At the Hall Committee meeting on 28th March 2024, following the AGM, Ian Newton was elected Chairman of the Marden Memorial Hall Management Committee for 2024/25.

Staffing

At the current time an employed caretaker has not been taken on but the local company contracted in 2023 remains (Harvey House Property & Garden (HHP&G)) who undertakes the day-to-day maintenance, painting and decorating and other work required. External companies for electricity, gas, plumbing etc are contacted to deal with any work that HHP&G is unable to achieve.

Unfortunately, in October 2024 Debbie McKenzie had to resign as cleaner due to other commitments. Trustees continue to look at other options but, in the meantime, HHP&G along with trustees and hirers undertake the cleaning role.

In November 2024 Lisa Stevens was employed as the Facilities Administrator for 10 hours per week who assists with bookings, obtaining quotes, ensuring all certificates are up to date and contacting external companies when they are required to assist with any work that is required.

Residential Flat

In August 2024 the tenant gave a month's notice to quit and moved out at the beginning of September. Since that time the Trustees agreed to do any work that was required in the flat prior to it being re-let, this included decorating, new kitchen cupboards, new stair carpet and electrical work. This was all completed by end of November and Radfords Estate Agents have been contracted to advertise the flat for letting (approx. monthly rental proposed is £1,250).

Hirings

The hall continues to be very well used with the pre-school being the main user. Other regular groups /organisations continue using the facilities at other times of day and evenings. As well as a continual stream of bookings for parties.

Projects

Projects undertaken this year include:

- Installation of solar batteries and conversion of storage room to accommodate these (grant received)
- Resurfacing of majority of main car park and white lining
- Redecorating of Main Hall
- Sanding and varnishing of main hall floor
- Refurbishment of residential accommodation (see also above)

Future projects include:

2025

- Purchase of new tables
- Purchase of large projector screen for Main Hall
- Purchase of a range cooker for the Main Hall kitchen.
- Refurbishment of ladies' toilets

2026

- Refurbishment of Main Hall kitchen

Other

Regular statutory inspections continue with safety gas checks, Pat Testing, fire alarm and CCTV systems.

Thanks are expressed to all the Trustees for their hard work and commitment during the year.



MARDEN MOTOR CLUB

No report received

MARDEN NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

By Cllr Andy Turner

Report included in the Planning Committee report.

MARDEN ODDFELLOWS

No report received

MARDEN PARISH CHURCH

No report received

MARDEN PATIENT PARTICIPATION GROUP (PPG)

No report received

MARDEN PRIMARY ACADEMY

By Hannah Penning, Principal

Expansion and building works

I am pleased to report that significant remodelling of the current building took place over the summer. This enhancement has seen the classrooms increased in size, alongside a thorough redecoration throughout the premises. Additionally, we have introduced a new entrance area, providing a comfortable waiting space for parents and visitors upon arrival. Our new library, furnished with contemporary furniture and cosy seating, is now open for use. Furthermore, I am delighted to announce that planning for the new build has been approved, and we are currently awaiting a confirmed start date for this exciting development.

Competitions

This year, the children have had the opportunity to participate in a variety of competitions, which included swimming galas, a Bake Off, a creative art competition, football tournaments, and netball matches. I am proud to report that all of the children who took part displayed fantastic sportsmanship and served as excellent role models for their peers. Notably, we were thrilled to emerge as the winners of this year's Boys LAT Football tournament, a testament to the hard work and dedication of our young athletes. Such experiences not only foster talent but also enhance teamwork and community spirit within our school.

Trips and links with the local community

To build on the children's learning in school, we have worked hard to plan a range of exciting off-site trips and opportunities for the children within the local area. Some of

the trips include: Bedgebury, the Natural History Museum, the British Museum and the Tower of London. Our Year 6 children went on a residential trip to Norfolk where they had the opportunity to do a range of outdoor and teamwork activities. We have continued to work closely with the village to share with the children what Marden has to offer. Thanks to Reverend Nicky and Reverend Vicky we have been able to take the children on regular outings to the church and they have also made visits to the school to lead assemblies and talk to the children as part of their inquiries. Marden Library has kindly welcomed us again this year, and we have visited them on a number of occasions to promote a love of reading.

