

**Bishopswood Consultation Meeting**  
11.30 am Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> February 2024  
at Bishopswood Village Hall

**Welcome**

Rev Tim welcomed everyone to our third, and final, consultation meeting about All Saints church and its future.

He asked for people to record their name and contact details if people wished to receive a summary of the discussion and updates as the consultation progressed.

As there was a member of Ross Gazette in attendance, Tim asked him, Mark, to introduce himself and in the interests of data protection to explain what his role at the meeting was. Tim asked those present if they minded Mark attending. No one did.

Tim recorded the names of the 6 who had sent their apologies for this morning:

- Rosemary Allen.
- Brenda & David Morris.
- Alfred Mason.
- Lou Carnell-Evans.
- Cathie Hatherall.

At the last meeting (on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October) Mrs Freeman asked that we could place an advertisement in the local paper, which was done in the Ross Gazette, The Forester and the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley Review. Thanks were expressed to Mrs Freeman for suggesting this and Carol Pimblett for putting the advertisement in the papers.

Tim then outlined a structure for the meeting:

- A summary of the issues faced by the church.
- A summary of the feedback that he had received/heard.
- A summary of the correspondence he had received from people since the last meeting.
- He would then open discussion to the floor – for questions, comments or observations.
- We would summarise.

**Issues faced by the church**

The following was outlined – and copies of the report given out at the first and second meeting were available for any who wanted it:<sup>1</sup>

- Quite simply the attendance at our two services a month had dwindled significantly in the last years. It is not uncommon to have 2-3 people at our services (including the priest and the organist).
- The festival services in the church have gradually been decreasing in the past 12 years.
- All the church officers all resigned for good reasons in August 2020. This means we are short of two Churchwardens, one PCC Secretary, one PCC Treasurer (although Dave has said he would take on this role), a PCC of around 4-6 people to undertake a range of other activities.
- We have run a deficit budget consecutively for 8 years, depleting our reserves by £17,550.91. As this rate the church will be bankrupt within about 3 years.

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<sup>1</sup> No one asked for a copy of the report at this meeting.

- In addition, we are unable to pay our Parish Offer, which should be around £7,750 a year. And our Quinquennial Inspection report shows we have around £22k of work to do. We also know that the boiler needs to be replaced urgently. This means we need around £12.5k a year to ensure we break even.

### **Summary of Feedback**

Tim then outlined a summary of the feedback he had received during the consultations:

- That a lot of people are emotionally connected to All Saints, and many, over the years, have invested a lot of time and energy into fundraising and supporting it. To all of them I said a huge thank you. However, the reality is that most of these people are unable to offer all the support that they used to do.
- The church is in the wrong location in the village. It doesn't have toilets. It is often cold. The parking isn't the best. And it isn't easy to get to without a car.
- Can a village the size of Bishopswood really support two community buildings – the church and the village hall. As lovely as the church is, the village hall has all the facilities, car parking, conveniences and is accessible.
- There was a realistic sense that people did not believe they were up for the continued fight of keeping the building going.
- We have been talking/consulting about this since 2020; it is time to make a decision.

A summary of the notes was sent out after each consultation to those who passed on email addresses to me. Tim thanked Bob Puzey for putting the information on the Bishopswood Village website.

### **Correspondence that I have received**

Tim outlined the correspondence he had received from people since the last consultation meeting:

- At the last meeting a question was asked by Anne Martin-Slater about funding from the Church Conservation Trust. As a result, I had a long conversation with Beth, from the Trust about our situation.<sup>2</sup> I learnt that:
  - Because Bishopswood church is an unlisted building, it was highly unlikely that they would be interested in taking it on.
  - And they didn't have any grants, suitable for our situation, that we could apply for.
  - Should the church be closed, they would be formally consulted as part of the process.
- Correspondence from Heather and Sylvia which says, "we have discussed this at home many times over the last years and our conclusion is there is only one answer that it to close the church. My mother, Heather & I have supported the church over the last 64 years. This is the only sensible practical solution as we see it – but do appreciate that no everyone will think the same".
- Rosemary wanted to share her family memories of her association with the church, including her grandparents who were wardens for a combined total of 50 years.
- Brenda and David wanted to let me know that they couldn't attend as they were celebrating an 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in Italy but wanted to know more about access to the churchyard.
- Alfred also wanted to know about access to the churchyard for several family graves, including a commonwealth war grave. He also wanted to know what would happen to a family plaque situated in the church. Unfortunately, he was unable to attend today.

