



MARDEN ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

TUESDAY 2ND APRIL 2024

**MARDEN MEMORIAL HALL
GOUDHURST ROAD
MARDEN**

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PARISH CLERK)**

PLEASE FIND ATTACHED REPORTS FROM:

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COMMUNITY WARDEN

By Mira Martin

MARDEN ORGANISATIONS AND CLUBS

(some reports have been taken from the recent newsletter)

- 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

This has been another very busy year for your Parish Council. We have endeavoured to deliver improvements to our village environment within the constraints of our budget. Of particular importance to us has been improving pedestrian access around the village. I am especially pleased that we were able to complete the path beside the Library last year and along with the flower bed planted by Cllr Boswell and myself and the bed maintained by Marden in Bloom this area is now a very pleasant and welcoming part of the village, as well as providing safe access for pedestrians. We have also recently linked up the path between The Parsonage and Windsor Meadow developments which means that both developments can be accessed on foot without getting wet and muddy. It is a mystery why the developers of both sites did not think to do this when the sites were constructed but we are discovering all the time that it is left to the Parish Council to sort out and tidy up what the developers leave behind.

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

Highways issues continue to be a cause of concern for residents. We have developed a Highways Improvement Plan which currently has 25 outstanding items on it. Kent Highways are supportive, but lack of funding means it is doubtful that many of the identified issues will be resolved in the near future. We recently heard back from KCC Highways that of our top 5 priorities they have discounted 2 of them. We have pushed for a continuation of single yellow lines in Goudhurst Road, but KCC have said there is no case for them. I'm sure many residents disagree with this; we will continue to seek road safety solutions in this area with KCC and the Police. We had also asked for a bollard to be placed at the Maidstone Road/High Street junction which KCC deem unnecessary. There is some hope that our other 3 priorities will receive some attention but it is becoming more and more apparent that if we want highway improvements in the Parish then the Parish Council has to pay for them.

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 are developing plans to redevelop the old changing rooms at the Playing Field into a community facility and we held an open morning on 9th March at the Vestry Hall for residents to view the plans and feed back to us their comments. There were some lively discussions and we know that valuable feedback will be provided. The consultation closes on 12th April and we will be very carefully studying all the comments after that date. Updates will be provided in the Parish Council newsletter.

Littering and fly tipping remain a constant problem. It is hard to understand why people do not take their rubbish home with them. On Saturday 16th March we held the annual litter pick. On a lovely sunny morning 44 adults, including Parish Councillors and staff, 10 Police Cadets and more than 10 children litter picked the village centre and many of the outlying roads. More than 60 bags of rubbish were collected, which were then transported to the

Library Car Park for collection by MBC. We are very grateful to everyone who helped to spring clean the Parish and to those residents who regularly litter pick around the Parish. If you see any fly tipping please report it to MBC, they respond very quickly once it is reported.

The Parish Council has a range of environmental policies and is committed to our biodiversity responsibilities. I am especially grateful to Cllrs Anne Boswell and Matt Besant for their work in this area and for spearheading our tree planting initiative which has seen more than 2000 trees planted in the Parish over the last year.

After a very wet winter and a record wet February it will be no surprise that flooding has featured high on our agenda. We remained very concerned that the sewer on Maynards path bursts whenever there is heavy rain. We continue to report all events to Southern Water, since November last year there have been 5 incidents. I am grateful to Cllr Mike Summersgill who has been investigating the sewer network and raised questions for Southern Water to answer. We await their response.

We have held a number of public events in the last year including the ever popular Marden at Christmas. We held a fete to celebrate the King's Coronation in May, although the weather was not helpful on the day. On June 6th this year we will be joining the national commemoration of 80 years since D Day. Our beacon will be lit in Southons Field at 9.15pm, at the same time as beacons all over the nation and on the beaches in Normandy. We invite all residents to come along and bring a picnic to join in the commemoration.

The Summer Play Scheme was an outstanding success last Summer. Led by Jen Ward up to 64 children attended each day for 2 weeks at Marden Primary Academy. Jen has agreed to run the scheme again this year, but due to the exciting plans for the School it will be held at the Scout HQ. We hope to return to the School next year.

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 Gillis Coates 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.

A lot of Parish Council time is spent responding to consultations, both those held by MBC and KCC and any national ones we feel are relevant to us here in Marden. We very actively responded to the KCC consultations regarding the Children's Centre and the Community Warden service. We are grateful to the support we received from our County Councillor Lottie Parfitt Reid but are very disappointed that Marden Children's Centre is earmarked for Closure and that the Community Warden service is due to be dramatically scaled back. We have already held a constructive meeting with KCC Childrens and Young Peoples Services

about how they will deliver services to our families in Marden when the Children's Centre closes.

We are grateful to our Borough Councillors for the continued support they give us. We meet regularly to discuss items of interest and to exchange views. As many of you know Cllr Burton is standing down at this election and I want to thank you for your unwavering support for the Parish Council and the residents of the Parish. We wish you well for the future.

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 2 Parish Councillors stood down – Matt Burton and Chris Barker and we are very grateful to them for the work they did for the Parish during their time in office. We co-opted 2 new councillors – Mike Summersgill and Adrian Rabot, both of whom have hit the ground running and are making valuable contributions to the Council.

2nd May this year sees both Parish Council and Borough Council elections. All your Parish Councillors have to stand down but hopefully many of us will be standing for re-election. If you are interested in joining the Parish Council, please speak to any of us after the meeting. There is still time, just, to submit an application.

Finally, a huge thanks to our office staff, without whom we could not function. Deputy Clerk Rachel has truly thrown 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 Councillors to contain, but she makes sure that we do what we have to and nothing slips through the gaps. We welcomed Lisa Stevens who joined us in May as our Administrative Assistant. All of us here tonight are grateful to Ali, Rachel and Lisa for your hard work, dedication and constant good humour.

We are also extremely grateful to our two caretakers – Ian Jones who has looked after the Cemetery for more than 35 years, and Chris Prince who looks after all our open space and many other jobs that need doing around the village as well.

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 Play Area, Rookery Path and Southons Field, as well as Marden Cemetery and Public Toilets. It is also a discussion forum for Climate, Sustainability & Biodiversity as well as Health & Wellbeing issues. The Village Events Sub-Committee also reports to Amenities.

Southons Field is a beautiful dog-free haven with a plethora of trees for residents to enjoy and children to run around in a safe and peaceful environment – so important for health and wellbeing. As well as the Play Trail - which presents a challenge for both adults and children - there's a bay of swings, football nets and several picnic benches which are inspected weekly by the caretaker. New gates leading to the field were installed last year and a new football net will be in place soon.

The Marden Wildlife Group have installed two QR information codes explaining the wildlife, trees, wildflower meadow etc. which residents may find of interest (the information needs

updating). 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 looks wonderful in early Summer attracting many bees and butterflies and a bench has been placed next to the meadow by the 'Bloomers'.

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 6th June to commemorate the 80th anniversary of D-Day. The Marden Motor Club Show on 25th May, the Rude Mechanicals Theatre Company will perform again on 21st June and the Hazlitt Theatre Summer Touring Show is performing The Three Musketeers on 22nd August all at Southons Field.

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, youth shelter which are inspected weekly by the caretaker and a Dog Bag Station. More CCTV will be installed shortly to monitor these areas.

Sadly, the picnic table in Napoleon Drive play area which was damaged last year was made good, but once again it was vandalised and reported as a crime, but a new picnic table will shortly be installed. There have also been a few incidences of trees being removed which were planted last year – again these have been reported as a crime. In the Playing Field play area, the netting on the multi-play unit is being replaced and a new piece of equipment will be installed where the old spinner was.

Marden Minors Football Club no longer require the use of the field for football matches, so the old Changing Rooms are now redundant. Marden Parish Council still has S106 monies left to spend at the Playing Field which cannot legally be spent elsewhere. We undertook an initial public consultation last year where the consensus of residents' responses was to use as a dedicated youth facility (with controlled supervision). As KCC Youth Services is currently not running the youth club in Marden, another consultation was held in March where we proposed that the refurbished building be used by any village group, residents and for events. We plan to extend the building to a community space with three storage areas, a WC facility, small community room and kitchenette area. The architect who has drawn up the plans is in the process of obtaining indicative quotes from building companies and once agreed, planning permission will be sought.

Chris Prince, our Caretaker, and our contractor, Graham Carey, spend many hours keeping our green spaces in good order. It is unfortunate that some of these hours are spent removing litter and graffiti.

Marden Cemetery is a tranquil place of rest with a plethora of wildlife and is kept immaculate by our long-serving caretaker Ian Jones and we are very grateful for all his efforts in maintaining the Cemetery to such a high standard. Section 4 is now in use but only headstones are permitted in the new 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 will be planted. A sign is being 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, 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 biodiversity responsibilities, last year we planted several trees at the Playing Field to help create a wildlife corridor and many whips/saplings were also planted in March. Sadly, some of these have not survived or been vandalised.

In February, as part of the Kent Tree Plan initiative, we planted 1,000 whips to form a hedgerow in the field behind the Cemetery which Marden Parish Council owns. Another 1,000 whips were planted at February half-term provided by KCC/DEFRA with the assistance of the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership. The aim of the project is 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. Thanks to those volunteers who helped including the Police Cadets.

