

**Parochial Church Council of St. Stephen's Sparsholt and St. Peter's Lainston**  
**A Charity Excepted from Registration with the Charity Commission**  
**Annual Report for 2020**

The Parish of St. Stephen's Sparsholt and St. Peter's Lainston lies within the Diocese of Winchester. Correspondence should be addressed to ; The Benefice Office, The Rectory, Church Lane, Littleton, SO22 6QY. Tel 01962 880845.

**PCC Members during 2020**

<b>Incumbent</b>	Revd Jax Machin
<b>Churchwardens</b>	J Wesley and A Barron
<b>Elected members</b>	S Wesley (Treasurer), T Wilson
<b>Secretary</b>	K Simpson
<b>Deanery Synod Representative</b>	A Barron

**1. PCC Membership**

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. All Church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC. Our PCC is small and a new member or two would be very welcome.

**2. Aims and Purposes of the PCC**

- The aims and purposes of St Stephens remain as before and as below but our ability to achieve them this past year has been shaped and limited by restrictions imposed by the Government and the Church due to Covid 19. Consequently, our key aim in 2020 became to ensure the health and safety of those supporting and working in the church, those taking services, those visiting the church and our congregations.
- Working with our Incumbent, the PCC is committed to enabling as many people as possible to worship at our church and be involved in its life as a part of our Christian community. We aim to cater for as many styles of churchmanship as is practical so that everyone in our community can find a spiritual home at St Stephen's and also that we build strong links with village organisations such as our school, shop and post office, clubs, groups and college.
- We maintain the fabric of the church of St. Stephen's to facilitate the mission of the Church and we keep it open every day for private contemplation and prayer. All are normally welcome every day in this house of God. This is made achievable to a very large degree by the existence and financial support of the Friends of St Stephen's.

**The Life of the Church**

**3. Activities**

Due to Covid 19 restrictions, our activities have been limited – the fete and the harvest supper were cancelled and we were unable to hold our customary post APCM drinks.

That said, the church joined the Village Support Group when the pandemic began, along with the Parish Council and the Shop to provide a support network for any villagers who needed support and to publish an information newsletter passing on information about the virus and good practice on how to stay safe.

#### **4. Worship and Prayer.**

- A daily prayer was put on to the website as part of the work of the Village Support Group.
- After lockdown in March, we held a limited of Sunday services as part of a Benefice wide schedule.
- Whilst restricting the areas of the church people could use and allowing 72 hours in between days when the church was open, we then opened the church on Sundays and Wednesdays for personal reflection and prayer.
- Subsequently, and as the pandemic worsened, we had to close the church again for all use.
- During this whole period, the Rector wrote a weekly letter with a distribution list of about 500 across the Benefice, staying in touch with our church family.
- There has also been a weekly morning prayer service, held over Zoom and in the tradition of the Northumbria Community, that people from across the Benefice have dialled into. Members of the St Stephens congregation have regularly led and contributed to these short services.

#### **5. Messy Church.**

Messy Church events were held live on a monthly basis until March last year. Since the pandemic, "Messy Church at Home" sessions were posted weekly on their Facebook page and Messy Church activities were sent out by email every month to all the Messy Church families in Crawley, Littleton and Sparsholt and this has been successful in keeping people, adults and children, involved. On a couple of occasions, Messy Church in a Bag (activity bags), picked up from church porches, have been available to those signing up for them. We are indebted to Carol Coleman and Carol Ward from Littleton and our own Sally Wesley for their commitment and energy.

#### **6. Pastoral Care.**

The Rector, the Benefice Office and our own network of visitors have tried to stay current with anyone who may need some support. Visiting has been difficult because of Covid restrictions but contact has been made and kept up by phone. We have also worked with the shop who are often told of people who are struggling or unwell. This programme of taking God's love out to the village continues but we hope to return to 'normal' by the middle of 2021.

#### **7. Deanery and Diocesan Synods.**

The Rector and our Deanery and Diocesan Synod reps have attended meetings by Zoom. The focus, unsurprisingly, has been on how parishes have managed the Covid restrictions in place and how planning to manage the resourcing and financial consequences of Covid has developed during 2020.

#### **8. Sparsholt Church of England School.**

The PCC has maintained close links with Sparsholt Church of England School this year although the physical links have been limited by Covid restrictions on, for instance, the ability of the Rector to go into the school. The Worship Group, led by Jane Gwilliam, has produced some wonderful material reminding us all, despite the difficulties during 2020, that God's love is very much part of the life of Sparsholt School and its children and staff. Sally Wesley, the Church Foundation Governor, has helped to maintain very high Christian values within the school and is much appreciated.

