

**PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL OF
St MARY THE VIRGIN CHURCH, GREAT BRICKHILL**

Annual Report and Accounts

For the year ended 31st December, 2024

**St. Mary the Virgin Church,
Lower Way
Great Brickhill
Milton Keynes
MK17 9AE**

Bankers:

**Barclays Bank PLC
Leighton Buzzard Branch
The Aylesbury Group
34 Market Square
Aylesbury
Bucks.
HP20 1TT**

Independent Examiner:

**Mr. D. Beatty
Roxburgh House
Pound Hill
Great Brickhill
Milton Keynes
MK17 9AS**

Church Architect:

**Adrian Ringrose Dip Arch BA Arch RIBA AABC
Stimpson Walton Bond
Chartered Architects
59 York Road
Northampton
NN1 5QL**

Report Of The Parochial Church Council (PCC)

Year ended 31st December, 2024

MEMBERS OF THE PCC

The following persons served as members of the PCC from the date of the Annual Meeting, 9th April 2024:-

The Reverend John Waller (Chairman)
Jeremy Hopkinson (Licensed Lay Minister; PCC Vice-Chairman)
Julia Turner (Church Warden)

Phillipa Cook (Secretary) – re-elected
Clare Hankins-Lewis – re-elected
Stuart Jones – re-elected
Sophia Walmsley – re-elected
Diana Williams – re-elected
N.B. Joy Wilson – resigned 9/4/24

Deanery Synod Representative:- Jeremy Hopkinson newly elected 9/4/24

Neil Cook continued in the role of Treasurer, co-opted to the PCC, 28/5/24

N.B. The maximum number of lay representatives on the PCC is 6, as per the prescribed formula for Electoral Rolls up to 50.

OBJECTS AND CONSTITUTION OF THE PCC

The object of the PCC of St. Mary the Virgin Church, Great Brickhill, is to further the work of the Church of England in the parish of Great Brickhill. The Council is constituted under the Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956 and as amended by the 1969 Measure, and is required to co-operate with the minister in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.

At the Annual Parochial Church Meeting in 2004 provision was made for the annual appointment of representatives on the PCC. All members of the church electoral roll are entitled to vote and stand for election. There is also provision for the co-option of members of the PCC, and the incumbent is ex-officio a member and the Chairman. The LLM, Warden and Deanery Synod Representatives are also ex-officio members of the PCC.

ELECTORAL ROLL AND CHURCH ATTENDANCE

Membership of the electoral roll is open to any lay person who is baptised, over sixteen years of age and has signed a declaration that he or she is a member of the Church of England and is either (a). resident in the parish, or (b). has habitually attended worship in the parish during a period of six months prior to enrolment.

At the 2023 Annual Meeting, there were 36 on the Electoral Roll. There was a revision of the Electoral Roll prepared for the 2024 Annual Meeting. There had been two deaths and three additions and so the number recorded at the Annual Meeting in April was 37, seven of whom are not resident within the parish. Since then, there was one death, making the number on the Roll at the end of 2024, 36. A new Electoral Roll will be prepared for the 2025 Annual Meeting.

The average attendance on a “normal” Sunday remains at 18, as last year. Attendance at special services is significantly higher than the average figure for a “normal” Sunday service.

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

The Reverend John Waller continues as Rector. The Rector had a sabbatical leave, from 13th April to 1st July. Visting clergy came for our Communion services, and other services were lay led during these three months.

There has been no change to the general pattern of services – the Rector takes a Holy Communion Service and a Family Service across the Benefice every Sunday unless it is the week when there is one just one joint service in the Benefice for all four parishes.

The Rector writes a letter for inclusion in the monthly Newsletters for each of the four villages. Jeremy Hopkinson continues as LLM. Sharon Sutton from Little Brickhill resigned from the role of Admin Assistant in August. Kathryn Layland from Great Brickhill took on the role in November.

Following the sudden death of Bishop Alan Wilson in February, the Revd Canon Dave Bull was nominated as the next Bishop of Buckingham in November. Former Team Rector of Marlow and Area Dean of Wycombe, he will begin his new ministry next February, after a consecration service at Canterbury Cathedral.

Unless work is being undertaken, the church remains open every day of the year between at least 10am and 4pm.