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. Councillors are currently exploring the possibility of installing solar panels on the roof 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 Group – The Parish Council now has a statutory duty to exercise all its functions with regard to 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 have ratified both an Environmental Policy and Biodiversity Policy. It is now in a position to extend the group to any residents and businesses who are interested in helping with the project and some Councillors are undertaking Carbon Literacy training.

Health & Wellbeing - Marden Parish Council strive to provide as much information as possible on health and wellbeing and in liaison with the PPG, maintain a 'Health & Wellbeing Contact List' which will be updated shortly. We are part of the Marden

Community Engagement Forum 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 Children's Centre, the Parish Church, Involve (Social Prescribing), the School, Village Community Warden, 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 Richard Adam, 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.

At the October/November Finance Committee meeting the RFO presents Councillors with the forecast to 31st March along with a draft budget for the forthcoming financial year. Councillors review this along with any requests for additional expenditure, revenue and/or capital, and start preparing the document ready for agreement in January when setting the precept.

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 the cost of various services, the Parish Council has made a slight increase which means the amount of money collected from residents to be spent in Marden in the next financial year from April 2024 for a Band D taxpayer will be £82.72 per annum or £6.89 per month. This is an increase of £2.44 per year or 20p per month (3.8%) 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 scheme. This grant is set and paid 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

2023/24 saw business as usual for the Marden Parish Council's Planning Committee.

Face to face 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 taking a keen interest in Maidstone Borough Council's Local Plan Review which recently has been voted on to adopt by MBC. This has involved keeping on top of all the information and details coming out from MBC, I would like to thank all my colleagues, both on the Planning Committee and our Borough Councillors for keep the MPC abreast of all the 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 reassess 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 is in the process of issuing a draft of the CAAMP. Due to elections, we have yet to be given a date on when this will happen.

The Marden Neighbourhood Plan (MNP) review is still on going with members of the Parish reviewing and cross referencing any changes to the MBC's emerging Local Plan and changes to the National Planning Policy Framework to see if the MNP polices are still current and still in conformity with these two documents.

This work is being carried out in line with MBC Local Plan which has now been adopted. A draft copy of the amended MNP has been assessed by MBC and we have had feedback. This work will be ongoing until we have an updated Marden Neighbourhood Plan.

The other major task undertaken by the Planning Committee is reviewing and commenting on planning applications within the Parish. This year 97 planning applications have come before the Council, which is slightly less than last year, some of which have been controversial. I hope that all residents' views have been considered - 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

The role of Parish Clerk is a varied one and not one day is the same.

This past Council year (May to April) the Parish Office staff will have covered 12 Full Council meetings; 2 Extra Ordinary Full Council meetings; 9 Amenities Committee meetings; 5 Finance Committee meetings and 20 Planning Committee meetings along with many Neighbourhood Plan, Sub-Committee, Sub-Group 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 King's Coronation, Summer Play Scheme, village litter pick, Marden at Christmas and the changing rooms consultation in March.

At the 2023 APM we reported that we unfortunately had to say goodbye to Hollie as she resigned to take on a role working from home but we were glad to welcome Lisa as our new Admin Assistant in June 2023. Lisa has settled into the office and all three of us are working well together.

My clerking role continues to regularly cover working with families and Funeral Directors to arrange burials and interments of ashes; signposting residents to reach the right people to deal with their issues; helping Rachel with planning the Parish Council events; liaising with other agencies, County and Borough Council together with the ad hoc duties of answering telephone calls, emails, in person visits to the office.

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.

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 four times a year, following the drafting by Cllr Boswell, ready for printing – a mammoth task.

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 11 Parish Councillors.

We are looking forward to the year ahead with the elections on 2nd May; wondering whether this will bring us any new Cllrs; the refurbishment of the changing rooms and D-Day celebrations along with the regular events planned.

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

By County Cllr Lottie Parfitt-Reid
Lottie.parfitt-reid@kent.gov.uk / 07919 360000

Budget

Prior to the budget, KCC received news that government were giving some additional support to local authorities which with the exceptionally challenging financial pressures all councils are under is very welcome. Of the 600M announced, 500m is new funding for councils with responsibilities for adult social care and children's social care. The benefit to KCC is around 12.9 M, however this really doesn't address the structural issues we are faced with. Circa £13m, when we were looking at requiring £118m in savings isn't going to cut it and difficult decisions to ensure the councils sustainability will have to be made.

Adult Social Care

ASC is still, and probably will be until the whole sector is reformed, the biggest and most troublesome aspect of our statutory responsibilities. Many transformative initiatives are happening which are starting to show green shoots of delivery, but it is early days, and the problem is ever increasing. There's a big push or drive to increase the uptake of directs payments.

We have launched a new technology service; Enabled Lives with a raft of digital technologies with the aim to keep people living independent healthier and longer lives in their own homes. I was asked to serve on the ASC committee which started in March. I have a personal interest in this area and am looking forward to contributing to this department.

Children's Services:

The closure of the Marden Children's centre remains first and foremost for our division, and whilst it's a very disappointing decision I have constantly sort assurances that the money will be invested in staff and people to deliver a comprehensive and reliable outreach service for our residents. I have also been reassured no closure will happen until we know what and where and HOW the service will be delivered. Our meeting with the team was positive but now we need to see the actions. My concern is that things are happening at a snail's pace and then suddenly it's all change so I will keep asking for updates.

UASC:

We continue to press for a comprehensive national transfer scheme as this is the only long-term solution to enable us to dispatch all out legal responsibilities. This is after all a national issue and must be treated so. Reception capacity for 9 sites is being established to comply with the court judgment from last July, no such site is currently in our division.

Highways

The state of the road network

The state of our roads is blatantly clear for all to see, and the situation is not good, we are of course at the worst time of year for torrential rain coupled with freeze thaw the damage is unprecedented. This is unquestionably a national problem, driving the back lanes of Norfolk on a regular basis I see the same problems everywhere. This of course provides no comfort to residents. Recent correspondence with Neil Baker our highways cabinet member with whom I'm in constant touch has emphasised that to repair and bring up to standard our entire network would cost £700M and if all assets were included it would be in excess of £1B this

puts the government's announcement which allocates us £134m over the next 10-11 year into context, it should be noted this is also back-ended...it will help but is hardly transformational. On a positive note, we are bringing the pothole blitz forward and the funding does give us a degree of confidence to set longer term plans.

Utility Roadworks

This is probably the number one issue I get contacted about - Emergency Road closures. These spring up instantly and seemingly with no thought or consideration for planned or scheduled works that are going on currently. Consequently, we have set up a Project Team to look at the whole issue, which is more complicated than might be supposed. This is not least because a significant percentage of Utility Roadworks are classed as emergencies, on their own definition of the term, which mean that KCC gets no notice of them, and only has to be informed two hours after they start. I will give more detail about this in my annual report which will be sent over in the next couple of weeks. But just to note in conclusion over 30% of road closures are done under Emergency powers.

On a final and personal note, whilst I have many concerns regarding the budget, I felt it my duty to vote it through. Things are very challenging, but nothing compared to the consequences of having to issue a 114 notice. There was however a saving put forward of 1.3million which involved the allocation of approx. £330k to MBC to assist with recycling, which was to cease immediately. On the surface it would be easy to conflate this with money that could be used to save the HWRC, but they are different things. This money is vital for the borough and would in the long term save KCC money in the form of gate fees at the Allington incinerator by diverting recycling to material recovery facilities in advance, therefore less waste to Allington. It also helps us hit recycling targets allowing us to reclaim PRN. An amendment was put forward by the opposition to restore this payment to the 4 boroughs which I explained to the leadership team I felt I must support and therefore voted for this amendment.

Public Rights of Way:

The headlines (the tables are below for information):

Length of PRoW network in Maidstone Rural South (as best as we can get it): 132Km
5Km length of PRoW are cleared three times by contractors through the summer months.
We're always happy to discuss amendments to our programme with the Parishes if they feel that routes should be added (or removed).

177 issues reported through the last 12 months,

97 of which are resolved.

41 are awaiting inspection.

31 are in progress in one way or another.

8 alignment/ long term obstruction issues have been reported/ identified. Just one or two of these can generate huge amounts of work for officers, can take many months and involve legal challenges.

21% of the network has been inspected by volunteers in the last 12 months.

29 Hours of volunteer work.

One temporary closure to facilitate work.

Interestingly 155 property searches were responded to. It's a very accurate indicator of the volume of property sales.

KCC has been operating without an officer in the Maidstone area for the last few months. Recruitment is underway and hopefully we'll have someone in post early in the new financial year.

As always if there are any particular topics of interest don't hesitate to contact me.

