

Report to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting of The Parish of New Town and the Hythe for 2024 St Stephen's Church Centre



Meeting to be held on 26 May 2024



Reports for APCM May 2024

Annual Curate's Report 2024

Changes

The year gone has had its challenges and both St. Margaret's and St. Stephen's would have folded if it were not for the commitment and dedication of the PCC's and congregations. But here we are starting April 2024, ready to welcome a new minister into an attractive and thriving church in the parish of Newtown and the Hythe.

Mission

I will leave a lot of the talk on mission to our new community worker because this has been her focus and area of expertise, and she has done such a lot of outreach these last few months.

We have been blessed to still have the YMCA use the building for the Youth Club and the Holiday Clubs. This brings lots of people into our church building and adds another branch of contact with the community and church. It is lovely to see Mal at the Youth Club coaching badminton and table tennis with the children, Debbie in the kitchen and other church members going in every now and then, their commitment to the children is a great example of mission.

The Chillout Café became The Hub (St. Stephens café and community Hubbub) last year and is now a busy and bustling community gathering. It is lovely to see the church and the community coming together and owning this new expression of Church. It is thanks to the dedication of Annette (knit and natter), Tom and Ian (War Hammer Club), James (Lego Club), Harry, Lilly, Denise and other fill in helpers and Afterschool chill out staff (Café) that this community gathering is blossoming into a powerful missional gathering. Bringing baptisms and weddings into the church centre too. Many church members are committed to attending regularly and this make the café the success that it is today.

We have continued our tradition of sending an Ecumenical Christmas Card to the local area. Everyone helped to deliver them including the Scouts for which we are incredibly grateful.

The Rainbow Tots continues with Louise and Denise, and they have seen new people come along this year and relationships continue to be developed and new members of the community are cared for and reached.

The 'Over 60s lunch' has continued to blossom and grow, with thanks to the commitment of all the team – Debbie, Claire, Jill, Laura, Louise, Chris to name just a few.

Once again, we went carol singing around the locality and ended up in the local pub for drinks and soup.

Dan, Louise, Denise, Andrew and I have worked on links with the local primary schools and we have see both Kendall and St. Georges come regularly into the building, where we have entertained and spoke to them about different Christian festivals and what the Church does in the community. We treasure the links that we have with them.

Denise and Louise have put on great holiday family days which have brought the community in too. Annie and Peter have been instrumental in mission this year with Craft fairs and a quiz night. Peter and I are also in the process of organising a Beer and Hymns night down at St. Leonards.

Bringing me nicely to our new re-connection with St. Leonards at the Hythe. We are now holding services down there again. Every time there is a 5th Sunday in a month we have an evening prayer service down there. The first one saw members from St. Stephen's and Wimpole Road gather together, but also saw many people, who do not normally attend church, come together because they loved to see the old building used. So, as a missional tool this was an enormous success and hopefully will continue to be so.

It is great to be down at the Hythe again, because it is part of our parish that is often neglected. We are blessed that the Friends of St. Leonards are so welcoming of us and want to work with us to get the building used, and the fact that they also have a heart for the neighbouring community and want to see them in the church is a blessing too. I want to thank them for all the work that they do and their encouragement and help in allowing us to use the building again.

Andrew our administrator works many hours above his paid quota to reach out and bring people in to the two churches. His heart for mission has been a real blessing to our church this year.

Worship

Some of what I have said above under mission is of course worship too but looking at Sunday mornings now:

The regular pattern continues with Messy Church on the first Sunday, Communion on the 2nd and 4th Sundays and Café Church on the 3rd Sunday. We are seeing new people added to our numbers regularly which is encouraging to see.

The Wednesday Eucharist continues, and I have been told by those that attend that it has developed its own style and has blossomed into a beautiful service, which has been a blessing to all those that attend.

Sunday Club continues thanks to the dedication of Lesley, Ali, Beryl and Emma We really appreciate their commitment to our children.

With thanks to Dan and Andrew we now have most of our liturgy on the church computer and with thanks to the dedication of them and the church wardens, worship tends to run more smoothly with the modern technology. It is so easy to follow now it is all on the screens and hopefully we will save a few trees along the way by not having paper copies anymore.

We have been working on being more inclusive and Andrew and Dan have been working with Fiona to make the services better for her to access and feel part of.

