

Chairman's Annual Report
Marton cum Grafton Parish Council 2023/2024

Welcome all to the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council and my Chairmans's Report for the year.

We have seen a welcome decline in building activity within the parish in the past year, admittedly from a heightened level, although we still have two substantial builds in progress.

The Kiln Garth (Yew Tree Farm) development in Marton is to all intents and purposes complete, but the final plot is proving a struggle to sell. As such Brierley Homes technically remain on site and although the landscaping of the Public Open Space (POS) was undertaken in the autumn, under the terms of the planning approval the proposed Management Company will remain dormant until such time as Brierley vacate the site for good.

To put the timeline of this development into perspective, planning approval was granted by Harrogate Borough Council on the same day Rishi Sunak MP was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer. With recent focus on the 80th anniversary of VE Day, were we to put the Kiln Gath development timeline into a WW2 perspective, Dunkirk would be a distant memory, Rommel defeated in North Africa, Italy liberated, D-Day and the Battle of Normandy and the Low Countries completed and the Germans would have been launching their final ill-fated offensive of the war in the Ardennes. Let us all hope this long running episode concludes before we reach the equivalent of VJ day.

It is therefore not a huge surprise to see recent press reports anticipating a circa £3m loss for Brierley Homes in this financial year. Being a wholly owned subsidiary of North Yorkshire Council, and essentially underwritten by council-tax payers this, if true, is something of a cause for concern. However, setting the financials aside, from a Parish Council perspective Brierley have engaged with us throughout the process and have largely taken onboard our many observations, creating a development as sympathetic to its surroundings as we could have reasonably expected. The overall design won recognition in the UK Property Awards this year and the areas of public open space are generous with a welcome and robust home provided gratis for the village lawnmower.

In other planning related areas we wrote to the Chief Executive of North Yorkshire Council expressing our concern at the lack of resource within their Enforcement function. We have subsequently noted a modest improvement.

In June we welcomed Bella Cornelius into the council and we're most grateful for her valued contribution to date, not least with her dedicated work on the proposed asphalt plant.

Although technically out with the Parish the proposed plant is a major cause for concern not least because of issues such as pollution, noise, traffic and potential contribution to the encroachment of ribbon development alongside the A168. I'd also like to express our gratitude to Michael Emsley for his ongoing work on this matter.

There has been constant speculation as to when the application will be presented and discussed by the NYC planning committee, but as yet, no date has been confirmed.

The childrens playground by the playing fields is starting to show its age. There has been a couple of incidents of equipment failing, one of which resulted in a claim which was subsequently settled by our insurers. As such we have adopted a professional quarterly inspection programme with additional monthly checks. We have also opted to undertake a thorough maintenance and repair programme by HAGGS, the manufacturer of most of the equipment, which will ensure many years of future use. This is an expensive process but an essential one.

The children of the parish are not the only group in receipt of expenditure, with increased activity on the playing fields and the creation of an energetic walking football community a new defibrillator has been purchased for the pavilion.

The rabbit issue on the playing fields and resultant holes is an ongoing one. Occasional bouts of myxomatosis reduce their burrowing capacity from time to time, but the problem shows no sign of abating, and it is a particular issue within the playground area. As such we have requested a series of quotes to rabbit-proof the boundary of the playground area and picnic benches. Once these have been collated we will endeavour to apply for grant funding so we can isolate the area. This will also have the benefit of excluding dogs from pestering the children.

We had looked at undertaking a substantial resurfacing of the track to the playing fields parking area, but the costs were excessive and the benefit would largely apply to those out with the Parish who access by car. We have therefore opted to regrade the track, at a fraction of the cost, and to date it appears to be holding up well. Some of the wooden steps and supports for the path network are also in need of repair and quotes for the work are ongoing.

The village has become larger and the monies required to fund services have risen accordingly, however this year we opted to increase the parish precept in line with inflation. With additional residents in the parish from Kiln Garth set to contribute to the precept, we are confident of maintaining the precept in real terms for the foreseeable future.

As ever, the June Open Gardens event was a resounding success, blessed with fine weather, a mass of satisfied visitors and an entertaining well-earned after-party on Grafton green. The Parish Council wishes to extend our thanks to the organising committee and all those who gave of their time to make the event such a success and help raise monies for village projects.

In November our vibrant WI group celebrated their centenary and a magnificent artwork commemorating this milestone now proudly adorns the wall in the memorial hall.

Further afield in Marton Wood the Chrysalis Arts activities and workshops have been a welcome addition to village life with some fascinating activities organised for

residents of all ages and the permissive footpath through the woods is much appreciated.

Thanks to village IT supremo, Tim Joynson, the more observant residents will have recently noticed a significant advance in village IT capabilities. The technology supporting the village website has been greatly enhanced resulting in an upgraded type face and layout, improved interaction, and importantly is now NALC compliant with dedicated support.

In addition, the Parish Council area on the website has been enhanced and a dedicated email account and addresses for councillors and clerk established incorporating enhanced security, protocols and support.

My final comment is to thank all of the many volunteers who willingly give of their time and expertise to make life in Marton cum Grafton so enjoyable and ensure it remains a great place to live. This includes my colleagues on the Parish Council, the Primary School, Punchbowl, Christ Church, the magnificent team at Spellows, the Open Gardens Committee, WI, litter and bin volunteers, neighbourhood watch committee, playing fields & pavilion volunteers, playground inspectors, village grass mowers, the Helmes charity trust, village hall & tennis courts committees and no doubt many I have omitted. Thanks to you all.