



Parochial Church Council

Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 July 2023 at 7.30pm

Present:

Rev. Tony Rindl (TR) - Chair
Eileen Roby (ER) – Churchwarden & Vice Chair
Peter Dean (PD) – Churchwarden
Daniella Clinton (DC)
Roger Courtney (RC)
Tilly Elliott (TE)
Lesley Gray (LG)
Margaret Greenstreet (MG)
Cathy Honeyman (CH)
Gill Watson (GW)
Martin Whittick (MW)
Marcus Jones (MJ) - PCC Secretary

1. Opening Prayer

1.1 GW opened the meeting with a reading from Matthew 14.13-21 and a prayer.

2. Apologies for absence

2.1 TR offered apologies on behalf of Joanna Cooper.

3. Conflict of Interest

3.1. None declared.

4. Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM)

4.1 The Council received the minutes of the APCM held on 21 May 2023 and expressed its thanks to Jenny Whittick (JW) for transcribing them. There were no matters arising.

5. Approval of the Minutes of 19 June 2023

5.1 GW proposed that the minutes of 19 June 2023 be accepted. This was seconded by ER and approved unanimously by the Council.

6. Matters arising: Purchase of a card reader

6.1 TR reported that at the meeting of the Standing Committee on 10 July, he had agreed to consult with Helen Baldwin about the purchase of the card reader approved at the Council meeting on 19 June 2023. HB had advised that the necessary authorisations were in place. The card reader had not yet been purchased. TR asked PD to arrange for this to be done. MW could assist with the set-up, if necessary.

Action: PD to arrange for Finance Committee (FinCom) to purchase and set up the card reader with assistance from MW as required.

7. Correspondence

7.1 None received.

8. Improving PCC meetings

8.1 ER considered the Council needed to be more strategic in its approach to meetings. She distributed copies of a proposed Meeting Plan for June 2023 to May 2024 showing for each month the focus of the meeting, the policies to be updated, the sub-committees which should report, what items were required to be listed on the agenda and the essential preparatory work. She said that in her view it was unnecessary for most of the sub-committees to report each month and she hoped this would result in more tightly focussed and shorter meetings. TR should also submit his Vicar's report in writing so that the Council could receive the report in the same manner as other reports.

8.2 During the ensuing discussion, it was agreed that anything urgent could be raised at Standing Committee, that the Council should discuss in November the budget for the following year, and that safeguarding reports needed to be made bi-annually for the Dashboard. RC reiterated his comments from the Standing Committee on 10 July (see section 6.3 of those minutes) that he thought there should be a Buildings Report at each meeting since some buildings matters were of direct relevance to members of the Council. However, the report could be sent out in advance of meetings with any questions or comments being sent to him and circulated. Any financial decisions required on buildings could be included as part of the *Finance* agenda item. Subject to these points, the Council agreed to ER's Meeting Plan which would be adopted from September.

8.3 TR added that while everyone should have the opportunity to have their say at Council, he wanted to encourage a greater focus on the issues. He would also try to summarise discussions where relevant and set out the required action points.

9. Safeguarding

9.1 LG reported that JW needed to undertake two safeguarding training courses which would cost some £40, which the Council approved. JW also needed to arrange her own DBS check. LG advised that it was necessary to have a full list of who required a DBS check and that she was working with TR, PD and ER to draw this up for circulation to the Council in time for its meeting on 25 September. The Council could then review it and add any further names if necessary.

Action:

- TR, PD and ER to draw up DBS list in consultation with LG in time for the 25 September meeting
- LG to send the list to MJ for circulation to the Council

9.2 LG confirmed that neither the choir nor the bellringers needed to be individually checked but someone who was so checked should be present. She offered similar advice in response to a question about another group.

9.3 LG confirmed that PD had sent her St Mary's insurance policy and also the minibus insurance policy.

10. GDPR

10.1 Nothing to report.

11. Committee Reports*a. Standing Committee*

11.1 The Council received the Standing Committee minutes of 10 July. TR encouraged the Council to read these and advised that the Standing Committee had approved funding of £250 to replace a clapper that had worn on one of the bells.