I have been on a sign language course and am hoping to collaborate with Archdeacon Ruth to provide a setting for local clergy to learn how to sign the liturgy. This will add further to us making our worship more accessible to all.

We are in the process of joining 'All Inclusive Church', which we hope will make us visible as a church that wants **ALL** to come and meet with God, and that we are all committed to making our church a better, more welcoming, safe place for all.

Many thanks to all those who contribute to leading services regularly across the churches over the year.

We have continued to develop our link with St Margaret's, Berechurch. We have had two PCC away days where the PCCs of both churches have come together for a day. This is invaluable. Both churches have so much to offer each other, and I pray that this year ahead, with a new incumbent proves to strengthen the links even more.

We have continued with an online presence ecumenically through the 'Three Together' service on Facebook and with thanks to Andrew who coordinates it so smoothly we have been able to get some faces from the past in the line-up to take some of the services. So, make sure that you are watching to see who they are. I want to thank Andrew for the service that he provides in pulling all this together in his own time.

Pastoral

Home communions have been given by Dan where needed since Lorraine left.

Funeral and Baptism visits have continued.

Hospital and pastoral visits continue as and when needed.

With the community coming into the building more and more, we have been able to touch the lives of many and have pastorally supported many members of the community and congregation through challenging times; family disputes, bereavements, divorces, and the illness of loved ones, and although much of this work is unseen it is an important ministry that as a pastoral team we continue to provide.

Education and Faith Sharing

We have a home group that continues to meet and arrange activities for the wider church.

The church has continued to help me with my training and enabled Dan to get all the work that he needed to be signed off and move to pastures new.

We are incredibly lucky in St Stephen's to have Christine helping to lead our worship and help us with faith sharing. She is often a quiet presence in the background watching out for those that need speaking to.

The church is a happy place and people enjoy hiring the space. It is lovely to have the regular hirers, like me, Denise and Jesters Annie because that makes the centre busy and brings many people through our doors. And we have seen many of them attend church regularly because they consequently feel part of what goes on here.

Concluding Remarks

We have John to thank for our two eco awards and the work that is being done on our behalf to make the church a more environmentally friendly place. We are now working towards our Gold award but we are told by John that this is going to be very hard to get. John has been looking into getting solar panels installed and the possibility of air source heat pumps too.

Martin and Mal have been busy maintaining the building as and when they have been able to. Martin has fitted new tiles in the foyer which make the place much tidier. Denise has worked hard getting in window cleaners, carpet cleaners and kitchen cleaners, also making everything much tidier and welcoming. We are going to have the hall floor sanded and re-varnished in the near future, this is long overdue and will make the hall a much better space for all the hirers.

We are in the process of looking into making a new opening onto the street, in front of the church doors, to make us more welcoming and easier to access by passersby. Along with this we hope to re-vamp and move our notice board that looks tired and is hardly used. We hope that this will make us more visible to the community who pass by.

Your PCC have been working hard behind the scenes this interregnum and have increased their meetings to once a month to make sure the church stays healthy during this period. They are a committed, enthusiastic bunch of people who have a big heart for the church and the community. Though we have been without an incumbent they have been passionate in driving the church forward in mission and in all the directions it had started to move in. It has been a pleasure to work with them this past year. They are very inspiring.

I want to extend my thanks to all the many volunteers, the people who help lead worship, the hard work of our wardens, community worker, Denise and Andrew, thank you all for your hard work and dedication over the last year. You all give above and beyond, all of you make St. Stephen's the happy welcoming place that it is today.

I want to conclude with a thanks to Dan who has done so much for us over the last few years. We will be sad to see him leave us, but we will be excited to see all that God has in store for his ministry in the years to come.

Reverend Belinda Kerins
Curate

On behalf of Rev Belinda Rev Dan

Financial Review for year ending 31st December 2023

Unrestricted Church Income

Voluntary Income saw a 1.8 % increase compared to 2022. Although Gift Aid and Tax recovered decreased by 1.5%, collections at services increased by 87%, resulting in a 1.5% increase in the overall sum received that is eligible for Gift Aid and the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme.