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<sup>2</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> January 2024

- Lou Carnell-Evans who regularly cleans the church, wanted to share how fond of the church she was but understood that it feels tired and old, and that so much money needed to be spent on it, that with a heavy heart, given the lack of attendees, the position of the church, lack of water and toilets, its life of the church is probably coming to an end. Unfortunately, she is unable to attend today.
- Juli Marangon called to confirm the time of the meeting.
- I have received an email from a couple who saw the advert in the paper and have 4 family members in the churchyard. They were unable to come to the meeting, were sad to hear the church could close and wanted to understand access to the churchyard.

### **Discussion**

Time then opened the discussion to the floor – for questions, comments & observations. Responses made by Tim are in italics:

#### What are the next steps if the decision to close is made?

*As I am the PCC, I will contact Hereford Diocese and ask them to begin the process to close the church; I don't close the church – the Diocese and the Church Commissioners then take 2-3 years to consult and inspect the church building. Only when they are ready do I hand them the church keys and the church closes. The process can be stopped, by me, at any point if circumstances change and could then remain in use. This will only be considered if we have the money, a full team of church officers step forwards and there is a congregation wishing to attend. It should be noted that anyone may enquire about purchasing the church; Hereford Diocese will get the building valued. They will not necessarily sell it for the highest price – as they will consider its future use and the appropriateness of any new buyer.*

*Comment from the floor - even if we had the money, we do not have the physical resources to run the church; the people who helped in the past are now older and cannot sustain this going forwards.*

With the Churchyard remaining open how can we be sure that there would be car parking and access to the churchyard; a lot of people in the village wanted reassurance this would be provided as they were aware that searches had not produced clarity about ownership for the lane from the road to the church/old school.

*The churchyard will remain open and will not close. Therefore, access will be needed from the road to the churchyard, and parking must be available. Tim agreed to discuss this with the central team at Hereford Diocese, so that it is written into any 3<sup>rd</sup> party contract / agreement.*

How will the churchyard be looked after until/after the church is closed?

*Initially the PCC (that is Tim) will still be responsible for the church building/churchyard until the building is closed. Once the church building is closed it will be the responsibility of Hereford Diocese until it is 'sold'. The churchyard would become the responsibility of another local church – no churches had been approached yet – with agreements put in place.*

Big Breakfast has been an excellent fund-raising source. What will happen to future funding received?

*Nothing will change in the foreseeable future. However, once the church building is closed, and the churchyard transfers to a new vicar with oversight of the ministry and ministry of the church, they will need to sign this off. But they would be mad to stop such a good mission opportunity and fundraising stream.*

**Will we continue to have a pattern of services in Bishopswood?**

*Yes, there will be no change in the pattern of worship and will continue the trial of having services in the Village Hall (and festival services in the church) and review it in six months. Services will continue until the church closes. If the church closes, and the churchyard is transferred to a new parish, they, in consultation with those in the village, will decide on what program of worship at the village hall or elsewhere is available.*

*Comment from the floor - we are an active, vigorous community; church is not the church building but the community – it is the community that is important.*

**Next Steps**

Even though the decision to begin the process of closing the church sits with the PCC (Tim), he asked for an indicative show of hands to guide him:

	<b>Indicative Votes</b>
In favor of starting the process to close the church	20
In favor of not starting the process to close the church	0
Abstaining <sup>3</sup>	3
Not voting	4

Tim thanked everyone for attending and acknowledged that this was a sad day but felt like the right decision had been taken. Tim would now contact Hereford Diocese Office to recommend the closure of All Saint’s church, Bishopswood.

Finally, a summary of the discussion would be sent out in due course.

**Action taken as a result of the meeting**

On Saturday afternoon, 10<sup>th</sup> February, Tim emailed our Diocesan Office (Bishop Richard Jackson; Archdeacon Derek Chedzey; Pastoral Secretary Sarah Girling and Sheila Anthony Rural Dean) to “begin the process to recommend the closure of Bishopswood church”. This has been acknowledged, and the necessary reports have been completed by Sarah and Tim this week.