*b. Finance**i. Financial Report*

11.2 The Council received FinCom's June Report which showed a year-to-date deficit of £6,725. PD explained that this was lower than anticipated owing to a donation of £10,000. The donor had specified that £4,000 should be used to operate and maintain the minibus leaving some £6,000 unrestricted for use in the General Fund. He highlighted various details of the Report to the Council.

11.3 PD said he had not yet reported the 2021 accounts to the Diocese owing to difficulties accessing its website while it was being updated.

ii. Replacement book-keeper

11.4 ER reported that Jacky Faria had completed the day-to-day records to 30 June before she left. To prevent the records falling behind again, Standing Committee had taken the decision to hire a replacement book-keeper who was known to St Mary's and trusted and was charging us at the lower end of the normal rate. This was a temporary contract until the end of the year which afforded the necessary time to consider a more permanent replacement. The Council noted this.

iii. Presentation of 2022 Accounts to APCM

11.5 GW and PD reported that as we had made insufficient progress in preparing the accounts, Myers Clark (MC) would be hired to undertake this task as well as examining

them. MC would advise about their charges for this additional work shortly. To assist MC, FinCom would need to undertake certain preparatory tasks and to respond to any questions from MC. PD said that while he was optimistic 2022 accounts would be ready in time for the APCM, he could not give any specific date for this.

11.6 TR commented that he felt the Bishop would not be overly concerned if the APCM were to take place in early October and provisionally suggested it be held on Sunday 1 October; but he asked that Standing Committee be advised immediately if there were any problems with that deadline.

Action: FinCom to advise Standing Committee immediately if it appears that the 1 October deadline will not be met

iv. *Legacy*

11.7 RC reminded the Council that it needed to decide about allocating legacies it had received. The legacy of £50,000 received last year had been discussed on several occasions but no firm conclusions had been reached. Formally, that legacy had not been restricted but informally the legator's family had suggested that £35,000 might be put towards the purchase of a new minibus and the rest used as an operating and maintenance fund. He was concerned that if the Council failed to take a decision to use the legacy for something specific and significant it might impact on the relationship with the legator's family.

11.8 Some members of the Council expressed reservations about using the legacy for a new minibus in view of the shortage of drivers: we might find that we had a minibus we could not use in practice. Furthermore, there was a possibility of obtaining a grant towards its purchase price if it were used by community groups. Others pointed out that the clock faces on the tower required work and that signage around the church needed to be improved and part of the legacy might be used for these significant projects.

11.9 RC advised that the cost for restoring the clock faces using gold paint was around £4,000. This was lower than he had expected but he would confirm this with the contractor and would also ascertain whether the use of gold paint rather than gilding had any implications for the future rate of weathering of the faces.

11.10 The Council was content to allocate part of the legacy to the restoration of the clock faces.

11.11 RC also explained two options for improving signage previously discussed with Rev. Josh Brocklesby (JB) and, after a suggestion from a Council member, acknowledged a third:

1. make the boards on the external Office wall (facing the High Street) and at the West Door consistent with the church's present design style and colour and update the service information. This would cost around £5-600 for each board. To be worthwhile, the post pandemic pattern of services need to be seen as well established.
2. renewing the West Door board as above and installing a digital display board (DDB) on the Office wall. This would allow the information shown to be changed easily and hence could be used to advertise many different services and events and to show videos of what happens inside the church e.g. church

services. It would attract interest from passing pedestrians. Such a board would cost upwards of £10,000. It would also require consultation and permission from the DAC and the Borough council. Previous enquiries had shown that no church in the Diocese currently has a DDB in place.

3. One of the present boards might be modified to have a key-operated window section for temporary notices.

11.12 TR said that while the post pandemic pattern of services was now established, there was scope for adding extra evening services. He considered that only Option 2 was a sufficiently large outlay appropriate to the size of the legacy.

11.13 The subsequent discussion focussed mainly on that Option. Council members broadly supported the flexibility and attractiveness of the DDB, especially its evangelistic potential in screening services to onlookers in the High Street. It was dynamic and in keeping with the use of many other DDBs in the High Street and across Watford. It was attractive to the young people who were a significant part of the parish's constituency. It was thought that the legator's family would be supportive of the Council purchasing a DDB.