Services:

To make it fair for all four parishes, the pattern of services is complex, but the services are publicized widely to enable everyone to easily access the information through all the various channels of communication. Each month in Great Brickhill, on the first Sunday there is a 9.30am Holy Communion service and on the third Sunday a Family Service at 11am. On the second Sunday a variety of services are held, which are lay led. Generally, there is no service on the fourth Sunday of the month and a Benefice service is held if there is a fifth Sunday.

During the re-roofing work, there was a lot of disruption, dust and rubble, requiring a huge amount of work to prepare the church for the services but we were pleased that we did not have to cancel any services.

Special Services:

During 2024 we had one wedding, one baptism and two funerals. We were very sad to hear of the loss of Alan Poynter, until recent years a regular member of our congregation.

The highlight of the year was the Service of Thanksgiving held on 13th October for the completion of the roof work. The Archdeacon of Buckingham, the Venerable Guy Elsmore came and gave the sermon.

In addition to our annual services such as Remembrance Sunday, Nine Lessons and Carols, all of which were well attended, three outdoor services were held:

- Palm Sunday Procession and Service. The procession started at the Old Red Lion, following the bagpipes and “donkey” and waving palms, and stopping along the way to the church to sing some songs. A short service was then held inside the church with a dramatized reading of the Easter story.

- A Pimms & Hymns service was held on 11th August in the afternoon, in the churchyard where there was plenty of shade from the heat of the sun. The hymns and songs were chosen by those who were going to be present, and there was a good mix of traditional hymns, but also a number of songs that were new to many but with lovely tunes, they were easy to sing to.

- The Village Nativity on Sunday, 15th December. The Cricket Club kindly hosted this event again. We were fortunate with the weather, a nice sunny day and as usual it was very well attended and a great start to our Christmas celebrations.

HIGH ASH SCHOOL:

High Ash School is a Church of England school. Reverend John Waller is one of two Foundation Governors, appointed by the Oxford Diocese. The position of second Foundation Governor is held by Mrs Emily Lund.

Mrs Ruth Lewin was appointed as Headteacher and started after Easter 2023. Since the second half of 2023, she has been on long-term sick leave and Mrs Kate Goodger resumed as Acting Headteacher. In the summer term Mrs Goodger was appointed the new Headteacher.

The report from the Ofsted Inspection held at the end of the 2023 Winter term was disappointing. In June however, High Ash had a good report from their SIAMS inspection, focusing on their theologically rooted Christian vision and impact.

Mrs Goodger arranged an informal meeting in November for representatives from our four local churches, parish councils, sports clubs and other groups to explore opportunities to work together for the benefit of the wider community.

High Ash Services:

We were pleased to welcome pupils from High Ash for their four services - Harvest, Christmas, Easter and end of year Leavers' service.

Due to the size of the school, normally the school would come on two afternoons for their services but, to minimise delay to work on the roof, the whole of High Ash School came together on one afternoon for their Easter service. It was quite a squeeze to get all the pupils seated and unfortunately, there was no room for any parents. It was wonderful to see the church so full of children, and to hear the readings and songs, which were sung with great enthusiasm.

CHURCH ACTIVITIES:

The Lent Course followed the "Come and See" course which the Oxford Diocese has been running for the last few years. Those who signed up received a short email each day during Lent, Monday to Saturday, and on Sundays a short video from Bishop Steven exploring the theme, "The Way of Love", looking at how the commandments to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, and mind and strength", and to "love your neighbour as yourself" can give a rhythm and a shape to our lives.

There were two sessions each week for the 6-week Benefice Lent Course:- on Tuesday afternoons in Stoke Hammond and a midweek evening session at venues across the Benefice.

The monthly midweek Bible Group for the Benefice continued at The Rectory, except for when the Rector was on sabbatical. The sessions led by the Rector focus on the readings which will be heard in one of the Sunday services.

Except for when the roof work was being carried out, the Monday Morning Coffee Club was held every Monday in the church during term time, between 9.30am and 11.30am. Sadly from the end of the year, due to declining numbers, the Coffee Club is taking an extended break. If we hear of young mothers who would like us to re-start the Coffee Club, we will consider doing that. Thank you to Debbie Jones and Diana Williams who were stalwarts in running this on Mondays for a number of years.