Maidstone South: Key PRoW Data (last 365 days from 13/03/2024)					
Issue Status	Boughton Monchelsea	Chart Sutton	Marden	Staplehurst	Area Total
Resolved/ Closed	45	7	17	28	97
Awaiting Allocation	0	0	1	0	1
Allocated - Awaiting Inspection	8	7	12	13	40
In Progress	0	1	2	3	6
Landowner Action	0	1	1	4	6
Long Term Obstruction/ Alignment	1	6	1	0	8
Work Added to Forward Maintenance Plan	5	0	0	3	8
Work Scheduled	3	1	3	4	11
Parish Total	62	23	37	55	177
Issues Resolved/Closed (%)	72.58%	30.43%	45.95%	50.91%	54.80%
Issues Open/Live (%)	27.42%	69.57%	54.05%	49.09%	45.20%
PRoW Network	Boughton Monchelsea	Chart Sutton	Marden	Staplehurst	Area Total
Length of PRoW (m)	16,300	24,927	50,471	40,635	132,333
Length of PRoW (m): Vegetation Clearance	1148	868	861	2294	5171
% Length of PRoW : Vegetation Clearance	7.04%	3.48%	1.71%	5.65%	3.91%
Total Length of Clearance Over 3 Cuts (m)	3444	2604	2583	6882	15513
Length of network (m) inspected by volunteers	5423.41	2608	5443	14375	27,849
% Length of PRoW inspected by volunteers	33.27%	10.46%	10.78%	35.38%	21.04%
Barrier	5	0	2	1	8
Bridge	12	29	79	52	172
Fingerpost	51	44	78	60	233
Gap	16	14	30	25	85
Gate	31	43	45	54	173
Steps	6	7	9	2	24
Stile	16	42	64	82	204
Parish Total	137	179	307	276	899
Furniture inspected by officers during period	74	52	36	46	208
% Furniture Inspected	54.01%	29.05%	11.73%	16.67%	23.14%
Property search requests for PRoW and CLVG (Full response required)	2	5	24	15	46
Property search carried out for PRoW and CLVG (Full response not required)	3	38	25	43	109

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

By Borough Cllr Claudine Russell

It has once again been a busy year, both in terms of the ward and Maidstone Borough as I continued to be in the Cabinet, adding Communities to my portfolio of Leisure and Arts.

During the year I have tried my best to help residents with various queries, from planning issues, waste collection issues, and housing problems. I have spoken at MBC Planning Committee on behalf of residents and have this year sat on Planning Committee to further assist in the correct determination of planning applications. I have furthered my campaign on rural crime by attending a meeting at the Ministry of Justice, campaigning to have catapults (apart from when used for fishing) to be classified as a dangerous weapon and to have the punishment for their use to reflect this. I was really pleased to see the return of rural crime to the police control strategy and this, combined with the return to “bobbies on the beat”, will help enhance safety in our villages.

In my cabinet role work on the new archaeology gallery at the Museum has continued at pace, it opens in June, and we have secured funds to continue to improve the offering with a revamp of the Modern History Gallery. The new leisure contract has been let and the capital budget now has an allocation for a new centre built to a sustainable concept. The café is going so well at Mote Park that the plans for the second smaller café at the other side of the lake continue at pace. Maidstone Town Centre has never had more events on offer, and I have strived to use the UK Share Prosperity money to make as many of them free to attend and family focussed as possible. As recently as last week I was pleased to be able to bring to committee a plan to create an Arts and Maker Space in the town centre. Finally, our community grants have helped lots of different groups and organisations and I would encourage anyone to watch this 2 minute video of how we have distributed some of the funds; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8CwqsuVI1A>

Within the wider council you may have seen that we have awarded a new waste collection contract and that is shortly to commence, the local plan is reaching its adoption vote and we continue to purchase both land and houses for our affordable housing stock for local people.

As you may already know, we are about to all stand for the first “all-out” Maidstone Borough Council elections. This was something that we wanted, to save voter fatigue and lots of taxpayers money. It will mean that whoever is returned after May will have a 4-year term to run the council. I’ve really enjoyed my term since 2021 and if I’m lucky enough to be voted in again I would be proud to represent you to the best of my ability once again at Maidstone Borough Council.

As always, if you need my help, please do not hesitate to email me at
claudinerussell@maidstone.gov.uk

COMMUNITY WARDEN

By Mira Martin

Over the years this role has evolved from being 80% visible presence when I first started, to being more about responding to agency referrals and the welfare of individual residents. This is why I’m not seen out and about as much.

Agencies such as GP surgeries, social services, housing associations as well as other residents make referrals to our service. As a result, I'm carrying out more home visits and assisting residents to access the relevant services they need.

The Neighbourhood Charter has prompted return visits to residents who have been feeling a bit lonely and isolated and I've been advising them of the many local clubs and groups in Marden. I'm happy to accompany anyone that isn't confident enough to go on their own.

Having been approached by Golding Homes for assistance, I'm currently helping to set up a Victim Support group. A resident who has been a scam victim would like to help others and to raise awareness. The group will give support to anyone that may be feeling a bit overwhelmed and doesn't know who to turn to.

I enjoyed taking time out to help with planting trees at the cemetery and it was lovely to work outdoors with some very enthusiastic volunteers. It made a nice change, and I can't wait to see the woodland start to mature.

I'm still popping into clubs and groups and am available for people to contact by phone and email:

Mobile: 07969 584179 Email: mira.martin@kent.gov.uk

MARDEN ORGANISATIONS AND SOCIETIES

LITTLE FISHES TODDLER GROUP

Taken from recent MPC Spring Newsletter

Little Fishes baby and toddler group runs in the Vestry Hall every Wednesday during term time between 9.30am-11.00am. All parents and carers are welcome to go along with their little ones. There is no need to book just turn up as and when you are able to. Suggested donation for each session is £1. For more information, please contact Kathy: office@mardenchuch.org.uk or Rev Nicky: rev.nicky@gmail.com

MARDEN BOWLS CLUB

By Colin Smith (Secretary)

High Street, Howlands Road, Marden. TN12 9DT

We are looking forward to the new season and our Green opens on 27th April.

Our green team have been working hard over the winter months to ensure the green is ready, we really hope the weather improves as everybody is fed up with the constant rain!

We are always trying to recruit and welcome new people to our wonderful game of bowls.

Members may take part in our internal competitions and leagues. We also run a programme of matches against other clubs and our teams play in the Maidstone and Millennium League. Members also take part in County & National competitions, but our rinks are also available for leisurely 'roll ups'.

The bowls season starts late April and finishes in late September; However, the club continues to function though the winter. Short Mat bowls is available in the clubhouse, on afternoons. We do hold social events during the year (usually on Saturday evenings).

It is a game for all and ages range from 12 to 92! It is a fun and social game, and also for those who have a competitive nature. It is a good way to make friends and also helps keeping fit. If you are interested, please contact us at www.mardenbowlsclub.co.uk alternatively email Mardensecretary24@gmail.com or call 07941 485089.

Come and give it a try, you may be quietly surprised?

Club Open day coming soon Sunday 26th May from 2pm, all you need is a flat pair of shoes or trainers.

MARDEN COMMUNITY CIO

By Kate Tippen

Marden Community Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).

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 contributed towards the cost of new doors at the Vestry Hall; paid for new toys for the Little Fishes play group; covered the cost of the printed materials for the Medical Centre Nature Prescribing Project and paid for the coach for an outing the Sporting Memories Group are having to cricket at Canterbury.

We are also pleased to be supporting the concert being held in Marden Church on 21 April, given by the choir of the Chapels Royal HM Tower of London. Proceeds from the concert will be split between the food bank and Marden History Group.

Trustees are particularly keen to support village organisations and encourage any group to apply for a grant towards a specific project.

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

By Janet McIntosh

The lunches are held in the Vestry Hall once each month except December and are on Mondays at 12.30pm. There is a choice of two main courses with potatoes and freshly cooked vegetables followed by several different puddings and tea or coffee. A team of volunteer cooks prepare the food in their homes and are reimbursed the cost of the ingredients. The price per meal is £5.

The first lunches were held in 2000 and for that first year they alternated between Sundays and Mondays. Mondays proved to be more popular with both cooks and guests so the Sunday lunches were stopped. Apart from the long break for the Covid epidemic they have continued until today.

The priority is to provide meals for the infirm or elderly and for those of any age who live on their own and feel the need of company.

MARDEN CRICKET & HOCKEY CLUB

www.mardenhc.co.uk

Queries: membership@mardenhc.co.uk

Taken from recent MPC Spring Newsletter

As the days get longer, thoughts may be turning to sports and healthy activity. At Marden Cricket & Hockey Club we can offer a few ideas:

Tennis - We play all year round, with social tennis sessions being relaxed, informal and very popular (Sunday mornings & Wednesday evenings). New beginners coaching is offered on Saturdays from 1.30pm and there's Rusty Racquets on Tuesdays 7pm.

Contact tennis@mardenhc.co.uk for more info & to enjoy a free taster session.

Cricket - Outdoor nets should start mid April with indoor nets at Cornwallis School over winter. Come for a couple of free outdoor nets and see what you think. All levels, all ages welcome. See www.mardenhc.co.uk/cricket

Hockey - Russets Hockey Club always welcomes new members, especially beginners of all ages (we run special summer sessions for newbies and rusties - no charge). We have 12 adult teams and around 400 juniors all enjoying the exercise, fresh air and camaraderie at all levels. Why not try out a couple of free taster sessions (sticks can be borrowed)?

