



## ST. HELEN'S CHURCH IS IN CRISIS YOUR INPUT IS VITAL

### PLEASE COME TO A VILLAGE MEETING TO DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF SIBBERTOFT CHURCH

**19<sup>th</sup> May, 7.30 p.m. in the Reading Room**

Dear Fellow Villagers,

St. Helen's Church is facing crucial decisions as to its continued existence and input from the village community is crucial to understand the importance or otherwise of its presence in the village to us all. There are three main issues - dwindling congregation, dwindling finances and administrators for St. Helen's.

As churchgoers, the church building is important to us as a place of worship, and it is there for any villagers who might want/need it. As with so many churches, particularly rural, the congregation is declining and yet the church building (Grade II\* listed with attendant responsibilities) has to be maintained. We have to raise £20,000 +/- a year just to keep the church open and functioning, of which £10,800 is payable to the Diocese as our contribution to the cost of having a vicar. The remaining £10,000 +/- includes:

- Insurance £1,500
- Electricity £800
- Alarm monitoring £1,500
- Grass cutting /churchyard management £3,500
- Plus ongoing building management (fabric repairs, renewals, architect's fees etc., as necessary)

The village has historically been generous in helping to run events and supporting them but the burden of maintaining the church and organising fund-raising events falls on the increasingly fewer and older shoulders of the dwindling churchgoing community. Like many organisations, we were badly hit by covid and our limited reserves, currently down to about £18,000, are diminishing year on year. We receive no grants and have to raise every penny from collections at services, regular givers, occasional weddings/funerals etc. and our own community fund-raising projects (Sunday teas, fêtes, and other special events). There is, realistically, a strong likelihood that within five years the number of churchgoers, church officers, energy and funds to maintain the church will have dwindled to a point of no return.

#### **So what are our options?**

- Continue to manage the church as best we can for the foreseeable future by drawing on skills available in the village.
- Modest standing-order giving by villagers to provide a reliable income stream, allowing the church to stay open for all.
- Struggle on for another five years until, like many other small churches nationwide, with dwindling congregations, one or two people are running everything with no energy, money or help and closure becomes inevitable.
- Try to increase the worshipping community. If the current service format does not attract you, it might if done differently - all ideas are welcome. We recognise, however, that the idea of Anglican (or any) faith is not for all.
- Accept, with deep regret, that the only way forward is one of gradual decline, so close the church as soon as we can.

A closed church means no christenings, weddings or funerals in Sibbertoft, and no Christmas/Easter services, Harvest Festivals or other services; services would still be available at other local churches. When churches close, they are sometimes adopted/maintained (as a building only) by the Churches Conservation (Redundant Churches) Trust, but it is not guaranteed, and if not, the building will slowly decay, windows may be boarded up and permanent secure fencing erected.

**Does it matter? This is where input from you is crucial.** These are serious issues and we are trying to address them while we still have options. We are very conscious that any decision taken will affect future generations.

**PLEASE, COME ALONG TO HAVE YOUR SAY ON 19<sup>TH</sup> MAY - YOUR VIEWS ARE VITAL.**