There is access to the Food Box in the church porch at any time of day for anyone to help themselves if they find themselves in need, either in an emergency or in the longer term. Since the introduction of the Food Box in 2019, there has been a varied amount of demand. Thank you to the families of Little Ashes and High Ash for the gifts that they gave for their Harvest services, which were passed on to us for Food Box.

With all the work carried out in the church we are now in a position, particularly in the summer months when we do not have to think about heating the church, for the refreshment area to be used for meetings etc. We would welcome any enquiries.

MUSIC & BELLS:

Jerry Breslin continues to play the organ regularly at the Sunday services and generally at any special services. Andrew and Margretta Smith provided the music for the Family Services and Sophia Walmsley led the singing.

Jerry continues to lead the choir and the weekly Benefice Choir practices, which are held on Monday evenings usually at Great Brickhill.

Bell ringing practice now takes place on a Thursday evening and the bells are rung before most services. David Middleton continues in the role of Tower Captain and organizes ringers for weddings and funerals as required. Visiting bell ringing teams often come to ring our bells. New ringers are always welcome.

CHURCH EVENTS:

Our events were similar to last year. We were fortunate that our two big fundraising events were very successful.

Snowdrop Walks:

We were blessed with good weather for both Snowdrop Walks in February. The second Sunday was a record, raising £1701. Added to the previous week, the total for both days came to £3,033. Thank you to all who helped with the setting up and clearing away, with the teas and providing the delicious cakes. But most of all, thank you to Sir David and Sally Duncombe for allowing us access to their wonderful grounds.

Plant Fayre:

We were also lucky with the weather for the Plant Fayre and the turnout supported that with 438 visitors recorded. The magnificent sum of £3,168 was raised. Thank you to all who helped - providing the cakes and plants and raffle prizes, helping with the stalls, setting up and clearing away, marshalling the car park and the team in the kitchen who worked tirelessly throughout the day to keep us all fed and watered with the delicious items on offer.

Tomato Plants:

Huge thanks to John Hall for donating the proceeds from selling his tomato plants. Thank you to all who purchased the plants and to John for the fantastic donation of £700.

The Christmas Coffee Morning:

Held in the church, there were visiting craft stalls as well as the St Mary's stalls and raffles. The event raised £1032.

Other events included the teas at Brickstock, the teas at the Open Gardens and Carol singing round the village. The Advent Windows lit up the village again from 1st to 31st December.

COMMUNICATIONS:

Communications continue as before.

The website is updated frequently and holds the up-to-date information of services and events. A weekly e-mail is sent to those on the database giving reports of events held and information of forthcoming services and events. Messages are regularly posted on the village WhatsApp group.

A Pew Sheet is produced for all services and a report is sent each month to the online Parish Newsletter. A printed scaled down version of the online monthly Parish Newsletter, including just the news items, is available in the church porch and a copy is delivered each month to those known to be in the village who are not able to receive the Newsletter any other way.

POLICY DOCUMENTS:

The annual review of the Safeguarding Policy took place at the November PCC meeting. No changes were made to the Safeguarding or Domestic Abuse Policy.

An annual safeguarding report was prepared for the November PCC meeting. For the year to 31st October the report is a nil report – no safeguarding incidents had been reported in the last twelve months.

The Health & Safety check was delayed due to all the work being done. It will be carried out in early 2025.

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was last updated in May 2021. The annual review took place in November. There were no GDPR issues to report and no further change required to the Data Privacy notice.

All the Policy documents are on display in the church porch and available on the website in the Great Brickhill section.

DEANERY SYNOD:

Our Benefice is in the Mursley Deanery, which is the smallest and unusual in that there is no urban setting – 20 parishes, small population with five clergy, plus House for Duty, a post which is currently vacant.

Jeremy Hopkinson took on the position of Deanery Synod Representative for Great Brickhill at the Annual Meeting in April. He stepped down as Deanery treasurer and the position remains vacant. Annie Copper is Lay Chair and Malcolm Oliver is the Deanery Synod Secretary. Revd Val Plumb continued as Area Dean.

The main topics during the year were further discussion on Mission to Children & Young People and discussion about the Blessing of Same Sex Relationships. All PCCs were asked to discuss the latter and all four PCCs in the Benefice agreed that we should be ready to offer these prayers for same sex couples within Sunday services.