We are very grateful to the many loyal church members who continue to support the church. Regular voluntary giving and Gift Aid receipts are the largest source of funds, providing 80% of church receipts (excluding the Bequest) and 44% of total unrestricted receipts in 2023.

In 2023 the Parish benefited from a very generous bequest from John Weston. This gift has ensured we have funding for our Community Worker for at least three years, and a substantial contribution to the planned eco-friendly upgrade of the heating system and major building repairs.

Fundraising receipts remained high, increasing by 4%. This was due to a combination of successful community events and surpluses raised by regular user groups. Thanks are due to the hardworking volunteers who make these events and services run so successfully.

Use of Church income continued to rise, increasing by 12% compared to 2022.

Fees Income was much lower as there were no Funerals or Weddings held in the church in 2023

Church Payments

The Parish Share which we paid in full, was 2.5% higher than 2022 and accounted for 69% of church expenditure in 2023.

Expenses that changed significantly in 2023 were:

Upkeep of Services up by 71%

Parish Administrator –PCC agreed to continue with the increase hours throughout 2023.

Heating and Lighting-as expected, mitigated by diocesan fuel grant, we are unlikely to benefit from a grant in 2024.

New Equipment – included a replacement laptop & new printer. In 2022 new equipment was covered by the Mission Fund.

Building Project –Expenditure shared equally with the Church Centre, included RT Solar Heating survey, ESOS Energy Audit, & EAP Envoy Building Survey.

We continue to owe a huge debt to Martin Kerins, Mal Hutley, Eddie Weller and their supporters for covering a large proportion of the Repair and Maintenance labour costs, which came in under budget and remained much lower than we would otherwise incur.

Church Centre

Rental Income increased by 8.8% on 2022, thereby keeping up with inflation.

Payments increased by 19%. This is partly explained by the addition of 50% of the Building project expenditure. After taking this off, the increase is 13%. As with the Church, expected above-inflation increases in Heating and Lighting and the Administrator's salary have contributed to the increase. The cost of the Cleaning Contractor increased by 21%. Even taking this into account the Church centre raised a surplus of £11,817 at the end of the year.

Thanks are especially due to Andrew Topple for his unceasing commitment to maximising lettings income and reducing costs.

Church and Centre Receipts of £75,073, excluding the Bequest, and expenditure of £79,502 give a deficit of receipts over payments of £4,429 on Unrestricted Funds at 31 December 2023. After taking the Bequest into account there was a surplus of £214,043 on 31 December.

Restricted Funds

General Deposit Fund

After receipt of the Bequest, £218,472 was transferred into the interest-earning general deposit fund, prior to the PCC agreeing in 2024 how this bequest will be used.

The **Mission Fund** benefited from the proceeds of the closure of the St Stephens's Youth Club Account. As at 31 December the fund had increased by £854 (13%).

The **YMCA Youth Club Fund** closed with a surplus of £9000. This sum is set aside to contribute to two more years' service, after the initial three years have ended. The Parish paid £5,000 for each of the first three years.

Community Worker

This is the renamed and repurposed Family & Children's Worker Fund which, commencing September 2023, is the fund from which the Parish Community Worker will be administered.

Balance Sheet and Reserve Funds Policy

The closing balance on the Current Account, net of Restricted Funds, was £7,836.77. On 31 December a total of £247,522 was held in Unrestricted Funds. This is more than is needed to cover three months' general running costs and two months' additional administration salary costs, as required by the Reserve Funds Policy agreed by the PCC in February 2022.

Many thanks to Simon Large for preparation and examination of the Accounts.

Chris Poole
Treasurer

Churchwarden's Report

This has inevitably been a time of regrouping following Rev Lorraine's departure in July. We have not required outside help from other ministers during this vacancy thanks to the priesting of Dan Cant and Belinda Kerins with continued assistance from Christine Shillaker. The PCC has been meeting more often (monthly) with the standing committee managing urgent business in between.

The pattern of services has remained largely unchanged (Messy Church on first Sundays, Holy Communion on second and fourth and Café Church on third Sundays). Café church, introduced by Rev Lorraine has evolved into a regular pattern. Generally, attendances have been holding up and increasing for Messy and Café services. It has been a privilege to welcome some new attenders and share faith with them. Wednesday morning, Sunday Evening communion and weekly meditation have provided important reflective counterpoints to the more extravert Sunday services.

