

St Werburgh's Parish Council Meeting 10th October 2024

Present:

Parish Priest:	Fr Paul Shaw
Finance:	Denise Jones
Housekeeping and Hospitality:	Cristina Jones
Liturgy:	Lyn Williams
Outreach:	Lal Cook & Tina Bainbridge
Social:	Bernice Meredith, Pat Floate Tina Bainbridge Steve Tierney
Altar Servers:	Gerry Tighe
Buildings and Maintenance	Marian McCarthy.
Admin Assistant to PP	Stephen Hutchinson

Apologies for absence.

None.

Prayer and Introduction by Father Paul.

Minutes to Last meeting.

Corrections –

Page 5 - Lyn suggested a register of interest (not Denise)

Page 2 – The last sentence 'Pat mentioned she would like to open this to the rest of the parish, as well as to the hospice'. Remove 'as well as to the hospice'.

Names – Cristina Dominte should be Cristina Jones.

Fr Paul emphasized that the minutes will be reviewed by the chair and the admin assistant before sending out to the council for their comments. The minutes must reflect what was said in the meeting. After this, the minutes can be published for a wider audience. Approval of the minutes from the last meeting will always be an agenda item.

Fr Paul reminded everyone that since he has already held the chair for two meetings, he will only be able to chair for two more meetings, then a new chair will need to be elected. (The role of chairman is only for the duration of 6 months i.e. 4 meetings).

Bishop's Visitation – Fr Paul.

The Bishop was very pleased indeed with what he saw during his visitation. He felt he had been given a very warm welcome and thought that St Werburgh's had done an amazing job of rebuilding the church following covid.

He thought that St Werburgh's had managed to use covid as a platform for a complete renewal of the whole parish. The renewal steering group was singled out for congratulations and full marks. Fr Paul gave a huge thanks to Pat, Lyn, Bernice and Marian for all their work on the Renewal Steering

Committee. The whole parish is in their debt. The Bishop would have been looking at our Mass attendance figures, and will have noted that for the visitation weekend there was an even higher attendance than pre-covid of 600, which was extraordinary.

If anything, the church is bigger and better than before. We hope that St Werburgh's has captured the heart of synodality, and taken brave steps in leading a recovery after the covid lockdown.

Stephen Tierney asked if we were including on-line attendance via the live streaming in the attendance figures. Fr Paul said we were not, so the attendance figures may actually be even higher.

Stephen Tierney added that he thought what the renewal group had done (especially the Welcome Wednesdays) reflected exactly what Pope Francis had said during the Vatican Synod talk in Rome, where he encouraged churches to 'open the doors and invite everybody in'.

Pat wished to emphasise that the Renewal Steering Committee could not have done anything without the support of the Parish Priest. The committee worked in complete harmony with FP.

Fr Paul said he felt the committee was a like a very happy department, working together and establishing very lasting friendships.

Gerry mentioned that during the Bishop's first visitation, he was unhappy about the screen which was in place, and the distribution chalices, which have now been replaced. Gerry asked if anything was raised during this visit that the Bishop was unhappy about that we need to address?

FP added that a parishioner had asked him whether watching a Mass via live streaming fulfilled a Sunday obligation. FP explained that it can only if you are so ill that you cannot attend a Mass in person. If you are able to get to a Mass, then watching it via live stream would not fulfill a Sunday obligation.

The Bishop and Fr Paul had a very constructive conversation about the future of both the parish and its Parish Priest as his seventy-fifth birthday approaches in the spring of 2026. St Werburgh's is one of the busiest parishes in the diocese and, at present, is responsible for a number of 'add-ons': the University, High School and Primary School, Hospital and Hospice, and for Ecumenical relations in general. Many of these could be looked after by other Chester parishes, but there are many arguments for keeping the link between St Werburgh's and the University. FP & St Werburgh's subsidize the University to some considerable extent. The University CathSoc meet at St Werburgh's, so it would make a lot of sense to keep St Werburgh's as the University Parish as it is near lots of good facilities.