To find out more, please visit www.mardenhc.co.uk or contact membership@mardenhc.co.uk

MARDEN COMMUNITY DEMENTIA GROUP / LIVING MEMORIES

By Rachel Chacon

Marden Dementia Friendly Community has set up a monthly lunch for those living with dementia and a carer, first Thursday in the month alternating between the West End Tavern and The Unicorn. Please come along 12/12.30pm, there's no need to book. This is a great opportunity to share with others dealing with the same issues so please don't be afraid to give it a try. The next one is Thursday 2nd May at The Unicorn.

As part of our Reducing Your Risk project, we are also paying for a seated exercise class in the Congregational Hall every Friday 10.30 with Physiotherapist Hamish. Please turn up and give it a try, it is excellent, very friendly, and, of course free!

We are now making grants available to those living with dementia, please apply via mardendfcinfo@gmail.com or telephone Rachel on 01622 831941.

Amazing Summer Event, get your place booked as soon as you can! On Thursday 4th July Balfour Winery are offering us a visit to Hush Heath Manor Garden followed by lunch on their estate, transport arrangements tbc. We are also organising a Christmas event with Balfour Winery - date and arrangements tbc.

Asking for some admin help please. We would welcome some help with admin/applying for grants etc. please get in touch if this is something you can help with, thank you.

MARDEN FOOD BANK

By Kathy Young

We have around 50 families on our register and see 20-25 of those families each week – some come weekly, some towards the end of the month, but all are very grateful for the help.

We are working with Marden Pre-School and Marden Primary Academy when necessary to ensure there is practical, hands-on support for local families; and visitors can call in to meet with colleagues from Involve Kent and Talking Therapies, charities that provide advice, encouragement and support to resolve problems affecting an individual's health.

Bethany School have also been hugely supportive in donating food and attending each Friday to date-check donations and restock the cupboard after a shop – all alongside learning more about helping within the community.

We have recently managed to secure a grant of £2000.00 from Maidstone Borough Council to top up our funds through the winter months, and we are also in the process of applying for a further £1500.00 through the Parish Council's Winter Support Scheme – this along with our very generous community of donors has really helped us keep up with the increased demand we are facing.



MARDEN HISTORY GROUP & HERITAGE CENTRE

By Imogen Wedd, Chairman

The Group exists to research, preserve, and disseminate the history of the parish of Marden. It maintains a Local History Collection and Archives in the village Heritage Centre (which is accessible to visitors) and arranges events and visits of historical interest to members and volunteers.

We welcome volunteers to assist with our research and with staffing the Heritage Centre.

We have a subscription scheme for online access to our collection, and members who are unable to volunteer but would like to join us in our activities.

Website www.mardenhistory.org.uk
E-mail history@mardenhistory.org
Address Marden Library, 2 High Street, Marden, TN12 9DP



MARDEN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

By Sue Pennicott

The Society has continued to thrive over the last year, with a membership of over 100 including several new faces who joined in 2023. All are welcome.

Our monthly meetings (every month except August) in the Vestry Hall were consistently well attended. We had an excellent, and varied, programme of talks on subjects ranging from 'The 5th Kingdom of Fungi' to 'Flowers in Folklore', via the philosophy of Japanese gardening and birds in the garden. We also welcomed back Steve Edney (who appeared on Gardeners World last Autumn) who inspired us to think about Structure in the Winter Garden. At our December meeting we enjoyed a glass of 'something festive' as we watched Sophie Leathart demonstrate how to make some Christmas floral decorations, making it look so easy.

We held an additional social meeting in July, where members could meet and chat with old friends - and make new ones. Several of our members have talents besides gardening and had stalls showing and selling their art and handicrafts.

Our annual plant sale was held on the second Saturday in May as usual. This has become something of a village event and last year, as usual, there were people waiting at the gate when we opened. We are grateful to those who support us every year; everyone seems to have a thoroughly enjoyable time regardless of the weather.

We enjoyed three garden visits last year. We had a wonderful day out visiting Winchelsea Secret Gardens, where several small but very lovely gardens were open. We also had an evening visit to Boldshaves. Although we were perhaps a little late in the year to see the garden at its best, we had an interesting tour led by the owner and Head Gardener. Finally, we had a coach trip to the RHS Hyde Hall Flower Show. Did it ever rain! Being tough gardeners, we enjoyed ourselves regardless.

We were able to hold our first cream tea in probably 3 years in the delightful garden of one of our members. All were made welcome (not just members) and it was a perfect way to spend an afternoon. We hope that cream teas can again be a regular event in our calendar.

I am sure that our website, with linked Newsletters, plays a considerable part in our success. Anyone can subscribe to our informative newsletters and, of course, view our website. Our thanks go to our webmaster for maintaining such a high standard. It is definitely worth a look.
www.mardengardeners.uk



MARDEN IN BLOOM

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

Marden in Bloom had another busy and successful year in 2023 both with its projects and fund-raising activities. The 30,000 daffodils that have been planted around the village gave another stunning display to welcome Spring as well as crocus and snowdrops.

Fund Raising/Events – The Garden Safari in July attracted many visitors from both the parish and other areas and we raised £320, the Bulb Sale in September raised £280 and the Disney Scarecrow Safari in October raised £131 which again was great fun with a very high standard of competitive entries.

Sponsorship – Once again Golden Hill Nursery kindly supplied most of the Summer plants for the planters. Peter Hall, Liz Stanley and Marden Village Club sponsor 3 of the planters in the village, Marden Parish Council sponsor the troughs/bike rack in the High Street, Marden Horticultural Society look after the planter at Highwood Green and the Marden Farm Shop ladies tend the planter there. A very kind lady from Chainhurst also kindly donated money to help with our projects.

Planters – There are now 24 planters around the village including one at Chainhurst and 4 in the school garden but some of them have disintegrated and will be replaced in late Spring. Thanks go to Stanleys Garage for donating grow bags to help fill the new ones – what a kind gesture.

Watering - is always an issue and we do struggle with this task particularly in hot dry summers. We have put a shout out for volunteers and hopefully we'll get some support.

Projects – the flower beds at both the Memorial Hall and Library area continue to be tended. We planted another 4,000 naturalising bulbs on the open space areas at Windsor Meadows, the Parsonage and Highwood Green developments.

Wildflower Meadow in Southons Field – this was created in lockdown in 2020 and made another beautiful display last year attracting many insects, bees and butterflies. It is a difficult and time-consuming task to balance the plants in the meadow and Bloomers have placed a bench by the meadow paid from their funds.

Activities in 2024: We held a Fashion Show in March which was a good start to our fund-raising, another Garden Safari is planned on 30th June, a Bulb Sale on 2nd September and Scarecrow Safari with a Heroes & Villains theme on 5th October. We plan to plant yet more naturalising bulbs in the Autumn and place a bench mainly funded by the Friends of Marden Medical Centre by the planter at the Medical Centre. Dependent on whether we receive any funding from SouthEastern, we plan to plant up the two beds at the entry to Marden Railway Station with low-maintenance plants.

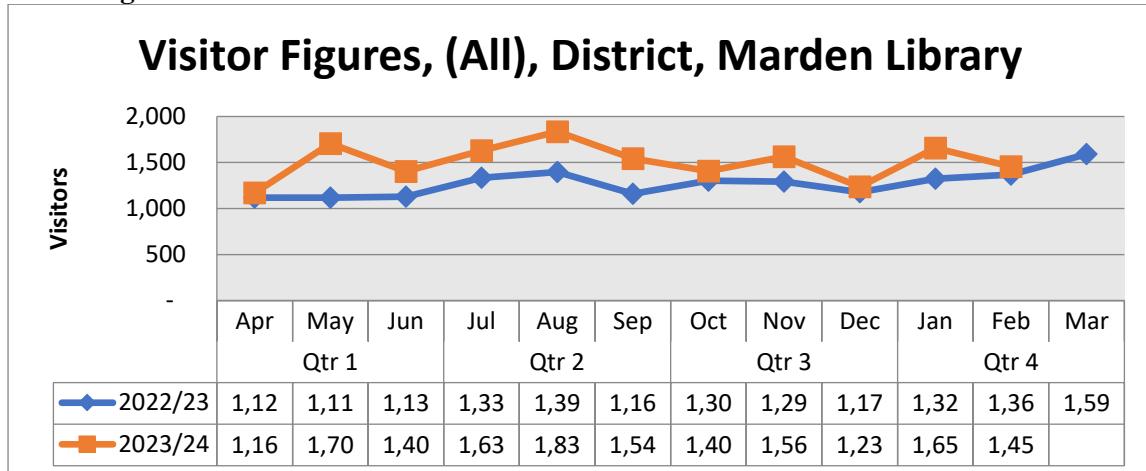
We always need help with our projects, so if you can spare a little bit of time, even if an hour or two, please email: anne.boswell@ymail.com Also check out our Facebook page and give us a like.