Much work has been done to transfer to digitize our liturgy which is becoming more familiar and seamless as time goes on. The video screens have also proved invaluable for videos and to accompany sung worship. Unfortunately, live music from our worship band has decreased somewhat. A gap which has long been unfilled is for a sacristan, that is, a person to help the ministry team by setting up the silverware and elements for communion.

The PCC has agreed to recruit Sunday wardens who would help look after routine aspects of setting up Sunday services and keeping things running allowing the churchwarden space to manage other administrative tasks. Our Sunday volunteers rota has some gaps for welcomers, and on the sound desk and laptop.

Speaking of extending a welcome to all comers, the PCC made an important decision in recent months to apply to become recognised as an Inclusive Church (<https://www.inclusive-church.org/the-ic-statement/>) "which celebrates and affirms every person and does not discriminate..." and "...which welcomes and serves all people in the name of Jesus Christ...". This does not mean that we claim that we do that in every way already. It means that we are committed to working towards making that a reality.

A Lent group provided an opportunity for some to deepen their faith. One home group is now active having recently rediscovered direction after a lull for most of 2023. There is probably a need for a new home group especially for folk who have recently joined us.

The rental of spaces in the centre continues to result in high footfall throughout the week. Numbers attending the Saturday Hub have increased providing an important bridge between our many visitors and the worshipping community. Our links with local schools have been strengthened. Meanwhile, Louise has been consolidating the role of community worker notably in repeat presentations of the slow cooker club. The over 60s lunch club is in high demand. The July annual camp at Thorrington is a social high point for many of us.

It has been a relatively quiet year for EcoChurch. Attenders and members have been challenged to do "Just One Thing" in a regular series of suggestions about embedding creation thinking in our lifestyles. Having gained our Silver Award in 2022, we have not pushed onwards the Gold in a comprehensive way. This is mainly because much work has been going on behind the scenes for the Green energy project (see below). A coordinator for EcoChurch is needed to help us move ahead across the board in the coming year.

We are so grateful to our ministry team and volunteers who have worked hard to keep all these and other aspects of the church's life vibrant during the year. You will note that there are a lots of opportunities to get involved in God's work here at St Stephen's. Could one of these roles have your name on it?

*John Clifton
Churchwardens*

On behalf of John Clifton and Martin Kerins

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is an essential part of what we do at St Stephen's and we are gently trying to raise it's profile amongst the church community: last November we celebrated 'Safeguarding Sunday' at a cafe church service and there is a growing number of folk who have received training at different levels and / or having a DBS check completed. We are trying to build a whole church ethos that all of us share a responsibility for a safer church and that we are on an on-going journey towards this goal. We pray that God will bless this work and keep our community safe.

*Michael Watkins
Safeguarding Officer*

Church Administration

The Church office remains a busy and buzzing place, often with all the seats taken up.

Our regular hirers remain loyal to us and it is great to welcome them week after week. I am always looking for new booking to both assist with the finances and to encourage as many people from across the community to attend and offer a wide range of activities to people locally. Our ad hoc party booking trade has fallen away a little of late, and I suspect this is largely to do with the increased pressure on household budgets.

Budgets are managed carefully, with every effort made to secure the best deals on utilities and other services and following the PC and printer upgrades in 2022 there were no capital expenses this year. With our fixed rate electricity tariff coming to an end in September, we had to increase our hourly charges at a rate above inflation (having kept the increase below inflation the previous year).

General day-to-day admin of invoicing, policies, risk assessments etc and elements of routine maintenance continue as before. We also continue to support elements of administration for St Margaret's.

*Andrew Topple
Church Administrator*

Fabric Report

It has been another busy year maintaining the premise, which as we all know are heavily used by so many people and for such a wide range of activities. We had no major expenditure and it is reasonable to say that the works undertaken are largely routine repairs and renewals. Below is a summary of the various works undertaken:

- Installed new drainage in car park to stop flooding when the soakaways reach capacity
- Missing drain grate in car park replaced
- Volunteer day in garden, raised beds, brickwork repaired to existing beds. painting and repair to benches
- Fitted Wi-Fi extender in the worship area
- Replaced main lighting ring in worship area with LED battens
- In the process of replacing existing lights throughout with LED units as required

- Replaced light switch in the Quiet room
- Resolved drainage issues to the toilets
- Replaced siphon and toilet seat in Ladies toilet
- Maintenance of heating system including replacing thermostatic valves as required
- Replaced water boiler in Kitchen and adapted plumbing to accommodate the new coffee machine
- On-going maintenance to the roof in attempt to keep the water out and prevent damage to the electrics and fire alarm

Mal, continues to support with on-going maintenance and varnish to the floor in the hall and Eddie has assisted with a number of jobs which helps us significantly to maintain the building and manage the maintenance costs. Many thanks to Mal, Eddie and others who assist us.