MARDEN SOCIETY

By Steve McArragher

We hold monthly talks in the Vestry Hall on the 4th Wednesday of each month. In 2024 this included a tour of The Universe, the Rother Levels, Aviation in Kent, the Real Pocohontas story, Marden Wildlife in “Ladybird Land” and a Magic Lantern tour of Kent. Our summer outing to Cobham Hall was enjoyed by 15 members and friends on a beautiful summer afternoon with two excellent guides. The cream tea was excellent and notable for the size of the scones.

We have a full programme of talks planned for 2025 covering Kent customs, Rudyard Kipling, British Airships, Witchcraft in Kent and the 1066 Harolds Way walk. Our Summer Outing will be a trip up the Medway on the Kentish Lady on 25th June.

We also continue to publish four issues of the Parish Pump each year and circulate to all members but would be grateful for some new ideas (and preferably authors) for articles. Admission to our meetings is free, and we only ask that you buy at least one raffle ticket. Membership currently costs only £5 per year, including subscription to the “Parish Pump”. For further information please contact Steve McArragher on 01622 831007 or steve.mcarragher@btinternet.com.



MARDEN SPORTING MEMORIES

By Sue Eltringham

Marden Sporting Memories - Tuesday 2.30 – 4pm

Marden Cricket & Hockey Club, Maidstone Road, Marden. TN12 9AG

It has been a busy year for Marden Sporting Memories. This is a group where adults meet to talk and reminisce about past sporting occasions; and catch up on the weekly sports events.

During the past year we have had some fabulous visitors to the group, including Ellie Sims, the world masters weight-lifting champion and Bobby Akers who shared his experiences of playing para sports and the challenges of being a sports fan when

you live with cerebral palsy. We also had a visit from Trevor Sturgess a retired sports journalist who shared his tales of interviewing Pele plus a visit from Jamie Spence, the former European Tour golfer, you can read more about his visit here <https://www.sportingmemories.uk/news/news/marden-tee-up-for-golf-masterclass-with-jamie-spence/>

The group enjoyed a coach trip to Tunbridge Wells to see the World Cup Subbuteo exhibition, kindly supported by funding from the Marden Community Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Some of the group also travelled by train to Canterbury to watch an afternoon of cricket, The Kent Spitfires v Durham.

The Christmas party was at the Balfour Winery, hosted by Richard & Leslie where everyone enjoyed a fabulous Christmas dinner with singing led by Marden's Come & Sing Group.

Each week there are 'half-time' refreshments, then afterwards everyone joins in with a variety of physical activities; all very light-hearted – lots of laughing and reminiscing. Such as Subbuteo, table tennis, snooker, indoor cricket, boccia, Owzthat, indoor curling and we even tried our hands at some practice with Korfbal; with instructions from Corrine Buckland, a former England Korfbal coach..... don't think anyone will make the team though!

We would like to thank Martin and all at Marden Sports Club for their on-going support for Marden Sporting Memories.

If you would like to read more about the organisation, click on the link [The Sporting Memories Foundation \(sportingmemoriesnetwork.com\)](http://TheSportingMemoriesFoundation(sportingmemoriesnetwork.com)).

Can you help? We are always looking for people who would like to visit us to share their sporting memories with the group. Do you, or someone you know have an interesting sporting or physical activity story to share? Please contact Sue Eltringham. MardenSportingMemories@gmail.com or call 01622 833053

MARDEN SPORTS CLUB

By Martin Goodman, Clubhouse Manager

Development

The last year at MSC has seen the addition of 2 Padel Tennis courts. Padel Tennis is currently the fastest growing participation sport in Europe. Its popularity is clear with MSC court bookings at peak times approaching 100%.