MARDEN LIBRARY (KENT COUNTY COUNCIL)

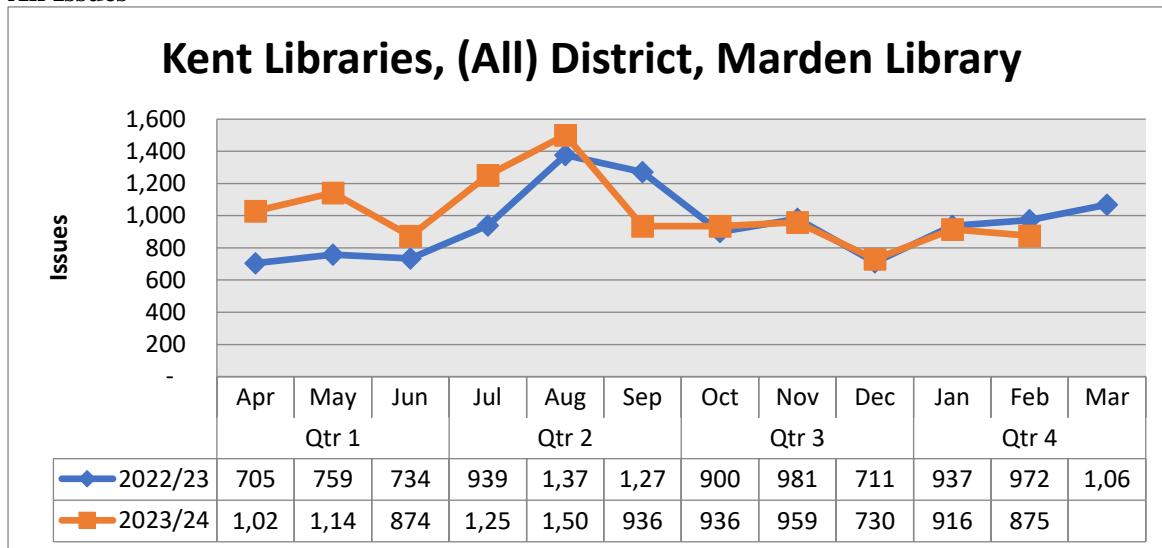
Marden Library, High Street, Marden TN12 9DP 01622 831619 Fax 01622 831619

Email: mardenlibrary@kent.gov.uk

Visitor figures

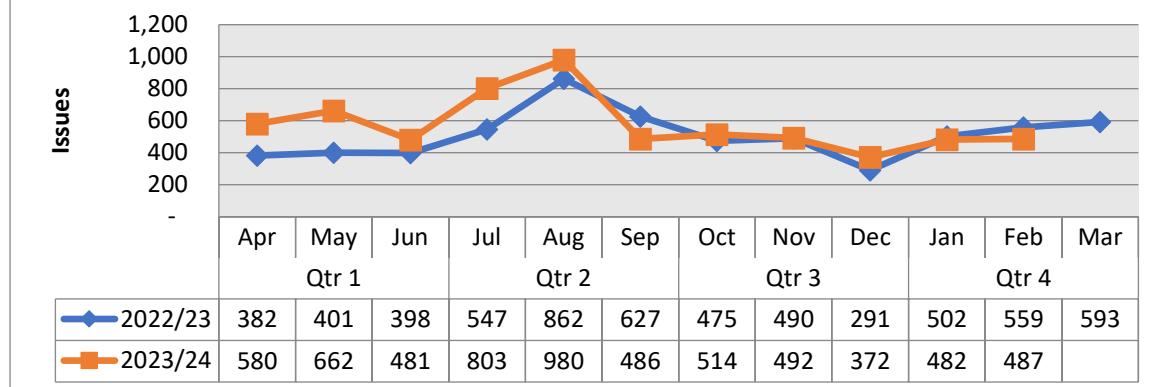


All Issues



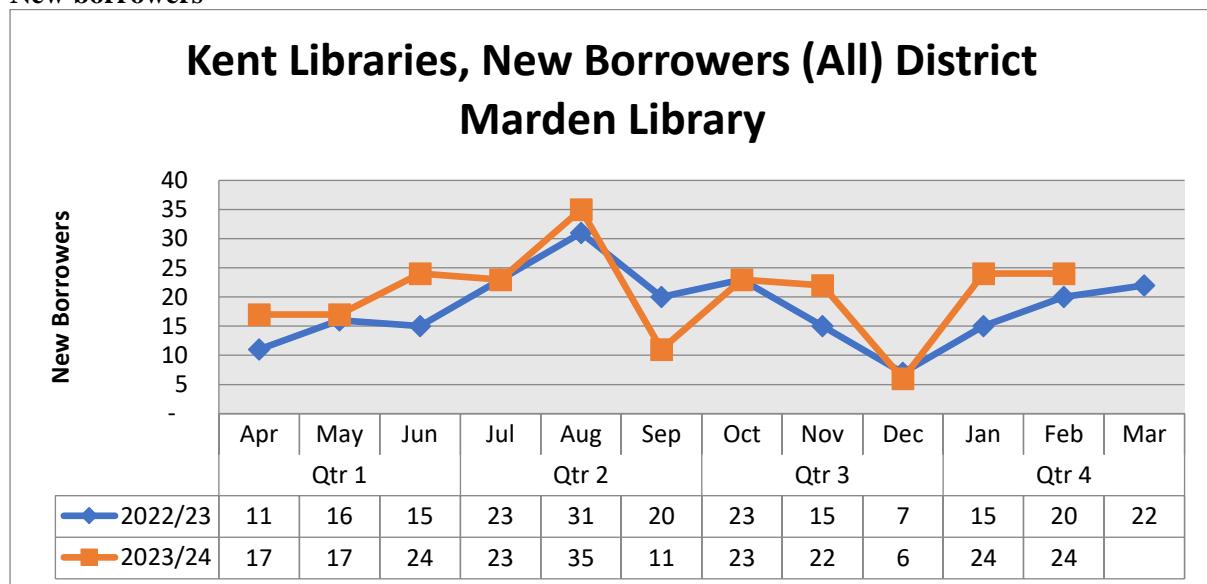
Childrens issues

Kent Libraries, (All) District, Marden Library, (Multiple Items)



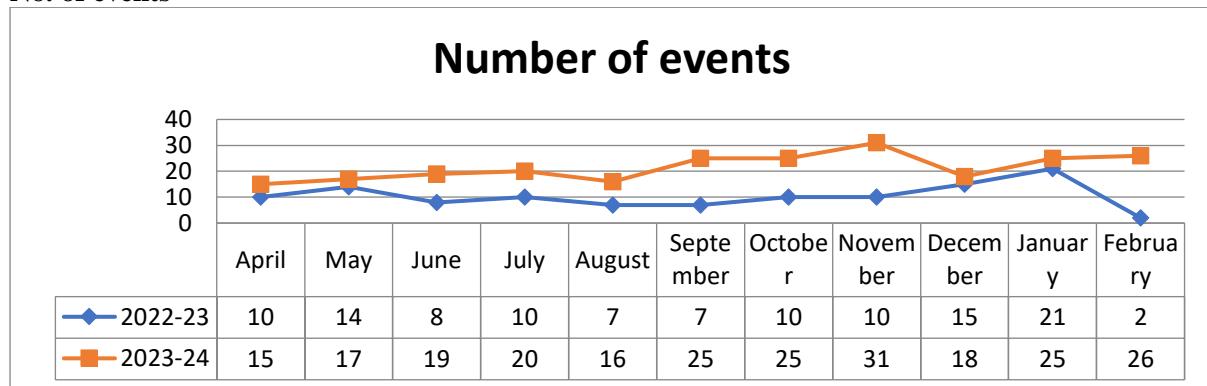
New borrowers

Kent Libraries, New Borrowers (All) District Marden Library

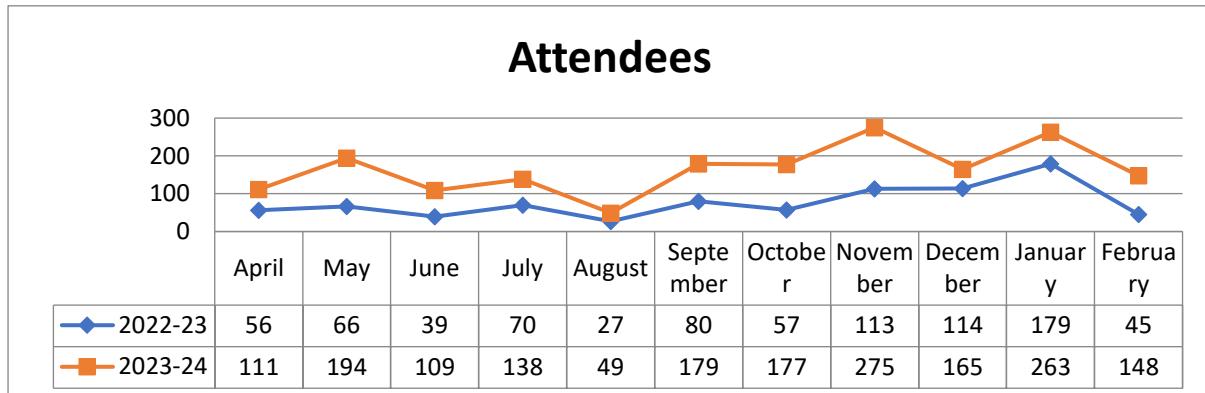


No. of events

Number of events



No. of attendees



We have been keen to continue all our popular clubs and groups and have been delighted that our ‘Baby Rhyme Time’ is so well attended. Tuesday afternoons ‘Talk Time’ continues to be an enjoyable way to spend the afternoon playing a game of ‘Up’. And on Thursday mornings we have our ‘Stay and Chat’ group which we only started a year ago and which has become a popular weekly event.

