

**ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
IN MARSTON ST LAWRENCE VILLAGE HALL
ON TUESDAY 16TH APRIL 2024 AT 7.30PM**

Present; Cllr Gale, Cllr Goodwin, Cllr Moller, Cllr Piper-Elsey, Cllr Scott and Cllr Skermer

Christine Coles (Parish Clerk), Cllr Rebecca Breese (arrived late) and three villagers

1. To receive apologies

None.

2. To receive a report from South Northants Neighbourhood Policing Team

A long report had been received. The Chair summarized the main points.

Most villages will have now been visited by the Beat Bus, an initiative launched in 2021. Overall South Northants is a pleasant and safe place to live. Crime levels are low. Policing priority surveys highlighted that road safety, vehicle crime and rural crime are the main areas of concern.

3. To receive a report from West Northants Council

A report is noted at the end of the minutes.

4. To receive a summary of the Parish Council unaudited finances for year ending 31st March 2024

The accounts have earned some interest which is the first time in ages. There was no overspend. Two payments were made to the Glimpse. There is a bank balance of £5456.00 which is slightly lower than the same time last year. A CIL payment of £700.00 is included in the figures but this will be spent soon on work on the village hall. A villager asked if comparative figures could be shown next year.

5. To receive an update on 'The Marston Inn'

An update was received from Hook Norton Brewery (HNB). They have had several expressions of interest but offers have been woeful with the complexity of the pub/holiday let being raised each time. They have had a couple of prospects asking about the development part of land only but they prefer the whole of the site. They are more hopeful now Spring is here as nothing moves much over Christmas. If there is a small cut in interest rates it might wake the market up. They welcome new ideas from the Parish Council.

Cllr Goodwin asked if the CIL payment would be paid if the pub was sold. The CIL money is linked to the whole development. There is 18 months of planning time left. The Parish Council do not understand the holiday let concern.

Action: The Chair to ask HNB to tidy the area up and kill the ivy.

6. To receive village reports from:-

- *Village hall – Chris Skermer*

The village hall continues to go from strength to strength. Our bookings include regular Pilates, sewing group, Dolly Mixtures, Table Tennis, Billiards and also the village bar, together with parties including for children, mostly at weekends. Also we have the Cricket Club functions, Sound Bath sessions and even Parish Council meetings. We have improved the facilities by building a storage room, adjacent to the Billiard room which takes chairs, tables, the stage, table tennis tables etc which means it is easier to keep the place tidy and freer access to exits. We have a committed group of trustees, representing village activities, and other organisations and individuals, who also help with activities in various ways. This all enables us to keep a reasonable level of income, to keep us running, and help with fundraising activities. The next improvement is the long awaited safe area for younger children. Thanks to the Parish Council using a grant for village improvements. The process has started with the levelling of the ground to the side of the hall and seeding it. The fencing is ordered, and Danny Jeffrey has this in hand. It will be gated with a child-proof catch and also prevent access to the back of the hall from the billiard room side. Our AGM is Tuesday 30th April in the hall and all are welcome.

I will be resigning as Chairman and Maurice as Treasurer, but we are staying as Trustees and will deal with bookings for the time being. Very grateful thanks to all who help us keep the hall going. Do not forget to enter your team for the Quiz on 27th April.

A thought – a problem with the hall is being in the middle of the village, noise, parking etc. The benefit of the hall being in the middle of the village is that it is watched over, and there is very little disturbance.

The Chair thanked both Chris and Maurice Skermer for their time spent on the village hall committee.

- *Dolly Mixtures - Joyce Scott*

Once again, we had a very varied and enjoyable year.

Speakers included illustrated talks on the Oberammergau Passion Play, The history, myths and legends of Stowe House and Grounds and St Helena & Napoleon. Perhaps the highlight of the talks was one given by Joyce's Guilding friend Kathy Hobbs about the charity ACEF (Akamba Children's Education Fund) which run a school in one of the biggest slums in Nairobi, Kenya. We were all so impressed with the work this charity does that it was decided, by the members, to donate to this worthwhile cause. With some of the money they bought mattresses for the orphan beds, as they were sleeping on bare springs!! Kathy & a group of Guilding members, including Joyce, are going out to work in this school in July 2024.

