



Parochial Church Council

Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 November 2023 at 7.30pm

Present:

Rev. Tony Rindl (TR) - Chair
Eileen Roby (ER) – Churchwarden & Vice Chair
Peter Dean (PD) – Churchwarden
Roger Courtney (RC)
Tilly Elliott (TE)
Lesley Gray (LG) – On Zoom
Margaret Greenstreet (MG)
Cathy Honeyman (CH)
Gill Watson (GW)
Martin Whittick (MW)
Anthony Wilson (AW) – Joint Treasurer (for Agenda Item 10.b only)
Marcus Jones (MJ) - PCC Secretary

1. Opening Prayer

1.1 TE opened the meeting with readings from Micah 6.8 and Isaiah 58.6-7 and a prayer.

2. Apologies for absence

2.1 None received.

3. Conflict of Interest

3.1. None declared.

4. Approval of the Minutes of 23 October 2023

4.1 ER proposed that the minutes of 23 October 2023 be accepted. This was seconded by MG and approved unanimously by the Council.

5. Matters arising

a. *Watford Town Centre Chaplaincy (WTCC): Memorandum*

5.1 MJ confirmed that he had notified WTCC that the Memorandum had been rescinded.

b. Volunteer shortage

5.2 TR said this was a work in progress. He confirmed that notices calling for volunteers had been placed in the weekly Notice Sheet and Mailchimp and there had been a focus on volunteers at the November CAKE.

c. Problems with sound system

5.3 PD reported this was also a work in progress. There had been issues with the sound on Zoom last Sunday. He had put a note on the sound desk advising the operators what to do. TR commented that this item should be kept on the agenda.

Action: MJ to include this item on subsequent agendas.

d. Christmas Flowers

5.4 TE reported that a small amount had been donated in response to her appeal but that this was insufficient: she would need around £250 to ensure a reasonable display. TR said he would continue to include the appeal in the weekly Notice Sheet and Mailchimp. The Council agreed to underwrite a budget of £250, including donations.

Action: TR to include an appeal for donations in the Notice Sheet and Mailchimp.

6. Correspondence

a. Same sex unions

6.1 Correspondence had been received from one of our mission partners about the developments in General Synod's regarding same sex unions. A reply had been given along lines agreed by the Standing Committee. The Council noted this exchange of correspondence and supported the reply.

6.2 The Council also noted the Church of England's *Press Release* of 15 November which explained that, by a narrow majority, the General Synod had approved the introduction, on a trial basis, of special services of prayer and dedication asking for God's blessing for same-sex couples.

b. Bishops' statement on Gaza

6.3 The Council noted the Bishops' statement of 31 October about Gaza. It will be reproduced in the December/January edition of St Mary's News along with an article from TR.

7. Safeguarding

a. Update on safeguarding training etc

7.1 LG reported that the Volunteer Administrator for Safeguarding (VAS) had circulated a schedule of volunteers' and trustees' DBS checks, training and references. This showed that several people had still not completed their training or submitted references. She encouraged Council members who had not yet submitted references to ask other Council members to provide these.

7.2 LG emphasised that it was essential that all references were provided and that all training was done. She proposed that if this was not done by 31 January, volunteers should be suspended until provided/carried out. TR counter-proposed that this should be done by the next PCC meeting on 22 January. This was seconded by MW and agreed unanimously. It was further agreed that TR would write to the relevant trustees and volunteers to advise them.

Action: TR to write to the relevant trustees and volunteers to advise them to complete training and/or provide references by 22 January or be suspended.

7.3 LG expressed her appreciation for the VAS's hard work and efficiency as safeguarding administrator and asked the Council to send her a letter of thanks. This was agreed.

Action: MJ to write a letter of thanks to the VAS.

b. Review of Safeguarding Policy

7.4 LG advised that she had reviewed and updated the Safeguarding Policy which the Council approved.

Action: MJ to send the updated policy to the Church Administrator for inclusion in the Policy Folder

8. GDPR

8.1 There was nothing to report. It was suggested that at some future point a GDPR officer might be appointed to relieve PD of this role.

9. Health & Safety

9.1 ER said she might be able to take over this role from PD at some future point.

9.2. ER said she had reported an incident to Watford Borough Council (WBC) where someone had slipped on the paving stones on the north side of the church for which WBC are responsible. She advised that the victim also needed to report this.

9.2 It was agreed that a log of such incidents should be kept so that we have an accurate record and can demonstrate to WBC that it is liable.

Action: ER to keep a log of such incidents

10. Committee Reports

a. Standing Committee

10.1 The Council received the Standing Committee minutes of 13 November 2023.

b. Finance

10.2 ER proposed that as AW was Joint Treasurer from 1 December, he should be co-opted onto the Council. This was seconded by TE and agreed unanimously.

