

**Report to the Annual Parochial
Church Meeting of
The Parish of New Town and the
Hythe for 2025
St Stephen's Church Centre**



Meeting to be held on 06 April 2025



Reports for APCM April 2025

Annual Priest-In-Charge Report

Introduction

As I write this report it is now 6 months since I was appointed as Priest-in-Charge of both St Stephen's, New Town & The Hythe, and St Margaret's, Berechurch. While things still feel very new, things have been packed full of activity and hope for a new season. Despite only being in post for a little over 6 months, I will do my best to share for the full year, however as I arrived in September 2024, the main focus of the report will be from September until March.

Incumbent overview

Being one incumbent over the two churches and parishes has so many blessings, as well as the obvious challenges, and the surprising ones too! The connection between the two churches is such a gift, and one that I feel will blossom into more over time. We are so much richer together, and the supportive and positive relationships that were already established before I arrived have been so encouraging. My role specifically will inevitably evolve over time, as I fully settle and we all grow into God's plans for us. I am so grateful for the warm welcome that I have received here and for your ongoing prayers and support.

For New Town and The Hythe, I am privileged to be a governor at Kendall Church of England Primary School, as well as chair of trustees for Mary Magdalen Almshouse charity. It is an exciting time to be here at St Stephen's with the Building Project - this is now well established with a committee and well led by John C. Our PCC continue to meet and pray, and we recently had a joint Pancake Party with St Margaret's PCC at the vicarage, which we hope will become an annual tradition. We have a Vision Day planned as PCC to pause and seek God together and pray for the next steps for our church. This will have taken place before the APCM and I will be delighted to share some highlights then. In the spirit of listening and discerning, I am also arranging a church survey, with the help of Michael. This will be coming very soon, and I encourage as many of you as possible to give honest feedback, with full assurance that it is anonymous!

This last year has consisted of many new beginnings; however we have also said some goodbyes as well. Whilst this is always hard, we trust that God has plans for each of us, and pray every blessing for those who have moved on. In February we said goodbye to Dan, who had been curate here since 2021. We wish him and his family well as he begins his incumbency in Suffolk Diocese. This APCM also marks the end of Martin's tenure as Church Warden. We are so thankful for his incredible dedication in this role and are delighted to have his continued input and support with our building project. Fiona and Philip are also stepping down from PCC, and we thank them for their prayerful service during their time. Fiona has especially advocated for Sensory Alliance and Philip has been key in our Alpha courses; we are very grateful for their input.

So much of what we do cannot happen without the right foundations. I would particularly like to thank Michael Watkins, who has diligently worked to get our safeguarding practices up to standard, with the training and the DBS checks. This is such crucial work, and a key outworking of our faith. Our hope is that the church will be the safest place, and we want to reflect God's love through that. This is an on-going work, and I am very grateful to Michael for overseeing this, as well as those who help process the forms, and all members who have undertaken the necessary training - it is very appreciated.

Worship

Before I even started this role, I said that I felt it important that I commit to one church each Sunday, in order to be fully present with you all before, during and after the services, and not rushing off afterwards. This was unanimously supported by all who I spoke with about this; the feeling of being present was mutual, and so I have generally alternate between St Stephen's and St Margaret's where possible, ensuring the overall balance is equal between the two. I also responded to much feedback about the service times having been changed over recent years, and a plea for them to be returned to what they were. A first act of teamwork and compromise between the two parishes has resulted in both churches now having morning services at 10.15am. The hope is that just one time is easier to remember (especially when we have joint services!)

Our regular pattern of services has remained unchanged:

1st Sunday Messy Church

2nd Sunday Holy Communion

3rd Sunday Cafe Church

4th Sunday Holy Communion

5th Sunday - All Age, joint with St Margaret's (venue alternating)

We are so thankful to Lesley, Ali, Beryl, Rachel and Emma who lead our children's work on the 2nd and 4th Sundays. This is such an important ministry, sharing not only the Bible teachings, but also the love of Christ with our young people.

We continue to have mid-week service on Wednesdays, with communion led by Christine, and until he left, Dan, and with morning prayer, led by John C. This service has grown to a strong number that support each other in faith, 'like a house group', and are able to welcome in new members as well.

There are so many people who contribute to our services, which is a beautiful picture of the body of Christ, all blessing each other in the ways that we can. I would like to thank our music groups, it is wonderful to see so many musicians and singers, and so much diversity - this really enriches our services. Thank you to Sheila, Mal, Belinda and Janet for organising this and holding it all together. Thank you also to our laptop and sound desk team, who ensure that we can hear this wonderful music, read the words and the liturgy, and bring to life the ideas of the service leaders - who often ask for things last minute. Your work is invaluable. As are the refreshment team, thank you for serving us in a very real way, it is such a godly thing to offer food and drink, and for our church to be able to provide nourishment in a physical as well as a spiritual way. All of this matters to God. Which is especially true for cafe church, with special thanks to Debbie and Denise for ensuring this always happens, and Denise and Laura at Messy church too. Our team of intercessors and readers are also key people, and we would love to see this area grow. We are so grateful to all of you for contributing, and I would especially like to mention Holly, our youngest intercessor, who inspires us at Messy church to pour out our hearts to God. You are such a gift to all of us.

