

Village meeting on 19th May, 2023
To discuss the future of St. Helen's Church

Attendance: 43 in total (including Kairen).

Toby Jackson (Churchwarden) in the chair.

Stephen Kimbell, Grahame Price, Bob Grenham, Derek and Lesley Hartshorne, Cynthia Bailey, Sue and David Parsons, Duncan and Pat Walthew, Hilary Yard, Tim and Gay Speechley, Anne Williams, Juliet Kraftl, Sue Clarke, Richard Gibbs, Miles and Jenny Lloyd, Jean and Joe Lee, Anne Haddon, Paul and Jules Wilkinson, Derek and Carol Hetherington, Graham and Christine Kershaw, Barbara Tabiner, Peter Burton, Kairen Ball, Penny Lawrence, Dave and Sally Cullum, Peter and Jose Kirby, Paul and Carol Smith, Steve and Angie Mitchell, Jo, Elliott, Toby and Caroline Jackson.

Apologies: Pam Putt, Jasper and Mary Hart, John and Dawn Hensman, Clare Garner, Peter Kraftl, Anna Hill.

Toby (TJ) fleshed out the background to the situation, which had been referred to in the village flyer.

Derek Hartshorne: If it stops being a building in active use, what would happen to it and the churchyard?

TJ: Diocese would take it over and try and repurpose it (social use, convert to dwelling). If they can't find a use, they'd apply to Churches Conservation Trust but they only take on about 20-30 churches a year. If they take it on, it would be maintained by them but not used for services. If Diocese cannot find a solution and CCT doesn't take it on, it will be closed, and will have to be kept safe. As it deteriorates, being next to the Jurassic Way, it would in due course probably need to have e.g. scaffolding. Re churchyard, the Council takes over closed churchyards. Churchyard probably would be closed by the Diocese and no further burials but TJ needs to do more research.

Richard Gibbs: On basis of suspension of payment of parish share [*suspended while we have no Vicar*], having halved outgoings, are existing streams sufficient?

- *TJ* - over to the Treasurer.
- *Lesley Hartshorne (LH):* Known costs, e.g. alarm, grass cutting (despite wilding some areas) insurance, electricity etc., are roughly £10,500 - £11,000 per year. We don't have a big pool of money for repairs, wiring etc., and costs for doing this to such a building are very high. Until Covid we maintained income of around £20,000 p.a., with a reserve of £30,000, which allowed a degree of flexibility, but this has reduced substantially and is unlikely to get back to pre-Covid levels, e.g. fewer services, some givers have died, fund-raising reduced. We can keep going for another 2-3 years. We feel that we have a duty to pay our parish share and we can't take the view that if we don't pay it, we are fine financially. Enthusiasm from the village may mean that the financial situation is not the worst thing, rather ageing people running the church. Have been Treasurer for 27 years and the job has changed substantially in that time. What we are doing now is trying to plan before we reach a crisis.
- *TJ:* Previously, we have always paid the Parish Share in interregnum (vicar vacancy), as we felt that we should and were able to do so.

Paul Wilkinson: does Sibbertoft fund-raising go just to St. Helen's or the benefice?

TJ: Just to St. Helen's.

Paul Smith: Electricity, utilities - what are they like?

- *TJ:* Electricity only. We have thought about putting in water etc. a number of times over the years
- *LH:* If the village wants it to be used more widely we would have to raise a lot of money to get water in etc. and a faculty would be needed. Probably at least £20,000-£25,000. Composting toilets a possibility. If we look at joint use of the church, for example, it would need a lot of money.

Stephen Kimbell: Why is there such an issue to get a vicar?

TJ: Healthy number of people becoming ordained, but not as many as there used to be. However, not all want a rural parish, nor to run a benefice of 7 parishes, even though it's a lovely part of the world.

Stephen Kimbell: Why aren't the C of E sorting this?

- *TJ:* The C of E cannot force people to become vicars, nor tell someone to go to a particular parish - Vicars apply in response to advertisements.
- *LH:* When we were a benefice of 3, we usually attracted vicars a few years from retirement. Now we are 7, this isn't something to take on at that stage of a career nor immediately after the three-year training (ordained curates

become fully-fledged priests at this stage). This is a very different post to take on and requires a younger person with energy. Difficult to walk into 7 PCCs, salary only £28,000. People have to be dedicated and highly motivated. The role would be for someone who has held one or two posts already.

- *TJ*: Also when there were only three parishes, it was a half-time post, which suited some, usually later in their careers. The plan to merge the two benefices was on the books for nearly twenty years before finally being implemented in 2019.

