

NORTH MARSTON PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL VILLAGE MEETING

Tuesday 13th May 2024 at 7.30pm in the Village Hall

1. **Apologies:** No apologies received.
2. **Minutes:** The minutes of the Annual Village Meeting held on 14th May 2024 were approved and signed.
3. **Parish Council Chairman's Report:**

The Chairman, Councillor Ian Mordue, delivered a brief verbal report in which he praised the efforts of the many clubs and societies active within the village. He expressed gratitude for their contributions in helping to make the village a vibrant, welcoming, and enjoyable place to live.

Councillor Mordue encouraged representatives from these groups to engage with the Parish Council and share any ways in which the Council could offer support, and help to sustain and enhance their valuable work.

On behalf of the Parish Council, he offered heartfelt thanks to all the volunteers who lead and support local clubs, village projects, and the maintenance of recreational facilities. Thanks were also extended to those involved in keeping the village shop and the vibrant church at the heart of community life.

In closing, the Chairman noted that the Parish Council currently has a full complement of councillors. However, he urged residents to consider volunteering or expressing their interest in becoming a parish councillor when a vacancy arises.
4. **Highlights from the Annual Reports** presented by representatives of the following organisations. (The full reports can be found on the Parish Council website at northmartston.org).
- a. **Monday Club**

On behalf of the Monday Club, Jean Wright reported that the group meets on the first Monday of each month at 8:00 PM in the Village Hall. The club currently has 29 members, including participants from Winslow and The Claydons. She noted that the recently installed PA system has been a great success, significantly improving the ability to hear the wide range of guest speakers who present on a variety of engaging topics.
 - b. **MADS**

David Heffer was pleased to share that, after a few false starts following the suspension of productions during Covid, MADS resumed in the autumn of 2024 with *Downtrodden Abbey*, a production staged in memory of Martin Frost and another show is already in the pipeline. MADS has been an important part of village life for 48 years, and David has kept records documenting its history throughout that time. MADS would appreciate more space to store its equipment, and it was agreed to look at the possibility of shed space.
 - c. **Poors Piece and Clockland Charity**

On behalf of the Trustees, Pete York reported that a total of £1,756 had been distributed over the past year to individuals in need and to support community projects. In addition, £1,129.31 was donated to the ECC.

He also noted that Michael Morton has stepped down as a Trustee, and that the Trustees had warmly welcomed Sue Chaplin as his successor.

d. St. Mary's Church/Wesley Centre Summary

Reverend Petra Elsmore reported on the Church's ongoing central role in village life, with regular collective worship and seasonal services continuing as key fixtures. Outreach activities such as Messy Church, coffee mornings, and community lunches remain well supported and effective in fostering engagement.

The Fundraising Committee has held a range of successful events, and the Church has supported several national charities. The Eyes and Ears team continues to assist ministers in valuable pastoral care.

Maintenance of the Grade I listed building remains a priority, with essential repairs hoped to begin in later in 2025. Appreciation was expressed to all who contribute to Church life, including the pastoral team, volunteers, and support workers.

The Wesley Centre continues to serve as a very welcoming and vital space for Church activities and is available for external hire.

e. North Marston School Summary

Headteacher, Sarah Brew, reported on several key developments at North Marston C of E School. The library has been relocated to a new pod structure, classroom book collections have been refreshed, and a reading shed added to the playground. A new catering provider, *Fresh Start*, is now supplying freshly cooked meals using local ingredients.

Reception pupil numbers are at a historic low, impacting both the budget and KS1 and years 1 & 2. The reception classroom has been redesigned, and open events are planned for Autumn to attract future families.

Children have enjoyed a wide range of trips and events, including museums, theatre visits, the Young Voices concert, and a residential for Years 5/6. Extra-curricular clubs remain popular, Forest School has been extended to KS2, and a new sports teacher has boosted PE provision.

Gratitude was expressed to the PTA for raising £7,000, which has helped fund trips and resources.

When considering how the Parish Council might support the school, Sarah suggested collaboration on addressing the issue of speeding in the village, potentially through the creation of new speed awareness signs. She also noted that the school needs new Governors and would welcome interest from anyone keen to learn more about the role.

f. The Shop, North Marston Summary

With apologies from Shop Committee Chairman Peter Dowcra, Ian Lenham presented the key highlights of the report.