Martin Kerins

'St Stephen's Building for the Future'

Our church centre continues to be a focal point for Mission and community involvement. But our building needs attention if it is to be in the service of Mission for the years to come. There are two parts to the project which aims on the one hand to repair serious roof leaks and on the other, to move to green energy, radically cutting our CO2 emissions and making energy affordable into the future.

Green energy project.

For some months these proposals have been well advanced. We have detailed costed plans for installing PV panels, batteries, air source heat pumps and radiators and a preferred contractor. A planning application has been filed for the PV panels. This will be followed by an application for permissions from the Diocese.

Repairs to leaking roof

Members who have been around for some time will already be aware that there has been a longstanding intermittent problem with water ingress around the perimeter of the worship area and elsewhere in the 25-year-old parts of the church centre. During the first half of 2023, there was little progress on the roof repair issue because of long delays caused by our surveyors. Matters came to a head in July and August 2023 with the very late delivery of a plan of works and the erosion of our trust that this company was competent to assist us during the process of inviting tenders for the work. There were also unresolved queries about certain important recommendations they had made. One such concerned the wooden structure supporting the worship area roof. It was suggested that the structure was pushing outwards at roof level, contributing to the water leaks. There was little evidence cited for this but nonetheless, the surveyors recommended installing a reinforcing steel frame which would have been very expensive and intrusive. Our relationship with this company ended in September 2023.

We have been regrouping since then taking advice from the architectural firm which carries out our "quinquennial" inspections. Recently, a structural engineer's report has ruled out significant problems with the wooden structure somewhat simplifying the roofing issue. A next step is to identify a lead professional to review the plan for the roof repair and devise a new plan of works. So, we are getting back on track.

What next?

At the point when the PV panels part of the scheme has all necessary permissions (in the next couple of months) we can begin to seek donations and launch fundraising for the whole St Stephen's Building for the Future scheme. This will be added to funds already set aside for the project from the church's reserves. John Clifton is standing down as churchwarden but will continue project managing the scheme on a week-to-week basis, accountable to the standing committee and the PCC, and ably assisted by our administrator Andrew Topple. However, we need an enthusiastic fundraiser to help with the project. Could that be you?

John Clifton

Messy Church

Messy church is always busy and it is a great way for people to experience church.

We have a team of helpers who take charge of a particular activity, and they always have great craft or talking ideas.

It is lovely to see all the different generations there, it is a real expression of family. It is also a relaxed atmosphere where parents of children with special educational needs feel comfortable to come, without worrying that their children might make too much noise.

It's also a great place for people to ask questions about God. It is lovely to see the teenagers getting involved in running tables too.

We have explored many topics as well as the normal church seasonal ones.

Rev Belinda Kerins

Kids' Club

Kids' Club meets at 11am in the hall on the second and fourth Sunday of the month. Lesley, Mum (Beryl) and I organise the second Sunday. Emma currently leads on the fourth Sunday. She was joined by Anna who helped before she went to university last September.

We usually begin with a game and then have a Bible story. As we follow the Lectionary, the children hear the same reading as the adults in church. This is usually followed by crafts, colourings and puzzles based on the Bible reading. We also join the congregation for Communion.

It has been lovely to see the children grow in understanding and confidence this year.

Alison

Ecumenical Working

This increasingly feels like "business as usual" for St Stephen's and Wimpole Road, but like everything else we mustn't become complacent and continue to look for new and innovative ways to work closely together to bring the Good News to our local community of New Town and the Hythe.

The weekly Zoom Prayer meeting continues and even though relatively few attend it is a wonderful way to share in prayer together. The Bible Study group has met less frequently, but forms the bedrock of our joint Lent and Advent study courses.

