

## ST PETER'S, TIVERTON

### Parochial Church Council

Minutes of the meeting held in St Peter's Church on Thursday 7 September 2023 at 7.30 pm

Present: The Revd Christian Hill (in the chair), John Brewster, David Catchpole, Emma Cobbledick, Joanna Hall-Tomkin, Gill Heard, Kate Henshall, Nickie Johnson, Averil Long, Sally Mundy, David Ricks, Heather Vincent and William Zarrett.

Apologies: Tom Mitchell.

The meeting opened with prayer.

#### 1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 13 July were approved and signed. There were no matters arising from the minutes.

#### 2 Safeguarding

JH-T reported that the process of obtaining DBS certificates for PCC members was proceeding, but a few remained still to be activated. She appealed for the remaining checks, including the three-document verification process, to be completed without delay: she was happy to do the necessary checking after a Sunday morning service, and she reminded members that the Diocese is quite clear about the need for everyone to be compliant in this regard. It was also an unfortunate necessity that attention be given to any situation in which someone turned out to be on the barred list.

CH added that there were aspects of pastoral care arrangements in the parish which, precisely because they involved contact with and care for children and vulnerable adults by St Peter's personnel, made the possession of DBS certificates, assuming the necessary confirmation was forthcoming, a protection for all parties concerned.

#### 3 Worship

GH introduced the minutes of the Worship Committee meeting on 29 August, drawing particular attention to the following matters.

- 3.1 *Taizé-style worship* (minute 1b): This has a substantial and appreciative following. Taizé services as such will be postponed for the time being, but elements will figure in an eight-week Sunday evening prayer service that is planned by CH for the autumn, the first of which will take place on 15 October, cf. minute 8.2.
- 3.2 *Choir membership*: a new soprano/alto, Lena Marvao by name, has arrived, to the general delight of choir members.
- 3.3 *Graham Willson* (minute 4a): very best wishes were expressed to Graham following his recent bout of ill health. It was reported that he hoped to be back in church quite soon and would in due course be resuming his much-appreciated playing of the organ.

- 3.4 *Harvest supper*: This would be held on Friday 22 September at 7 pm in church. The cost was being kept at a low level (£5 per person) and the menu will be eminently healthy. An appeal was issued by SM for helpers in the preparation of the supper.

#### 4 Finance

WZ introduced the minutes of the Finance Committee meeting, supplemented by the treasurer's report for the period to the end of August.

- 4.1 *The office of treasurer (minute 3)*: The Standing Committee, acting with the authority of the PCC, had at its meeting on 14 August, approved the transfer of this responsibility from Chris Shields to Helen Wakely, cf. appendix herewith setting out standing committee minutes. The committee, and now the PCC, expressed their great gratitude to Chris for his work during two periods of time, most recently over the past three years, and their sympathy with him in the face of serious health problems. This would be conveyed to him in a letter of thanks.

The Committee was very grateful to Helen Wakely for her willingness to become the Treasurer. She will be paid a fee: normally £20 per hour; £25 per hour for end of year work; £500 for current adjustment work so far running to 70 hours work *in toto*, a rate which is significantly lower and for fewer hours, given her familiarity with the church's financial systems, than that which Apsleys would have charged. This agreement, which WZ had worked out with her, was agreed by the PCC. Members of the PCC were very grateful for all the revision that she has implemented, cf. below, and CH undertook to write and thank her.

HW has already undertaken a transfer of the accounting programme from the desktop programme to a cloud-based on-line version called *myfundaccounting* by the same software provider, Data Developments. This has offered the opportunity to review the format and contents of the accounts themselves. The cost is £19/month, which includes access to an excellent support helpline.

WZ was able to confirm that HW has been added as one of the signatories able to access the Church bank and CCLA investment accounts as well as being able to update the charity details for the Charity Commission.

- 4.2 *Treasurer's report on income and expenditure (minute 3)*: The summary of the position on 31 August 2023 is as follows:

	Actual	Budget	Variance
	£	£	£
Income	33,533	35,118	(1,584)
Expenditure	77,586	66,007	(11,579)
Deficit	(44,053)	(30,890)	(13,163)

The figures above reflect our operating income and expenses and exclude the capital costs of the reordering project, since those are funded from restricted funds established for that purpose.

- 4.2.1 On a monthly basis, the Church has income from the Parish Giving Scheme and other donations, service collections. The Common Fund contribution each month is currently £4,280.

Before any other extraordinary income or expenditure, the Church has an operating loss of around £2,500 each month (which amounts to an annual deficit of £30k). The finances are protected by the current income from Church investments. but in the long-term this is obviously not sustainable. HW noted that the Finance Committee had discussed plans to enable online donations from visitors to the church and the need to formulate a re-launch of the Parish Giving Scheme to encourage new people to join and existing members to review their giving.