With myself alternating between the two churches, we are in a brilliant position to nurture the leadership gifts of many others, especially lay leaders. We are blessed to continue to have our wonderful curate Belinda, and Christine, our retired priest, we also are fortunate to have Jackie from St Margaret's who is willing to lead when able. Our connections with Wimpole Road Methodist also mean that we are blessed with their leaders in our joint services at Christmas, and our weekly 3Together online service on Facebook on Sunday evenings. Thank you to Andrew for organising and to all who contribute. Please do continue to pray into this area, as we look to the future of our worship services and how we can grow and develop as a church community.

I have recently introduced the Lent course, which is running on Tuesday evenings at St Stephen's and Wednesday mornings at St Margaret's. It has been such joy, on a personal level, to go deeper into our faith together. Also to see the congregations continuing to mix, and form deeper relationships, is so encouraging, and enriching for all of our faith.

I am continuing to listen to what you share with me about our services, and what you feel we need more of, in terms of your own personal journeys and collectively as a church. At the same, I bring this in prayer, and continually seek God's will for this wonderful place. We have spoken a lot about discipleship and a desire for more of this, for both new and established Christians, as well as our young people. This is something I am hoping will come into fruition next year. the Lent course has felt like a wonderful first step in this direction. I am also hopeful that we will hold another confirmation service next year, as we have several candidates interested.

Many thanks to Belinda, who organised the confirmation service at St Stephen's, with Bishop Roger in November 2024, with several candidates giving moving testimonies.

Pastoral

This is so often the ministry work that, due to its very nature, remains unseen. I am always honoured when someone asks me to pray with them, and talk through questions or challenges about their faith. So much of church is relational, just as our Trinitarian God is relationship in his very nature. To connect, to see and be seen, to hear and be heard, is the essence of being loved and loving in return, which is the essence of our faith.

Weddings, funerals and baptisms continue to happen throughout the parish, and these bring the wonderful opportunity to get to know a family and support them at key points in their lives. When someone who doesn't usually attend church, reaches out for church involvement in these times, this often expresses an underlying desire for God, even if they cannot articulate that fully or understand why themselves. This is a deeply pastoral ministry and is a privilege to share Jesus' love in a practical way of togetherness.

School Connections

As well as being school governor, I have many opportunities to connect with our local schools. Partly because there are quite a few in our parish (and across Berechurch too) and also because of such wonderful pre-existing relationships with the schools. We have had Kendall and St George's in to visit, and for termly services for Kendall students, staff and parents. We are also regularly invited in to schools to contribute to the RE curriculum and share quite openly about how our faith affects our lives and what we do as a church. There is a huge demand for this from our local schools, and Belinda, Louise, Andrew, Denise and Dan all contribute to this work. We recently had three classes from St George's come to St Stephen's to find out about baptism and have their class baby 'baptised'. It is a privilege to allow children an opportunity to ask open questions about big topics like faith, in an environment where their curiosity is safe and accepted.

Mission and Evangelism

There can be no doubt that St Stephen's strength is in its outward facing, missional attitude. So many people share with me that they have been so warmly welcomed here, and a glance at our Facebook page alone reveals so much activity within the parish. There is a real heart from our congregations for our parish - to welcome and include others - and to support those who God puts on our hearts. The specific reports from others will give a fuller picture, and special thanks must go to our dedicated Community Worker, Louise, who oversees and facilitates so much of our community work. This would not be possible without the invaluable support of Andrew, our Administrator, who works so earnestly across both St Stephen's and St Margaret's, together with Louise: maintaining our link with Wimpole Road Methodist Church and ensuring the smooth running of our social media, hall hiring, office administration and smooth running of many of our activities. Things like ensuring our electricity is paid, and on the best rate, may not be the first thing we think of when it comes to mission, but are essential to other things happening.

None of our missional activities would be possible without the hard work of so many individuals. Much like our wonderful wardens, Martin and Ian, who oversee the smooth running of our buildings, and faithfully serve us each week. Their contributions are immeasurable and so very much appreciated. As Martin steps down from his tenure as warden, we look back with much thanks and gratitude for all he has so generously done in his time in the role.

Belinda has led another successful Alpha course with Hannah from the Methodist Church, this has also been helped by Beth & Philip and many others who have offered welcome and hospitality. Several members have been engaged with the Lent course as well, and have been welcomed into the church. There is certainly an appetite for more events and course like this, especially as we connect with so many people within our communities. We continue to pray for resource (helpers!) to facilitate these outreach activities.

Our Community Hub Cafe continues to thrive on Saturdays, under the leadership of Belinda and Denise: the sheer volume of their helpers is so encouraging. More people are always needed for this, and I do encourage you to pray for and consider if there is any way you can support this missional area, or any others.

