

Annual Report of Old
Marston Parish Council
2016/17

Old Marston Parish Council

Parish Councillors

Mr J. Batey - (Chairman)
Mr D. Hatfield - (Vice-Chairman)
Mr N. Bartleet
Mr M. Cadd
Mr P. Cox
Mr T. Greenfield
Ms P. Hall
Mr B. Lewis
Mr C. Haynes
Mr M. O'Keefe
Ms A. Tiwari
Mr P. Williams

Oxford City Councillors

Mrs. M. Clarkson
Mr. M. Haines

Oxfordshire County Councillor

Mr. M. Lygo

Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer

Mr T.L. Cann

Objectives

- To represent the local community's interests;
- To support local organisations and activities;
- To help provide amenities, such as allotments, burial grounds, recreation grounds etc. and;
- To help look after all aspects of the Parish of Old Marston.

Old Marston Parish Council

Introduction

Over the centuries, poor relief passed from the monasteries to the church vestries and in combined parishes to the Boards of Guardians. Vestries were given power to provide lighting and charge a rate on the householders, another charge was permitted for highway work within the parish, in addition to the poor rate. This was the beginnings of local government as we know it. Boroughs were historically self-governing, the whole country was parished and counties well established.

The demand for services, and the organisation of them, resulted in groups of parishes being joined into Rural District Councils. As a result of the apportionment of services to those councils the parishes were left with no mandatory functions but parish government was formalised in 1894 in two ways. Parishes with elected councils were created; where councils were not elected the district council could appoint one.

The first Marston Parish meeting, where candidates to be Parish Councillors were nominated, was held on the 4th December 1894, with councillors signing a declaration of acceptance to office at their next meeting on the 31st December 1894.

The first elected chairman was a Rev. Charles Morris, the clerk, which was an unpaid position and one of the councillors, a Richard Lambourn and treasurer was Mr. W. Marycotts.

At their meeting on the 15th January 1895 they elected Mr A. Evans as vice-chairman, agreed unanimously that the public would be let in but “..anyone wilfully interrupting would be excluded from meetings for twelve months.”, reporters would also be allowed in and a search for suitable land for allotments started.

However, the first ‘elections’ as such, which was just a show of hands from those present, did not take place until the 23rd March 1896.

The Council met quarterly, and most of the business, for the next 20 years or so, seem to mainly evolve around obtaining land for allotments and the day to day management of them. Although they did agree to pay two shillings a night for the six Winter months and a shilling a night for the six Summer months for lighting and cleaning of the School, the building which now houses the Church Hall.

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On the 27th March 1917 it was proposed to obtain a carriage with wheels for funerals in the parish but this was deferred to a future meeting and never mentioned again.

At their meeting of the 22nd July 1918 Brasenose College proposed to increase the rent for the land being used for allotments from £2 5 shillings per acre to £4 per acre. Councillors were astounded at this increase as many plots were now vacant due to tenants being away on military service. The Clerk wrote to the Agricultural Board to see if the college was within its rights to increase the rent so much especially during war time, the Agricultural Board replied that the college were within its rights. After two public meetings with plot holders it was agreed to pay rent of £20 but under the agreement that any termination of the lease could only happen either in September or April.

The Parish of Marston, at that time, covered all of what we now know as Old Marston and New Marston running as far east as St Clements and north up to Elsfeld.

As with everything, things have moved on from those days, especially with the passing of the 1972 Local Government Act which is still one of the main legislations for Parish and Town Councils, although added to this is the ever increasing legislation such as the Localism Acts, Governance & Accountability Regulations and Transparency Regulations, etc.

The Clerk is now a paid officer of the Council, there to advise the council on matters such as law and good practice, as well as providing administrative, financial and clerical services.

However, it is still the local authority that makes decisions on behalf of the people in the parish. It is the level of government closest to the community, with the district authority (Oxford City Council) above it in the hierarchy.

