

THE PARISH OF WANTAGE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting held on 28 April 2024 at the Parish Church

**Present:** Revd. Katherine Price (Chair), Pamela Allen, James Clarke, Sheenagh Dernie, Matt Godfrey, Andrew Gregory, Ann Gregory, Diane Hayward, Flora Hobden, Alastair Hunter, Claire Hunter, Sue Hunter, Alison Jestico, Bill Jestico, Laura Kent, Peter King, Janet Kingdon, Tim Lamming, David Law, Ben Mabbett, Peter Martin, Peter McGowan, Benita Mould, Richard Mould, Lucie Payne, Bridget Procter, Jan Ralston, Lesley Royan, Terry Ryland, Ian Stone, Lucy Stone, Graham Stoter, Albert Tren, Judy Tren, (34)

Item	
	<p><b>Welcome</b> The Vicar welcomed everyone to the APCM.</p>
1.	<p><b>Clerk to the Meeting</b> The Vicar proposed that Janet Kingdon be appointed Clerk to the meeting.</p>
2.	<p><b>Apologies for Absence</b> Apologies were received from Simon Hunter, Fiona Lamming, Susie Lapwood, Dick Peters, Clare Richardson, David Richardson, and Sue Thwaite</p>
3.	<p><b>Minutes of the 2023 APCM</b> These were agreed as a true record, and proposed by the Vicar and seconded by Ben Mabbett, and approved unanimously.</p>
4.	<p><b>Matters Arising</b></p> <p><b>Item 9 – our link with Thokoza in South Africa</b> – this time last year, we mentioned that Judy Tren would be retiring from her fundraising for Thokoza. As you can see, the stall is still running, and Judy has not retired. We are thankful to God for her recovery, and grateful to Judy for the work she has done over the last 22 years, and is continuing to do, and to those who have very generously supported Thokoza. This has really benefitted the work at Greenfield School and has also been a blessing to this parish as well.</p> <p>The Vicar proposed a vote of thanks to Judy for everything she has done. This was seconded by Bridget Procter and was carried with a unanimous round of applause.</p> <p>Going forward, due to the level of corruption in SA, and our charitable obligations in how we manage our funds as a PCC, ensuring accountability at every stage, the PCC has voted that we temporarily suspend sending any more money in the way we have done up to now. The stall and fundraising at this end will continue under Judy’s care, but then as a parish we will need to decide how we use and send the funds raised. It will definitely still be for overseas charitable purposes, be that at Greenfield or a new charitable focus.</p>

5.	<p><b>Annual Report and Accounts 2023</b></p> <p>The meeting received the Annual the annual Report and Accounts. It was proposed by the Treasurer, Claire Hunter, that we appoint Chapman Worth as our Independent Examiner for the coming year. This was seconded by Alison Jestico and carried unanimously.</p>
6.	<p><b>Deanery Synod Representatives</b></p> <p>We are allowed 4 Deanery Synod Representatives. Jan Ralston and Susie Lapwood have been our reps this past year and will continue, but we still have two vacancies.</p>
7.	<p><b>Election of PCC Members</b></p> <p>Nominations have been received for          Claire Hunter, nominated by James Clarke and seconded by Flora Hobson          Peter King, nominated by Kath Mackenzie and seconded by Rosi Bartlett          Bridget Procter, nominated by Alison Jestico and seconded by Bill Jestico</p> <p>There being 5 vacancies, these three are therefore elected.</p>
8.	<p><b>Presentation of the Annual Review</b></p> <p>The review included the statutory reports on the Electoral Roll, Deanery Synod and Fabric.</p> <p>Alastair, representing the Churchwardens, looked back on 2023 saying there was much to celebrate.</p> <p>We are a growing community of God and have welcomed many newcomers during 2023. There has been a steady increase in the 10.30 service congregation, and the other congregations have been steady. This growth isn't fully reflected in the Electoral Roll – it does take a while for people to settle and become fully involved. If anyone is not on the Electoral Roll, they are encouraged to find out more.</p> <p>2023 has seen new initiatives and innovations in our life of discipleship, prayer and worship. We have had a greater and more visible Christian presence around the town, taking worship to where people are. It has been a landmark year in our outreach with Around Table and the Sustainable Flower Festival. Perhaps Fr. Benji's greatest gift to us was teaching us to be bold, to have courage and trust in God and who knows what we will achieve. What are we going to do to continue with that boldness?</p> <p>We have seen an exciting increase in the numbers of children and young people in the church. They have joined the server team, and the choir, and the children's area has had to double in size recently to accommodate the number of children coming to the 10.30 service. Trinity Tots at Holy Trinity has continued to thrive and grow. Charlton and</p>

Stockham schools have both visited the church along with our own Church school. Developing our work with children and young people will be a focus in the coming year.

Looking wider, we have the Wantage Deanery where all the CofE churches in Wantage, Grove and surrounding villages work co-operatively. We have two Deanery Synod reps with two vacancies – we are keen to increase our representation. This coming year the Deanery hopes to bid for funding for work with young people across the schools. To facilitate bidding for grants and employing staff, the Deanery Synod became a registered charitable incorporated organisation.

