

MARSTON MAGNA PARISH COUNCIL – CHAIRMAN’S END OF TERM REPORT

The Parish Annual Meeting was due to take place on the 20th May 2020 but sadly has had to be abandoned for the moment but will be revived in due course. It was my intention to report to you all through this public forum but instead the following is an account about the efforts of the Marston Magna Parish Council (PC). I would urge you to read this before you make a paper aeroplane!!

I was elected to the Chair last May and the PC have met six times over the year with an almost 100% attendance from the Councillors. Now many of you are not aware of what we do, and I have often heard us referred to as a talking shop. That is true to some extent but our main function, being in the last chain of Local Government, is to be constantly asking questions of those at a higher level. We have a limited budget which is available to help in small ways to improve some local facilities which you will see demonstrated later in the document.

Each Councillor takes up various roles and I am grateful for all their hard work. Some of these activities are as follows.

TRAFFIC MATTERS – Howard Butterfield has been working hard on trying to address the major problem in our village. The volume and size of vehicles using the A359, has been steadily increasing over the years and we have inadequate and mostly dangerous pavements of which we are all aware. We have had a series of meeting with Somerset County Council (SCC) Traffic managers and a scheme was agreed during the year to install village entrance gates, provide more warning signs, adjust road markings and improve the junction where the Sherborne Road meets the A359. Sadly, the SCC team ran out of time and budget, but with pressure, it is hoped the proposals will be fulfilled early in this financial year. It will not end there as in our sights are more ambitious plans to lobby for pinch points and more drastic speed limits and this could be achieved through our local District and Council Councillor, Mike Lewis, by using what is known as a Small Village Improvement Scheme where all traffic issues are considered. We will be consulting with you in due course and may ask for your help in lobbying/writing letters/emails etc. We all have our ideas on what might work but whatever we think might be ideal, it must meet the highway regulations. We are grateful to Howard for all the time he has spent so far on this.

ACTION GROUP – This is my baby and it is a group set up in March 2018 as a Parish Council activity and I have been granted financial support from the Midsummer Fair organisation for which I am so grateful. We meet on Saturday morning and whilst over twenty people signed up, generally we have six or so turn up with mostly our own tools and we have been involved in clearing leaves and vegetation mainly in Newberry Lane, the Village Hall and Playpark area. We have restored edging to the path through the Church yard and Green and even set the socket in the Green for the very welcome Christmas Tree which, with the lighting, was financed by a local person for which we are grateful. I would like to say a huge thank you to all of you in my group who have made such great efforts to improve the look of our village. We are not permitted to work on the A359 main road, more’s the pity, as it is just too dangerous.

PLAY PARK – Although out of bounds for now, this area is very well used by many families. Peter Griffiths is responsible for ensuring the equipment remains in a safe condition with a monthly safety check. There were plans to repaint and refresh it this year and a small team of volunteers were identified but this will now take place when we are allowed out once more. A new piece of equipment was installed early in the year, which was kindly financed with a grant from the Midsummer fair organisation. The Park is regularly mowed by the Church grass team – more later.

FOOTPATHS AND RIGHTS OF WAY – Rex Knott leads on this and has achieved a great deal during the year. He has been hot on the heels of Yarlington Homes and has persuaded them to remake the path linking the playpark to the West End and to clear the stream embankment in the village hall area. He has regularly liaised with Somerset County Council Heritage about the management of the Moat Field. That area has evolved into the village playing field and a favourite place for dog walkers and Rex empties the “poo bin” every week for which we should all be grateful. Rex also has been involved in obtaining clearer local road signage around the Green area and the reinstatement of the Camel Street sign, demolished by a speeding car. Whilst out walking his dog, he keeps a good eye out for defective styles and signs and he regularly is in contact with SCC to maintain local walks.

FLOODING – Fred Monson looks after this matter and he set up a visit to one of our meetings of a senior officer from the Parrett River Drainage Authority when we learnt about various areas of responsibility for the flow of water through the village via the Millstream. Many of you will be aware that the Millstream on each end of the village is well maintained and regularly cleared by contractors. It was fascinating to see from a plan tabled, that the Drainage Board are responsible for maintaining the River Parrett and its tributaries from where it rises to the estuary and amazingly the village of Marston Magna is the only section that is left to the riparian owners to maintain. It is hoped, particularly after the several flooding events of the winter, that the Drainage Board can assume responsibility for the Village section. It could make a huge difference.

The flooding over the winter has meant that a few times the A359 has been impassable with deep water lying in the area opposite the Church and in Rimpton Road. The PC are convinced that the whole drainage system of gulleys, and valves, is no longer functioning and if the system was cleared and renewed where necessary, and with the lying silt in the stream removed, the flooding could be managed much better. It needs all responsible organisations to be working together and the PC will continue to press each party to play its part in the coming months to get a good outcome for the village. There are hints of a major study in the offing.

There is planned work in the “pipeline” to tackle some outstanding issues which could help unblock culverts in Rimpton Road, Little Marston Road and the A359 and we await release of the planned works in this new financial year.

VILLAGE HALL - Managed on behalf of the PC, the Village Hall Management Committee under the leadership of Karen Price, is doing a good job and we have a Hall for which we should all be proud. It could be used more, but the Committee work hard by coming up with innovative ideas. They need more help and support for events they arrange. Kathy Lawrence and Andy Yesson represent the PC and report of activities at each of our meetings. The PC did contribute financially to two schemes during the year. Firstly, a grant towards the renewal and upgrading of the Fire Alarm system to comply with new regulations and secondly the provision of a welcome Hearing Loop., an excellent facility.

GRASS CUTTING – The Church invested in an excellent new mower and there is a dedicated team of volunteers who maintain the Churchyard, Playing Field, and the Moat Field. The Parish Council contribute financially towards these costs and we are most appreciative for all the hard work put in by this team.

PLANNING MATTERS – There has not been anything too contentious during the year, but we have commented, always constructively, on all planning applications that have come our way. We like to think the planners do take notice of local observations and we remain vigilant!!

PUBLIC ATTENDANCES AND LOBBYING – There is always a public session before our meetings start when any resident is welcomed to ask questions about any local issues. For instance, the follow up to a concern from someone being directly affected by excessive floodlighting at Perry’s, resulted in a visit to them by me with our District and County Councillor, Mike Lewis. We had a good reception including a promise to arrange a visit to their premises by neighbours at a time to be arranged. The floodlighting matter is unresolved at this stage and I await the ending of the current crisis to arrange the visit, but I will continue to press them to resolve the lighting issue.

THANKS – I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the Councillors for their contribution over the year. We have an enthusiastic group of people who always maintain the good of the village. Thank you as well to Mike Lewis who diligently attends most of our meetings and has a foot in the District and County Council door. My thanks especially to Lucy Gibbons, our Clerk. Minutes are produced promptly, and she manages to keep us within the rules!

You can now make your aeroplane!!

Lawrence Hopkins - Chairman