Sarah (Girling, the Secretary to the Diocesan Missional Pastoral Committee) and Tim were keen that we provided information relating to the ‘next steps’ and addressed the concern over access/parking for the churchyard. I attach correspondence from Sarah Girling (Appendix 1), and some FAQs she has produced for us (Appendix 2). I am grateful to Sarah for providing this information so quickly.

I have waited a few days before sending out this document to see if I would receive any additional questions, comments or requests following the meeting. I can confirm that I have not.

**Finally**

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<sup>3</sup> Out of the three people who abstained – one was in favour of starting the process to close the church but would only ‘vote’ for this to happen once access and parking were assured; another wanted to talk to her family about what had been presented/discussed; and one did not say.

Thank you too so many of you for your contributions to the church and the community, over many years; your commitment to supporting the consultation process. When it comes to closing the church building, I am committed to celebrating the good the church family have achieved over many years.

Tim Starling  
Vicar – Wye Reaches Benefice – including Bishopswood  
14<sup>th</sup> February 2024

## **Appendix 1 – Letter from the Secretary to the Missional & Pastoral Committee**



The Diocesan Office  
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14th February 2024

Dear friends,

### **ALL SAINTS CHURCH, BISHOPSWOOD**

I am writing to explain a little more about the process for closing a church.

Revd Tim Starling has held a series of local meetings and has now requested me to start the formal process of consultation on the closure of All Saint's church, Bishopswood.

On behalf of the diocese I will now consult with the interested parties, including the PCCs in the benefice, clergy, patrons, the local parish council and county councillor, and the planning department. That consultation letter will be sent out shortly after this one, so those of you involved in any of those groups can expect to receive it shortly. This will be the first of two rounds of consultation, and anyone can respond to either or both. More details of the formalities of the process will be sent out at the time.

You can also expect to see some associated activity at the church in terms of visits by various professionals compiling reports for the Church Commissioners, so please don't be concerned about this.

I attach some frequently asked questions about church closure which I hope will be of help and answer some of your queries.

One point to add to the FAQs concerns the lane to the church, about which I understand there is some anxiety. I hope it will be clear from the FAQs that the churchyard will remain open for visitors and for future burials, and so it will obviously be essential that adequate access is preserved to allow this to happen.

With kind regards,

Sarah Girling  
Secretary to Hereford Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee

## **Appendix 2 - FAQs**

### **Church closure FAQs**

**1. Who decides whether the church closes or not?**

The decision is made by the Church Commissioners following consultation. Nobody locally can make the decision – not the vicar, not the PCC, not the diocese, not even the Bishop.

**2. What happens about church services while the process is under way? Can we have a final thanksgiving service?**

The church remains open and everything continues as normal unless and until it is closed. So throughout the consultation process, services will continue, and the PCC will remain responsible for the care of the building, insurance etc. There will be time for you to have a final thanksgiving service before closure.

**3. What happens about burials in the churchyard?**

A church closure only affects the building itself. The churchyard (assuming it is open for burials) will remain open and in the care of the PCC, even if the church building closes.

**4. Where will our parish church be if this one closes?**

This will be the subject of a separate consultation after the closure process.

**5. What happens about finances, insurance etc?**

The PCC remains responsible for all finances unless and until the church closes. On the date of closure, responsibility for the building and its insurance passes to the diocese. Insurance of the churchyard, however, remains the responsibility of the PCC.

**6. How long does it all take?**

It is difficult to give an exact answer to this, as it is a consultative process and so it depends on whether there are any objections. If there are no objections, the closure process should take between 6 months and a year.

**7. Will the building be put up for sale? What can it be used for?**

Yes, the building will usually be put up for sale. Anyone interested in acquiring it should contact Sarah Girling at the diocese. The diocese is responsible for finding a "suitable alternative use" for the building and the best way to do this is usually marketing it, unless a suitable proposal is already available. Once a firm proposal is made, another public consultation is held and so people will get an opportunity to comment. In addition, if planning consent is needed for the proposal, people will have another opportunity to comment through the usual planning process. The final decision on any disposal is made by the Church Commissioners following the consultation.