11.14 Concerns were raised by some members about the possibility of vandalism and whether St Mary's insurance would cover this. Assurances were given that there was no evidence of other DDBs in Watford being vandalised but it was agreed our insurance policy should be checked to confirm cover. Another concern was whether the DDB would need to be replaced every few years as technology improved because this would involve regular major cost.

11.15 In summary, TR said that there was a consensus to spend a significant part of the legacy on restoring the clock faces and, subject to further investigation, also on the purchase of a DDB. The balance of the legacy might be allocated to the General Fund. However, we would first need to do some research, bearing in mind the issues raised, before deciding to proceed.

11.16 ER therefore proposed that the Council investigate the feasibility and cost of a DDB and to confirm the cost of re-painting the clock faces. This was seconded by TE and *approved unanimously* by the Council.

Action:

- RC to investigate the feasibility and cost of a DDB; and to consult with the contractors about the precise work needed to restore the clock faces and its cost.
- MJ to advise the legator's family of the Council's conclusions.

v. *Appeal*

11.17 RC pointed out that the Standing Committee had discussed the need for an appeal to the congregation to assist in reducing the deficit. He asked if FinCom had given any consideration to when this might be done given that, once the holiday period was over, we would be three-quarters of the way through the financial year with less ability to make a significant impact on the deficit.

11.18 There was much discussion about how and when an appeal should be made. In summary, TR considered that too much was being placed on FinCom and that, in the longer term, a separate Fundraising Committee should be set up that should consider a fundraising strategy, including fundraising events, obtaining grants, sponsorship etc.

11.19 More immediately, the Council agreed that an appeal was necessary. It was important to capture the congregation's attention in a short presentation on a Sunday in September or October. This should include:

- the Church of England's policy to encourage its members to give 5% of their income to and through the Church, and another 5% to other causes and organisations that build God's kingdom;
- a focus on our financial situation from the present through to 2024;
- our success in increasing income from room hires
- the cost of running St Mary's per person per week;
- the longer-term consequences of further expenditure cuts;
- an appeal for more volunteers to assist to enable us to reduce some costs; and
- what the vision is for St Mary's mission, including how we plan to grow our numbers.

The presentation should ideally be made to the congregation at a Holy Communion service when higher numbers attended, after the APCM and following the Away Day. It was agreed that the appeal would be made on 8 October (but see section 16.5 below).

vi. *Lunchtime concerts*

11.20 GW noted that there had been costs incurred, albeit relatively small, in holding the recent series of concerts but, contrary to what had previously been agreed by the Council, no budget for this had been sought and consequently the expenditure had not been approved by the Council.

11.21 PD acknowledged this oversight and explained that the expenditure was to cover musicians' travel expenses, performance copyright fees and performance charges. There had been up to 40 people attending concerts prior to the pandemic but attendance was currently low and donations were insufficient to cover the costs. He said that it was planned to hold a series of ten concerts in the autumn and he asked the Council to approve a budget of £50 per concert, a total of £500.

11.22 TR considered that it was part of St Mary's mission to offer quality concerts free to those who could not otherwise afford it. He advised that Luther Blissett was attempting to arrange sponsorship for our concerts and that the involvement of Watford Rotary should increase attendance. While noting this, a concern was raised that if numbers did not increase and if sponsorship was not forthcoming, we could be incurring additional costs of around £1,500 a year. It was also suggested that the concerts needed to be advertised in other Watford churches. The Council agreed to review the holding of concerts before the end of the autumn series.

Action: MJ to list lunchtime concerts on the agenda for the November 2023 meeting.

c. *Buildings*

11.23 The Council received the Report from the Buildings Committee.

11.24 RC reported that he had been asked at the June Council meeting to obtain an estimate of the market value of the property. The managing agent had advised that it would be in the range £500-525,000.

11.25 RC explained that the more intensive use of the church and Church Centre is enhancing the need for regular cleaning. Two immediate needs had been identified.

11.26 Firstly, the toilets on the first floor of the Church Centre were normally cleaned by the flat's tenant and alternative arrangements had to be made when she was away. At its July meeting, Standing Committee had considered that relying on the goodwill of the tenant was not good practice and that a more permanent arrangement should be put in place. The cleaner who cleaned the rest of the Church Centre would need an extra two hours a week for this task and the additional cost would amount to around £1,500 annually excluding VAT. The Council took the view that while this was an untimely increase in expenditure, it was necessary given the greater use of the Upper Room and corresponding increase in the use of the toilets. RC therefore proposed that the Facilities Manager be asked to amend the current cleaning contract to increase the cleaner's hours by an additional two hours a week and that the Council approve funding of £1,500 to that end. This was seconded by PD and approved unanimously by the Council.

11.27 Secondly, RC explained that the stone floor in the nave was in need of professional cleaning and sealing which had not been carried out since 2019 and was becoming very stained. The Facilities Manager had obtained two estimates and both were around £2,100 excluding VAT. Again, the Council considered that this expenditure was necessary to maintain the church. TE therefore proposed that the Facilities Manager be asked to engage a professional cleaner to clean the church floor and that the Council approve funding of £2,100 to that end. This was seconded by LG and approved unanimously by the Council.

Action: RC to advise the Facilities Manager to amend the cleaner's contract for the additional hours to clean the Church Centre's first floor toilets and to engage a professional cleaner to clean the church floor.

d. *Pre-School*

11.28 MG reported that the Pre-School Committee were continuing to obtain quotes for a replacement fence.

d. *Climate Emergency*

11.29 The Council received the ECO Church self-assessment survey. RC explained this had been circulated so that the Council was aware and had an opportunity to comment. It indicated that we had made sufficient progress under the scheme to qualify for bronze and silver awards. He said the survey revealed that we needed to do more in some areas to

achieve a gold award, which we were keen to do. He asked the Council to let him have any ideas on how we might do that. The Council *noted* this request.

11.30 MW said it was clear that we were leading churches in Watford on the climate emergency. We should seek to expand our influence further through e.g. Churches Together. He felt that our focus on being an ECO church would attract more people to St Mary's and that the Council needed to consider how it could better support this work. It was agreed that the climate change initiative should be listed for discussion at the Away Day.

Action: TR to list climate change on the Away Day agenda.

e. *Missions*

11.31 There was nothing to report.

f. *Health & safety*

11.32 There was nothing to report.

12. Deanery Synod

12.1 PD reported that several incumbents in the Deanery had moved on and as a result there were several vacancies, including at St Johns and Christchurch & St Marks.

13. Budget 2023

13.1 PD explained that we had not yet approved a budget for the year and were required to do so. The *St Mary's Budget for 2023* (the *Budget*) had been circulated to the Council and was estimated to be a deficit of some £23,090. He advised that, in line with Budget Proposal 7 on page 3, RC had taken steps to increase the rental on Brightwell Road. He proposed that the *Budget* should be approved.

13.2 MJ considered that the Council should not approve yet another significant deficit without first discussing the detail, including some of the issues arising from the Notes. In particular:

- given that the largest item of expenditure was on utilities at some £32,000, should we, as had previously been suggested, move into the Church Centre during the winter months to cut costs?
- there was provision for a non-consolidated bonus for staff for 2022. Were we content to approve this?
- there was provision for a pay rise for 2023 over and above the increase necessary to conform with our statutory obligations under the Minimum Wage. The sums involved would be relatively small. Were we content to approve this given that our Pay & Recognition Policy was to pay a consolidated CPI inflation increase each year, albeit subject to the church's financial circumstances?

- bearing in mind Colin Bird's advice and given the Brightwell Road property's valuation at £500-525,00 should we consider selling it e.g. to developers so that we could fund ourselves in the longer term?

13.3 In response the following points were made:

- We would not move into the Church Centre before 1 January which would fall into the next financial year.
- We should not seek to fund a bonus for staff covering 2022, a year that had now passed, in the current year.
- Staff normally had their appraisals in June but this had been postponed and would now be carried out in September. The matter of pay could be reviewed after, and in the light of the appraisals.