WORK ON THE FABRIC OF THE CHURCH:

The church is in a much better state of repair than at the beginning of the year.

The work on the roof started on 12th February. During the work, due to health and

safety concerns, the church remained generally closed but all services, plus the bell ringing & choir practices, continued as normal, although large areas of the church were cordoned off.

With the external work complete, the internal works started in April and for the next two months everything was moved round in the church, and finding things was at times quite a challenge. The damaged ceiling panels were repaired, and preparation work was carried out to the outer walls, ready for painting once the walls had dried out. The work was completed and the church back to normal by the beginning of August.

The contractors did a good job and were very accommodating. Our architects were also every helpful, making visits at various stages of the project.

We were successful in obtaining grants from several sources, totalling £75k. St Mary's was chosen as one of 18 churches in the country to share in a £1 million urgent funding pay-out from the National Churches Trust. This grant of £30,850 for the urgent roof repairs enabled us to carry out all the necessary repairs in one go, rather than phasing the work. The internal walls were decorated at the same time, taking advantage of the scaffolding already in place. The total cost of the work was £155k including VAT, which was recoverable via the Listed Places of Worship Scheme.

General Maintenance Work:

The Quinquennial Inspection was carried out by the architects on 10th July. The main concern was with the work required to the Chancel Roof and the tower. This work is scheduled for January 2025.

Electrical rewiring work identified in the 2023 5-year Electrical Installation Condition Report has been completed.

Two successful Workdays were held on Saturdays in the summer, and a lot of general maintenance work was achieved, both inside and outside the church.

Net Zero Carbon Project:

As reported last year, we are embarking on a project to reduce our carbon footprint. We have been awarded a Net Zero Carbon Preparation grant from the Diocese to help with preparatory work with this. Andrew Smith has been commissioned to conduct an audit of the energy use in the church and a plan for decarbonisation. This includes a larger project looking at replacing the old gas boiler, which will soon need replacing anyway, with a heat pump. There should be funds coming available nationally and from the Diocese that we can apply for to help with the funding of this work.

NATIONAL CHURCH AWARDS:

We were "pipped at the post as a finalist" for this year's National Church "Care & Conservation Award". The results were announced at the National Church Awards ceremony at Lincoln Cathedral in October. Whilst this was a little disappointing having made it to the short list, it is flattering to think that the work carried out in our church has been recognized at national level.

CHURCH FINANCES FOR 2024:

The accounts, produced on a receipts and payments basis as in previous years, showed a deficit of £1,286. The overall figures for receipts and payments are very similar to last year.

The income from Special Activities is in line with that raised in 2023. The figure for PCC Surplice Fees is lower as there were fewer funerals held. The Church Inspection fees are higher due to the £1,020 cost of the Quinquennial.

Despite the general rise in gas prices, the cost for Heating, Lighting etc shows a decrease of £966 due a more favourable rate with the new supplier and the programmable thermostat allowing for more efficient times the heating comes on.

As an end of year deficit was projected, only £14K was paid towards the allocation of the £20,783 Parish Share to the Diocese (the same as for 2023, £8K was paid in 2022, £16K in 2021).

Restricted Items: As well as general income the PCC has received donations which are restricted as to their use, the money having been given for specific purposes. Under the Charities Act accounting regulations, the restricted funds have to be identified separately in the main accounts. The PCC is able to confirm that it holds sufficient and appropriate assets to meet the conditions of expenditure of all restricted funds. Details of the balances of funds and the assets which are held to represent those funds are contained in the Statement of Assets and Liabilities.

St Mary's Fund: Receipts included donations, grant money and fund-raising items. No further payments were due to the original contractor for the New Facilities, as confirmed by the architect. Payments from the fund have been made to The Leadworks (main roofing contractor), ESK Decorating and our architects. The balance at the end of the year was £14,221. Further costs of £12,436 for the roof, including the contingency money, will be incurred in 2025.

The Parish Share due for 2025 has been confirmed as £21,885, a 5.3% increase.

A QR Code has been set up via the "Give a Little" scheme using the SumUp credit card account, and it is easy for people to gift aid their donation. It was used for carol singing round the village and also for the Christmas services – the QR code was inserted in the Carol Service insert sheet which people took home with them. The QR code is on display in the church for any visitors to use if they wish to make donations.