Stephen Kimbell: Are we heading towards becoming a secular village?

TJ/LH: Hope not. We are blessed with Lay Readers but we have to deal with a temporary situation of not having a vicar, which may take a year or more to sort. Almost all members of the PCC are in 60s and older. We have to do the succession planning, and people who help do not necessarily need to be churchgoers.

David Parsons: Has the whole benefice withheld the parish share?

Kairen Ball: 4 of 7 are currently withholding payment - last year everyone paid.

David Parsons: How many months have we saved for without paying the Parish Share and when do we start paying it again?

- *LH*: We paid in January but not since. We get some ring-fenced donations but not many. We shall start again when we get a vicar (we do not have to back-pay previously unpaid months) .

Kairen Ball (Lay Reader):

- Wider church: we are in Peterborough diocese, the largest in the country and very spread out. We presently have no Bishop and it can take a year for the Government to approve an appointment for that role. This is a problem for us, as possible future vicars may wait to see what type of bishop gets the job before applying.
- New model in neighbouring Leicester Diocese is to have even more parishes together. Not that the number is necessarily a problem but the dichotomy of people. For example, Kelmarsh has very few people in the village but lots of weddings at the church because of Kelmarsh Hall.
- Leicester Diocese may put up to 30 parishes together and have 4 licensed vicars, but they will have a large number of lay people to do stuff, e.g. funerals, which is what our lay readers are doing at the moment but don't usually do. If we get a bishop who decides to trial this model, we may get 4 vicars for 20 parishes, and we'd need to get used to having pastoral mission from lay readers.
- *TJ*: There are 9 lay readers in our Deanery (Brixworth area), and we are fortunate that 4 are in our benefice.

Chris Kershaw: There has been nothing about bums on pews, only finance. Sustainability and a congregation is what we need. No good having a five-year plan, it needs to be long term.

Jo Elliott: The questions have been primarily about finance but yes, we are aware of this and it's on our 4-point list for discussion: Alternative uses, congregation, finance and administration.

TJ then asked people to form discussion groups and to think creatively. The groups then reported back and ideas were noted on a flipchart.

José Kirby and group:

- Mainly the church needs water and plumbing before anything else can be done. Fund-raising for that needs to be a big event with a committee. Grants are available.
- Monthly standing orders for maintenance only.
- More volunteers for the graveyard.
- Do we have to have a faculty, church architect etc? Can we do this from within the village?
TJ: Depends on the work involved, as it's Grade 2* listed.
- *Cynthia*: Church Langton in Leicester Diocese has managed to do a lot, with subsequent inspection by inspector.

Kairen Ball and group:

- Facilities - toilets (Welford's cost £30,000 and they had to use specific contractors, which raised costs) More than one would be better. Our Archdeacon is amenable, unlike his predecessor, so not so insistent on faculties.
- Fund-raising: Antiques, auctions. Fund-raising should aim big - thousands not hundreds.
- Ask villagers if they would be willing to pay a standing order (either defined or voluntary), just for maintenance.

- People being part of the worshipping community. Wanting the church to be open all the time. Have stuff in the church people could take away.
- Sibbertoft teas are very important, staffed by villagers and congregation, but funds go to church, apart from last 4 weeks of season.
- Volunteers may not be conversant with what a job involves, so might need a job description. We should create a list.
- Invite people to do things, don't wait for them to offer.

Stephen Kimbell and group:

- Church should be priority building in village, taking over from Reading Room. Church should offer functions, e.g. concerts, clubs, film nights. You need to increase the profile of the church and to do that you need people to go inside.
- More open kind of service, better music.
- Facilities
- Funding – e.g. hundred club. 100 people pay weekly into fund and then there's a monthly draw with a money prize.
- Have a look at Aldwincle church - taken over by Churches Conservation Trust. Better to take the step rather than be pushed.

Cynthia Baliey's group:

- Grass cutting not necessarily cheaper with rewilding. Possibly put sheep in, or volunteers to help.
- Donations.
- Encouraging people to learn bell-ringing.
- Exhibitions, e.g. art exhibitions, with a few volunteers to keep an eye on things.
- Create support group project by project, so people do not feel that they have to do things by themselves.

