

**MINUTES OF THE HUNTON ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON MONDAY 19TH MAY 2025
AT HUNTON VILLAGE HALL**

PRESENT: Cllr D Heaton as Chairman, Cllrs M Summersgill (also borough councillor), T Stanbridge, I Simmons and S Webb, and Mrs S Goodwin, Clerk.
They were joined by Borough Councillor G Couch and at least 19 members of the public.

1. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed all those present at the meeting.

2. PRESENTATION BY RAY MORRIS, MARDEN WILDLIFE

I gave a presentation here three years ago and have been asked to talk about how things have changed since then.

To provide some background to start with, Marden Wildlife began at the end of 2019. I had been working with Peter Hall, a farmer in Marden, observing birds on his land, and was later introduced to Lou Carpenter, another farmer keen on wildlife whose specialism is in plants. This coincided with a new resident in the village who was a keen photographer. Rather than write a report at the end of the year to Peter Hall to list what had been found on his farm, a coffee table type booklet was created with photographs and published on the Marden village Facebook page, with a request for volunteers. It coincided with Covid, when everyone was at home, so people responded well. Marden Wildlife created its own Facebook page, posting photos of wildlife found in the village.

Marden Wildlife wanted to make people interested in the countryside and promote knowledge and understanding. We are lucky to still have a lot of surrounding countryside. The Facebook page now has over 1,000 members, so it has been very successful. Everyone is welcome. A variety of people post on the page, from beginners to experts (ie people who do it for a living such as professional ecologists). Hopefully we are encouraging people to sign up to wildlife. We inform people with notices containing QR codes, to give information about what is going on in the area, such as the grass being kept long in certain places to encourage insects. I read a new book about grey partridges brought back to the Duke of Norfolk's estate. They put QR codes up – the idea had come from Peter Hall! The question is - does it work? In 'The Times' newspaper today there is an article about research which demonstrates that the glimpse of the inside of a flower or looking at a beetle on the back of your hand improves our mood. That is what we are trying to do. A GP in Marden frequently prescribes the Marden Wildlife Facebook page to patients as it is so uplifting. So we are promoting knowledge and enjoyment.

There has been some success with education, going into schools. We have been to a summer playscheme and a forest school, involving the children in nature. There has not been as much success with primary schools, but some success with secondary schools such as Tonbridge Grammar School. Lou Carpenter's farm accepts farm visits. One was held recently for the Weald of Kent Preservation Society and many people came, just to see the meadows she is recreating. Her land is next door to Marden Meadow, which is SSSI and famous for its orchids, which are spreading on to her land.

Marden Wildlife is applying for an Arts Council grant, centred around the work on turtle doves because they are close to extinction. One of the reasons animals become extinct is due to the loss of social consciousness – many people do not know what they look like. Turtle doves do not look like pigeons or doves; they are very different. The purpose of the grant is to do something cultural about the history of turtle doves to take into schools, parish council meetings, etc.

The serious work of Marden Wildlife is to record the wildlife in Marden and post it on the national database – citizen science. Scientists then use the data. There are very talented people in the group who can identify plants and other wildlife. Marden has some of the rarest plants in the country. We have expert fungi people too. An ex-GP found a rare species of fungus last year which has only been recorded seven times in the country. Some members of the group (including several county recorders) are also experts on dragonflies, moths, butterflies, slime mould, reptiles and amphibians. More than 180 species of birds have been recorded and, with all the plants and insects also recorded, we are better placed than some nature reserves in terms of the number of species. We do not have any mammal experts. Deer are becoming a problem, eating everything and damaging the woodland.

A lot goes on in the hedgerows in Marden. Most hedgerows put down in the 1820 tithe map are still there. The Low Weald is one of the best preserved medieval landscapes in northern Europe. We have a hedgerow group too, who survey the hedgerows and report back to the farmers, part of a national scheme. Hedgerows in Marden have a higher biodiversity score than most. Some of the work done by our citizen scientists has been published in scientific papers.

We work with the farming cluster to improve biodiversity and give advice. Our experts have received a contract from Natural England to evaluate the impact of conservation farming on some of the farms in Marden. There was something on Countryfile recently about Kew Gardens, which Marden did first, collecting seeds from scarce plants on farms. Kew Gardens is serious about maintaining a seed bank. Groups in Marden collect the scarce plant seeds, propagate them and plant them out in fields being converted into meadows. Marden Wildlife is also linked to projects in other parts of the country.

