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Much Marcle Parish Council Meeting
Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on
Wednesday 10th April 2024
7.30pm in Much Marcle Memorial Hall

Present: Cllr M Barber-Starkey (in the Chair), J Baldwin, A Hope, S Cotton, F Powell

Also Present: 32 members of the public; Clerk Rachel Freestone; Ward Member Barry Durkin; Footpath Officers David Beckett and James Edwards.

1. Chairman's Welcome:

Cllr M Barber-Starkey welcomed all and thanked everyone attending, a great turnout of local residents to the meeting. He commented that the Annual Parish Meeting is all about the village and being able to network with each other.

2. Apologies for Absence:

Apologies had been received and accepted from Cllrs E Thomas, E Jefferson, T Weston and D Griffiths.

3. Minutes of the 2023 Annual Parish Meeting:

Members considered the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on the 12th April 2023. **It was RESOLVED:** to approve the minutes as a true record of the meeting. They were duly signed by the Chairman.

4. Chairman's Report:

Cllr Mike Barber-Starkey delivered his report.

The Chair thanked Cllr Elliott Thomas for stepping into the Chair position last year and leading the council through a difficult time and the interview process for a new parish clerk. Rachel Freestone was appointed as Clerk in February 2023, she was thanked for a productive year updating many policies and procedures to meet the councils legal responsibilities. The Chair congratulated the Clerk on passing the CiLCA qualification in March 2024. The parish council had supported her throughout the year with the parish council now able to adopt the General Power of Competence at the Annual Meeting in May.

The Chair introduced Ward Member Barry Durkin and informed the meeting that he also holds the position of Cabinet Member for Road and Regulatory Service at HCC. Despite being unwell for the last 12 months he has continued to be active with parish issues. He was thanked for all his help and for always being available to listen and offer advice. The reduction in the speed limit on the Ross and Kempley Roads will finally arrive in April. He has also helped with the planning permission for the new village shop.

The Chair introduced the Councillors and explained their roles and responsibilities within Working Groups. The Footpath Officers were also introduced.

He reported that Biodiversity will continue to be a key consideration explaining that the government aims to restore the UK's biodiversity to its 1960's levels. To achieve this we all need to do our part with for example; margins around lawns to encourage wild plants, a little change by all would be a good start. There is Biodiversity page on the website which will be developed to offer advice and many articles available online.

The parish council, lead by Cllr Simon Cotton have approved the design for the replacement gates for the Bartons to be known as the Jubilee Gates. They are being manufactured in wood with the late Queen's emblem carved into the gate, hope to be installed in the summer.

The Chair added that two lists would be circulated during the meeting, a wish list of residents and also a call for volunteers in any capacity with the Footpath project.

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The Chair introduced Cllr Julian Baldwin and the Footpath Officers.

5. Footpath Regeneration Project Report:

Cllr Julian Baldwin alongside Footpath Officers James Edwards and David Beckett presented their report.

Jim Edwards reported that the Parish have two bridges to replace on footpaths that have been closed for at least two years. Having achieved no progress during HCC meetings due to their lack of funds and our priority rating (44th) he decided to explore potential funding/grants to replace them. He discovered that Highnam in Glos., had been awarded Lottery Funding to replace an unusable footpath. With this information he informed MMPC who decided that it was worth applying for an Awards For All Grant to fund the bridge replacements. The application form was duly completed in November 2023 and a grant of £14852 was received.

Please see Appendix 1 for Cllr Baldwins full report.

David Beckett produced a presentation detailing the types and costs of footbridges for consideration. He has drawn up designs of a steel bridge with wooden furniture and a completely steel bridge for longevity.

The team are currently in discussions with HCC over the bridge designs and also the MMPC vision of creating a stile free 2 mile way around Rye Meadow, through the orchard at New Normandy to Watery Lane and back to Rye Meadows via Weston's orchard.

This walk will open up the Biodiversity in this area by the use of self closing metal gates including the MM3 bridge. The aim is to eventually have a network of locally named walks which are stile free.

6. Much Marcle C of E School:

Ms Laura Davies presented her report. Please see Appendix 2 for the full report.

It was agreed to move the Daffodil Line report to allow Mrs Michael to leave earlier.

11. The Daffodil Line:

Mrs Laura Michael presented her report on behalf of the Daffodil Line Bus Service.