Our joint Pentecost Service on the Recreation Ground was well supported last year and we were blessed with good weather for this and it was a joy to see Wimpole Road Church full for the joint annual Christmas Carol service and to have contributions of reading and prayer provided by members of all three Churches.

In terms of our other work it is such a joy to have St Stephens supporting the annual Community Day on the Recreation Ground in a number of ways including in no small part providing the BBQ to say nothing for the support given at the Toddler Group and the Coffee Morning. Once again we produced and distributed joint Christmas cards with Wimpole Road for distribution across the parish. The presents and practical support from Louise our Community Worker is another blessing.

As this work continues and develops it would be easy to overlook what a blessing it is to be able to work in this way. We must continue to thank God for the opportunities which he has provided us all with and pray that this invaluable work continues to grow.

Andrew Topple

Church Administrator & Member of Wimpole Road Methodist Church

Community Worker

Since starting the Community Worker role in September, it has been a time of learning and finding my place exploring what it means to be a Community Worker!

I have been meeting lots of members of the community and those who offer help in different forms; whether being volunteers of the food banks, citizens advice, YMCA youth group leaders and also those who lead and arrange

events at St Margaret's and Wimpole Road Church, helping to create more links between St Stephens and those who live within the Parish.

Some of the events that I have attended or taken part with are:

Over 60s Lunch Club at St Stephen's,
Rainbow Tots,
Wimpole Road Warm Space Coffee Morning,
Wimpole Road Toddler Group,
Make Lunch at Wimpole Road
Foodbank,
The Hub,
Community Fun Day events at St Stephens,
Messy Church at St Margaret's,
Little Lambs at St Margaret's,
Community Cafe & Foodbank at St Margaret's

Being part of these events that have taken place has meant that I've been able to invite and share the details with people / families who would benefit from the activities or events that take place across the three churches in the area. This has also enabled me to understand more about the needs of the local community and how we might support these.

Other very useful contacts have been established with a number of community leaders and groups within the area including the local councillors and Community Support staff from Colchester Council.

I have also run two further very successful Slow Cooker Events taking place at St Stephens; the most recent in January had 13 participants of varying family sizes attending, being supportive of each other and thankful for the food parcels and recipes across the 6 week course. This has led to some of the participants now regularly joining us at St Stephens for church services, as well as The Hub on a Saturday which is a wonderful by product of the event.

Starting in April there will be the first Slow Cooker Event at St Margaret's Church running alongside the Foodbank and Community Cafe, we have 12 participants signed up for the 6 week course taking place there. I am really looking forward to this event and being able to help and support those in that area of the community.

The Rainbows, Brownies & Scouts continue to meet in the hall each week. I assist in the leadership of the Brownies and Rainbows, which have full packs. All these groups are an important part of our Church community & it was a joy to have them attend our Remembrance Day service and to host the Scouts Christmas Carol Service.

There are other various things in the pipelines that I am starting to arrange and set up which I am really looking forward too. The past 8 months have been exciting and I am really thankful for the opportunities that I have been given in this role. I also wanted to say thank you to all those who have helped, supported or prayed for me - it's really appreciated!

Louise Brown
Community Worker

Over 60's Luncheon Club

We have had another successful year at the lunch club with fifty members on the register and between 30-40 members attending each month. Due to some generous donations we have still been able to provide a two course lunch with tea & coffee and entertainment of either prize bingo or a prize quiz for £5.00 per person. This, most likely, will have to be reviewed after the summer holidays and with effect from September due to the increase of food prices.

All who attend are always extremely grateful of a warm meal and a chance to socialise with others, which of course we wouldn't be able to provide if it wasn't for our amazing group of helpers.

Jill Liddamore

Hub Café (The Saturday cafe, formerly known as Chill Out Café)

The cafe has become a hive of activity. Whilst the cafe is in the foyer, there is the Lego club, war hammer club and knit and natter in the church. All three tables have children and adults taking part and the activities are still gaining new members.

The cafe has regulars from all walks of the community, from all ages too. It is lovely to watch friendships grow and watch people feel part of our Saturday family.

Our new barista coffee machine has been worth its weight in gold and has made the cafe more professional, as well as, increasing profit and decreasing waste.