## **9. Financial Review for 2020**

Total receipts on unrestricted funds were £29,450 of which £21,480 came from unrestricted voluntary donations. Restricted donations were also received of £3,360 from the Friends of St. Stephen's for churchyard and building maintenance. Planned giving through standing orders continued the downward trend with a decrease of 16%. Due to the COVID restrictions causing a minimal number of Services during the year, collections at Services were down from £7,580 in 2019 to £2,180 in 2020 (including £280 for Remembrance Sunday which was donated to The Royal British Legion Poppy Fund). Total income, including tax recovered, was only £36,800 as no fund-raising activities were allowed and minimal fee-producing Services (weddings, baptisms, funerals). Income on investments yielded 3.3%. £2,000 was raised through the FOSS/PCC 100 Club.

£34,000 (£35,300 in 2019) was spent from unrestricted funds to provide the Christian ministry from St. Stephen's Church, including the contribution to the Common Mission Fund that increased by 2.7% in the year. Sparsholt's share of benefice expenses increased by £500 over the previous year; this was caused by the drop in income due directly to the benefice for wedding administration which is normally deducted from benefice expenses before being notified to the parish. £1,150 of the benefice expenses was paid out of Investment income on Restricted Funds. No charitable donations were made in 2020 due to the severe lack of unrestricted income. However, a donation of £500 was made to Sparsholt School from accumulated income in the Buckston Browne endowment fund to help with their library/quiet room development project.

Overall expenditure of £47.9K was £1,700 less than last year. Even though costs, where possible, were kept to a minimum (for example, clergy & organist costs and utility expenses were down), we still had to pay for insuring and maintaining the Church building (structural repairs and maintenance were £5,500 more than in 2019).

The net result for the year was a shortfall of payments over receipts of £11.2K. This shortfall would have been twice as much if there had not been an amazing response to Reverend Jax's letter to parishioners asking for donations because of the financial difficulties caused by COVID-19, for which the PCC is extremely grateful. To cover the actual shortfall, £12,450 was withdrawn from Unrestricted Reserves during the year. The bank balance carried forward at 31st December 2020 on Unrestricted funds totalled £5,200 of which £800 relates to the Bell Fund (a designated fund).

## **10. Reserves policy**

It is PCC policy is to maintain a balance on Unrestricted funds and investments (currently £34,200) which equates to at least 12 months' unrestricted expenditure. This unrestricted expenditure in 2020 was £40,600 so the Reserves policy target in 2020 was not met. The Unrestricted Reserves are held to smooth out fluctuations in cash flow and to meet emergencies. The effect of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020 was considered to be such an emergency. Members of the PCC are regularly advised of the amount held in Reserves. As at 31st December 2020, £113,700 was held as cash and investments (an investment valuation increase of 5%). £78,600 of this total was held as Restricted Funds.

## **11. Building and Infrastructure**

A broken roof tile and gutter misalignment problems led to a patch of quite serious damp behind the picture by the font. After seeking advice, the picture was removed and the tile and

gutter repaired. The wall is now drying out and we hope to repair the unsightly patch before year end. We are grateful for the support of FoSS in this matter.

## **12. Music**

There have been limited opportunities for music this year but we have continued to invite an organist into our services as often as we have been able even though we have not been allowed to sing. Congregations have very much enjoyed just listening to our organist play the hymn music, and take a few moments to reflect on the words.

St Stephens has a ring of 6 bells which were normally rung every Sunday with practices on Monday evenings. Our bells are much admired and we have in the past, regularly received requests from visiting teams to ring. Due to the small size of the ringing chamber we are unable to comply Covid-19 social distancing guidelines and have followed diocesan advice that the bells should remain silent.

## **13. The Friends of St Stephens (FoSS)**

FoSS continues to thrive and to contribute significantly to our beautiful church being the centre of our worship and church life in Sparsholt. The main area of support this year has been the refurbishment of the 2 wrought iron arches and lamps about the gateways that lead onto the pathway to the main door to the church. FoSS also continues to work with the PCC on expanding the 100 Club which raises approximately £3000 for both the FoSS and the PCC in an average year – a valuable additions to funds.

## **14. GDPR**

St Stephens works with the Benefice to ensure we are GDPR compliant. No breaches or potential breaches have been brought to the PCC's attention.

## **15. Safeguarding**

The PCC continues to work to understand this sensitive area of risk and it is an agenda item at every PCC meeting. Alastair Barron, who is St Stephens' nominated point of contact for all safeguarding issues or concerns, and Sally Wesley have both attended safeguarding training. No safeguarding issues have been brought to the PCC's attention during 2020.

## **16. Volunteers**

Finally but very importantly, we would like to thank all the volunteers who have contributed to the life of St Stephens throughout this strange year and work so hard to support the church within the community of Sparsholt. Even though we have not been able to use the church as we would have wished, the wide range of background administration has continued and so we thank those involved in finance management, cleaning, flower arranging, bell ringers, key rota volunteers, sidespeople, organists, fete committee members, FoSS, 100 Club, school service organisers, magazine distributors – all have contributed. THANK YOU !!

Approved by the PCC on 30 April 2021