The Daffodil Line started last April and is approaching its first year anniversary and is so far a great success. The Daffodil Line received many donations from parish councils, councils and businesses and she thanked everyone who helped get it up and running, it is going from strength to strength. She thanked MMPC for their donation of £500. Numbers using the service keep increasing with March 2024 having the highest numbers to date helped by advertisement and the link to local daffodil walks. In the first year they have averaged 800 passengers a week. Much Marcle now has a 7 day bus service operated by DRM which currently runs every 2 hours but they would like to improve the frequency. Drivers stop if it is safe to on demand and regular surveys have received a very positive response. They have managed to keep the fares at the same price.

There was a very positive press release and article in the Guardian.

7. Parochial Church Council of St Bartholomew's:

Mr Richard Brooks presented the report on behalf of the Church. Please see Appendix 3 for the full report.

8. Much Marcle Memorial Hall:

Mr Scott Fleming provided a report on behalf of the Memorial Hall. He thanked Jenny Park and the many other volunteers who keep the Hall running. He commented that it is over 100 years since it was set up.

Their role as trustees is to make the Hall a warm and safe environment which is available for

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all to use. It takes a lot of work to manage and maintain especially with legislation such as Risk Management and Health & Safety being time consuming. Financially, Much Marcle Memorial Hall is in good shape, the investment in the new heating system has paid off with a 38% carbon footprint reduction and energy costs reduced by 40%. This has enabled them to keep rent fees static. They have a number of regular users and one off users including the Three Counties Rally, the regular revenue from these almost cover expenditure with one off events helping. They have held a very successful ceilidh, with a Quiz night with fish and chips, Beaujolais Nouveau and Burns nights coming up. The Christmas tree lights always look beautiful. They are currently making a slight profit to offset maintenance costs, thanks to due diligence of volunteers/committee members. All profits are reinvested in the building. They have enough finance to cover any unexpected costs. Scott thanked Cllr Julian Baldwin as the Parish Council link. Thanks to the skill sets of volunteers they have now got a 15 year plan of refurbishment etc.

If anyone is able to volunteer as a friend of the Memorial Hall, the help would be much appreciated.

9. Much Marcle Community Shop:

The Steering Group of Much Marcle Community Shop presented a report on behalf of the Community Shop. Please see Appendix 4 for the full report.

10. The Mercury:

Mrs Charmian Mocatta provided a report on The Mercury. Please see Appendix 5 for the full report.

12. The Twinning Association Grant:

In their absence, Cllr Alison Hope updated the meeting on the Twinning Association following their attendance at the parish council meeting in March. The Association is now dissolved but Much Marcle continues to be twinned with La Barroux in France. The parish council had been asked at the meeting in March to maintain and administer the remaining grant funds held by the Twinning Association. The Twinning Association have requested that the funds be ringfenced to provide grants for young people in the parish to travel to France if at all possible. Much Marcle Parish Council have agreed to manage this grant on their behalf.

13. Much Marcle Gardening Club:

Mrs June Beckett read a report on behalf on David Raitt the Chair of the Gardening Club. Please see Appendix 6 for the full report.

14. The Guiding Groups:

Mrs Nicola Johnson provided a report on behalf of the Guiding Groups, please see Appendix 7.

15. Comments and Questions from any Elector of Much Marcle Parish:

Mr Darren Maynard from the Royal British Legion was invited to speak. He introduced the local representative for our area and briefly explained their roles. It was agreed for them to attend the next Parish Council meeting in May to discuss the D-Day event in June.

A member of the public asked how many residents are in the parish - approximately 660.

A member of the public reminded the meeting of the Open Gardens Event on the 19th May to raise funds for the Community Shop All donations welcome.

Cllr Hope thanked everyone for coming and asked for those attending to take all the information they had heard away with them and talk to friends and neighbours about all the things that are happening in the parish and the request for volunteers from all including the

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parish council.

She thanked Barry Durkin for his attendance and Cllr Mike Barber-Starkey for all his work on the parish council as Chair.

Signed:.....*M Barber-Starkey* Dated:.....*16.04.2025*.....
Chairman

The Meeting Closed at 9pm

Appendix 1

Footpath Project

3 Footpath Bridges had collapsed resulting in footpath closures which had been in place for at least 3 years. Two of them connected Marcle Parish to footpaths in Putley and Aylton. Another one led from Rye Meadow to Watery lane. This one was replaced by HCC in 2023. However they informed us that as many as 40 bridges needed replacing in the county and we were not top of the priority list for the remaining 2. So, we concluded given HCCs difficult financial position it could be several years, or never before the bridges were replaced.