This year has seen the start of a ‘Lego club’ on Saturday mornings which has had great appeal for our young builders. We have just started a monthly ‘Pre-school age Story Time’ and hope that we may be able to increase the frequency as our audience grows. Enquiries from customers has seen us start a new book club which meets monthly in the library, and following a customer request for puzzles, we are delighted to be able to offer a small but good selection of jigsaws to loan. These groups would all welcome new members and we would invite anybody who is interested to pop in the library to find out more information.

We are delighted that we have been able to re-start regular visits form Marden Primary Academy with the children coming along to enjoy our books as well as visits to the History Group based within the library. This collaboration between the school, Library and Marden History Group enables the children to enjoy learning about Marden local history and in November the children visited for a memorable talk about Marden during the second world war and the work that the children produced was displayed in the library for all our visitors to enjoy and we will certainly be looking to repeating this successful event this year.

We have been pleased to support the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and have enjoyed having volunteers working towards their bronze and silver award whilst spending time with us learning about the library service and gaining invaluable experience whilst helping to run groups and create projects.

Exciting plans for the coming year include a new ‘Homework club’ for Primary School children with resources to help the children complete their homework project. In addition, we hope to increase our ‘Story Time’ events and ‘Themed Crafting Activities’ to coincide with the school holidays. This summer will again see the launch of our popular ‘Summer Reading Challenge,’ and we are anticipating that it will be even more popular this year due to our growing links with Marden Primary Academy and our band of volunteers whose enthusiasm and hard work is enabling us to maintain our popular groups as well as look for additional ways to offer more to the local community.

We are always looking at ways to offer additional support to residents in the village in the way of home library service and IT support and would be delighted to hear from anybody who would like to ask about these services and those who would like to volunteer and help out others in the community.

MARDEN MEDICAL CENTRE

By Dr Julie Morgan

Church Green, Marden, Tonbridge, Kent TN12 9HP

Tel: 01622 831257 Fax: 01622 832840

www.mardenmedicalcentre.nhs.uk

It has been another busy year during which we have been enormously grateful for the support of our patients and the community. We have been faced with rising demand for appointments whilst battling with the challenges of power outages, IT and phone upgrades, medication shortages and staff sickness!

Our list size is now sits at 7575, this is the highest it has ever been. We are hoping for a period of some stability now the influx of new patients (largely driven from patients moving into the new developments) appears to have slowed.

Staff

We have a very hard-working and loyal staff team and, apart from welcoming our new paramedic practitioner, Neil Curtis, we have not seen any significant changes over the last 12 months. In terms of clinicians, we have 6 GPs, 2 paramedic practitioners, 3 nurses and an HCA (supported by a locum HCA who is a retired nurse). Both our paramedics are very experienced and have done additional qualifications to allow them to prescribe certain medications. We have shared time of a clinical pharmacist who works with us two days per week. Over the last 12 months her role has expanded and she is now managing patients with raised blood pressure and cholesterol as well as reviewing patients who require medication reviews. She is also a non-medical prescriber.

We are a training practice and have a GP registrar, visiting student nurses and paramedics. We are supporting 2 clinicians through their advanced clinical practitioner training which will enable them to extend the care they give patients. Our HCA is undertaking general practice assistant training, which will enhance both patient care and the support she is able to give clinicians.

We host the midwife, counsellors, and specialist diabetes nurses. West Kent dementia support services are visiting us on a regular basis. We host an NHS ultrasound service once weekly.

Access

The new phone system is now fully operational and working well. The new technology has enabled us to analyse data which shows when demand is highest and shows how promptly calls are answered. There has been positive feedback on the callback facility.

Demand for appointments is very high and we are constantly monitoring and reviewing our appointment system to ensure that we have adequate capacity and the correct balance of acute (for those problems that require same day assessment) vs pre-bookable appointments.

Although our appointment availability is good when compared with national levels, demand is high and we are always keen to ensure that you are seen by the person or service who can

best help you in an appropriate timeframe: this will not necessarily be a GP. Our reception team have all been trained to offer to refer patients to other NHS services without the need to speak to a GP. These include the acute primary care ophthalmology service, first contact physiotherapy and our excellent local pharmacies. The quickest way to access your results, request repeat prescriptions, book appointments and view other aspects of your medical record is via the NHS App. We have been pleased to see use of the App increase to 63%.

We are part of Weald Primary Care Network (PCN), which includes practices from Staplehurst, Cranbrook, Yalding, Hawkhurst, Lamberhurst and Brenchley. The Practices share expertise, training systems, decision-making, and some clinical care. The PCN employ Clinical Pharmacists, Social Prescribers, Physiotherapists, Children's Health and Wellbeing Coordinators, Mental Health Practitioners, Care Coordinators and Physicians Associates. We are making increasing use of the expertise and skill mix that this team can offer our patients. We have also been grateful for the increased appointment capacity that has been offered through the extended hours scheme and winter hub clinics.

Prescription for Nature

We have collaborated with our Patient Participation Group (PPG), Marden Wildlife and Marden Parish Council to develop the Prescription for Nature Project in Marden. The approach is based on growing evidence that spending time in natural spaces can have positive effects on physical and mental health including reducing stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness. We were keen to develop a local scheme which encourages people to connect with the beautiful countryside and nature spots we have in and around Marden but also to engage with the enthusiasm and expertise of the local wildlife, nature, and wellbeing groups in the village.

Patients who may benefit from the scheme will have an initial discussion with a healthcare professional on the benefits of nature, supported by a leaflet (or prescription) with self-paced suggestions to connect with local nature resources. When you come into the surgery, please also enjoy the beautiful nature photos in the corridor at the end of the building. These were kindly donated by local wildlife enthusiast, Dareen Nicholls.

Priorities over the coming months

We had a very successful Autumn Covid and Flu vaccination campaign which we could not have done without the support of our Patient Participation Group. We will be participating in the Spring Covid Booster campaign. With an emphasis on prevention, we are also focusing on recall of patients for shingles, measles and whooping cough immunisations and cervical screening. We are also contacting any patients who have not had a BP check in the last 12 months.

We have signed up to the RCGP's Green Impact for Health Toolkit and are proactively looking at ways that we can improve our sustainability, reduce our carbon footprint and adapt to climate change.

Protect General Practice

There is mounting concern that General Practice is under threat. We are very concerned by the imposition of the latest GP contract proposal which represents a funding cut. There is a very real concern that services will be cut and GP surgeries close. These are some simple stats which demonstrate the scale of the problem. Since 2015 :

- Over 1000 practices gone
- Over 2000 GPs gone
- Over 6,000,000 more patients on the books
- The value of GP contract has eroded by £620million compared with five years ago.
- Equivalent of 1:2 population seen EACH month.
- 400 million consults per annum
- GP only receives 7-8% of NHS funding

We are not immune to these threats as your GPs we want our patients to know that we want to be there for you and your family whenever you need us. But this is getting harder and harder. We are awaiting the result of the BMA referendum on whether or not the contract will be rejected by the profession. Please look out for updates on our website and Facebook page over the coming weeks.

MARDEN MEMORIAL HALL

By Marden Memorial Hall Trustees

At the Hall Committee meeting on 13th April 2023, following the AGM, Tom Stevens was elected Chairman of the Marden Memorial Hall Management Committee for 2023/24.

Staffing

Unfortunately, in January 2023 our caretaker retired followed in May by the resignation of the Facilities Manager. Since then, one of the Trustees has taken over the bookings for the hall and Trustees have covered the caretaking and other Facilities Manager duties themselves which has worked quite well. It was decided at the HR Committee meeting on 16th October to take the Facilities Manager role in house and for Trustees to continue to undertake the FM duties. A local company had come forward offering their services for the caretaker duties to be undertaken via a contract rather than as an employed role. This was agreed in January 2024 and the contract is currently being drafted.

The Memorial Hall cleaner continues to be employed for 10 hours per week for cleaning duties.

Residential Flat

The tenant remains on a rolling month by month tenancy agreement and is working well. Following ongoing problems with the boiler it was necessary for a replacement, which was carried out in March 2023. There have been no other major issues reported.

Hirings

The hall continues to be very well used with the pre-school extending to four full days and one-half day per week term time and looking to extend this to five days per week. Other regular groups /organisations continue using the facilities at other times of day and evenings.

Other

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

Over the past couple of years Trustees have been reluctant to undertake major projects ensuring that there was enough money to cover all bills etc. Due to the healthy bank balance

at the end of the financial year 2023 we are proposing to start looking at improving the facilities and during 2024 hope to obtain a grant to purchase two battery packs for our solar panels to generate our own electricity, obtain quotes for new heating system and to redecorate the halls.