Action: MJ to list staff pay on the September agenda

13.4 PD proposed that the budget, an estimated deficit of £ 23,090, be approved by the Council. He was seconded by MW. There were seven votes in favour and four abstentions (RC, MJ, TE and CH). TR did not take part in the vote. The budget was therefore approved by the Council.

14. Staffing

14.1 Following explanations from ER, the Council unanimously approved funding for some additional hours worked by a member of staff.

15. Policies

15.1 TR reminded the Council that ER was reviewing the Bullying and Grievance policies and MJ the Conflict of Interest policy. These would be listed for discussion on the agenda for 25 September and also at the meeting of the Standing Committee on 18 September.

Action: MJ to list policies for discussion at the September meeting of Standing Committee and the Council

16. Council Away Day

16.1 The Council considered that a full day was needed for discussions to discuss the MAP. Since TR would not be available on the afternoon of 30 September owing to this being the date of Ian Pankhurst's marriage, the Council agreed to hold the Away Day on 7 October.

16.2 TR said that he considered the focus of the Away Day should be on the Mission Action Plan (MAP). The *Three Ps* of Parish, Profile and Partnership needed fleshing out along with climate change which encompassed all three areas. Underpinning the MAP process was the Asset Based Church Development programme (ABCD). ER undertook to re-examine the research previously undertaken by JB regarding the make-up of the Parish, to update it where necessary and to re-present it at the Away Day.

16.3 Council members reminded TR that it had been agreed that the Away Day would also discuss our future financial strategy (see minutes of 19 June 2023, sections 17.3, 17.4 third bullet, and 17.5) and that the MAP could not be properly considered without also considering finance (see Scourfield Report of 2021). TR replied that given our well developed starting point there should also be time to discuss financial strategy but it was important to give full consideration to our vision.

16.4 It was pointed out that it would be helpful to have an agenda in advance so that the Council could give prayerful thought to the issues in preparation for the Away Day. TR undertook to prepare a document by early September with headings for each of the *Three Ps* and a further heading *Where do we go from here?* Each heading would have up to a dozen points for consideration.

Action: TR to prepare Away Day document by early September

16.5 Again TR was asked where the discussion about financial strategy would fit in. TR considered that we should seek assistance from the Diocese and make an appeal to the congregation. It was agreed that the discussions of the Away Day should be fed into the presentation discussed in section 11.19 above. To give time for these to be included in the presentation, the date for the Appeal was changed to Sunday 15 October.

17. Winter provision for rough sleepers

17.1 TR referred to New Hope's request of 7 July for St Mary's to provide a winter shelter for rough sleepers which had been circulated to the Council. He confirmed that New Hope required access to the Church Lounge, toilets and kitchen with somewhere to store bedding during the day. The shelter would run nightly from 1 December 2023 until 31 March 2024. It was recognised that storage needed to be considered carefully but it was felt that solutions could be found. The Council agreed unanimously to New Hope's request.

Action: TR to advise Matthew Heasman that the Council has agreed to host a winter shelter.

18. Vicar's Report

18.1 TR circulated a written report in line with the new practice explained at section 8.1 above and highlighted some events. The Council noted his report.

19. Any other business

a. Assistants for Holy Communion

19.1 TR said he had drawn up a list of people from the congregation to assist with the chalice during communion. He wanted the Council to agree this and asked for this item to be listed on the agenda for the meeting of 25 September.

Action: MJ to list assistants for communion on the agenda for 25 September

b. Lack of car parking facilities at St Mary's

19.2 TE explained she had been in contact with Watford Council and been invited to a meeting of the St Mary's Improvement Project, which she had agreed to attend. She still aimed to speak with the Mayor, Peter Taylor. She would revert to the Council in due course.

20. Date of next meeting

20.1 The next Council meeting will take place at 7.30pm on 25 September 2023.

The meeting closed at 10.14pm with the *Living God's Love* prayer.

Marcus Jones
PCC Secretary