

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 2023

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 2023

Incumbent	Revd. Jax Machin (until September 2023)
Churchwardens	John Wesley and Tonia Truter
Elected members	Sally Wesley (Treasurer), Alastair Barron, Tim Wilson
Secretary	Sally Wesley (acting Secretary)
Deanery Synod Representative	Alastair 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 new members would be very welcome.

2. Aims and Purposes of the PCC

The aims and purposes of St Stephens remain as before and as below.

- 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 continue to build strong links with our 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 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

Fete - The 2023 fete was a great success despite being very late in the year, September. The Fete Chair, Caroline Horrill, successfully recruited new members on to the Fete Committee. The net profit was £6.25K. Our considerable thanks go to the Fete Committee and all the villagers who supported the Fete.

Harvest Supper – this was attended and enjoyed by many members of the village – it raised a net profit of £600.

'Thank you' event - we invited all those who volunteer to help the PCC (some 80 people !) to a party in the church to say goodbye to Revd. Jax at the end of her Incumbency. This was not a fundraiser – the food and drink were kindly donated.

Occasional Services – there were 6 Weddings, 3 Baptisms. 3 Funerals/Thanksgiving Services and 3 Interment of Ashes held in the church during 2023; the PCC is very grateful to the Registry Clergy and LLMs who officiated at these Services in Revd. Jax's absence.

4. Worship and Prayer

Sally Wesley previously worked with the other parishes in the Benefice to review our pattern of services – it was clear that it was not possible to hold a service in each of our five parishes every Sunday. We continue to hold two services a month – 8.00am Holy Communion on the third Sunday of each month and Morning Worship on the fourth Sunday of each month. Due to our Incumbent moving on in September and being in interregnum, we have had to rely on support to hold our Holy Communion services.

This may not be all we would ideally wish for but it enables us to worship in our village church and it does give us all a chance to worship in other churches in the Benefice which is a great opportunity – Littleton is only 5 minutes away and Crawley only 10 minutes away!

5. Messy Church

Sadly, Messy Church has not yet resumed since stopping due to the Covid-19 restrictions. Messy Church is a popular and well attended part of our church life in this Benefice and it hoped this will be restarted at some point if/when there are more helpers.

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. During the interregnum, Revd. Lisa Rodrigues, a Curate within Salisbury Diocese who lives very close to the Benefice carried out end-of-life support and other pastoral tasks on our behalf for which the PCC is very grateful.

Our Incumbent, Jax Machin, had an accident towards the end of the 2022 which saw her temporarily out of action. She has now moved to a new Benefice and we thank everyone who has stepped in to help with services and pastoral care. We look forward to welcoming Reverend Kevin Rogers in March 2024 to fill her role.

7. Deanery and Diocesan Synods

Deanery Synod met in February, May and September 2023 and also in February 2024. Our Area Deans and Lay Chair have worked hard to make the meetings interesting and relevant. Guest speakers have included the Dean of Winchester, Catherine Ogle, and Andy Trenier, Canon Precentor and Sacrist of Winchester Cathedral, who spoke about the life of the Cathedral, and also Colin Harbidge, Diocesan Secretary, who spoke about our Diocese, its structure, activities, charms and challenges.

Synod also voted to establish a Deanery link to Burundi (in East Africa) and there was a visit there in August 2023. The Deanery continues to develop that relationship.

Nigel May continues in his role as Lay Chair of our Deanery Synod which is very welcome, We should note, though, that the Rev'd Howard Jameson succeeded the Rev'd Chris Bradish as our Area Dean. We thank Chris for all his work and welcome Howard who we have got to know in the

initial months of his role as he worked with the Benefice team in the recruitment of our new incumbent.

All in all, a good year.

8. Sparsholt Church of England School

The PCC has maintained close links with Sparsholt Church of England School this year. The Worship Team, led by Jane Gwilliam, has produced some wonderful material reminding us all 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 maintain very high Christian values within the school and is much appreciated. The School was awarded Excellent in the SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) Inspection which took place in April 2023.

9. Financial Review for 2023

Receipts

- Total receipts on unrestricted funds were £31K of which £15.8K came from unrestricted voluntary donations.
- Planned Giving through standing orders decreased by 4.5%, a worrying trend which is worsening.
- Due to the generosity of the congregation, collections at Services increased by 13.7%. This does not include the collection on Remembrance Sunday which was donated directly to the Winchester Branch of SSAFA The Armed Forces Charity.
- £4K was raised through the FOSS/PCC 100 Club.
- Fee income from weddings, baptisms & funerals decreased by 4.8%, due to the Rector's 5 month absence for health reasons and being in interregnum for 3 months.
- Income on investments yielded 3.2%.
- Total income, including tax recovered, was £55.3K, an increase of £13.7K on the previous year, mainly due to the generous donation of £11.9K from the Friends of St. Stephen's for building repairs and redecoration and a successful Church Fete.