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



MARDEN MOTOR CLUB

By Stefan Geisse

The Motor Club meets the first Tuesday of every month in the function room of the Marden Village Club at 8pm. Membership has increased in the last couple of years to about 30 members and anyone with an interest in cars, motor racing etc are very welcome to come and join us. Membership requests can also be sent to membership@mardenmotorclub.org

Club members regularly attend local car events including the monthly car meets held at The Woolpack, Benover, the Hub Classics at Lower Ladysden, Winchett Hill, and at Headcorn Aerodrome.

In house events organised by the Motor Club include night rallies, treasure hunts, breakfast meets and driving days. Quizzes and desk top rallies are also arranged.

The Motor Club arranges an annual Motor Show which is held on Southons Field, this year being on Saturday 25th May. The Club expect to have up to 200 vehicles and motorcycles on display covering 100 years of motoring. Expect to see classic and vintage cars, super and sports cars, commercial vehicles, tractors, motorcycles and a couple of race cars. Entry to the public is from 1.00pm and is free. Burgers, hot dogs, drinks, tea, coffees, and homemade cakes will be on sale.

MARDEN NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

By Cllr Andy Turner

A Verbal report will be given and this handout will be updated following the meeting.

MARDEN ODDFELLOWS

By Julie Broomfield

Social Organiser, Oddfellows Society

The Oddfellows Society is a small friendly society, which runs every Friday in Maidstone and the 2nd Monday in every month in Marden.

Are you looking to bring invaluable laughter into your life, make new friends, chat, learn new activities, crafts, or share your own crafts?

We also organise cost effective trips throughout the year which do not break the budget.

If you would like further information, call me on 07910888607.

You never know, it may be the best decision you ever made.....

MARDEN PARISH CHURCH

Taken from recent MPC Spring Newsletter

The church continues to hold a normal pattern of services. 8.00am Holy Communion using traditional language and 10.30am services which alternate between Morning Worship on the 1st and 3rd Sundays and Parish Communion on the 2nd and 4th. The church is also open each day, for anyone who would like to spend some time in reflection or prayer. Do keep an eye on the church website www.mardenchurch.org.uk and Facebook page @churchinmarden for our services and events.

Messy Church is for all ages and explores a theme or Bible story through art, craft, and activities and is a wonderful way to engage with families and children. We have a short act of worship too and then we have tea. If you would like to receive our weekly newsheet, please email office@mardenchurch.org.uk. Sunday Club for primary school age children runs on the Sundays on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month. We also run the Little Fishes playgroup on Wednesday mornings, during term time, in the Vestry Hall.

Weddings and Baptism - At Marden Church we enjoy celebrating with you the happy occasions of Baptisms and Weddings so do please get in touch if you would like to plan any of these special events.

Funerals - We are also here for those who sadly need to plan the funeral of a loved one. These services can take a variety of forms – including leading services at the Crematorium – and we are here to help you plan the right service for your loved one when the time comes. Although the churchyard is closed for burials, we are still able to inter ashes for those who live in Marden.

Please don't hesitate to get in contact with us if we can help in any way. Ring the Vicarage on 01622 831379 or email vicar@mardenchurch.org.uk

MARDEN PATIENT PARTICIPATION GROUP (PPG)

By John Haddow

The Marden Medical Centre Patient Participation Group (PPG) works in partnership with Marden Medical Centre to encourage improved communication between the Medical Centre Partners, its staff and its patients, help patients take more responsibility for their own health, contribute to the continuous improvement of services and the quality of care & provide practical support for the Surgery. The group meets four times a year. We have approximately 300 members of which 50 regularly contribute, volunteer and attend meetings.

Over the last year we have provided volunteers to support flu and covid-19 booster clinics, held 8 NHS Digital Access Drop-in sessions at the Surgery, supported the development and launch of the innovative the Marden Nature on Prescription programme and continued to curate a monthly News Update to PPG members with the latest Surgery and other relevant health related information.

If you are a registered patient at Marden Medical Centre, you are invited to join the PPG. If you know anyone who would benefit by being better informed – please encourage them to join the PPG. To learn more about the group and join see our website www.mardenppg.org.uk, email us at membership@mardenppg.org.uk or contact the Surgery.

Being healthy is more than just the NHS and GP's – we are all responsible for our own health. Easy access to GP's and the NHS is a part of the story – where you live, your community support, what you do, how much exercise (*150 minutes per week is the current NHS guideline*), your DNA, all contribute. Also living in an attractive, clean & safe environment is also particularly important – supported by Marden Parish Council.

MARDEN PRIMARY ACADEMY

By Hannah Penning, Principal

Marden Primary Academy becomes an IB World School

Marden Primary Academy is very excited to announce that we are now an IB World School, authorised to deliver the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Programme. The Primary Years Programme allows us to teach the requirements of the National Curriculum through engaging inquiries with the aim of developing inquiring, knowledgeable and caring members of our community. Within our inquiries, children have the opportunity to develop their understanding of local and global issues, share their beliefs and respect the opinions of others. They are encouraged to take action and to develop their love of learning.

Expansion and Building Works

Leigh Academies Trust and Kent County Council have agreed – subject to planning permission – that Marden Primary Academy will be permanently expanded to 2 forms of entry (60 pupils in each year group) from September 2024. To support the academy with the permanent expansion, Kent County Council has agreed to allocate capital funding which will enable the academy to provide new facilities as well as remodel and modernise the existing facilities available to pupils.

A parent meeting was held on Thursday 14th March to go through the plans for the remodelling of the current building and for the new build. Another meeting for the local community will be held on 25th April to ensure everyone is aware of the plans and the benefits this will bring.

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, St Paul's Cathedral and Staplehurst village, we have also been lucky enough to have some companies come into school to lead on workshops such as a Karate coach, a petting zoo and local companies such as Go Group and the Little Green Energy Company.

We have worked closely with the village to share with the children what Marden has to offer. Thanks to Reverend Nicky we have been able to take the children on regular outings to the church and she has also made visits to the school to lead assemblies and talk to the children as part of their inquiries. Marden Library and Heritage Centre have kindly welcomed us and

we have visited them on a number of occasions to promote a love of reading and to further extend the children's geographical and historical knowledge.

MARDEN SOCIETY

By Steve McArragher

2023 was a good year for the Society with a full programme of talks.

In February Bruce Nicholls told us all about British Flags, followed by talks about Hovercraft, the Bayeux Tapestry and the Titanic, the latter covering the many issues that came together to cause the disaster. Our summer outing to Wildwood Country Park was enjoyed by 25 members and friends on a beautiful summer afternoon with an excellent guide who showed us all the animals.

In the autumn season we learned about the lost village of Hampton-on-Sea, the history and future plans for the Old Vicarage and Tom Crean, the Antarctic explorer that nobody has heard of.

We have a full programme planned for 2024 covering The Size of the Universe, Kent Customs, the Rother Levels, Aviation History, Pocohontas, Marden Wildlife and ending with a Magic Lantern tour of Kent. Our Summer Outing will be to Cobham Hall on 11th July.

MBC have carried out an appraisal of Marden's Conservation Area and developed a management plan, which we have commented on. Sadly, the appraisal does not recommend any boundary changes, such as including Albion Cottages, which we and the Parish Council have recommended. We were surprised by this activity as when we approached MBC about the conservation area some years ago at the start of the Neighbourhood Plan work, they said that there was no money available to do anything like this. The Action Plan Summary is to encourage more public seating and trees in the village, and property owners to reverse unsympathetic additions such as UPVC windows.

The Copper Lane development of 117 houses has been refused, but the developer, Rydon Homes may of course appeal. Marden Society and the Parish Council had both objected to the development. The Chainhurst Chicken Farm application has been resubmitted with only two chicken houses rather than the original three. This has still not been discussed at Planning Committee.

We 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 membership 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

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, whether that's local sports, national or on the international circuit.

During the past year we have had some fabulous visitors to the group to talk about their personal 'Sporting memories'. There have been talks from the world of equestrian, motor racing, hockey, the Royal Marines, cycling, boxing and in the coming weeks the group are looking forward to visitors who are going to share their stories about rowing, golf, flying a Spitfire and football officiating. There is something for everyone!

Each week there are 'half-time' refreshments, then the club members enjoy 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 have even dug out the Scalextric set for the Grand Prix!

Last summer, one of the group was running the London Marathon to raise money for charity. So, over a few weeks, to show their support the group walked 105 laps of the cricket boundary, which equates to 26.4 miles!

Last year the group enjoyed visits to the 'Village Golf' in Staplehurst and tried their hand at bowling at Marden Bowls Club and we would like to thank these organisations for their hospitality. The group also enjoyed a Christmas gathering in the Marden Village Club, who generously supported Marden Sporting Memories.

In the summer the group have successfully applied for funding for a coach trip to Canterbury Cricket ground to watch Kent v Durham, which everyone is looking forward to. With the forthcoming Olympics in Paris, Wimbledon, The Open Championships and the Tour de France it will all add to the enjoyable Tuesday afternoons, along with reminiscing and playing sports together.

If you would like to read more about the organisation, click on the link [The Sporting Memories Foundation \(sportingmemoriesnetwork.com\)](http://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 via email: MardenSportingMemories@gmail.com or call 01622 833053.

MARDEN STATION & PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Update on South Eastern, Network Rail and consultations

By Cllr Richard Adam

A verbal report will be given and this handout will be updated following the meeting.