Marden Wildlife also engages with other bodies/interest groups on shared projects that align with Marden Wildlife's aims. Some of the planning authorities recognise the expertise of Marden Wildlife and have asked for assistance. Marden Wildlife has spoken nationally about turtle doves. Over 99% of the species have been lost since 1970, due to hunting and the industrialisation of farming. Marden Health Centre has started 'nature on prescription' as contact with nature does make a difference to wellbeing. The prescription is the provision of materials and guidance to make a difference to people's health.

Questions:

I understand turtle doves are partial to common fumitory. I have had a lot in my field, but it seems to come up where I have planted a tree and dug the ground out. I have put in a pond and where the ground has been excavated, the common fumitory has come up. It is there for a year then disappears. How do I ensure it comes up year after year to provide fodder for turtle doves?

Turtle doves exclusively eat seeds. The seeds that they have evolved to eat are farmland weeds which have all been wiped out with industrial farming with herbicides. However, where you have disturbed the soil, there are seeds in the seed bank still. There are scientists who say the seed bank is virtually exhausted now, so we need to find other ways to get the farmland weeds to grow. That is one of the reasons conservation farming schemes involve farmers creating meadows or wild flower margins to get these weeds back again and start shedding their seeds. Eventually they will shed enough seeds for their seeds to be in the soil. Turtle doves do not eat seeds off the plant; they shake it so the seeds drop and then eat them off the floor. Fumitory is one of the seeds that they like but there are others as well. They need to be small seeds like niger, flax and poppy.

Clock House Farm have taken out orchards and three fields along the Greensand Way have just been left rough – there are a lot of dandelions and thistles. Do you think turtle doves could appear in that area?

Clock House Farm have a conservation farm agreement. The apple industry in Kent has collapsed, so they have gone into conservation farming. The orchards have come out and Clock House Farm are being paid to convert them to meadow land or scrub. We have found through moth traps that the number of moths have increased there, particularly in areas left rough or which have never been farmed. Hopefully we will get lots of turtle doves back.

The Chairman thanked Ray for his presentation. The Chairman has spent time at Knepp, a rewilding estate in Sussex and, other than the white stork, saw all the birds that are in this area. Ray agreed that it is a special area, mainly because there are a lot of smallholdings. Knepp also has the luxury of a huge area, managed principally for wildlife with farming in it too. One of the drawbacks of turtle doves is that they like overgrown orchard and scruffy hedges, but some places in Marden have been built on. There are small family farms, where the family die off, the farms are sold and go to business people who want to build on the land and the meadows and orchards are removed. They are 'tidied up' but turtle doves like untidiness.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Borough Cllr Claudine Russell, Parish Cllr Annette Trought (Hunton Village Hall Committee/Community Orchard), Steve Jones (Hunton Wanderers Cricket Club), Scott Elliott (Hunton Football Club), Adam Moore (Hunton Run Club), Colin Slattery (King George V Playing Field Committee), Sam Andrews (Hunton Tree Warden), James and Andrea Forster (Hunton Herald/Hunton Litter Picking Group) and Reverend Lorna Faulkner (St Mary's Church/Peace Cottages Charity).

4. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON 20TH MAY 2024

The minutes of the meeting had been circulated and it was agreed that the minutes be approved as an accurate record. The Chairman signed the official copy.

5. POLICE

PC Charley Maskell and PC George Head were unable to attend the meeting.

The Chairman was disappointed the police could not attend as there has been no police presence at Parish Council meetings for some time; perhaps one of the borough councillors could raise this. Parish/Borough Cllr Summersgill was aware that one of the PCs was off work currently but he will contact them.

6. OPEN SESSION

The Chairman invited residents to ask questions, suggest ideas and give views.

When will the play area be open again?

A new metal platform for the multiplay equipment has been made by Yalding Forge. Unfortunately one of the posts was found to be rotten when the old platform was removed. A contractor is coming out to look at it this week, so hopefully the play area will be open before too long. (Cllr Heaton)

Are there any plans for the phone box?

The Parish Council has purchased the phone box now. There are no plans as such, but if anyone has any suggestions, they can let the Parish Council know. An article could be placed in the Hunton Herald to ask for ideas. (Cllr Heaton)

When will the new defibrillator be fitted?

The defibrillator cabinet is due to be fitted by a Community Heartbeat Trust electrician, but they have not arranged a date yet. It will be followed up. (Clerk)

Hunton Bowls Club received training on defibrillators; 16 members attended. The training took 2½ hours and was very interesting. Everyone felt they would be more confident in using a defibrillator after the training. The Bowls Club made a donation for the training.

The Parish Could arrange some training sessions at the Village Hall or Village Club. We will be in contact to find out more details. (Cllr Heaton)

The Chairman thanked everyone for their questions and comments.

7. PRESENTATION OF THE KALC COMMUNITY AWARD

The aim of the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) Community Awards Scheme is to acknowledge and give recognition to those who have made a significant contribution to their local community.

Hunton Parish Council unanimously agreed that the award for 2025 should be given to Lesley and Roger Lee for being a driving force in the village for decades – organising many successful events at the Village Club (the Plant & Produce Sale and Beer Festival among many others), running the Gardening Club, work with the church and Parish Council, and much more.

The Chairman thanked Lesley and Roger for all the time they contribute to the community and presented them with a framed certificate.

Roger gave thanks for the award, although he felt it was undeserved as Lesley does all the work and he just does as he is told! He acknowledged that there are many people in the village who do a lot of work, many of whom are not getting any younger, so we need to find people who are prepared to take over in the coming years.

8. REPORTS FROM LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Twenty-three local organisations reported on their activities over the last year. The written reports provided to the Clerk are published as a separate document, along with reports from those who could not attend.

9. REPORT FROM THE COUNTY COUNCILLOR

The Chairman advised that County Cllr Robert Ford, who has recently been elected, was not in attendance.

Simon Webb, who was county councillor until the recent election, had provided a written report, distributed at the meeting. The Chairman invited him to say a few words.

Mr Webb summarised the highlights of his last year as county councillor:

- Worked with KCC to obtain over £190,000 for additional works at a young child's school, to make it wheelchair friendly.
- Spent a lot of time speaking with the KCC Cabinet Member for Education about the proposed expansion of Coxheath Primary School. Eventually the Cabinet Member came to the same conclusion, that if the school is expanded and there are not sufficient numbers of children in future, it would have an adverse effect on the other local primary schools. Originally, in the planning determination, Coxheath Primary School was increasing to 90 children each year from September 2024 and September 2025. This was changed for September 2025 to revert back to 60, so all local primary schools are full.
- Nettlestead zebra crossing – much of the Members' Grant was spent replacing lights in the pelican beacons and repainting the zebra crossing. A petition was also started to go to KCC, to install a proper press button zebra crossing there, which KCC do not want to do. There were two near misses with children on the crossing last year. Information will be provided to support Nettlestead Parish Council on this going forward.
- Church Street in Loose – water runs from a main in the road. Mr Webb asked if he could help. Residents had evidence going back to 1990 of every single roadworks on Church Street to provide evidence of what KCC had done wrong. Mr Webb was nearly at the point of having KCC cut out a channel down the right hand side of the road, for the water to flow down, when he lost the election. He has sent all the details to the new county councillor but has not received a response yet.
- Mr Webb did get something wrong last year. He said that KCC would go into administration; they were in the bottom quartile a year ago in terms of efficiency and funding. When Mr Webb left, KCC was in the mid quartile.

Mr Webb thanked everyone. He is delighted to now be a Hunton parish councillor.

10. REPORTS FROM BOROUGH COUNCILLORS

Borough Cllrs Claudine Russell, Mike Summersgill and Grace Couch had provided a joint written report, distributed at the meeting, which Cllr Couch read out. Borough Cllr Russell was unable to attend the meeting.

Cllr Summersgill added that the Civic Parade had taken place the previous Saturday, and the first council meeting of the new year where the new mayor and deputy mayor were appointed. The new mayor is Martin Round (Headcorn Ward), who has been a councillor for 11 years. The new deputy mayor is Brian Clark (Loose & Linton Ward) who has been a councillor for 10 years. There is a sequence of councillors who will become mayor for the next few years.

Cllr Summersgill advised that Cllr Russell was elected as county councillor for Cranbrook, which covers 13 parishes, as well as the five parishes she covers in this ward.

Cllr Simmons commented that it was heartening to see councillors from different political parties working together for the needs of the community.

11. REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

The Parish Council has prepared a summary report, including the receipts and payments figures for 2024/25, which was distributed at the meeting and is published as a separate document.

The Chairman highlighted several aspects of the report and thanked all the parish councillors and Clerk for all the work they have done in the last year. He also thanked Jonny Goddard, who stood down during the year and had worked hard liaising with KCC Highways. This has resulted in a vacancy on the Parish Council, which will be advertised.

The Chairman concluded by thanking everyone for attending the meeting.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Cllr Summersgill noted that the Village Hall will be 100 years old next year and asked if there are any plans to mark the occasion. The Chairman advised that there will be an event. Cllr Summersgill suggested that the Track Dogs band could possibly play as they have been in existence for 20 years next year and it is 10 years since they last played in Hunton.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 9:46pm.