Payments

- £32.6K (£34.4K in 2022) was spent from unrestricted funds to provide the Christian ministry from St. Stephen's Church. The contribution to the Common Mission Fund of £19.3K is included in that figure; there were insufficient funds to pay the total requested by the Diocese of £23.3K, resulting in a shortfall of £4K (previous year's shortfall was £3.5K).
- Sparsholt's share of benefice expenses was 0.7K greater than those in 2020. £1.2K of the benefice expenses was paid out of Investment income on Restricted Funds.
- Donations of £250 each were made to 5 village organisations (Sparsholt Primary School, Sparsholt Village Shop, Winchester Scouts and Ham Green Conservation Group), using the profit made from 20% of the Fete profits. In addition, £300 was donated to charities outside the village [Winchester Hospice, Karis Kids, Winchester Nightshelter].
- Overall expenditure of £57.9 was £13.5K more than last year due to the spend on the outstanding structural repairs and maintenance to the Church which has left the Church looking much improved.
- The net result for the year was a shortfall of payments over receipts of £2.6K (£2.8K in 2022). The bank balance carried forward as at 31st December 2023 on Unrestricted funds totalled £2,400 of which £940 relates to the Bell Fund (a designated fund).
- The PCC Trustees have confirmed that a review of the charity's internal financial controls in the year reported has been carried out; there has been no change to the policy whereby approval in the form of authorisation by email or signing the relevant invoice is given by a Trustee who is an authorised signatory and who is not John Wesley (as he is married to the Treasurer), to provide dual control on all expenditure.

- The PCC Trustees have also confirmed that they expect the PCC to be able to settle outstanding invoices, bills and commitments as and when they fall due (except possibly for our Common Mission Fund).

Reserves Policy

- The PCC carried out a review its Reserves policy in September 2023 as the Church of England has revised its ideas on Reserves policies for Parish Churches, and considers an equivalent to 6 months' unrestricted expenditure to be adequate. Therefore, the revised PCC policy is to maintain a balance on Unrestricted funds and investments (currently £23.9K) which equates to at least 6 months' unrestricted expenditure. Six months unrestricted expenditure in 2023 was £16.8K (1/2 of £33.6K) so the Reserves policy target in 2023 was met. The balance on Unrestricted funds and investments at the end of the financial year in question equated to 8.5 months' unrestricted expenditure.
- Unrestricted Reserves are held to smooth out fluctuations in cash flow and to meet emergencies. Members of the PCC are regularly advised of the amount held in Reserves.
- As at 31st December 2023, £101.2K was held as cash and investments (an investment valuation increase of 0.3%). £76.5K of this total was held as Restricted Funds, of which £58.2K are Endowments held in the name of the Vicar and Churchwardens of St. Stephen's Church and cannot be disposed of in any way.

10. Building and Infrastructure

The unsightly patch from a previous damp patch has now dried out and the church has been repainted internally. We are grateful for the support of FOSS in these matters.

There has been discussion about renewing the existing pathway that leads through the church yard and replacing the noticeboards in the churchyard. However, these have not yet been carried out. The bell ropes and bells have been serviced.

Mary Vale who was the church cleaner has retired, and a new church cleaner will need to be found.

11. Music

St Stephen's has a ring of six bells which are rung every Sunday with practices on Monday evenings. Our bells are much admired and we continue to receive regular requests from visiting teams to ring. Our two organists, Anthony Burns-Cox and Mark Zarb-Adami, have brilliantly accompanied our sung Services, including special Services, throughout the year.

12. The Friends of St Stephen's

FoSS continues to thrive and to contribute to our beautiful church being the centre of our worship and church life in Sparsholt. The main support from FoSS this year was help with repainting the church internally. FoSS also continues to work with the PCC and the 100 Club which raises approximately £3000 for both the FoSS and the PCC in an average year – a valuable addition to funds.

13. GDPR

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

14. Safeguarding

No safeguarding issues have been brought to the PCC's attention.

15. Volunteers

We would like to thank all the volunteers who have contributed to the life of St Stephen's throughout this year. They work so hard to support the church within the community of Sparsholt. We thank those involved in the finance management, cleaning, flower arranging, bell ringers, key rota volunteers, sidesmen, organists, fete committee members, FoSS, 100 Club, school service organisers, magazine distributors – all have contributed. THANK YOU!!