10.3 AW reported that he was in the process of getting up to speed with the details of the finances. He explained that a number of issues remained regarding the completion of the 2022 accounts and he estimated that the accounts might take a further two months to finalise. In the ensuing discussion concern was expressed out that Myers Clark (MC) had submitted several questions on 30 August and only one had so far been answered. It was felt that the considerable delay in addressing these questions must be dealt with as a matter of urgency so that the accounts could be completed and audited, a date set to present them to the congregation at a Special Annual Parochial Church Meeting, and Bishop Alan could be informed that we were able to meet our obligations under the Church Representation Rules.

Action: AW and Richard Watson (RW) to work with PD to locate the relevant documents and answer MC's questions as soon as possible.

10.4 AW reported that RW had drawn up a draft Budget for 2024 that showed that the Council was heading for an estimated deficit of around £33,000 next year. He advised the Council that this situation was unsustainable, especially given the very significant deficits from previous years. Moreover, congregational giving had dropped substantially and a large proportion was given by just three donors. This situation was also unsustainable. He warned that the Council would use up its reserves within two years if this continued. To address this situation, he said that the Finance Committee recommended strongly to the Council that the vacant Brightwell Road property be sold. Referring to RC's paper, *Options for 63 Brightwell Rd*, the Council might expect to receive around £500,000. The money could then be invested, which would need to be with the Diocesan Board of Finance, and we might expect to obtain higher interest of around 5%. This was enough to cover most, if not all, of the recent yearly deficits and should ensure St Mary's long-term sustainability.

10.5 Continuing, AW pointed out that the annual income from investment would be more than the net income (after expenses) that would be obtained by renting out the property, which according to the agent would also incur a prior cost of some £50,000 for a substantial refurbishment to make it rentable.

10.6 The Council discussed this in some detail, including whether we should liquidate a capital asset that might be viewed as inflation-proof; whether or not to spend up to £10,000 on essential minimal refurbishment recommended by the agent to make it more saleable; whether a property developer (who might not be concerned about the state of the property) might express an interest; and whether the large sum obtained in interest might cause the congregation to become complacent in its giving.

10.7 The Council was minded to sell the property but considered advice should be sought from the agents and also from a former member of St Mary's (the former member) who had been involved in the sale of the Estcourt Road property; in particular about whether it might be sold without refurbishing or whether the Council would need to incur the costs of a minimal refurbishment to obtain a quicker sale and a higher price. Accordingly, the Council agreed to take advice about 63 Brightwell Road with a view to sale¹.

10.8 The Council expressed its thanks to AW for taking on the post of Joint Treasurer and for his excellent presentation of the need for a sale to help achieve long term financial sustainability.

Action: RC to seek advice about the sale of the property from the agents and the former member.

10.9 The possible terms of an appeal to the congregation in January was discussed. It was agreed that TR would work further on this with AW and RW.

Action: TR to work with AW and RW on the terms of an appeal to the congregation.

c. Buildings

10.10 The Council received the *Report from the Buildings Committee* (the Report).

10.11 RC reminded the Council that there was a need to apply for a Faculty for the repainting of the clock faces on the tower. Accordingly, he proposed the following resolution:

This Council approves the Petition for a Faculty for the repainting of the tower clock faces, as detailed in the accompanying documentation, and authorises its submission by Roger Courtney to the Consistory Court of the Diocese of St Albans.

This was seconded by MJ and passed unanimously.

10.12 RC reported that he had sent details of the Council's proposal to install a digital display board on the exterior office wall on the north side of the church to Watford Borough Council (WBC) to ascertain informally their likely view. The officer responsible for heritage matters had responded with the view that WBC did not favour the installation on the grounds that it was incompatible with the Grade I listing of the church and its location in a Conservation Area. RC said this was disappointing and suggested four options to the Council as detailed in his *Report*.

10.13 The Council discussed these and it was suggested that WBC might be prepared to take a less conservative view if we argued that the office was constructed in the 1930s and was not itself listed.

¹ A resolution was passed confirming the Council's wish to sell but in the light of advice reported at the meeting on 3 December 2023, this was overtaken by the more detailed resolution passed at that meeting.

10.14 The Council agreed to pursue the proposal because WBC had given only an initial view at officer level and the Planning Committee might take a different view, even if planning officers advised to reject it. TR commented that in his experience it could be difficult when Councillors overruled officers' advice and he would prefer further dialogue at officer level, perhaps bringing in the central ward Councillors with a view to an informal site meeting to explore what might be feasible. RC undertook to contact planning officers. TR said he would also seek advice from a former planning officer who had been a member of the congregation.

Action:

- RC to contact planning officers to investigate the possibility of a compromise
- TR to approach ward Councillors and seek advice from the former planning officer

11. Deanery Synod

11.1 There was nothing to report.

12. Policies

a. *Livestreaming Policy*

12.1 LG explained that she had reviewed the draft Livestreaming policy, in particular to ensure that it was consistent with Church of England guidance. However, she considered that as she had little technical expertise others would need to review technical areas such as section 5.3. As a consequence, in her view the policy was not ready to approve.

12.2 PD considered, however, that the Council should move forward with the policy as it stood because it was only by implementing it that any shortcomings would be revealed. It should therefore be reviewed every six months. The policy was approved on that basis.