Planning permission has been given for floodlights on astroturf hockey pitch 2. The club is currently engaged in a members' fundraising campaign to have the floodlights installed including other work stipulated as a condition of the planning consent.

Hockey

The regular hockey season has just finished for both adults and juniors, although there will continue to be youth hockey festivals and events through the spring and a senior's summer league.

Marden Russets currently has 8 men's teams and 5 women's teams as well as mixed and veterans' teams. Season 24/25 was successful with most of our teams finishing high up in their respective leagues.

For the juniors, Marden has programmes at all age groups from under six to under sixteen. The club has also played host to county wide festivals for the various age groups, state schools' events and private school training and matches.

Cricket

With the cricket season approaching, net sessions for seniors and juniors have begun. Marden currently has 3 senior teams, a development team and boys both and girls' programmes at various age groups.

The excellent facilities and pitch attract touring youth teams from as far afield as London.

The club also hosts the Young Leaders in Cricket Programme which provides opportunities for young people to acquire leadership skills.

Tennis

The thriving MSC tennis club caters for players of all ages, regardless of ability. The tennis team play matches against other clubs.

The club is partnered with Hotshotz, a company providing tennis coaching for all ages.

Other Activities

The clubhouse hosts the Marden Sporting Memories club which brings together older people with sporting interests and backgrounds. Through its meetings, Sporting Memories aims to reduce isolation and promote mental and physical wellbeing. All the playing surfaces, clubhouse and other facilities are available for rent for sporting and non-sporting events. The clubhouse is regularly booked for events including birthdays and wakes.

The pitches are also booked for other sports. Local football clubs with both adult and junior teams regularly use the facilities. Football 5 Star, a company providing high quality football coaching for boys and girls of all ages, are regular users for the astroturfs.

MARDEN VILLAGE CLUB

No report received

MARDEN WALKING GROUP

By Steve McArragher

The group continues to organise three series of walks. Long Distance walks are done in roughly 9-mile sections doing one section per week on Tuesdays. These are led by Ian Balmer and have just completed walks along the Teise and Beult. A new walk along the North Downs Way back from Dover will start on 1st April.

Sunday walks are done on the first Sunday of each month, normally 5-6 miles. Saturday walks are held every Saturday afternoon led by Colin Coomber and are 1 to 1½ hours with no stiles. This group are also running monthly excursions by train to places in Kent.

Details of the walks are published in the Parish Magazine, but for further information please contact Steve McArragher on 01622 831007 (steve.mcarragher@btinternet.com) or Sian Burr on 01622 831106 (sianburr@hotmail.co.uk).

WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

By Barbara Hammond

Marden WI meets on the first Thursday of the month at 7.45pm in the Vestry Hall. Our membership has been 42 this past year.

In the last year, our programme included a wide variety of subjects, which included flower arranging, a talk from 'More Than Words' a charity based in Kent which teaches Makaton for families and children that have communication difficulties.

Juliette Jenson, a Global Manufacturing Chief Scientist, employed by a large retailer and travels overseas to factories who supply goods, checking on everything from hygiene in the premises, to ensuring that what it says on the outside of the box is really what is in it!

Katherine Hook spoke on making her Sloe Gin chocolates, samples always available! Following our talk by Fergus Garret, head gardener at Dixter, several members enjoyed an afternoon visit and tea in July. We also enjoyed pub lunches during the year. Various other events included Watercolour Painting workshops, Walking Netball sessions and the opportunity to learn Paddle Boarding and Kayaking.

Our 2025 programme is nearly complete, thanks to our Programme Secretaries and includes, a talk on Fraud Protection, Setting up a Flower farm, Barnardos, Cake Decorating and Silk Painting.

Please come along initially as a visitor and hopefully enjoy the evening, which could lead to many more evenings with us - Contact Barbara Hammond – President, for further information – 01622 831569.



MARDEN WILDLIFE

By Ray Morris, Chairman

mardenwildlife@gmail.com / www.mardenwildlife.org.uk

The last twelve months have been as busy as ever, if not busier, for Marden Wildlife, measured by its interaction with an increasing list of species and its activities in recording, protecting and increasing their numbers.