FP is very much conscious of the fact that the Dean and the primary school could be any parish. However, the one thing that he really felt probably has to go with St Werburgh's is the University.

The second big issue is the house. It will need some money spending on upgrading the kitchen and bathrooms, and possibly rewiring and a new boiler. It's a beautiful house. Warm, quiet and cozy and FP loves the house and it is entirely habitable at present. The logical time for this upgrading work would be between Parish Priests. The house is a listed building and so necessary permissions will have to be sought in plenty of time. The house may be uninhabitable for a few months while this work takes place and the Bishop made a number of suggestions as to how this could be arranged.

FP added that St Werburgh's is a truly astonishing example of a Victorian Presbytery as it is virtually unchanged, and unique (there are very few examples of Victorian Presbyteries left). Upstairs, it's the original set of large sitting room and small bedrooms off for four priests.

The Diocesan architect Rob Harrington will be spearheading the project. However, as it is English Heritage and not Historic Churches, this may be a new area for the Diocese.

The house is an ideal place for 2 or 3 priests, a religious order, or an overseas Priest.

Parish Council Member Lead Reports.

1 - Diocesan Financial Audit – Denise.

We had an audit on the 11th of September by a firm of accountants and external auditors based in London. One of their employees visited from London and was here the best part of four hours. We were able to provide all the documentation, the financial reports and the accounts paperwork that he required.

There were no issues identified. The only failure was that we were unable to provide the minutes to our Finance Committee meeting. Minute taking had lapsed, really, because the Finance Committee meetings lapsed during covid.

We are grateful to the Renewal Steering Group for pushing St Werburgh's to have two people doing the counting and collection, as well as two people (that cannot be related) doing the banking.

Denise added she is very grateful to everyone on the new St Werburgh's counting, collecting and banking rota.

FP advised that every Parish Priest slightly does things his own way and the Parish needs to be aware that there will be changes to the financial regime under a new PP.

2 - Buildings and Maintenance – Marian.

2.1 Development projects:

- Day Chapel: This went to the HCC on 27th September and is now 'under consultation'. Various elements are Kitchen, Lighting, Heating, Redecoration and Flooring, and the application has been submitted to a number of interested bodies – Historic Buildings and Places, The Victorian Society, Historic England (NW) and CWAC. We don't know how long they have to respond. But this is a step forward from last month!
- Porch Redecoration: This also went to HCC on 27th September and has been approved. If nothing comes back by the end of this month then we are in a go situation. We have been in touch with the company who are lined up to do the work and are awaiting a date for them to come to re-assess the job and provide a formal quote. We hope that the work will be complete in time for Christmas.
- Church Lighting: with Rob Harrington. Two lighting firms have visited and submitted quotes. Diocese will make decision. This will mean big disruption with a scaffolding tower. We will have lighting switches with preset options, that will make life much easier.

2.2 H&S – the big one!

We now have H&S consultants supporting us – BSS – in getting ourselves in proper order for H&S matters. It is a very big area, though not complicated, just process-driven! We actually had a Diocesan H&S audit in July which went pretty well but there are some key areas that we need to work on:

- The main thrust is developing Risk Assessments in all relevant areas, ranging from the cleaning of church through to crowd control at large services, such as Christmas and Easter, lone working and everything in between
- The other main area of concern is Fire Safety. We need a clear Fire Evacuation Plan, which we are now working on. This needs to be communicated to the whole parish, and we need to have a group of 'fire marshals' geared up, for all services of 100 or more people. Question: how do we get these people and what do we call them that is not off-putting?
- Other areas include all electrical equipment being PAT tested (including any equipment belonging to parishioners brought in by themselves), managing contractors – insurance and own risk assessments – and some additional signage needed

The main point is that this H&S stuff is important and all PC members' need to support St Werburgh's in getting us up to speed.