We don't exist in isolation and play an important role in civic life – the Coronation, Remembrance Sunday, AlfredFest which started as a small church initiative and has grown, Dickensian Evening – the church is at the heart of the community and contributes to the vibrancy of the town. The bellringers played their part in the Coronation as well.

We don't overlook the social side of life in the church family to share in fun, fellowship and food – Wantage Wassail, T-Bar, Pancakes and Fry-ups, Quiz Night.

Music is an important part of the worship in both of our churches. We now have 10 junior choristers. The choir visited our twin town Seesen, Germany. And many groups hold concerts in the building, bringing people into their church.

The choir, serving team and bellringers are always looking for new recruits.

2023 was a year of notable welcomes and farewells in the team. Barbara joined as Assistant Director of Music as John retired ... though stays as organist Emeritus; Cathryn became Parish Administrator; James and Rosi joined as Parish assistants; Claire took on the role of Treasurer, Janet became PCC Secretary.

Having been Sacristan for many years, Moira has stepped down – we give her our thanks and to the others who stepped down in 2023.

Of course, none of this would happen without all those who contribute in so many ways to our Parish life, from church watchers to breakfast makers, from pew-shifters to flower arrangers and so many more. Thank you to all the teams and individuals who help us tick.

Finally, special thanks to Katherine and Benji, for their dynamic leadership, compassionate pastoral care, inspirational preaching, their innovative (and occasionally whacky) ideas, and for many things that help us grow and flourish as a parish.

**Accounts**

Claire then presented the accounts. She began by saying a big thank you to David Law and Simon Jones who assisted her by dealing with the cash.

The income over 2023 was £158,382, whilst expenditure was £187,316 – at £83k, the parish share was not far off half of this figure. This did mean we had a deficit of over £28k; however, this was an improvement on the £49k deficit of last year. The deficit was offset by a gain of £51,511 from our investments – we are fortunate to have them. Investments currently stand at £588,589.

The PCC has budgeted for a deficit of £34k in 2024, dropping to £31k in 2025.

We have three main assets; £588,589 in investments, £123,481 “cash in hand” in the bank and in money owed, and £42,716 as the purchase price of the Curate’s house. These assets are split between restricted funds (£635,964), which may only be used for ecclesiastical purposes within the parish, and unrestricted funds (£753,915). Overall, our funds increased by £21,617 compared to 2022.

**9. Our Parish Church**

Alastair presented shared with the meeting where we stand with the plans to refurbish the parish church.

The church building has a key role in providing space for our vision of “Encountering and Sharing God’s Transforming Love”. As with all buildings and houses, things have worn out, spaces need to be updated and reconfigured so that we can make the best use of it today. It was last refurbished 25 years ago, and it now doesn’t meet our current needs.

We are at the thinking and praying stage, so it’s right to share what has been done so far and talk about where we go from here. The PCC met in November to talk about what we value about the building – a place of peacefulness and prayerfulness, historic and beautiful, somewhere for celebration and fun but at the same time a holy space, a green oasis in the centre of town ...

We must care for what is special about it and hand it on intact to future generations. But at the same time, it must meet the needs of today – does it provide a welcome to the community and visitors? Is the suitable, properly equipped space for all the activities that are part of our vision? We also need to improve the sustainability of the building for the future, maintaining its beauty yet making it more economical to run.

There are four things we need to do:

	<p><u>Statement of Significance</u> – we need to understand what we have inherited. What is significant about the building. Any changes need to be looked at in terms of the impact on the significant features.</p> <p>The PCC will commission specialist heritage consultants to work with us to prepare a Statement of Significance</p> <p><u>Statement of Need</u> – it is important to think carefully about what is needed to support our vision and mission as effectively as possible. Things like storage space, an entrance that draws people in, a sense of welcome for all comers to the building, what do our local community groups need from the building. The PCC will develop the thinking and then share with the wider congregation, and also seek views from the local stakeholders such as schools, those who hold concerts in the building.</p> <p><u>Energy Audit</u> – refurbishment would give us an opportunity to look at reducing our significant energy costs, as well as reducing the environmental impact. The Audit has been undertaken already and has given us a number of things to consider – LED lighting, improving the efficiency of the boiler. We can look more generally at environmental impacts such as not using floral foam, managing the churchyard to improve the “oasis”, making it more attractive to people and wildlife.</p> <p><u>Feasibility Study</u> – asking an architect to prepare a feasibility study setting out all the options for all the things we would like to do, the advantages and disadvantages.</p> <p>There’s lots of thinking and praying to be done. As someone on the PCC said, this is a building which has evolved, not a museum stuck in a previous century. It’s a living room. And it will continue to evolve.</p> <p>Our task is to understand what we’ve inherited from the past, to work out how it needs to evolve now to serve the people of Wantage today. And then to hand something on which is more sustainable for future generations.</p>
10.	<p><b>Vicar’s Address</b></p> <p>The Vicar began by saying Spring is here at last. It is springtime and we’ve seen lots of new life and growth. We had the enforced winter of covid and the interregnum, but now life is coming from that. Using the analogy of what you might do in a new house, waiting to see what grows in the garden in the first year, she has waited and watched the parish. But spring also means there is work to be done with planting new things and pruning. Last year, she asked the parish to be fearless, and people have more than met this challenge. She is impressed and heartened by the life in the parish, by how through the PCC, we have put our money where our mouth is, putting money into the Parish assistant scheme, Around Table which is featuring on the Diocesan website as a model to follow, the sustainable flower festival that grew from here to the deanery and onto the Diocese who have now passed a resolution.</p>