MARDEN VILLAGE CLUB

By Les James

2023 was a hugely successful year for the club, growing enormously in all ways, having had over 450 new members join last year, making our total membership just over 1,650. We were, once again, awarded winner of CAMRA's National Club of the Year for 2023 - one of the highest accolades afforded to British clubs - having previously won it in 2022. The award was presented to the club by CAMRA on 27th January 2024.

The club raises a huge amount of money for various charities, by holding weekly meat and tote raffles, an Easter egg raffle, as well as various charity fundraising events throughout the year. Last year we collaborated with Atlas Eco Gym in Marden by cycling and rowing the distance between Lands End and John O'Groats in 8 hours, to support one of our bar team who was walking the route in aid of Parkinsons UK, which raised over £1,000 on the day. In fact, the club broke its own charity fundraising records in 2023, raising just over £22,600 for their two Charities of the Year: the Restoration of Marden Church Bells and Hospice in the Weald, along with raising money for other various charities Dandelion Time, Chalkdown RDA, Heart of Kent Hospice and of course Parkinson's UK.

A further £7,000 was also raised by our members for the Marden Church Bells from our hugely successful Pie Nights, kindly ran and sponsored by Alter Image, Frubana and Homeleigh Timber.

We have raised in excess of £4,500 for the club's two charities for 2024, Chalkdown RDA and Dandelion Time, both local charities. We will also be donating £350 from our Easter Egg raffle to Safe Anaesthesia Worldwide.

The success of the club is down to a lot of people: our Club Manager, Simon, who leads our incredible bar team, the hard work of our dedicated committee, as well as all our members who create such a friendly ambience making the club a place that's a real pleasure to work and socialise.

We provide our meeting room free of charge for various local groups including Marden Motor Club, Marden in Bloom and the Marden History and Heritage Group to name a few. The club also runs a weekly warm hub every Thursday from 10am - 2pm offering hot drinks. Non-members are also welcome to attend, which gives people of the village a warm secure place to come and meet new people.

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. These are led by Ian Balmer and will start in March/April when they will be walking the Sussex Border path in 16 sections.

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. In the last year, we have seen our membership grow to 50 which is very encouraging.

In the last year, our programme included a wide variety of subjects, Self Defence for Women, The Body Shop, Marden in the 60's/70's, Glass Alisa and recently an excellent evening with Fergus Garrett, Head Gardener at Great Dixter. Our Christmas meeting was all about ABBA and dancing!

Our 2024 programme is nearly complete, thanks to our Programme Secretaries and includes Flower Arranging, Origami, Sloe Seduction and Mature Drivers Safety Prevention. We also organise theatre and garden visits during the year, together with our annual Garden Party when we enjoy strawberries and cream and Pimms!

If you would like to join us, please come along as a visitor and hopefully enjoy the evening. Contact Barbara Hammond – President, for further information – 01622 831569.



MARDEN WILDLIFE

By Ray Morris, Chairman
mardenwildlife@gmail.com / www.mardenwildlife.org.uk

The last year has yet again proved a busy one, as much for the protection of our local wildlife as it has been for the study and enjoyment of it. The growth of membership (as measured by our Facebook page) has continued and now stands at nearly nine hundred, of which around seven hundred log-on regularly to share the obvious pleasure people derive from it, or to celebrate a newly discovered species. Unsurprisingly, with greater interest, more rare or unexpected plants and animals are being revealed to be part of the parish's 'natural capital' enjoyed by residents and often envied by visitors.

Like it or not, commercial interests and politicians have generated the term ‘natural capital’ as people are waking up to the importance of plentiful wildlife in a healthy natural environment. The knowledge, skill and the time members have devoted to studying it, therefore, is becoming increasingly valued and, through our relationship with the Marden Farmer Cluster and Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT), has helped put Marden on the map. July, for example, saw the village’s work to restore its ‘natural capital’ showcased in a DEFRA event at the House of Lords, followed in November by a visit from the Chair and CEO of Natural England to see it for themselves. Marden is becoming a regular venue for Natural England’s specialist staff training days and hosted a day for their National Grassland Conference.

Councillors will also be aware of KCC’s Making Space for Nature (MS4N) project tasked with identifying thirty percent of Kent dedicated to wildlife restoration by 2030. Rest assured Marden and its environs are well represented by pins on the project’s map!

As well as recording scarce plants, a joint project with Marden Horticultural Society plans to slow, and hopefully reverse their local declines. Genetically appropriate local seeds and cuttings are being garnered, sown and propagated (some in their fridge) by gardeners, to be replanted back in suitable local habitat. Results so far are encouraging and contributing to a recently started significant piece of conservation work – the recreation of Lowland Meadow (LM). All our Marden grasslands are in the lowlands; the LM designation is a Priority Habitat under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and refers to populations of specific indicator plants. Marden Meadow SSSI is the best example of a local LM - and its peak season is imminent. Lowland Meadows are rare in Kent, and their national area is a quarter of that of chalk grassland. Efforts to recreate this important habitat have brought in a host of other species, most particularly pollinating insects, butterflies and moths. Our new meadows will be the subject of a research programme carried out by Natural England this year.

A second significant piece of conservation work - turtle doves - continues with KWT, alongside local landowners working with Natural England on area-wide restoration of suitable habitat. KWT has secured funding for more GPS tracking this year to extend last summer’s successful trial. An account of the project was well received at last month’s national webinar for Operation Turtle Dove.

Progress continues in our aim to ‘educate and inform’. Starting with young children at one end of the spectrum, last year we supported the Marden Summer Playscheme with a fun day devoted to turtle doves, barn owls’ eating habits and building homes for tree sparrows. At the other, we have a MSc student studying turtle doves and nightingales alongside KWT’s scientists. In between, Tonbridge Girls’ Grammar and The Skinners School are planning practical work on a Marden farm for GCSE, A Level and International Baccalaureate science. With a hoped-for Arts Council England grant secured by Marden-based theatre-in-education group Fabulous Projects, our joint Turtle Dove Project with KWT will be extended to work with interested local primary schools and to entertain the community at large.

Finally, members have supported Marden’s Health Centre with their Nature on Prescription project, as well as facilitating a successful Social Prescribing referral.

As an organisation with no income other than that raised from giving public talks about our work, donations (notably from Marden’s annual Art in the Garden weekend) and grants for specific projects, we are indebted to our volunteers: without their freely given time and expertise none of the above would be possible.



MARDEN YOUTH GROUP

By Rob Yorke

Open Access Team (Early Help Service)

Maidstone Youth Hub (Infozone), 3 Palace Avenue, Maidstone ME15 6NF

A verbal report will be given and this handout will be updated following the meeting.

MEN'S BREAKFAST

By Geoff Burr

The Men's Breakfast is held on the second Saturday of every second month starting in January in each year. A full English Breakfast is served with tea or coffee. The cost being £10.

The venue for a number of years has been the West End Tavern, but in November 2023 the breakfast was switched to the Old School Room at the Memorial Hall with Sean and Bridget Harvey catering. Here special thanks must be given to Sean and Bridget for their invaluable help.

At each breakfast a speaker delivers a talk and these talks have been entitled:

“A journalist’s journey from the Gulf to the Garden of England”

“Bedgebury Park: the changing fortunes of a country mansion, its occupants and their legacy”

“From seashells to bombshells – the life of Sir Marcus Samuel Viscount Bearsted”

“How Duchenne changed my life”

“Marden at the 60s: for better, for worse”

One break from the pattern was on 11th November when, instead of having a speaker, the opportunity was afforded members to share any stories they may have had from their families about life in the services, or at home during the wars.

The average number attending is 28.



SAFE ANAESTHESIA

Chairman: Mike Cox

Safe Anaesthesia Worldwide (SAWW) Registered Charity Number 1148254

Safe Anaesthesia Worldwide (SAWW) is based in Marden and provides anaesthesia and respiratory equipment to hospitals around the world to ensure patients get the treatment they need. Worldwide five billion people have no access to affordable surgical and anaesthetic care, most in poor countries, and many suffer or die as a result.

In past year SAWW has helped hospitals in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Somaliland and Zambia, as well as anaesthetists working in difficult conditions in Ukraine. SAWW also supports

training for anaesthetists in order to improve anaesthesia skills and services in low-income countries. Recently we have funded workshops using innovative virtual reality technology to make anaesthesia training accessible in remote locations.



Photo: Nurses at Nkwen Baptist Hospital in Cameroon are delighted to received donated ventilators for the intensive care unit.

The charity is funded mainly from donations and we are very grateful for any money you can spare. Running costs are kept to an absolute minimum (less than 1% of expenditure) and virtually every penny is spent on directly helping those in need, making your donation literally lifesaving. To donate simply click the DONATE button on our website (www.safe4all.org.uk) or use our QR Code.



SAWW was founded by local resident Dr Roger Eltringham and his book *Laughing Gas* is available to buy in The Little Marden Farm Shop and in the 47 Gift shop. All proceeds go to fund the charity's work.

At the beginning of the year, we published our Annual Report and copies are available on our website or from our HQ at White Lyon House, High Street, Marden.