

Members of council present

Rev Joe, Rev Philippa, Simon Trapnell, Carolyn Wright, Derek Wright, Ellie Stevenson, Graham Limbrick, Andrew Wilkins, Tony Crawshaw, Ali Moseley, Gareth Moseley, Jean Smith, Lynda Chan.

Apologies Phil Cotton, Hazel Cotton, Adrian Hawkins, Janine Smith.

In attendance, observing the meeting Joan Howard

Rev Joe opened the meeting in prayer, with words from Psalm 51 and Evening Prayer.
The minutes of the previous meeting were approved and there were no matters arising.

Clergy Report

Rev Joe thanked members of the Council for their responses to his requests for 3 areas to focus on in the Benefice a) in 2025 b) over the next 5 years.

The 3 points for this year condensed down to

- Embedding Ecochurch
- Enriching worship
- Embracing Mission and Outreach

These broad statements were then explained as follows:

1) Embedding Ecochurch

Integrating care for creation throughout the life of the church.

Rev Joe congratulated all our parishes on having achieved a Bronze award! Now we must all work towards a silver award, though Joe stressed that it isn't just about achieving the awards, it is about integrating eco principles into our daily life and worship.

Actions

- Commissioning Parish Eco champions to advocate and monitor local efforts – could be Parish Reps, or others with a heart for this.
 - Writing and implementing policies and plans.
 - ~ Nature friendly churchyards – need a proper policy for this, to be made available to our churchyard working parties.
 - ~ Sustainable events including food and drink – fairtrade coffee / tea
 - ~ Buildings / resources – DAC rules, no oil heating going forward etc
- Concern was raised – the DAC don't always respond, or take months to do so, frustrating.

2) Worship that is Benefice-wide and open to all

Discussion about what the words 'open to all' mean, and 'where people can feel comfortable.' Rev Joe confirmed: everyone is welcome to all our worship gatherings, and can and should feel they can invite friends.

- Improving access to all our services and events.
 - ~ Purchasing a minibus? Or lift system / rota – cheaper cost -no purchase price / Insurance.
 - ~ Midweek gathering – Holy Communion service?
 - Encouraging support – confidence with a range of styles and effective communication. Important to have a balance of worshipping together and worshipping in local communities.
- Declining numbers concerning, partly post-Covid, partly fewer services available in the Benefice each week / month.
- Discussion around 'effective communication.' All agreed that word of mouth is the most effective way to encourage people to attend services and events.

Ideas included – flyers, school newsletters, banners, magazine articles – more detail in the magazine about what to expect at each of our varied service style.

A6 postcards, for Café church, Explore! and the informal service – details.

Banners, £50, eco friendly material, advertising services, with details. **Ideas to Joe, please.**

- Teaching and nurturing spiritual maturity.

3) Equipping every member as local missionary

This can be divided into 2 sections

- Inreach
- Outreach

Inreach

Also sometimes called 'attractional' – welcoming people 'in' but also growing ourselves, in faith and discipleship.

~ Connecting with local friends and those on the fringe

~ Welcome Team – setting up shortly

~ Vision for use of buildings -use, celebration, preservation

~Teaching

~Putting prayer into practice

Outreach

~Coffee mornings/lunches – could the monthly lunch at Sandhurst continue?

~School club – after school didn't work, lunchtime club ?

~New neighbours – cards, magazines

~Local prayer triplets

~Acts of Kindness in the community

~Doing Festivals well -distinctive in every parish, supported by the whole

~Sandhurst can record audio services, which could be sent to housebound/ elderly.

Also: Actions we can do now

~ Pew Bible review. Aim is to have 20 Bibles in each church, for use in services.

Parish Reps to take audit of what they have, how many Bibles, what translation, and edition and to send a photo to Rev Joe.

~New daytime home group to begin in May. **Rev Philippa to advertise.**

~Home group social events, once a term ?

~Home group material after Easter – 1 Peter.

~ This year is the renewal of our Electoral Rolls, which will happen at the APCM. It would be good to have a good number of people on each parish E Roll, to maintain individuality in the parishes, but only if people want to be involved and / or empathetic to the Christian way of life and how this is lived out in the Benefice.

APCM May 8th at NIA.

Treasurer's Report

Joint Council encouraged to refer to the documents received from Derek.

Derek due to meet with Accounts Reviewer this week (wk beginning March 10th) and all is looking positive at this stage. Thanks to Derek for all his hard work.

Joint Council approved the Accounts subject to considering if there should be any fund raising amount shown for DH in note 6. Agreed that if other than minor amendments following independent review Derek would seek approval from F&PC

At end of Feb 2025 our deficit was £6,300. At the end of 2025 deficit prediction is £20,000 - £25,000.

Prior to the setting up of the Joint Council, each parish had their own Parish Share amount to raise, and pay to the benefice who passed on to DBF, and often this was made up to the amount required by fund-raising.

During 2024 fund-raising has tended to be more local, with funds raised going to the individual parish projects or fabric funds. Only the Leigh sends funds raised to the Benefice General Fund.

Suggestion and discussion of 25% (or more, or less?) funds raised, to go to the Benefice, for general costs?

Derek asked that this be encouraged this year – remind people how they used to pay their own share!

Also remind the local teams This will also be mentioned at the APCM in May.

It was also agreed that we should seek increases in giving through initiatives such as a letter to all of those joining the new electoral roll.

In 2024 reserves were £95,000. In 2025 predicted reserve will be £70 - £75,000.

JC agreed the proposal that General Fund reserves should, under normal circumstances there should be at least 3 months expenditure in reserve, and not more than 6 months. This would be £30,000 to £60,000.

JC agreed to re-establishing the practice that the “cash collection” at 5th Sunday services should go to a local charity. It was agreed that for March this would be to a local women’s refuge as it was Mother’s Day. Further consideration to be given for future 5th Sundays.

Lynda to research local women’s refuge and report back to Derek.

The Diocese is looking to change the way Parish Share is allocated across Deaneries / Benefices from 2026 onwards. To that end it has asked every Parish / Benefice to complete a questionnaire proving past information for 2019, 2022, 2023 and 2024 as well as early indication as to commitment for 2026 onwards. JC reviewed the Seven Towers responses and subject to a minor change to question 9 approved our return.

In discussion it was noted that our USA (Usual Sunday Attendance) has fallen from 90 in 2019 to around 41 in 2024. In part that reflects the change in worship pattern. In other returns Derek had seen so far most benefices had seen numbers being unchanged over that 5 year period.

There will be a meeting on Tuesday 8 April for Severn Vale Deanery at which each Benefice will meet with the team from DBF to review our responses and commitments. Seven Towers will be represented by Joe and Derek.

Safeguarding

Nothing to report.

Parish and Team Reports

There was not time to have any discussion on these reports. Rev Philippa prayed for the parishes and the teams.

AOB

~Parish Reps to let Carolyn know if they need a new Paschal candle.

~Easter Monday events in each parish – ideas to Rev Joe, so they can be advertised in the April magazine.

The date of the next meeting is Tuesday May 13th, 7.30pm at NIA.

The meeting closed at 9.35 with the Grace.