- 4.2.2 In the first eight months of the year, the main Church re-ordering work has continued to progress and has cost £43,659.14. Within this total, the new pew cushions cost £10,303.73 and expenditure on the Newte Library stood at £7,830.47 so far including the necessary Faculty at the end of August.

The PCC should be made aware that the Church has received an invoice from SSE Energy for electricity which catches up 12 months during which previously only estimated readings have been taken. It is around £5k and will obviously cause the total for electricity to exceed the budget for the year. Steps have been taken to access future bills on line and possibly fit smart meters (or submit regular readings on line). In addition, the gas expenditure is already £4k over budget and emergency maintenance £9k over budget.

- 4.3 *Re-ordering ongoing expenditure:* The re-ordering work on the children's area is in hand. It is expected that completion of phase I of the re-ordering project will cost a further £30-40k, and the proposal from the Finance Committee was agreed by the PCC, namely that any remaining funds in the Church House Charity, a restricted fund that cannot be spent for any other purpose, be put towards the cost of the Newte Library/mezzanine (probably ca. £69k). This will take total expenditure on re-ordering above the sum currently approved by the PCC, i.e. £705k.

A donor has come forward to contribute towards any shortfall in the funding for the mezzanine floor within the library, but it is hoped that any funding can be kept in an unrestricted and therefore flexible fund. In addition, grants to contribute towards the library are being sought.

The PCC was reminded that from the beginning the re-ordering project had as a central focus the provision of a movable nave altar as a means of furthering the contemporary understanding and experience of corporate worship. WZ gave an assurance that this remained a priority, to which careful consideration would continue to be given.

- 4.4 The planned installation of a card reader for use by visitors to the church who wish to make a donation in support has now happened, and a modest stream of income has been initiated. Its positioning on a table inside the south porch is temporary; the final location will be determined after the completion of the work on the children's area.

The PCC endorsed the Finance Committee minutes and the proposals set out in them.

## 5 Fabric

DR introduced the minutes of the Fabric Committee meeting on 29 August, drawing particular attention to the following items.

- 5.1 *Fire safety works:* cf. PCC 11 May 2023, minute 10.1. The necessary application for DAC approval has been lodged.
- 5.2 *Dry rot in the vestry:* cf. PCC 13 July 2023, minute 6.2. Crowstep have been instructed to undertake the works at a contract value of £18,827.40. The carpet has been stripped out to reveal the extent of the rot, and the stripping out of the floor and walls will be next. A formal application has been made to the DAC for approval but we already have the Archdeacon's authority to proceed.

The PCC endorsed the minutes of the Fabric Committee meeting.

## 6 Reordering

DR and EC reported on the latest developments in respect of reordering.

- 6.1 *The children's area:* The works have commenced since the last PCC meeting and slow progress is being made. The contractor is waiting for the delivery of cabinet furniture which is being assembled off site.
- 6.2 *Chairs:* A fourth chair trolley has been purchased. This allows the stacks to be kept to a much more reasonable height for handling, down from 30 to 24 chairs maximum per stack. It also allows for much easier manoeuvrability and keeps the stacks hidden below the level of the partition wall when stored.
- 6.3 *Library/meeting room:* Crowstep has been appointed as contractor for the works, at a contract value of £69,080.41. This is some £25k below the lowest alternative quotation received, as reported at the last PCC meeting. They have commenced works on site involving room clearance and the preparation of the sleeper walls, to correct levels. The precast concrete 'beam and pot' floor is almost complete. Note: No reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) has been used.
- 6.4 *Window blinds to the mezzanine:* To preserve the book collection we need to reduce the light levels on the mezzanine reaching the shelves and books. Our specialist advisor has recommended the use of light-reducing permanent blinds to both west and north windows. These would allow doors to be omitted from the bookcases and represent a much safer solution in respect of the environment for the books. They would be installed as drops between the stone window mullions with the top at tracery level.

The Chair of the DAC has been consulted, and we believe this solution will be acceptable. Once the DAC have agreed to the proposal [confirmed, 08sep23] it may be administered as an amendment to the existing faculty by exchange of emails and payment of a small fee.

The conserved paintings from the Newte library will be returned to St Peter's on 13 September. The paintings will be stored in the Memorial Chapel until work on the mezzanine is complete. The intention, if space allows, is to hang them on the front of the library screen facing into the church. This means they can be enjoyed by a much larger number of people. The conservation has been funded by two grants (£3,000 from the Church Buildings Council and £4,250 from the Idlewild Trust). Pending the funders' receiving the conservation report, these grants can now be reclaimed.