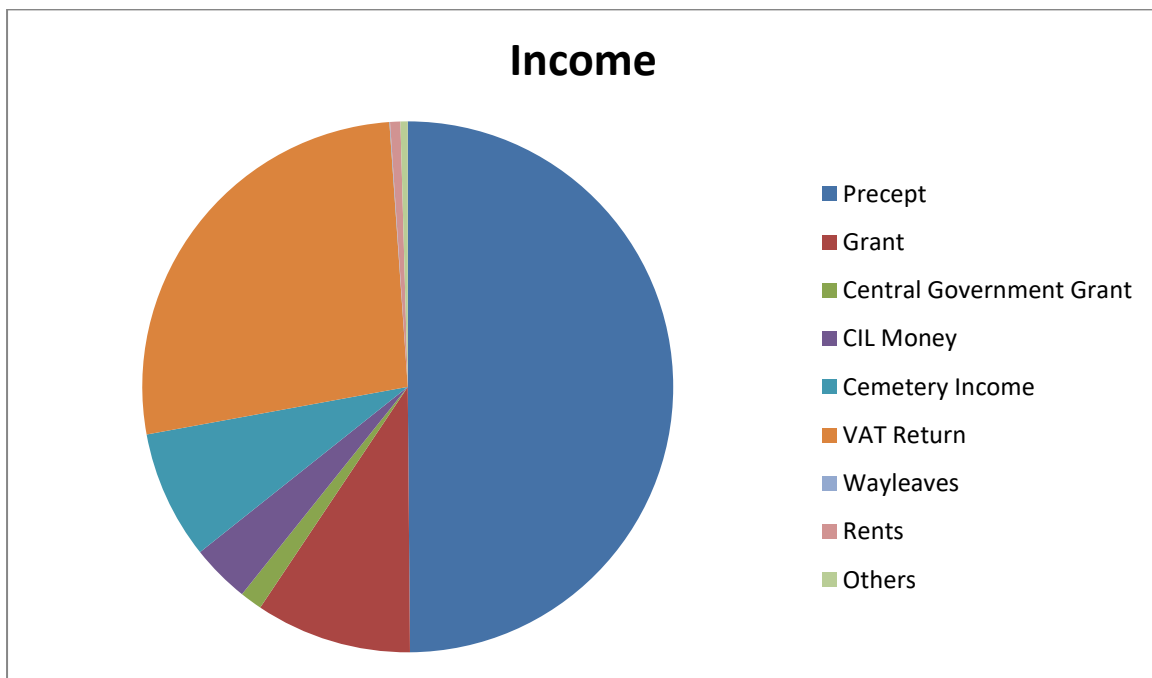
As it is the authority closest to the people, parish councils are invariably the first place people will go with concerns or ideas. For this reason they are a vital part of any community.

Old Marston Parish Council

Administration Report (including finances)

Income

	£
Precept	52,426.07
Grant	10,000.00
Central Government Grant	1,425.93
CIL Money	3,750.00
Cemetery Income	8,225.00
VAT Returns	28,140.96
Wayleaves	43.28
Rents	655.05
Others	463.74
TOTAL INCOME	£105,130.0



Old Marston Parish Council

Precept: This is the actual figure which is collected from every household through the Council tax.

Grant: The Oxford City Council gives the Parish Council a grant to assist in the maintenance of public areas owned by the Parish Council which are open to everyone, regardless of whether they are parishioners or not. This includes the two recreation grounds, allotments and cemetery.

Central Government Grant: When the boundary changes were done back in the 1990's some local council's gained while others lost out so to soften the blow central government gave those who lost out a grant. This grant has been decreasing by approximately 30% each year and will stop in 2020.

CiL Money: For every new build within the parish the developers pay a Community Infrastructure Levy, of which a percentage goes to the Parish Council.

Cemetery Income: Self-explanatory really, this is the fee collected for burials, headstones, etc.

VAT Returns: The Parish Council can reclaim the VAT paid on non-business activities such as maintaining the recreation grounds.

Wayleaves: Is the consent in writing that allows utility companies to carry out work on privately-owned land. It is a written legal agreement between the company and the land/property owner that grants access to install, maintain or repair network equipment.

Rent: A charge for use of Parish Council land.