2.3 IT:

- Website update: Lyn mentioned at the last PC meeting that we need to move on getting current content of the website reviewed and updated as appropriate. Lyn has further update on starting to get choir/music material onto the website
- Lyn and Stephen H are going to start trawling through the website content starting next week.
- The use of Generic email addresses was discussed. These are being used, and understandably there will need to be a certain transition period while people get used to the new system.

2.4 Greener Parish:

- Paula Wszolek is beavering away on recycling matters and also has some moves afoot for sustainability, e.g. water butts for the gardens

2.5 Stewards for significant events:

Marian has had the job of finding stewards ever since lockdown. We had a great team who were extremely committed to the job. However, now that we no longer have regular stewarding it has become increasingly difficult to get steward volunteers when we need them. For example, last Christmas we needed four stewards for the two children's Masses and also for Midnight Mass; we struggled as we did at Easter. We would ask all PC members to encourage people to help out when it is needed. Training is given!

Web Month – Feb 2025

FP added that Feb is the web update month, he also added that he needs names put forward for Eucharistic ministers. He does not want them to be asked beforehand, just send the name suggestions direct to FP.

Parish Library

Leave it as it is now? Bookcases should be screwed to wall, but can't because of panelling. Maybe just remove the bookcase altogether? A lot of the books there are very old. Need to mull this over. Lal added that if the library was not working, why not remove it to make more use of this space. Marian added that she thought the books were just collecting dust.

Discussions:

Heating in the Church

Lyn mentioned that she thought the church was cold, the Sunday before last. The heating cost is a major factor. FP will turn the heating on now that the days are getting colder.

Heritage Event for 2025 (150 celebration)

The Church will be 150 years old next year (Christmas day 1875). This needs marking in some way. Anne Marie and heritage team are producing a 3rd book. (Red book, obituary of who died in the war; the blue book contains essays of Chester from during the war).

Gerry mentioned a flower festival / seven sacraments, had been extremely well attended in 2002. We need to restore the graves of Canon Chambers and Canon Welch. We are missing a crucifix above the tabernacle. It was there until 2000. When looking at the tabernacle, it looks as if something is missing.

FP has met the relatives of Canon Welch but does not know much about Canon Chambers. "Canon Welch, not just a Moses, but a Joshua of his people". Three newspapers in Chester 1924 wrote very good tributes about him. Could find out additional information from the Maidenhead diocese and the Portsmouth archives. His family moved from Reading to Maidenhead. During the Requiem Mass, the streets of Chester were packed out. Canon Chambers is buried in the old part of Overleigh Cemetery.

Anne Marie and the history group have suggested a programme for 2025. FP – wonderful if we can combine Bishop's visit with opening of day chapel. No date yet for opening of day chapel.

Any Other Business

Lyn – With regards to the register of interests; we need to keep volunteers coming. Each renewal steering group needs to come up with three things people can volunteer for. A list of things already happening will be compiled, then we can ask for volunteers. Lyn plans to complete this by the end of October. From 2025, all volunteers will need an individual check. Do we know who our volunteers are? Who should be contacted if in an emergency? When did they have their training? The role of the parish safeguarding officer is vital. St Werburgh's is an example of excellent safeguarding. Chris and Liz are already doing an excellent job.

Lyn added that she is still working on the music platform. There will be a music review 7.30pm next Thursday.

FP – Thanks Tina for the Sister Act trip. Very well organised and very enjoyable. Good Catholic musical with a positive message about fellowship.

Pat – Drop-in Social planned for Friday.

Lal – Aiming to have a planning meeting for bereavement support. CTS Mass cards to be ordered including six large size Mass cards.

Steve Tierney – Reminded everyone about the upcoming talk on the 13th of November by Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald on Christian / Muslim conversations.

Cristina – A quote has been provided for pruning the trees, which needs permission from the council where the trees overhang the pavement. Cutting back is needed for four trees. The quote of £700 includes planning application.

Marian – Suggested total immersion plunge pool baptistry for St Werburgh's.

Time and Date of Next Meeting - Thursday 14th November 7.15 pm.