EC has ordered temperature and humidity readers and a lux reader to monitor the environmental conditions in the library. These should arrive in a few weeks' time.

## 7 Proposed coffee morning in aid of CHAT

Several members of the PCC had been alerted to the severe shortage of stock and/or money at CHAT for the purchase of food, and NJ proposed that a coffee morning be held as soon as possible, and probably in October, and ideally with the involvement of other Tiverton churches, to raise money and strengthen the position of this important charity.

In discussion there was widespread agreement that the raising of funds for St Peter's itself is an ongoing preoccupation, and justifiably so – and that the annual Christmas fair in November plays an important part in reinforcing our income. The hard work of many St Peter's members in this connection is widely appreciated. But alongside this annual event – and here there was also widespread agreement – the commitment to care and provide for the needy has deep roots in the Christian gospel, and is a commitment wholeheartedly maintained by St Peter's.

The PCC therefore agreed that, provided (i) that a date could be agreed that did not clash with the Christmas fair, and (ii) that a group of those who would share responsibility for the planning and implementation of such a plan could be formed, the proposed coffee morning would have our wholehearted support.

## 8 The follow-up to 'the big conversation'

Following the session on 19 August that was given over to the sharing of a vision for the future of St Peter's, St Thomas's and St Andrew's, CH had been reflecting on the suggestions that had been put forward. He shared with the PCC a number of developments and plans which had already taken shape or might be implemented in time to come.

8.1 *The overall aim of proposed plans:* the advertising of services/concerts to promote St Peter's Church, with a view to drawing in more people and greatly increasing our numbers. On Tuesday 19 September at 10.00 am a meeting is planned which will be with API, the company that installed our sound system, to discuss livestreaming and the use of screens and a projector for Church and community group use. This development might enable our participation in the current zoom service to be ended, and our offering to a wider audience to be advertised by the end of November, thus drawing more people in for our Christmas services.

8.2 *Learning to Grow in Prayer:* a Sunday evening prayer course (6.00-7.30 pm), spread over 8 weeks and beginning on 15 October, located at the west end of the church, a 'seeker service' perhaps involving workshops/seminars to assist people with their faith. The format will consist of worship – video talk – discussion – prayer.

8.3 *The overarching assumption* of what follows is an improved working relationship with the Town Council. This is necessary in view of current pressure on the Council to sever ties with the churches, represented by a recent vote not to have prayers at any Council meetings. (The current Mayor's Chaplain, the Revd Andy Humm, is involved in discussion with them.)

Plans for the annual Mayor's Day on 1 October have been abandoned in view of lack of interest and the cost involved. Conversations about a religious service on Remembrance Sunday are current. There will be a planning meeting on Tuesday 12 September about this.

- 8.4 *Plans for the run up to Christmas:* What CH regarded as a productive meeting involving himself, Lydia and the Council staff member responsible for planning had generated a possible plan for Christmas in the town centre.

Saturday 25 November, when the lights will be switched on for Christmas. If this is the CHAT fundraising event it might raise substantial extra contributions. So, St Peter's could stay open for coffee/tea/snacks and provide activities throughout the afternoon for children, e.g. lantern making with parents. Some specialist volunteers will give assistance with this. Before the late night in town, and with a Christmas tree and lights for St Peter's, music groups might play beforehand between 5.00 and 7.00 pm, compered by CH and with Lydia's music partners playing a key part.

Wednesday 6 December: Christmas Music (from Lydia), with mince pies/chestnuts as part of the late-night opening.

At these events flyers/cards with invitations to our Advent/Christmas services could be handed out.

## 9 Any other business

- 9.1 *The churchyard:* JH-T commented on the condition and the potential of the churchyard. The work spearheaded by Mark Heritage was having an excellent effect on the paths, which were steadily becoming safer as a result of the reduction of the moss between the stones. More generally, she suggested that the condition of the churchyard would be greatly enhanced by the encouragement of wild flowers. A programme needed to be developed with this aim in sight, and recruits, perhaps including school students, assembled to bring about change. CH and WZ had met with a naturalist working with the environmental officer of the Diocese to discuss possibilities and had received his outline of a suggested plan. St Peter's may need to realise a relatively small amount of its financial resources in order to improve the site, which is a priceless asset. JH-T undertook to approach a potential new groundsman for a quote.
- 9.2 *Cleaning and caretaking:* At present the cleaning of the church, including the toilets, is undertaken voluntarily and, basically, out of the kindness of a person's heart. CH commented that he thought we should change this situation and be prepared to pay for regular cleaning and caretaking assistance.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9.03 pm.

Signed:

Date:

Next meeting: Thursday 9 November at 7.30 pm in The Tiverton Hotel.