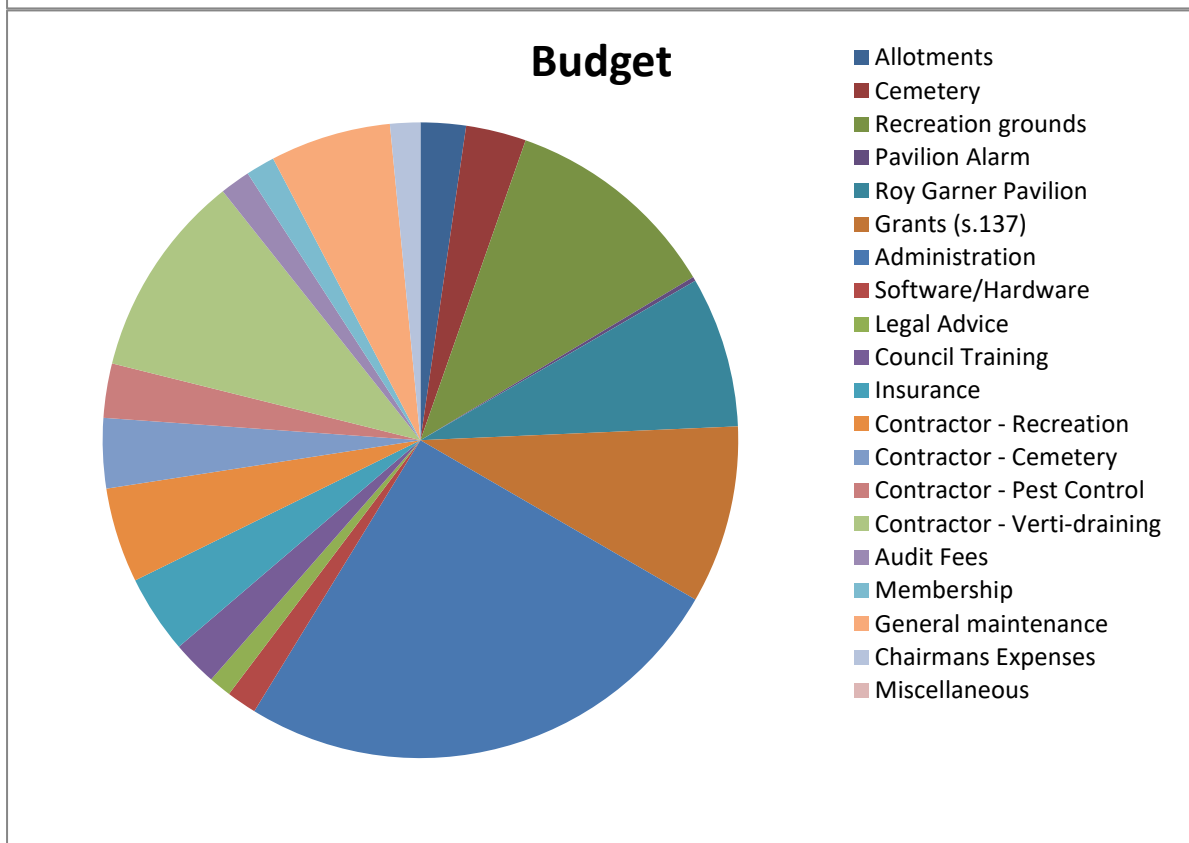
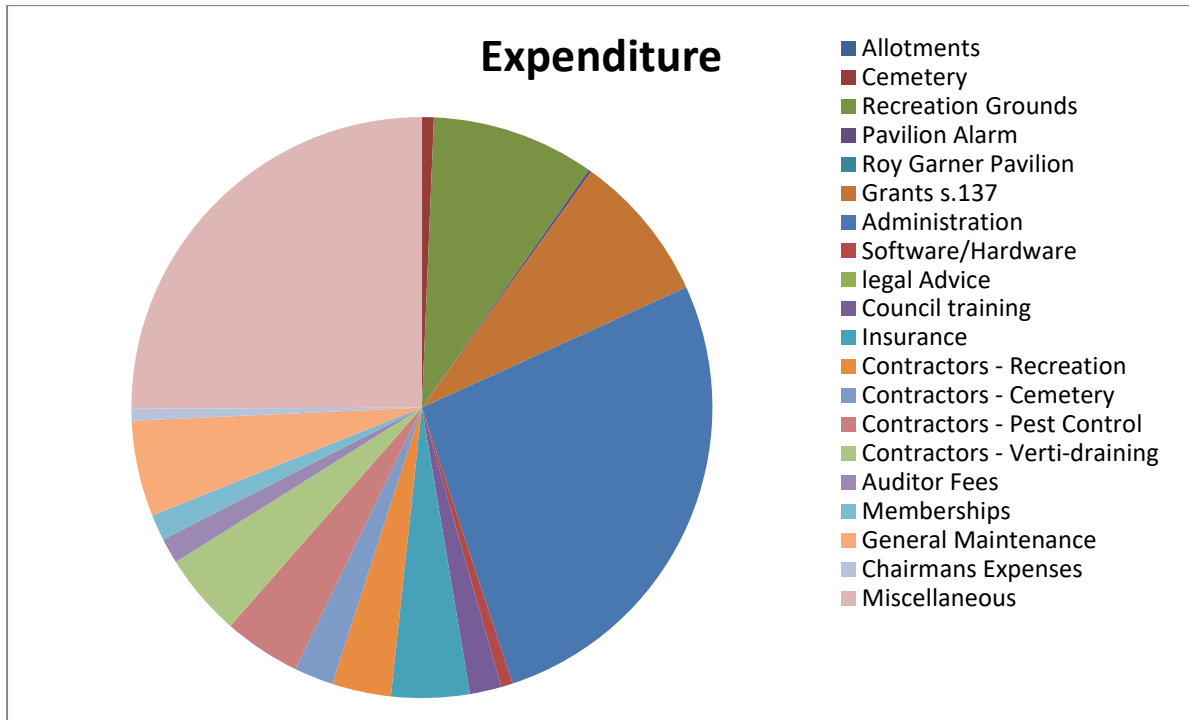
Others: Various activities throughout the year such as the profit from the calendar, which was then donated to a local cause.

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Expenditure v Budget

	Budget	Actual
Allotments	1,500.00	00.00
Cemetery	2,000.00	410.59
Recreation Grounds	7,200.00	5,633.17
Pavilion Alarm	140.00	98.50
Roy Garner Pavilion (See separate list)	5,000.00	
Grants (s.137)	5,900.00	5,140.00
Administration (Salary, stationery etc.)	16,550.00	16,573.07
Software/Hardware	1,000.00	401.24
Legal Advice	750.00	00.00
Council Training	1,500.00	1,089.30
Insurance	2,600.00	2,697.28
Contractors		
Recreation Grounds	3,150.00	2,039.40
Cemetery	2,320.00	1,350.00
Pest Control	1,800.00	2,660.40
Verti-draining	6,800.00	2,861.64
Audit Fees (External & Internal)	1,000.00	878.00
Memberships (OALC, SLCC, ICCM, etc.)	960.00	896.59
General Maintenance	4,000.00	3,304.00
Chairman's Expenses	1,000.00	409.04
Miscellaneous		15,533.26
TOTAL	£65,170.00	£61,975.48

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Overview

Allotments: The Parish Council owns the allotment site in Mill Lane, it is run on a day to day basis by the Old Marston Mill Lane Allotments Association (OMMLAA)

Cemetery: This covers the 'L' shaped land at the back of the cemetery which the Council owns, it is still maintained on a voluntary basis but the Council pays for the maintenance costs.

Recreation Grounds: These are the Mortimer Hall Recreation Ground, Boults Lane Recreation Ground and the field in Mill Lane, (on the right of the entrance to the Victoria Arms drive) which although not owned by the Council it is maintained by the Council for local children to play. A large part of this expenditure was for the new footpath running through the Mortimer Hall Recreation Ground making it easier for pushchairs and buggies to get from the subway to the play area.

Pavilion Alarm: The building down Boults Lane which is used by Marston Saints FC is actually owned by the Parish Council, hence why the Council pays for the alarm maintenance.

New Pavilion: There is a separate list showing the actual expenditure on this. The Parish Council owns the old pavilion in Boults Lane and therefore has a responsibility to ensure it is fit for purpose. Many years ago the Parish Council decided to replace the old pavilion as it was old, rotting and in a very poor state. Roy Garner, the Clerk for many years, along with the Council built up a reserve so as to replace the building. It was clear that, even after all this and after a number of years, with reserves of £244,000 and the cost of the new building being estimated at £800,000+ and increasing as time went by that it was a disheartening task.

The Parish Council then had the opportunity to purchase a second hand pavilion, which was located at Barton, for £20,000 from the Oxford City Council.

It was then a mammoth task of getting planning permission, relocating the building from its site in Barton to Boults Lane and getting it up and running.

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A planning application was needed which would take 6 – 8 weeks the building had to go into storage while all the preparation work was undertaken.

It was basically, in the opinion of the Parish Council, the best option as it could replace the old pavilion within its own financial restrictions. It would have needed loans/mortgages to raise the £800,000+, then the burden of 25years of repayments.

To get it through planning it had to have various restraints such as not competing with already existing venues such as the Red Lion, Victoria Arms, Mortimer Hall, Church Hall, etc. The last thing the Parish Council wants is for any of these to suffer.

Grant (s.137): This covers the Firework display and grants the Council gives to local organisations to assist them in carrying out the work they do. This year the recipients were:- St John Ambulance, Mortimer Hall, Mortimer Hall Pre-school, 43rd Scout Group, OXSRAD, OMMLAA, FOSNS PTA, Marston Times, St Nicholas School Garden Club, St Nicholas Church Junior Choir.

Administration: This covers everything which involves the running of the Council, employing the Clerk; his pay, tax, National Insurance and Pension plus any stationery, ink, paper, postage, etc.

Software/Hardware: This is not only the laptop and printer used by the Clerk but also renewal of the domain address to keep the website and emails active.

Legal Advice: Although not used regularly there is an amount budgeted should the Council need any advice involving legal matters.

Council Training: A Council and its staff need to be up to date with local administration, good practice, understand correct procedures and the law. This covers new Councillors going on training if needed as well as the Clerk/RFO becoming qualified and up to date in their job.

Insurance: By law the Parish Council has to have certain insurance cover in place and it would be very short sighted of the Council if it did not protect itself and its property from theft or damage.

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Contractors: The Council has several contractors who ensure pests such as moles do not infest the recreation grounds or cemetery, as well as keeping mowed the Mortimer Hall Recreation Ground, Boult's Lane Recreation Ground and Cemetery.

Audit Fees: By law the Council has to have an internal auditor as well as an external auditor, so as to ensure public money is correctly spent and appropriate records are kept. Although called an 'Internal Auditor' they are not connected to the Council in any way.

Membership: The Council are members of various organisations so as to assist them in the running of the Council by providing the latest information, training courses etc. These include the OALC (Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils), ICCM (Institute of Cemetery & Crematorium Management), Oxfordshire Green Belt. The Clerk is a member of the SLCC (Society of Local Council Clerks).

General Maintenance: This is a contingency and used for emergencies such as tree damage etc.

Chairman's Expenses: The Chairman to the Parish Council is the public figure of the Council; he attend functions where they represent the Council. Out of pocket expenses are available, such as travel costs to and from functions, any stationery they may use while carry out the role as chairman.

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2016/17 Overspends Explained

Administration: £23.07 – This covers all costs to run the Parish Council. This includes the Clerk's wages, tax, National Insurance, Pension, Pay Roll Services, Stationery, Ink, etc.

Insurance: £97.28 – the building cover was increased as it was felt too low.

Pest Control: £860.40 – As moles were becoming a problem in the Mortimer Hall Recreation Ground it was added to the contract.

Miscellaneous: £15,533.26 – This was not budgeted for but covered an error made on the VAT return which meant the Council received £16,423.10 instead of £1,642.31 resulting in £14,780.82 having to be returned to the HMRC. A calendar was produced and sold. This made a profit of £65.92 which was donated to the Marston Times. So although these were unbudgeted for expenditures there was also income which covered both of these spends.

There was £66.00 in rent paid to the Mortimer Hall for the use of the main hall every month throughout the year.

The Parish Council made a contribution of £500 towards the seat installed at the Mortimer Drive bus stop.