The Shop has invested in new equipment and staff training to improve operations and consistency, including new refrigeration, IT upgrades, and expanded storage capacity in partnership with the Parish Council.

Financially, sales increased by 4.7% in 2024, and cost savings helped the Shop break even, enabling support for local causes including the church and Sportsfield Committee.

A wide-reaching customer survey highlighted strong satisfaction and interest in expanding locally sourced, dietary-specific, and fresh product ranges, as well as interest in a café space. Several improvements have already been actioned.

Community engagement remains strong, with support for food banks, youth volunteering, and work experience. The Shop continues to serve as a valued community hub and advocate for local producers.

Major challenges ahead include addressing temperature control for fresh produce, recruiting more volunteers, and increasing footfall, particularly from non-regular users.

The Shop encourages continued community support to ensure its long-term sustainability.

g. North Marston & Granborough Sportsfield

Councillor Ian Mordue reported that the drainage project had been very successful, though ongoing maintenance will be required within five years, with associated costs. Repairs are also needed to the trim trail, but maintenance costs have to be weighed up against its limited use, and if beyond economical repair, apparatus might have to be removed.

Plans are underway to revitalise the nature trail, supported by HS2 funding.

A joint Sportsfield and North Marston School **Grandmarstonbury** event is planned for September, featuring live music and a dog show. Proceeds will be split equally between the Sportsfield (to support maintenance costs such as mower fuel, servicing, fencing, and utilities) and the School PTA.

h. 1st Granborough Scouts

Martin Tanner reported that the Beavers, Cubs, and Scouts currently have 15, 20–25, and 14 members respectively, with an encouraging increase in volunteer support this year.

The additional storage container is in regular use and has been clad, although some finishing work remains.

The group continues to rely on fundraising efforts, with the Christmas Tree collection being a key source of income. Unfortunately, a small financial loss was recorded for the 2024–25 year.

i. Well Restoration Committee

Christina Hutson, reporting on behalf of her father, Michael Finnemore, noted that the Well had recently undergone some restoration and repairs by Jason Hutson in preparation for a day of celebration and fun in North Marston Village. The festivities were set to begin with the grand opening of the Well Dressing at midday on Saturday, 7th June.

A total of £16.64 in coins had been collected from the Well and generously donated to the Parish Council funds, with thanks extended by the Parish Council for this contribution.

The Village and Parsnip Ponds and defibrillators

- j. Christina Hutson sent a written update and continues to volunteer monthly checks to ensure the defibrillators remain emergency-ready, reporting to the Parish Council and The Circuit. She also oversees the Village Pond, with help from a few volunteers, and recently applied another treatment of barley straw extract to address algae growth. She noted the importance of monitoring water levels during dry spells to protect the pond's ecosystem. Parsnip Pond needs to have the bullrushes removed as they are not native, and each bullrush takes about 10 litres of water per day, and the pond therefore dries up very quickly. The willow also needs to be cut back behind the pond.

k. An update on the new Parish Council website

The Parish Council's web designer, Martin Tanner, reported that the new website is now live and encouraged everyone to visit it. He explained that the site serves as a digital front door, helping to connect people with what's happening in North Marston. All local organisations were urged to review their pages to ensure the information is accurate and up to date, and to suggest any additional content they would like included.

The new Village Hall booking system is also live and accessible through the website, which features a contact form for general enquiries. The site is currently receiving around 150 visits per week, although some of these may be from bots.

5. Open Forum for Villagers:

A resident of Granborough Road raised concerns about speeding through the village. Buckinghamshire Councillor Phil Gomm responded that he is trialling a new speed initiative using Sentinel technology and is working in partnership with Thames Valley Police, with enforcement potentially being introduced. Parishioner Pete York expressed his gratitude to all Parish Council members for their voluntary service and dedication.

6. Date of next Annual Village Meeting: May 2026 (date tbc)

The meeting closed at 8.45pm

Signed: *Jan Brandon*, Clerk to North Marston Parish Council

3rd July 2025