We now have built up good relationships with the parents of the dance class that takes place on the hall and lots of them have become part of the Hub too. We have had lots of Sunday baptisms from the cafe and the cafe will hold its first Saturday baptism in two weeks' time. One of our families are not only having their second child baptised but have asked to get married next year.

The Hub is a cafe where people congregate for cake and coffee, but it has become a caring community, that encourage and care for each other.

Rev Belinda Kerins

Lego Club

Lego club started in September 2023 and has been a wonderful success. Week by week the numbers grow, with an average attendance of 20 people a week. We have a variety of ages and abilities that attend and it is great to see everyone's imagination flourish with the weekly challenge that I set them.

We have also had some generous contributions of Lego which we are extremely grateful for.

I look forward to continue building on the success we have started.

Brick Man aka James Maddison

Rainbow Tots

This year Rainbow tots has been running successfully with 3 volunteers.

Amie Ward has been stepping in to help with the group as our 3rd volunteer.

Louise Brown and myself as the core volunteers.

The group varies from week to week. We see new parents to the area visiting from outside Newtown. We have supported local parents that come to Rainbow Tots and have a small core of parents and children who attend some weeks and others who pop in when they can. Attendance varies weekly but I would say we average about between 5 to 10 children a week.

It's a great way of getting to know the 'new' local parents who have recently moved into the area and we also invite them to other groups happening in church -Messy Church, Knit and Natter, Lego Club, Warhammer Club and the fund raising events that are on.

Denise, Louise and Amie.

Foodbank

The Foodbank has continued to open twice a week throughout the year. Numbers remain variable and we did see a significant dip in demand for food parcels in April May 2023, which seemed to align with the weather getting better and we suspect a reduction in heating costs as a result.

However, we still have a flow of people attending, largely from the local area, along with others who come in more for the company and a cup of tea or coffee. This has also continued to provide a point of referral to and from the Hub Cafe and the Warm Welcome Warm Space at Wimpole Road Church and we have continued to run the Slow Cooker Clubs alongside this.

Citizen's Advice continues to attend regularly and provide an invaluable service to many who attend.

Our loyal and hardworking volunteers from St Stephen's, Wimpole Road and the local community have enabled us to keep the Foodbank running and offer a warm and friendly welcome to all those who attend.

Andrew Topple
Local Foodbank Co-Ordinator

Youthy

There are 51 young people registered with up to 27 people attending each week. Engagement levels are tracked half termly using an engagement ladder; it is really positive to see that the engagement is at an average of 3. In practice this looks like young people:

- Joining in
- Handling conflict with maturity
- Enjoying positive relationships with staff and peers
- Responding to instruction

Young people really enjoy playing card games, doing arts and crafts and socialising together. We have a number of young people who thoroughly enjoy gymnastics, dance and singing and are often seen creating and practicing routines. Attendees like that there are different areas to go to so they can sit in a comfortable place to chat, have space to play games, or go to a quieter area when they want some down time.

Frequent learning opportunities arise as young people raise questions around topics such as relationships, mental health and self-confidence. Young people talk about their aspirations for their future as well as feeling able to express their worries as well. This balance demonstrates the fantastic relationships that have been built between young people and youth workers. Numerous attendees have expressed difficulties with their mental health and have been offered strategies and tools to support them. Some are already accessing outside support, such as CAMHS, and openly discuss this with staff. Young people feel that youth club is a safe space for them to share food, relax, play games and build friendships. With the cost of living crisis affecting many families, youth club offers a much needed opportunity to be in a warm environment and to be able to share food. Attendees enjoy sharing the snacks and food on offer each week and they frequently get involved with the preparation. A favourite this term has been pitta pizzas, where they each added their own choice of toppings and then cooked and enjoyed them. In the lead up to Christmas they enjoyed some wonderful group games and challenges. These offered a great opportunity for friendly competition and chance for everyone to work together to do their best as a team.

We continue to be grateful to our wonderful volunteers at St Stephen's. It is great to see the young people so focused in Badminton and it's fantastic to see their skills and confidence grow week-on-week. One young person told me 'I love playing Badminton here, I'd never done it before and it's the best thing about coming here!'. Young people are truly grateful for the new activities and opportunities they gain through youth club.

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April 2024