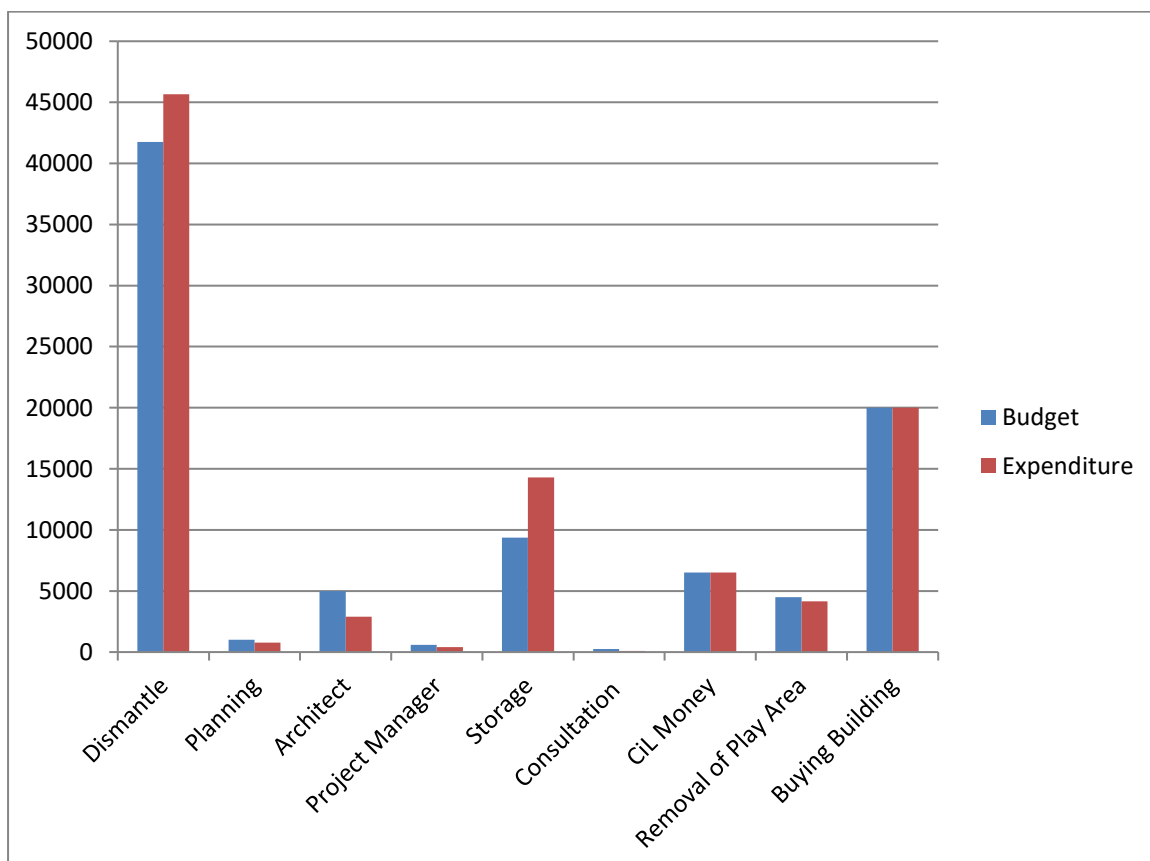
Overall there was an underspend of £3,194.52

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Roy Garner Pavilion Expenditure

	Budget	Actual
Dismantle & Relocate for storage	111,300.00	45,650.00
Planning Application	1,000.00	770.00
Architect	5,000.00	2,885.60
Project Manager Advert	600.00	420.00
Storage	9,360.00	14,300.00
Copying Consultation letter	240.00	80.00
Oxford City Council CiL Money	6,500.00	6,499.53
Play Area Fence Removal & Store	4,500.00	4,150.00
Oxford City Council Purchase of Building	20,000.00	20,000.00
TOTAL	£158,500.00	£94,755.13

The biggest overspend was on storage. This was due to the time the City Council took processing the planning application and not allowing for the consultation period. There was additional work needed by the architect as the planners wanted a tree survey done and then insisted the building was moved away from the canopy of the trees so as to ensure healthy trees are protected.



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End of Year Audit

The end of year audit is performed by the external auditor, for 2016-17 a company called BDO LLP. They have no connection with the Parish Council and in fact have never visited or attended any of their meetings.

Issues raised in this years' report followed by explanations and resolutions are:-

1. Risk Assessment not minuted during the year – the small authority has not minuted its review of effectiveness of internal control including its risk assessment during the year.

This is correct. However, the Clerk did realise the error, the risk assessment was reviewed by the Finance Committee in April 2017 and passed through full Council at the June 2017 meeting.

2. Risk Assessment – the internal auditor has noted that the small authority has not minuted its review of the effectiveness of internal control including arrangements for the management of risks during the year ended 31 March 2017.

Again see previous answer.

3. Fixed Assets – The value of fixed assets included in the Annual Return appears to be undervalued.
This was the new pavilion. There was some doubt as to what value needed to be declared in the fixed asset register. Should it be the cost of the building, £20,000, or the full cost of the project for that financial year, £100,589.13. The Clerk asked the SLCC for guidance who advised that it should be the actual cost of the building, £20,000 which is what happened. However, the external auditor disagreed and stated it should be the full value of the project! The clerk referred this back to the SLCC whose finance expert agreed with the external auditor. The asset register is being corrected.
4. Minutes not signed or initialled – The small authority produced printed minutes, which were submitted for audit purposes. The pages were not maintained in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12, para 41.

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In a way this is correct. The Clerk printed off a copy of the minutes and highlighted the section showing where the risk assessment had been passed through full council. However, they are saying it should have been a scanned copy of the signed and dated minutes. The Clerk can confirm that all documents are maintained in accordance with all legal requirements.

5. Standard Information – We had to contact the clerk as standard information, including bank reconciliation, date of electors rights or explanation of variances was not supplied with the initial submission.

This is a misleading statement as the bank reconciliation and explanation of variances were supplied with the initial submission. However, despite the fact that the form had in bold red “TO BE SUBMITTED TO BDO LLP WITH THE ANNUAL RETURN..” this was not sent. Although in the clerks defence, it had already been announced that BDO would not be the external auditor for next year so the clerk assumed the notification confirming the date the inspection period commencement should be sent to the new auditor.

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Chairman's Report

The last council year has seen a great deal of activity by the Parish Council and many issues have arisen which involve us all here in Old Marston. I will start with....

Proposed developments.

In July 2016 the Oxford Mail reported a proposal by developers to build 700 homes on land north of Mill Lane. It was not supported by City Council and was a major threat to that part of our parish. We sent a press release stating our strong objections, especially because of traffic access, which was published by Oxford Mail in August and council expressed their opposition at the September meeting.

At that meeting two members of public raised the issue of the proposed Swan School on the Harlow site. This reflected press reports of efforts to locate a new secondary school there which we were not a party to and I sent emails to the leaders of the City and County Councils asking why we had not been informed and expressing our huge concerns over the impact of this. Nevertheless the site was eventually chosen and County Council's cabinet were scheduled to discuss the sale of the site to DfE on February 21st. I called a public meeting for the night before this happened and there was unanimous opposition to it from that meeting. This council met immediately afterwards and approved a document with 9 points of objections which was sent that night to each of the cabinet members. Unfortunately they decided to approve of the sale for £1 and we now await plans from the DfE to the City Council.

In September Peter Williams, the Clerk and myself attended a meeting in Elsfield concerning a proposed development by Christ Church at Lower Elsfield. I voiced our major concerns over the impact of traffic on the Marston interchange and Marsh Lane. We are represented on a large group consisting of local bodies which is still fighting development of this and a further proposed development at Wick Farm.

Apart from Green Belt implications, all of these would have a very serious impact on traffic in Marsh Lane and through Elsfield/Oxford Roads as well as the Marston Ferry/Cherwell Drive/Headley Way arterial route. Here in Old Marston we are suffering already from being a major hub for traffic and we are yet to feel the impact of the Barton Park development on our roads or see any benefits from the Headington Access proposals.

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Planning.

We were successful in having the City Council approve of our application to have the Red Lion pub nominated as an Asset of Community Value. Unfortunately the Jack Russell, although having an ACV and having been opposed by the council at planning stage, has been lost to developers and they plan to build a huge block of flats. Some of our members attended a planning training session held by City Council and all of us have been issued with a helpful document on planning from that meeting.

We are very concerned at family-sized homes being turned into multi-occupancy flats for rental which tends to change the character of our neighbourhoods.

Boults Lane Project.

I have always seen this in 3 distinct phases - erecting the modular pavilion, demolishing the old one and creating more parking, and providing new play equipment in a relocated area.

The planning and preparation for the first phase was a great challenge especially for the Clerk and myself. We were dealing with issues of which we had no knowledge or experience and I felt it necessary to have the Pavilion Committee appoint someone with such experience to help initially. (We have also received advice from Ian Homer, a builder from Marston Saints). Fortunately, the contractors proved to be very helpful and we built a good relationship with them. The Structural Engineer decided that the ground necessitated more sophisticated foundations than planned for and this was an extra cost. Although there is more to do, costs have been kept within budget and we do have some reserves. The first phase is now almost complete and people I have spoken to have said the building looks fine, better than expected. At present the mains services and internal connections are being set up and landscaping will follow. We are working with Marston Saints regarding occupation.

Meanwhile preparations to dismantle the old pavilion and plans for the new playground are continuing in council. We expect soon make an application for a grant for the play equipment.

Vandalism.

At the end of last 2016 this community suffered a wave of vandalism unlike any before. Among other things, several trees on our recreation grounds were attacked with an axe or machete. Some were chopped down and some had to be destroyed, incurring extra expense.

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Depressingly, Roy Jones memorial tree was destroyed and I had to inform his widow. The vandalism was reported to and publicised by the Oxford Mail. The local police have increased their visits to the area, especially at weekends and the Clerk joined one team to see them working. I arranged for PCSOs to attend council meetings and there is now a regular agenda item to cover that.

Because of this vandalism, council decided to hold back on buying a defibrillator, one of which was damaged at Marston Saints pavilion.

Bradlands Bus.

Council voted to financially support the local 'shopping bus' from Bradlands in view of regular bus services not serving north Mill Lane. This has proved to be very valuable and popular with residents.

Recreation Grounds and Cemetery.

A new footpath was made into Mortimer Recreation Ground from the underpass, a waste bin has been sited near the picnic table at Oxford Rd. end, various repairs were necessary due to vandalism.

The equipment is inspected weekly. A group of councillors examined headstones in the cemetery for safety and found no real problems.

Thanks are due to councillors Peter Cox and Anthony Greenfield for their dedication to these grounds which are a credit to the council.

Events.

A successful Fireworks Night was held at the Red Lion and a Family Fun Day is scheduled for 24th | June at the Victoria Arms. Such events are normally supported by grants from the Parish Council, which also distributes grants to many local bodies each year.

Councillor Greenfield produced an Old Marston calendar illustrated with local photos and council decided that proceeds from their sales were to be given to the local Oxford Times circular.

The Clerk and myself will be representing the council at the installation of the new Lord Mayor and

The Vice-Chair and myself will be representing council at the induction of the new vicar at St. Nicholas' Church.

Structure and working of the Parish Council.

We now have regular slots on the agenda for public participation and inputs from city and county councillors as well as the police. These are valuable channels of information and feedback for the council.

Council has met 12 times in the last year and following restructuring, we have committees for planning (Chair Michael Cadd), recreation grounds and cemetery (Chair Tony Greenfield), finance (Chair Pat Hall), pavilion

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(Chair Michael Cadd) and staffing and standards (Chair Peter Williams). These have met 15 times in the last year.

Thanks.

Committee meetings have meant a great deal of extra commitment and time from councillors and in addition to those already mentioned I want to thank Anji Tiwari, Nils Bartleet, Peter Cox, Barry Lewis and Michael O'Keefe for their attendance at committees and for the way they work together for the good of this parish.

My thanks to Vice-Chair and Website Manager Duncan Hatfield for his hard work and support.

I want to thank the city and county councillors for their attendance and support for council and for the work they do for the Old Marston community. They do a great job.

Finally, I especially want to thank Clerk Tim Cann. He has been a great help to me during the year and his work rate and dedication to his role as Clerk to Council and Responsible Finance Officer is amazing. Council voted recently to increase his salary in recognition of this. He is a true professional who takes his work seriously and looks to improve himself at all times. This council is lucky to have him.

John C Batey. Chairman
May 2017