

South Marston Annual Parish Meeting 2026

Chair's Report

Introduction:

The year has been dominated by the 500-house village expansion moving from the planning stage to delivery. We have formed a good working relationship with the two firms of Contractors delivering the infrastructure as well the 3 house builders, but all has not gone smoothly.

Development Issues:

A change of plan has resulted in Old Vicarage Lane being closed in sections from December 2025 through to mid-2027. This caught the Contractors on the hop and liaison with residents did not go well. Matters were made worse by the wet winter, which resulted in a lot of mud on the road, particularly affecting residents of Manor Cottages. We and Cllr. Vallender represented resident concerns to the Contractors and improvements were made.

There have been other surprises, such as the appearance of a construction road opposite Manor Cottages without any warning or permission, as the Contractors strove to deliver plans for houses on both sides of OVL. I am pleased to say that now the Principal Street is complete from the new Thornhill Road roundabout almost to OVL, construction traffic and deliveries can access the build sites from the west.

The “on-site” Engineers have struggled with co-ordinating the build of the northern loop road across the Leaze/Morses Lane bridleway with the interests of residents and walkers. Sylvia Brown has taken the liaison role, and minimally disruptive compromises have been achieved. There is now a WhatsApp group for direct contact between the Engineers and residents.

Apart from brief planned closures a route from the village to Keypoint has now been secured. Initially using Morses Lane, the gap that has now been made through the Keypoint hedge at the Thornhill Junction will eventually make an alternative route.

The area of the proposed “superjunction” at Morses Lane is transformed, with considerable damage to the ancient hedge and bank of Morses Lane. We protested to both the Contractors and Planners and hope that no further destruction will be needed.

We have spent much effort on ensuring that the drainage challenges of the site are recognised and note the Contractors' confidence that their extensive works will be adequate. Given OVL's history of flooding, the fact that it stayed dry despite an exceptionally wet winter is a good omen. Having said this, a detailed report on the area south of Bell Gardens is still awaited.

School Expansion

There is no news on the school expansion, which is a worry given the rate that houses are being completed and the fact that Vistry have pre-sold 93 units. We are ensuring that the current area of the smaller football pitch will remain free for school use. We continue to keep in touch with the Borough and Academy.

New Village Hall

We enabled a group of "33" residents to meet with the designers appointed by the Developers and significant changes have been made. The new Hall should prove a real asset, but effort will be required if we are to make the most of it. The requirement is for a building only. It will need capital for equipment and furnishings and, one suspects, at least initial subsidy. It was timed for delivery at end 2027, but this is now in doubt.

Road Naming

An anticipated pleasure was advising the Borough on road names within the new sites. It has proved no such thing. The Borough has strict "Guidelines" which produce anodyne names unrelated to place or placemaking.

Rowborough

The focus of Planning applications has now moved on to Rowborough. We have agreed that, rather than reflecting the architecture of South Marston village, a modern appearance is appropriate. We agree with the Borough that an overall drainage plan is required and have commented in detail on the various detailed proposals.

Panattoni

Nigel Hole is leading our liaison with Panattoni, where the groundwork phase has ended and construction of the most magnificent sheds is well underway. We had a site meeting with the drainage engineers, who are confident that flood risks to the village have been addressed. We have been pleased to see the green infrastructure and footpath/cycle routes through the site taking shape.

Village Hall Title

Twenty years ago, the Borough was looking to take all assets into its umbrella ownership. A charity, "Village Hall South Marston" was set up for the sole purpose of keeping the Hall in community ownership. The risk has now passed. Problems have arisen in distinguishing

between the roles and accounts of VHSM, South Marston Recreation Association and the PC. The joint Trustees of VHSM and SMRA are conducting a Statutory Consultation on transferring the legal title to the Hall back to the PC, to be held on the same terms as if it remained with VHSM.

Subsidies

The PC continues to encourage and financially support community activities, notably the provision of the Village Hall and Recreation Ground through SMRA and “Party in the Park”.

Elections:

We congratulate Matthew Vallender on success in the recent Borough Council elections, polling 70% of a 60% turnout. We are pleased that he has again agreed to be co-opted onto the PC.

Tony Leathart decided not to continue as a Councillor, but we were pleased that he will continue in various other roles. Tony could be a contrarian voice, and I thank him for helping to guard against “group think”!

Help Needed

We remain 3 Councillors short of a full compliment. The workload is more or less what you choose to make it. If you are interested in helping to shape the village in this transformational time, please step forward!