These bridges are 7m long and each costs Between. £5 and £6 thousand.

We decided to try to find another solution and our volunteer FP Officer found a National Lottery Community Fund with money up to £20k available to Parish Councils for a variety of projects. The PC decided to make an application but as well as funding for the bridges we decided to widen the project to make some of our paths more accessible for people who are less physically able, people with small children and those with large dogs. This meant replacing stiles with self closing gates on certain key routes.

The paths chosen will give circular routes of varying lengths from Marcle
This means they are easily accessed by local residents and parking is available for visitors and the paths are accessible by people travelling on the new daffodil line bus service.

So we decided to apply for just under £15000.

Rachel, our council clerk and myself spent a morning in November putting together the application. This was more straightforward than we thought although it is important to read the guidelines carefully and understand what those administering the fund are looking for. "Benefit the community and wider engagement" were obvious themes. We duly emailed the application and waited, I really didn't expect we'd be successful. But a few weeks later I got an email saying we'd been awarded the full amount requested. I then kicked myself and wished we'd applied for more. A couple of weeks later the money was in the PCs account. We didn't even need to talk to anyone by phone. It was that simple!

We've now put a volunteer project team in place to acquire the materials and carry out the work through spring and summer of this year. As this progresses we will publicise progress and the various routes which have been completed.

If anyone has practical skills and would like to help please talk to us.

Appendix 2

Much Marcle Parish Council Meeting - Wednesday 10th April 2024

Much Marcle CE Primary School Report

Introduction

Laura Davies – second full year in post, previously deputy for 6.

Numbers – 4 classes

School Age Numbers	66
Nursery Numbers	12
Total	78

Merged our Nursery and Reception class in September to offer 5 days of nursery care. Re-visited our Vision and Values in September in consultation with parents, children and staff:

Our Vision

From Tiny Seeds Grow Mighty Trees (The Parable of the Mustard Seed)

Core Values

Respect, Perseverance, Generosity. New house names were introduced to incorporate our 'growth' theme. Pippin, Pearmain, Pomeroy and Russet are our new names – Herefordshire Apples.

Ofsted

Expecting an Ofsted inspection as our last was in 2014. New framework since last inspection.

Lots of preparation, although we like to ensure that decisions we make are based on what would benefit the children most, not just for Ofsted purposes.

Academisation

Currently in the process of pursuing the possibility in joining the Diocese of Hereford Multi-Academy Trust. A consultation was carried out and the outcomes and questions remain positive. The drive to join is longevity, security for the school and support in growth and development, where the local authority no longer has the capacity to do so.

Challenges

External Ofsted pressures

National decrease in birth rate has meant a slow decline in pupil numbers this year and next.

Budget cuts do provide challenges as less children equates to less money, but like everything cost of utilities, salaries and resources are increasing.

We are applying for local grants to help with funding outdoor areas and new laptops.

Positives

Dedicated team of 5 teachers and myself. 6 teaching assistants and an extremely efficient business manager, alongside a lunchtime supervisor and sports coach.

Supportive parents. Overwhelmed by community uptake for hearing children read through our advert in the mercury.

Trying to inform the community more with ensuring regular articles in the mercury, as we want the school to be the heart of the village.

New links with Homme House- tree planting in November. School still regularly uses the church, village hall and Hellens for projects and performances and thankful for the use of these facilities. Any suggestions for advertisement, help with funding/ fundraising and how we could support the community more would be most welcome.

Appendix 3

St Bartholomews Church.

Following on from last years report I am pleased to confirm that all work on the tower has been completed and hopefully there will be no major works needed in the foreseeable future. The total cost of that work was £140000.00

The only work on the horizon is the creation of a new garden of remembrance. The existing one by the side of the church is full and untidy.

I do not need to remind you that the church building and its churchyard are a central and very historic part of the village and whatever your beliefs it exists for the benefit of the whole community. It is a parish asset. It attracts visitors from all over the world for its historic monuments and the famous yew tree. It is funded solely through voluntary donations. There is no external income or support. Although there are many visitors very few make any donations and with only a small regular congregation the church is currently losing some £12000 pa. For 2023 the running costs were £51000 against an income of £38777 The major and recurring costs are :

parish share of £21610. This forms the contribution towards the vicars salary and expenses

Insurance £6911

Churchyard maintenance £4316

Heating £3100

Organist £4300

Unlike Homme, Hellens and indeed this Memorial Hall we cannot charge for normal use. Fees are received for weddings and funerals but the very nature of the events makes income erratic and uncertain. There were 14 weddings in 2022 but only 8 in 2023. The church receives £310 for each wedding. Currently the shortfall is being met from reserves but this cannot continue indefinitely. There exists a parish giving scheme through which you can give a fixed amount regularly whether that be weekly monthly or annually. If, for example, everyone here gave £10 per month that would go a long way to reducing the shortfall. Even if you do not go to church the building deserves to be cared for.

This brings me to the notice convening this meeting which asks what we would like to see provided. Given the need to keep the churchyard tidy for the benefit of all, a small contribution towards its upkeep and /or the new garden of remembrance would be much appreciated. I would remind you that the churchyard exists for the benefit of all whether a churchgoer or not. If you die in the parish you have the right to be buried in the churchyard

It was thought that a parish council could not contribute to church costs . I understand that the position has been clarified by a recent amendment to the Local government Act 1894. Perhaps the council would be willing to consider such a contribution as it did in the past.

Appendix 4

Community Shop Steering Committee

I want to begin with a big Thankyou to the Parish Council and everyone here who has supported the Community Shop project in so many different ways.

But today, as a Shop Steering Group we want to mention some of the setbacks we've experienced as well as the wonderful help and encouragement we've received. Most of you will know that we submitted our planning application for the shop building in early November 2023, having already had very positive pre-planning advice. At first, the planning application seemed to be doing very well, with 44 very supportive letters from members of the community. The problems started several weeks after the closing date for consultation on our proposal.

The first objection came from the historic buildings expert, who didn't like our building plans. However, after Councillor Barry Durkin arranged for us to meet with him, we were able to agree on a building plan that he would not object to.

The second big problem arrived in the form of a pond on the site which was filled in in the 1970s - so very few people knew of its existence. The environment officer said it was possible contaminated, so we had to arrange a risk assessment and then the landowner personally arranged for digging and soil sampling by experts which proved the land is perfectly safe.

All this costs money.

So, the good news this year is that we've been successful at raising enough money for all these professional surveys and have a team of wonderful volunteers who continue to work at raising the money we will need.

We've maintained a monthly presence at Hellens Produce Market - Thankyou to Hellens - where we sell flowers and produce and work at raising the profile of the shop.

Volunteers have attended car boot sales, organised 2nd-hand book sales at the Model Air Show and in Ledbury, run the Dymock half-marathon with sponsorship, organised an archery contest at The Big Apple, sold teas at a vintage car rally, run workshops, such as the Sound Bath at Hellens and Easter wreath-making and don't forget all the volunteers who are working to make the Open Gardens on May 19th a success.

We try to keep the community informed through our reports to the Parish Council, articles on Facebook and in the Mercury and information sent to shareholders.

Appendix 5

The Mercury

The *Mercury* has a modest circulation so some of you will perhaps not know what I'm referring to, but I understand that originally it was a Parish newsletter begun by the then vicar towards the end of the nineteenth century. When David and I retired here in 1996 we discovered from the *Mercury* what Much Marcle could offer socially and found the advertising pages very useful.

Like many local events, it has continued for so long through the efforts of volunteers.

I would like to mention the **Mercury Team** volunteers whom we were aware of when we arrived.

The Editor was Jocelyn Finnigan, followed by Jean Nowell, Rosalind Barker, Jacqueline Riley and Lyn Sulley (who somehow kept it going when nothing was happening during covid).

Advertising & sponsorship was dealt with by Bryan Morgan (previously by Nick Pope).

Lynda Morgan, his wife, was **Treasurer** and dealt with **subscriptions**.

Distribution was taken over by Marie Bowyer from Margaret Adams.

When Brian & Lynda retired in the summer of 2021, Bernard Morris volunteered to be treasurer so now deals with subscriptions *and* advertising & sponsorship.

Printed copies are delivered to Marie who has a bevy of volunteers; she sorts copies into relevant numbers and delivers these to each volunteer who distributes them through letterboxes. When subscriptions are due, Marie, like Margaret Adams before her, writes reminders on each set of *Mercurys* for her letterbox volunteers.

Before Bill & Lyn Bowers retired from the Much Marcle Post Office & Shop, copies were left behind the counter for collection by individual readers. Bill played a huge role by collecting subscriptions in little brown envelopes attached to each copy. He also had a pile of *Mercurys* on the counter which were sold to any passing trade at 50p per copy. A service we sadly miss.