Richard Gibbs and group:

- Church needs to be opened for additional use. It's only in use 5-6 hours per month. Why can't the CoE fund it, being rich (!)
- No solutions to increasing the size of congregation, although discussed.
- TJ: There is a welcome interest in the village in the future of the church but whether that translates into a larger congregation remains to be seen. Getting more people into church for other activities would be a start.
- Why isn't the meeting in the church? (also asked by Stephen Kimbell's son)
- TJ: Too cold, difficult layout for breaking into group discussions.

Paul Wilkinson and group:

- Toilets - maybe a portaloo for events, so it's not a restriction to events.
- Advertising - promotion, local and further afield
- Coffee mornings - maybe during the week. Make it more friendly and warm.
- Suppers - Sibbertoft supper club, bring a bottle etc.
- Heritage funding - looking at various websites, e.g. HLF
- Promoting family events - christenings, weddings - why do people come or not come. Local wedding company using church facilities.
- Jurassic Way - how to attract walkers and passers-by.
- Local sponsorship - companies sponsor a roundabout, maybe a church? Placard up?
- Ground maintenance - consortium of villagers to help with grass cutting etc. That would remove quite a lot from our annual costs.
- Toddler groups
- School trips - bring the family in

Consider something along the lines of the way teas are done, i.e. a group signing up to do a task occasionally, e.g. committing to a couple of weekend days in the summer to cut grass.

A number of people kindly put their names down as willing to help when required; they will be contacted in the next few days to establish the areas in which they might be interested in helping.

EMAIL COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM PEOPLE UNABLE TO ATTEND (specifics incorporated in the table at the end)

- I think it would be great to have the Church as another venue for the village. The RR is great but actually so is the church and has so much potential.
- I wondered if we could use the church as a music venue? The acoustics are great in there and we should use that unique selling point.
- Church is an important part of the community but as it stands appears not to be viable
- One option is to consider what the church – the community and the building – could offer the village, whilst still retaining an important religious role for those who wish it to. A multi-use building hosting for example children's/youth activities, social events, classes, pop-up shop/café, would bring more people into the building and give it a function which meets the needs of more villagers. A possible re-design, including the removal of pews to give greater flexibility and a small modern kitchen/toilet facility would enable the building to be used by many
- You may ask – does the Reading Room not fulfil these functions? Yes it does, although its size and the surrounding area limit its use. It would not be viable for the village to support two community hubs, but the use of the church – as opposed to the Reading Room – has several advantages. It could combine both religious and community functions, it is larger and has outdoor space. It would also ensure that this historic building is kept alive for current and future generations.

IDEAS FROM VILLAGE MEETING AND EMAILED CONTRIBUTIONS (in no particular order, pending discussion)

FINANCE	ALTERNATIVE USES	CONGREGATION	ADMINISTRATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund-raising cttee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services for other denominations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church open daily during daylight hours <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Village ○ Jurassic Way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create support groups by project e.g. churchyard, so no feeling of doing thigs alone
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Heritage ○ Lottery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open church up for more uses • Remove pews • Make the church a welcoming community space • Could we ask the existing craft group to design and make some new pictures / wall hangings to represent the church and the village which could be hung / displayed in the church? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave books/tracts for people to take • Allow the opportunity to be indirect members of the worshipping community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mini job descriptions so people know what support is being requested
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing orders from villagers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ General ○ For building only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Concerts ○ Film nights ○ Exhibitions Clubs ○ Arts and crafts ○ Coffee mornings ○ Supper clubs ○ Mums and tots ○ Toddler groups ○ School trips ○ Flower Festival (re-introduce but make it chargeable) ○ Literary Festivals or Book Readings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knock on doors – “Do join me” for events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teas rota as a model?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Churchyard <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Volunteers ○ Sheep ○ Grass-cutting not necessarily cheaper with wilding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilities essential: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Loos ○ Compostiog/Portaloos? ○ Kitchen ○ Heating ○ Grants? • Major fundraising effort and cttee required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More open type of service/music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite people rather than waiting for them to offer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use local builders / architects where possible to reduce costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church should be the priority building in the village - main community hub 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching bell-ringing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistance is not full time - only as required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundraisers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Antiques, auctions, kids’ games ○ Think big 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase profile of the church by getting more people in via other events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortage of ideas for increasing congregation 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 club 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactively put church into conservation (see Aldwincle church - CCT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposing more people to the church building would be a start 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sponsorship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Local ○ big businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising church/village 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote family events - weddings etc. • Local wedding companies • Marquee? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convert RR into a house and rent out – use income for village and church as dual use. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sibbertoft teas are an important contributor as are the volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire the Church to local musical people 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jurassic Way - attract walkers 			