

NORTH MARSTON PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL VILLAGE MEETING

Tuesday 9th May 2023 at 7.30pm in the Village Hall

Present: Councillors Mordue (Chair), Boyt, Newman, Hogbin-Mills and Du-Plessis, Jan Roffe, Clerk, Councillor Philip Gomm (Buckinghamshire Council) and 20 members of the public.

1. Apologies: Apologies for absence were received from Rob Symonds, Jon Martin, Pete Butler and Trevor Lane (SF), Valerie Price (Monday Club), Alyson Perrett (ECC), and Peter Dowcra (The Shop)

2. The Minutes of the last Annual Village Meeting, held on 17th May 2022 were approved and signed.

3. The Chair of North Marston Parish Council, Ian Mordue, presented a short report on the past twelve months and current and planned projects. On behalf of the village, he expressed the Parish Council's grateful thanks to Michael Lane, Chair of the North Marston Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group for his hard work and commitment to produce such a well-documented, evidenced and well thought out Neighbourhood Plan. Happily, the Referendum was passed on 9th February 2023 and adopted on the 10th February.

4. Reports from village organisations followed. The full reports can be found on the Parish Council website at northmarston.org.

a. **Buckinghamshire Council** – Councillor Phil Gomm reiterated the Chairman's thanks to Michael Lane and the Steering Group and expressed how pleased he had been to be part of the Neighbourhood Planning process. He also took the opportunity to explain some of the work that he is involved in on behalf of the six parishes he represents. He continues to work closely with Highways to ensure that potholes are repaired, and road closures re-opened as quickly as possible. He is also working to address issues with parking on verges and pavements in our rural villages. He finished by saying that he is very happy to be contacted about anything that he may be able to help with.

b. **North Marston & Granborough Sportsfield** – Ian Mordue read the Sportsfield report which highlighted the matches played by the Junior Football Club, the Junior and Senior Cricket Club fixtures, and new equipment purchases. The report also mentioned the continuing problems with the ground preparation after the very hot summer in 2022, when the ground was severely cracked, and a very wet beginning to 2023. Improvements have been made to the pavilion steps and a new concrete ramp at the brick storehouse has been installed. Finally, the continued use of the Nature Trail by the school for Forest Schools and the continued enjoyment of the Sportsfield for recreational use by the public and by dog walkers alike was highlighted.

c. **MADS** – David Heffer gave a very brief verbal update to say that, unfortunately, enthusiasm appears to have waned and that there have not yet been any productions staged since the pandemic. He hopes that this will change and encouraged anyone interested in amateur dramatics and in joining MADS to contact him.

d. **History Club** – John Spargo shared an update on a full year's programme of guest speakers during 2022 and that, following the pandemic, the History Club is now fully back in its stride with a strong start to the programme for 2023. The Heritage Trail has been supplemented by the commissioning of Landmark Plaques which will be displayed on about 20 of the buildings in the village that have played an important part in its social history. Displays to celebrate special occasions, most recently, the Coronation of King Charles III, have been exhibited in the Wesley Centre. Fundraising for War Memorial bronzes, to be attached to the outside of the Village Hall to mark its centenary, is an objective to be achieved by Remembrance Sunday 2023.

e. **Monday Club** – In Valerie Price's absence, the Clerk read her written report, giving details of when and where the club meets (the first Monday of the month at 8pm in the Village Hall) and outlined the varied programme of talks that had taken place, including Pets as Therapy, Women's Aid and the Power of Aromatherapy. The cost of speakers and their transport costs has risen sharply, but the club was fortunate to benefit from a share of the Rotary Club Father Christmas Float in December 2022 which has boosted funds.

f. **St. Mary's Church/Wesley Centre** – The Revd. Petra Elsmore read the Churchwarden's report which highlighted that special services held during the year had appealed to a wider congregation. These included the Remembrance Service and Christmas by Candlelight. Outreach has continued to flourish, and several local and national charities have been supported during the year. The Fundraising Committee had organised a range of events enjoyed by the village community, including Bubbles and Bangers and the Scarecrow Trail to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Subsidence had been found to be the cause of cracking in the south wall. Unfortunately, subsidence is not covered by the Church's Ecclesiastical Insurance Policy and the work to help prevent further deterioration will be very costly. The Churchyard continues to be maintained to a high standard by a small group of volunteers and more volunteers would be welcomed. There are three new church bell ringers, and the church hopes to train more in the summer and would love to hear from anyone who is interested. The Wesley Centre Management Committee continues to be committed to promoting the venue to potential hirers to generate more income.