	<p>We are investing in people with sending Benji on to a new parish, Rosi to be a Chaplain assistant at King’s College, organ scholars and choristers, Barbara starting here as an early-career organist.</p> <p>Sometimes in a garden, you need to stake something, give it a bit of support, in order to grow properly. Around Table has had structures put in place to make it more sustainable, the children’s area has been made bigger to accommodate more children.</p> <p>We also have to keep up with the new growth, support for new people coming to faith who need to be nurtured and fed. We don’t want to miss the opportunities that God is giving us.</p> <p>As the seasons change there will also be some endings as well as beginnings. Benji leaving us, John standing down as organist, Fr Robert Teare moving on. There are changes and those can bring some grief and anxiety – it’s important to acknowledge that. But it is all part of our story.</p> <p>The focus for the coming year will be on children. How can we nurture their faith and grow their spirituality? How can we engage with children and families who are on the edge of our parish family? How can we engage with people who have a connection but are not yet fully part of that family life?</p> <p>We need to welcome and nurture in a wider sense, and we need buildings that meet our needs.</p> <p>We do have some drawbacks; we have a limited number of people and a limited amount of energy. You look around and there are maybe a small number of people helping in multiple ways. We need to make our systems easier for volunteers. Part of the solution is to have more paid staff. The Parish Assistants have been fantastic over these last months, you may not see them, but they have taken pressure off the clergy and other volunteers. We’ve been able to have more pastoral care in the care homes, we’ve been able to support events like the Big Thank You. We heard that Rosi will be moving on, but James will be staying with us and will have a particular focus on children and families. He has a calling and passion in this area. The PCC will discuss exactly what the shape of his work will be.</p> <p>The refurbishment of the parish church will be a big project, and there are a few adjustments that are needed at Holy Trinity to help Around Table function.</p> <p>The Vicar referenced a book by Professor Bent Flyvbjerg, How Big Things Get Done; one of his principles is “think and plan slow then act fast”. We are going to be spending a lot of time on the thinking and praying, making sure we get it right. We need to come back to the vision of encounter, share, transform, and ask, how does this building embody our value? What is it actually communicating about who God is? Does it communicate the hospitality and welcoming of God?</p>
11.	Q & A

- **Thokoza** – Alison Jestico informed us that the Diocese has a link with the Diocese of Kimberly and Kuruman in SA, and within that there are a variety of projects in different places – it may be something to consider if we cannot send funds to Thokoza anymore.
- **Curate’s House – why is the valuation as it is?** – it is listed at the value when we acquired it rather than having the value reassessed every year. We are unlikely to ever sell it, but it is listed as an asset so needs a notional figure against it.
- **Churchwardens** – the Vicar spoke about how valuable it has been having two assistant churchwardens. Thanks go to Andrew and Ian; you don’t necessarily see what they do but it has been significant. Ian has now stepped down. Hopefully another person can be identified in that role.
- **Do the refurb plans include a projector screen?** – This is something on the list for the PCC to discuss. There is unlikely to be a move to a large screen that replaces the need for books etc, however possibly a smaller screen that will aid people to know where we are in a service for instance.
- **Are there plans for solar panels?** – this is again something on the list of things to discuss. We have to show how we are moving towards net-zero. The south side of the church faces houses so that needs to be considered. The energy audit came up with a suggestion for some panels that would not be widely visible. Alongside this is the boiler, it still works so we would think long and hard before removing it. It may be possible to do some work that increases the efficiency e.g. replace the burner unit, as long as it works with the heating system we have.
- **Do the refurb plans include losing the pews?** – this is something being discussed at the PCC. The pews are big and very heavy, there’s no plans to move to chairs but maybe there’s another option of benches that are lighter and stackable.
- **Are there plans to improve the exterior lighting?** – it on the list. We may look at applying for a grant, but the lighting certainly needs replacing/fixing. The community would like it, it would help with security.
- **Plans for better signage?** – it’s on the list.
- **Plans for the church to be open more?** – It is on the list! Ideally it would be good to have the church open in daylight hours. There are risks as at the moment there is no fire alarm or burglar alarm. We would need to put things in to make it happen. It raises the question of whether Holy Trinity should be open more?

All these items are on the list of things that the PCC decided they wanted to keep on the list of possibilities we would like to consider. It comes to down to what options are feasible after examining the pros and cons.

**The meeting closed with prayer at 7.45pm**