Action: Council to review the policy in May 2024

12.3 It was observed that a significant number of people would have to be advised about the policy before it could be implemented including those who lead prayers. TR undertook to discuss this with the staff team who would systematically look into who should take responsibility for which parts of the policy and advise them accordingly. To assist in this process, LG should draw up a list of actions required by the policy for the staff team. Once that process was completed the policy could be put into practice, which was likely to be in the New Year.

Action:

- LG to draw up an action list
- TR and the staff team to decide who takes responsibility for the actions required and to advise them.

b. *Short Term Room Hire Policy*

12.4 RC explained that this new policy set out the terms and conditions to protect the interests of the Council and to make clear what we expect from those hiring church premises. The policy also included Diocesan guidance. He said he was still awaiting

information from the Facilities Manager regarding an Annex that set out which organisations received discounts and at what rate; but this could be added later. He proposed that the Council adopt the policy. This was seconded by MJ and approved unanimously.

13. Mission Action Plan

13.1 TR said he was pleased with the outcome of Working Group's deliberations on the Vision Statement and Values and felt that these had fully reflected the outcomes of the Away Day. He was content with the explanations given to him at Standing Committee regarding the 3Ps (see section 10.3 of the Standing Committee minutes of 13 November 2023). He considered, however, that the comment in section 5.3 of the Working Group, "We are like you even though you are on a different journey" might be improved and that the concept of a *shared journey* was perhaps a better one. It was pointed out that while this might indeed better reflect the five priorities in section 5.1 of the Report, section 5.3 was merely a summary and a reference to a *journey* was not needed at all.

13.2 The next steps were discussed. It was agreed that the Working Group would meet to identify two or three *SMART* objectives under each of the 3P headings and report to the Standing Committee and then the Council. The need to consult with the congregation was emphasised, so that everyone had an opportunity to contribute to and actively support the MAP. It was agreed that this should start now with an article in St Mary's News based on the Working Group's Report and inviting comments.

Action:

- MJ to arrange for the Working Group to meet to discuss SMART objectives
- MJ to write an article for St Mary's News

14. Kitchen Hygiene

14.1 TE emphasised the need for hygiene regulations to be observed by volunteers while using the kitchen for making refreshments etc. She pointed to some bad practices such as putting uneaten biscuits back in a tin after they had been handled and with the risk that they could be cross contaminated e.g. by nuts. It was agreed that training would be arranged for volunteers (which might reveal further issues); that a sign would be placed in the Church Centre that we cannot guarantee that biscuits etc are allergen free; and that uneaten biscuits would be thrown away.

Action:

- TE to arrange hygiene training for volunteers, including advising that uneaten biscuits must be thrown away.
- ER to arrange signage

14.2 TE also pointed out that we should cease serving refreshments in the church. As well as causing additional work, some of the trolleys were wobbly with potential for health and safety risks, and spillages caused the stone floor to become stained. It was agreed that in future refreshments would be served in the Church Centre.

15. Vicar's Report

15.1 The Council noted the Vicar's Report.

16. Any other business

a. *Worship Group*

16.1 MJ remarked on the high level of musical professionalism and spirituality of the Worship Group (the Group). In his view the Group had laid down a firm foundation and were a valuable addition to the morning service. However, he noted that the songs chosen were primarily for performance. They had rhythms and key changes that a congregation could find difficult. St Mary's congregation were also not familiar with the songs and it was not always clear the music where the Group were intending to sing by themselves and where they intended the congregation to join in. He had observed that as a result, few of the congregation were singing.

16.2 He emphasised that it was important to continue with this younger, modern style and made suggestions to help build on the Group's strong foundations:

- The Group could open morning worship with a song in the same way that the Choir often opened with an anthem; and similarly it might have perform another solo item during the service.
- To improve congregational participation, the Worship Group could choose songs with a more obvious and regular melody such as *Ten Thousand Reasons*; teach new songs to the congregation e.g. before or during the service; and give clear instructions about where the Group is to lead and where the congregation are to join in.

He was supported by other Council members. TR agreed to discuss these suggestions with the Group.

Action: TR to discuss MJ's suggestions with the Worship Group.

b. *Christmas candles*

16.2 TE said that with the Christmas season rapidly approaching we needed to avoid candle wax dripping onto the floor because it was both costly and difficult to remove. She was supported by other Council members. It was agreed that non-drip candles or alternatives would be used in future and that TR would speak with bodies such as Watford Girls Grammar School (WGGS) who had traditionally brought their own candles for use in their Carol Service.

Action: TR to speak with bodies such as WGGS about alternatives to dripping candles.

c. *Staffing*

16.3 ER advised the Council about a staffing issue.

17. Date of next meeting

20.1 The next Council meeting will take place at 7.30pm on 22 January 2024.

The meeting closed at 9.50pm with the *Living God's Love* prayer.

Marcus Jones
PCC Secretary

Signed:

Chair/Vice Chair [*Delete as appropriate*]

Date: