

**All Saints, Bishopswood Church – The Future
A meeting of the village**

Venue

Village Hall, Bishopswood

Date

11.30am on Saturday 14th October 2023

Attendance

- Bob Puzey
- Chris Puzey
- Stephen Hoskins
- Mary Hoskins
- Louise Field
- Ann Martin-Slater
- Don Bent
- Carol Bent
- Carol Pimblett
- Barry Pimblett
- Monica Edmunds
- Sallyanne Tottie
- Andrew Anderston
- Catherine Haterall
- Sylvia Groucott
- Heather Bartlett
- Albert Freeman
- Mervyn Freeman
- Jennifer Freeman
- Paul Baker
- Celia Ashley
- Lou Carnell-Evans
- Terry Ruck
- Tim Starling

Apologies

- Luke Freeman
- Eileen Wood
- David Emerson
- Jill Pitkeathley

Summary of the meeting

Tim thanked everyone for coming.

He talked through a paper called '*Bishopswood – the facts*' (which were available to everyone) which gave a summary of the churches current situation relating to attendance, occasional offices, festival services, church officers, helpers for services, finances, parish offer and QIR/maintenance costs.

He outlined that none of this was particularly new – a process had begun with Penny Powdrill (designate Associate Vicar), Mark Johnson (Rural Dean) and Derek Chedzey (Archdeacon) in October 2020 but wasn't concluded.

Finally, Tim outlined the four options, as he saw them, that lay before us:

- Close the church – the churchyard would remain open and be transferred to another parish for legal care and upkeep.
- The Church merges with another parish – and becomes a 'chapel of ease' (with services still happening at the church). However, it is highly unlikely that another church will want to take on a church without financial security.
- The parish merges with another parish – the church closes; the churchyard transfers to the new church. Services happen at the new church and/or, with permission of the new incumbent/PCC some services could happen in the Village Hall.
- Bishopswood keeps going – to do this we would need a team of people willing to service/help and a financial input of around £12.5k per year.

A summary of the discussion comments

The following items were discussed:

- Might it be possible to use of Portaloo at church? *It is possible to explore having these but they tend to be less easy for seniors to use especially with mobility issues. We tend to hire them in for weekend events in other churches but we could look for more expensive toilets if that helped people.*
- Who makes the final decision on what happens to the Church. *It is the PCC of the church concerned. But as the PCC all stood down it is the incumbent's role, as the PCC, to make the decision.*
- Could we use the village hall to have services? *Given the facilities in the hall and it's proximity to the church, that would be a great idea. In fact, I have planned services for January, February and March in the hall thanks to the permission of the Hall Committee.*
- In the past we have had services after the 'Big Breakfast'. Is that an option? *Pre-Covid this did happen. You would have 50 people to breakfast and then a service afterwards. However, less people come to breakfast now and opinion is split on if they want this – 50% do and 50% want to be able to speak to their friends without rushing away. We do know that when we do this sort of thing for special occasions (e.g., coronation; jubilee) we can attract 20 to 30 people.*
- Could Bishopswood church hold the 5th Sunday of the month? *In the past the 5th Sunday has rotated around the churches. However, most people only come to their own church and so don't travel. I have therefore abolished 5th Sundays moving around and just run services in the two areas of population. However, when a church makes a special case for doing something differently, I have done this (e.g., Ganarew Summer service attracted 40+ people).*
- Could fundraising take place (e.g., the flower festivals and events)? *Of course, this could happen however the last concert at the church only attracted 6 people and there aren't the helpers to, sadly, run the flower festivals. Of course, it isn't just doing one or two fundraisers, we need a team of volunteers to have a full program of events. A number of people felt they couldn't fundraise for two community buildings and it was challenging enough to look after one; and some recognized that those present weren't young and as able to do what they had use to do.*

- There was recognition that most had a sentimental connection to the church. Many have loved ones buried here. *Tim recognized this and explained that even if the church closed, the churchyard would stay open and transfer to another local church to care for it.*
- What happens to the building if it closes? *It transfers to the care of Hereford Board of Finance but the process takes 2-3 years to do.*
- Are there other sources of funding available? For example, the Church Restoration Fund?
- Lots of people have served the church faithfully over the years and made such a helpful contribution. *That is correct. We need to thank them and finish well, if that is what we do.*
- We have been talking about this since 2020 when will we make a decision? *Tim is clear that a decision needs to be taken after a period of consultation. He would like to make a decision in the coming months.*

Next Steps

Those gathered asked for a second meeting in two months' time to allow them to reflect on the information and encourage others in the village to attend.

Once the date had been agreed, there would be appropriate advertising in the village (flyers, posters, parish magazine, Bishopswood village website etc). It was asked if we could advertise the meeting in the local newspaper too.

Tim thanked everyone for coming and apologised that it was a sad reason that had gathered us together.

The meeting closed and Tim handed out cards with his telephone number and email address in case people wanted to contact him.

Tim Starling & Paul Baker
14th October 2023