A games evening was held in March & in May we had a meal at the White Horse, Kings Sutton.

Other meetings were now annual events, e.g. – Garden Party, Harvest Supper, Christmas Craft Evening and a very enjoyable social evening in December to round off 2023.

Our meetings are open to all females over the age of 15, so please come along and see us.

- *Cricket Club – Richard Gale*

2023 saw our two adult teams finish mid-table in the premier division and division 2 after some disappointing results, mainly weather related. However, we did win the prestigious Wardington Cup.

At the AGM in late 2023 we took the decision to move to the Cherwell league after more than 75 years with the South Northants league. This will provide greater opportunities and challenges for the club and individuals. The first Saturday league match will be on 11th May.

Our junior section continues to welcome newcomers for training and competitions, particularly in the under-11 and under-13 age groups. This is a great opportunity for developing team sport skills and personal wellbeing.

2023 saw a higher than usual expenditure on essential maintenance of ground equipment. There was also expenditure on improvements to the pavilion which is starting to show its 25-year age. As a result, our financial resources are rather depleted and we would welcome any support in the form of membership, donations or sponsorship.

- *Billiard Club – Maurice Skermer*

We have had a very reasonable season, still managing to raise two teams – the only club to do so. Marston A won the League this season, and also gained the Ron Jackson Cup. Named after a former Marston player (and treasurer of the Village Hall). The team was also finalists in two other cup competitions. One former Marston inhabitant, still playing for the club won the Individual Trophy, and also the Wilf Isham Over 50s cup – David Wiggins. Marston B won no trophies, but thoroughly enjoyed their games. Just as a reminder, the Billiard Rooms was actually built by members of the Billiards Club and friends, Sam Walker, Rupert Wootten and John Fermer, and as has been shown, is a solid and well built addition to the Village Hall enabling bars and so on to be held. Good co-operation.

- *Table Tennis Club – Susan Gale*

The club meet at 8.30pm on Thursday nights. There are two tables and the club is open to anyone. Children are welcome with parental responsibility. There is a minimum of six adults. It's a lot of fun with no membership. The cost is £2.00 per session. New people have joined this year including a twelve year old boy who is very impressive.

- *Church – Mick Scott*
A small increase in attendance this past year is very encouraging. It brings with it an increase in giving. We still have to run with a deficit in general funds, and we only pay 70% of our parish share. 61 people attended the Easter service. Many people are involved in helping including Sue Gale and thanks was given to everyone. 8 people came to help last Saturday.
- *Bell Ringing – Richard Gale*
The last twelve to eighteen months have been successful. 17 bell ringers are available each week. 2 new people have joined the team. It's a welcoming tower and guild membership is £7 per year. The tower fits 10 people comfortably. The bell ringers alternate ringing between Marston and Greatworth. Coffee mornings used to be held at houses to raise money for the village hall. This could be restarted to raise money for the church. Greatworth run regular coffee mornings and raise a lot of money for their church.

7. **Guest Appearance – Thomas Pymfrey MDCLXXXIV (1684)**

Thomas Pymfrey made a guest appearance and is safe and well.

In 1886 "Old Pymfrey was sold by a temporary possessor (believed to be a Belcher) for £5.00 to a Banbury Dealer, but the whole village "rose in arms" and energetically rescued their ancient friend. It was returned to the Marston Inn in the care of the Landlord and hung on a chain attached to the beam in the bar. It is recorded in 1955 that Frank Gillett – Landlord, undertook to home "Pymfrey", as it was now known, after it was discovered in Mr Belcher's Wagon Hovel! It was returned to the Parish Council in 1988, when Frank Gillett retired as Landlord. It was returned in 1991 into the care of Paul Parker – the new Landlord. Eventually, after various Landlords, it was returned to the Parish Council in September 2002 and into the care of Mick Scott – Chairman and kept at his home – "Culkein", Marston St Lawrence. It is presented each year at the Parish Council APM.

8. **Other matters to discuss**

The billiard room in the village hall will be used on 2nd May for the PCC election. Access will be by its own access door.

9. **Open Forum**

Cllr Moller asked if a leaflet could be produced and display showing dates and times of clubs using the hall.

Summer fete discussions are ongoing. The event will be held on the cricket field on either 14th or 21st September.

Cllr Rebecca Breese arrived.

3. **To receive a report from West Northants Council**

WNC has saved £34 million of taxpayers money as a result of our Unitary status and this year we will be delivering another balanced budget. This has been achieved through actions such as closing the Daventry Council offices and rationalizing the office space in Northampton – with more to do. The Forum in Towcester (the former SNC offices) is now the base for Planning for West Northants. In the last year we have created a new dedicated legal team which provides services to specialist areas, for example, Northampton Childrens Trust, Environmental Crimes, Planning – saving considerable sums in external legal fees.

Added to the financial pressures are the difficulties in finding staff for key areas. Carers, Social Workers, Planners, and Educational Psychologists are some of the areas in short supply and add to costs as we seek to attract permanent staff while using contract staff .

We have raised Council Tax by 4.99% of which 2% goes straight to supporting the adult social care budget.

Circa 50 Councils are on the verge of issuing Sec 114 notices (banning any further non-statutory spending because of severe financial distress). We are not in financial distress and have our budget under control.

HS2 construction causes significant issues in our ward, engagement through our HS2 Marshall, has been particularly useful in tackling various issues as they emerge.

Roads – Potholes – WNC have, this year, bought a PotHole Pro machine that does 4x as many repairs and to a better standard. I continue to bring potholes and damaged roads to the attention of the council, having suffered 2 flat tyres in the last 12 months. WNC has been allocated a further £2.8m from government funds to tackle pothole repair.

Farthinghoe Bypass – Despite ongoing and determined engagement by the Parish Council with WNC Highways, there is no positive news to report at this time. It remains on the WNC priority list should a solution be found. The Council (Highways) have indicated that they are not prepared to expend the funds on developing any further plans while the Business Case does not reach the required return on investment for capital funding from central government sources. Any WNC Highways capital funding would require a vast housing allocation in Farthinghoe area to contribute.

Farthinghoe Recycling: There are NO plans to change the service. It is much loved and well used. Plans had been proposed to try and control access to WNC recycling and reuse sites, by, for example, permit, advance booking or restricting access to WNC residents however Rosie and I have resisted this for Farthinghoe Recycling Centre and plans were dropped.

Acorn Biodigester: Following the refusal at Committee of the application in Evenley Parish but adjacent to Croughton, an appeal has not yet been lodged but is expected. The applicant has until mid June to make their appeal.

Planning Engagement:

Engagement between Cherwell District Council and WNC is not as effective as it could be. It is something I am working on and encouraging a more collaborative approach but our interests are not necessarily aligned.

Local Plan consultation. This is live now and there is a Consultation day in Brackley on the 1st May at the Old Fire Station Community Rooms between 2 and 5 pm. It is important to remember that this is a draft plan – and will be refined and adapted as a result of the consultation process. There are no site allocations for this area. Self builds outside the village confines will not be supported in the new Local Plan.

The Chair thanked Cllr Breese for a positive report. He asked how the staffing was progressing as there seems to be delays still in dealing with planning applications. There has been a major restructure and it takes 11 days to validate an application. They aim is 10 days. Things are improving but there are still issues.

Cllr Scott spoke about the great relationship between CDC and SNC which was lost overnight. The public are not seeing such a good service now. Cllr Breese replied that they still have a good working relationship with CDC.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 8.37pm.