As Kew Gardens at Wakehurst Place and the National Arboretum at Westonbirt collect and propagate seeds of rare flowers and trees, so Marden quietly does this, albeit on a lesser scale and without the publicity of BBC's Countryfile. Aided by Marden Horticultural Society members, compost paid for by KCC Plan Tree, and with bespoke facilities at Foundation Farm subsidised by Southeast Water, this will have a marked impact on village life as wildflower meadows are restocked, and future generations enjoy the shade of The Weald's iconic Chequer trees.

As more local farmers recognise the need to boost the nation's wildlife as well as produce food, and other landowners add an increasingly wildlife-friendly dimension to their land management, opportunities are increasing for our members to explore and record the resulting increase. Given that birds are relatively easy to spot (and given our members' expertise to identify them) it's not surprising that the Parish list of birds now exceeds a hundred-and-fifty – a total that would be the envy of many nature reserves and one that increased last Autumn by the appearance of the rare Red-Backed Shrike. Less glamorous but equally important has been the discovery of yet another rare fungus. Found a year ago in our ancient woodland, with a name unpronounceable by anyone but mycologists (*Steccherinum bourdotii*), it took a whole year of discussions between our expert – David Newman - and Kew Garden's top expert to identify it! Unsurprisingly, having only been recorded a handful of times in the UK, this is the first record for Kent.

Aided by expertise and funding from Kent Wildlife Trust and Natural England, we have continued our study of the local Turtle Dove population. This has been a huge undertaking made possible by many hours of volunteers' work tracking doves across the landscape – well beyond the Parish - with trail cameras and hi-tec GPS tags. But the effort is paying dividends in our increased knowledge of their whereabouts and behaviour. As the doves return from Africa to breed in Marden this year we will have extra technology in our research armory in the shape of state-of-art audio recorders funded by a company installing a local solar array.

Alongside the deployment of new technology, the humble measuring stick is sufficient for a group of our volunteers to survey the condition of the village's hedgerows. Some may be as old as the village itself, and most were recorded in the 1820 Tithe Book. Details, including a measurement of quality for wildlife, are

registered on a national website; Marden's are generally well managed with a high wildlife value.

While funding, as ever, remains a challenge for our 'free at the point of enjoyment of wildlife' ethic – ie. no income from membership fees! – we now have sufficient expertise to be awarded a small commercial contract to monitor moths and butterflies on a local farm to assess the effectiveness of DEFRA's policies. Much of this expertise has been acquired through members' many enjoyable hours spent trapping, recording and discussing moths in their gardens and on local farms. The group's membership spans those we refer to as experts – and some really are, participating in their chosen field at a very high level, eg. in the detection and control of invasive yellow-legged hornets in the UK – and our Facebook page has more than a thousand adherents posting everything from snaps of garden wildlife to informed professional opinion. Educational activities range from a grammar school's adoption of a local farm to base its International Baccalaureate curriculum in first-hand environmental study, to encouraging five-year-olds' understanding of nature in a local Forest School. To increase wider engagement with Marden's natural history, we hope to secure funding for more community engagement via drama and music, and to encourage more interest from schools.

Both Marden Wildlife and Marden Farmer Cluster have engaged with the preparation of Kent's Local Nature Recovery Strategy and have helped shape the draft document. Our aim remains to record, protect and restore our parish's unique biodiversity, including that of the River Beult. Threats posed by large scale developments are increasingly part of our everyday reality. We will continue to ensure our evidence-based environmental knowledge is submitted to the planning process to ensure applications are properly scrutinised.

Being entirely voluntary, we depend on the interest of local people and their willingness to become involved in our activities and surveys. If you think you could contribute a few hours of your time to help us with surveying hedges, potting seedlings, counting turtle doves on camera footage, or exploring the fascinating world of moths and butterflies, do contact us – no previous experience required!

MEN'S BREAKFAST

No report received

SAFE ANAESTHESIA

No report received