During covid, Brian & Lynda Morgan initiated the circulation via the Internet of an 'infection-free' online *Mercury*. When printed copies were again available some readers preferred the online version so we now provide both.

Internet banking was becoming the method of payment because many high street banks were closing. But Banks now charge for payments by cheque - and there are difficulties with cash; this is why we prefer online banking. Receiving subscription payments via so many methods (online banking, by posted or delivered cheques, or in cash), caused a real headache for Bernard. So for administrative purposes it became essential to amalgamate subscribers' names, postal addresses & emails (the latter seldom ever give indication of name or place). Marie volunteered to compile a Master List which took her a considerable amount of time. I would like to mention here: *Chasing late payers also takes time and commitment so it would be most helpful if readers paid promptly by 1 September as requested.*

Contributions

The aim of a newsletter is to announce future events & activities and then to report on these with text and pictures. Any editor relies entirely on contributions – whether typed articles or photographs or both. The *Mercury* is fortunate to have several regular contributors whose articles provide a *Structure* to the content. There are occasionally the surprise 'one offs' which I hope readers enjoy. So, this local newsletter relies on contributions from the community.

FUTURE

At present the circulation totals about 200. The *Mercury* is 16 pages, printed only in black and, as such, is rather dull compared with other locally produced magazines which usually have colour pages - *if not throughout, at least on some pages*. Obviously, the inclusion of colour will increase the price. But Bernard watches the costs and we do think carefully about whether we have a good reason to have a colour section . . . the Mercury has often been able to contribute funds to local causes and this we should like to continue.

The annual subscription has remained at £5 for 11 copies for a very long time. But I have to announce this evening that to keep pace with costs (colour pages or not) the *Mercury* Team has decided that we do need to increase this. Details will be published shortly.

HOWEVER . . .

With the speed of technology, how much longer will readers want to receive printed copies? Many village websites now provide plenty of local information . . .

Constructive comments on this aspect, please, to any member of the Mercury Team!

Appendix 6

The Garden Club year traditionally features 5 or 6 talks from local speakers held in the Memorial Hall and in the summer months, we visit some of the many gardens in the Three Counties as well as holding our summer social in the garden of one of our members.

2023 saw a wide range of topics covered, from lawn care through a royal history of the Forest of Dean and the Herefordshire Wildlife Trust to a history of grains and the making of bread. We visited the Flower farm in Parkway and Sir Roy Strong's Laskett Garden. The weather was kind to us and the whole year proved to be very successful. One visit to May Hill had to be abandoned at the eleventh hour and we were lucky that John and Janet Chapman very kindly offered to host a visit to their splendid garden at Reddingend.

The 2024 programme is similarly wide ranging and started with an excellent presentation on Dowsing and will end with a talk by the National Garden Scheme about local attractions.

The committee strive to find a variety of interesting topics and gardens to visit so that we do not compete with Gardeners World but rather complement what we see on TV. Despite national inflation we have managed to keep our charges down and meetings are reasonably priced at £3.

Whilst the Open Garden Day in May is a community shop fund-raising exercise, five of our members have offered their gardens on the day and we will be running a plant stall in The Bob Dallow room. All gardeners in Much Marcle are invited to contribute anything they can spare on the day, including unwanted garden tools.

Looking forward, we are always keen to attract new members and intend to improve our advertising locally.

Thankyou for listening and I can take questions.....

Appendix 7

Guiding Report to Much Marcle Parish Council

GirlGuiding units have been run by volunteers in Much Marcle for the last 14 years. We offer Brownies (7-10), Guides (10-14) and Rangers (14-18). We have been established long enough to now have a Brownie whose mum was a Young Leader when we first opened!

We meet at the hall every week and run activities from fire lighting to pancake cooking, games, crafts and seasonal activities to active evenings on the Bartons. The Guides went away on a Guiding festival style camp last summer. We recently joined up with other Guiding Units to celebrate Thinking Day, which is a key date in the Guiding calendar. The day involved lots of activities, with several highlights including a space dome, silent disco (with everyone wearing headphones and choosing the music), and campfire singing. We are always involved in the Big Apple, with the Brownie Unit holding their annual Tombola stall and Guides providing refreshments from Avenue Cottage. This always helps boost our funds.

We are looking to replace our storage shed at the back of the hall this year, having procrastinated about it over the past year!