g. **North Marston School** – The Headteacher, Cathy Gouldstone, reported that there are 98 pupils on the roll, which is slightly below the capacity of 105 and explained the catchments that the pupils are drawn from. Finance continues to be a challenge because of rising costs. After school activities continue to flourish and several trips had taken place during the year, including to the British Museum as well as more local attractions. The PTA held several fundraising events to help the school. Forest School is enjoyed every week and provides a marvellous learning experience. The Eco-Council coordinated a North Marston Spring Clean and litter pick earlier this year. The school is very grateful for the ongoing support from parents, locals, the Church and Parish Council.

h. North Marston Pre-school - Arch Dancer gave a verbal report to say that all is going well and that the dedicated staff are all come from the local area and do a wonderful job.

i. North Marston Shop – Ian Lenham explained that the Shop has been through a period of dramatic change following the pandemic, but also because of the very sad passing of its manager, Eddie Parsley and its founder, Alison Finnemore. The committee has worked tirelessly to preserve the Shop for the village during this very difficult time. After a lot of hard work and dedication by the committee and its new managers, Julie Saunders and Marie Cowen, the Shop has been revitalised and takings have significantly improved. **The plea is that villagers please use the Shop as its survival depends on more customers – evidence suggests that it is only used by half of the villagers.** The Shop is urgently in need of new chillers and is also hoping to apply for grants to extend the premises.

j. Poors Piece & Clocklands – Neil Tuckett read a report on behalf of the trustees and paid tribute to Alison Finnemore, who had been a Trustee for 15 years. The remaining trustees were listed as Cynthia Hall, John Martin, Michael Morton, Rob Symonds and Neil Tuckett with the Rev Petra Elsmore as ECC representative and Chairman. Neil then explained the aims of the charity are to provide financial support to those who are in need and living in the parish, to contribute towards the repairs of the church and to oversee the maintenance of the land as set out in the Charity Scheme, which is looked after by an excellent tenant. A new Grant Making Policy will be published in the very near future and the Trustees are currently working on a leaflet about the Charity to help to raise awareness. This will be posted on the Parish Council website in due course. Together with the Charity Commission the trustees will be reviewing the Charity Scheme and it is hoped that these steps will raise awareness within the village community about the purpose of the Charity and will make it easier for the residents to seek support if needed. Unfortunately, the year had been overshadowed by questions raised by some about the charity and how it is governed. The trustees had reported this matter to the Charity Commission as a Serious Incident as they felt that the reputation of the charity was at risk. The Charity Commission considered all relevant communication, considered that the Trustees had dealt well with the situation and that no further investigation was needed. The Trustees now hope to move forward and continue to serve the village community and to support those who need help.

k. Well Restoration Committee – Christina Hutson reported on behalf of her father, Michael Finnemore, that the well had been maintained, but that the devil in the boot had been recently broken and now longer rises when the water is pumped. This will be repaired by Jason Hutson, who is taking over the maintenance of the well from Mr Finnemore.

l. Granborough Scouts – The Clerk read a report in Wendy Towler's absence highlighting the activities of the Beavers, Cubs and the Scouts. The Beavers and Cubs had enjoyed traditional Scouting staples such as raft building and First Aid, but also more modern activities such as preparing sushi and learning about the solar system. The Scouts had enjoyed hikes, cooking, building zip wires and water slides and learning the type of life skills that they don't learn in schools. The Scouts will be heading off to Wales on a camping trip this year, where lots of activities are promised as well as teaching traditional scouting skills. Finally, thanks were

extended to the Parish Council for its recent equipment grant and to the group of leaders and executive team without whom the running of the troops would not be possible. If anyone would like to help, please let Wendy know.

5. Open Forum for Villagers: Opportunity to raise ideas, make comments or raise concerns

A resident said how much he had learned during the evening about the different local organisations in the village and felt that the demise of the Parish Magazine, in which information about things going on in the village used to be found, was a great loss and missed by many. It was explained that the magazine took too many hours to compile and was not cost-effective. It is hoped that a quarterly newsletter may be sent out instead on an A4 sheet, keeping printing costs to a minimum and not involving hours of chasing content, compilation and formatting. The North Marston and Granborough Facebook Community Page has a growing membership and is now a good source of information for many residents.

6. Date of next Annual Village Meeting: May 2024 (date tbc)

The meeting closed at 8.25pm

Signed: *Jan Roffe*

Date: 11th May 2023

Clerk to North Marston Parish Council