YMCA continues to run the Youth Club (Thursday evenings) and Holiday Clubs. This is often celebrated by the community, as providing a much needed space for our young people. We continue to hope and pray to be able to offer discipleship, and Christian focused youth work for those young people who seek to go deeper in their faith. It is so encouraging that so many young people in our parish already connect with St Stephen's, and know it is as a safe place where they belong. If any church members have a particular skill or craft they would be willing to share with the young people in a session, please do get in touch, as they would warmly welcome this. As Mal and Sheila have done previously, with badminton, table tennis and music respectively and not forgetting Debbie who is so often helping in the kitchen on a Thursday.

Louise and Denise continue to successfully run Rainbow Tots, along with Amie, Shauna and Laura. There are new people coming and relationships continuing to grow. It is wonderful to be able to connect these families in with our other events, like Messy Church and the Community Hub Cafe.

The 'Over 60s' Lunch Club also continues to thrive, and is a wonderful place for people to connect over food and company. The team really do put so much effort in to make this a special occasion; thank you so much to Jill, Debbie, Claire, Laura, Chris, Louise and many others who make this happen. More recently Belinda has also started up a Singing for Fun Group on the 4th Monday of the month, supported by Louise, Denise and Andrew as needed and Louise is also exploring new opportunity to support some of our more senior members of the community.

At Christmas we were able to send our traditional Ecumenical Christmas card, helped once again by the Scouts. This is such an effective way to share our Christmas services with the local area, which were very well attended, and encouragingly are very much enquired about from our community. In our culture and society in 2025, traditional Christmas services may not immediately look like mission, however for many people, this is a time when they seek God, or look for some stability and tradition in our current climate. I would like to thank Annie for organising the flowers as St Stephen's (for the whole year, not just at Christmas!) This is a beautiful addition to our worship space, that adds to the welcome people receive when they come. I would also like to thank Chris L for organising the carol singing, and sharing the reason for the season, through song, in our community.

Belinda continues to lead an evening prayer service on the 5th Sunday at St Leonard's at the Hythe, which is a wonderful opportunity for us to reach into this part of our parish and connect with the ancient church, that has been a place of prayer and worship for many centuries. The Friends of St. Leonard's are brilliant at helping facilitate things in the building, and we do have enquiries about its use for weddings and other services. We want to acknowledge the hard work that they put in, and thank them for maintaining this beautiful building of our faith. We continue to pray for how we can develop mission in this part of our parish and best service this community with the resources that we have.

This last year has seen the launch of Neurospicy, led and organised by Annie. A support group for additional needs; the practical, pastoral, and physical challenges on these families cannot be underestimated. It is such an area of need within our community, and we are thankful to Annie for creating space for that support within our church.

Conclusion

Activities are wonderful, but people are so much more wonderful! For those who I have not named, largely for reasons of me being new still, please know that you are appreciated, wanted and loved. Thankfully, unlike the incumbent, God sees it all, and knows every sacrifice, every act of generosity, and every act of faith that everyone gives. Our church is our family, and I am so thankful to have been chosen by you and appointed to be part of this family. You have made me and my household feel so welcome already, and we are excited and expectant for what lies ahead. I would especially like to thank the PCC and so many volunteers, who have held things during the interregnum (vacancy): it is not an easy time for a church and it should be noted that you have handled it with grace and faithfulness.

*Rev Anna Davis
Priest-In Charge
St Stephen's and St Margaret's Churches*

Financial Review for year ending 31st December 2024

Unrestricted Church Income

Voluntary Income saw a 15% decrease compared to 2023. Taking Account of tax to be recovered on Gift Aid that was still due to be claimed at the close of the year the decrease is about 8%. Collections and free will offerings at services also decreased, resulting in a 7.9 % decrease 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 and for those who started making regular payments in 2024. Regular voluntary giving and Gift Aid receipts are the largest source of funds, providing 72% of church receipts (excluding interest) and 37% of total unrestricted receipts in 2024.

General Fundraising receipts remained high, increasing by 83%. 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 6% compared to 2023.

Interest of £11,057 was the result of investing the Bequest received in 2023 into the interest earning CCLA General Deposit Fund

Fees Income was higher primarily because we had a wedding at the church in in 2024.

Church Payments

The Parish Share which we paid in full, was 2.9% higher than 2023 and accounted for 67% of church expenditure in 2024.

Expenses that changed significantly in 2024 were:

- New Equipment – the main item was a new Cooker £6364. A Grant is expected to be received in 2025 to cover at least part of this
- Christmas Tree- this included 2023 tree as well as 2024

Building Project –Total expenditure of £16,009 shared equally with the Church Centre, made up as follows:

➤ Morton Partnership	£660
➤ Brett Design	£900
➤ RT Solar	£596
➤ R Bedford	£12,000

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

Neurospicy

A grant of £296.48 was received for this new project based at St Stephens supporting the Neuro divergent and their families, of which £190.76 was spent in 2024.

Church Centre

Rental Income increased by 15% on 2023 and Payments increased by 14.9% (excluding Building Project Costs.) The cost of the Cleaning Contractor increased by 21%. Even taking this into account the Church centre raised a surplus of £6,831 at the end of the year, £14,836 net of Building Project Costs.

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

Total Church and Centre Receipts of £88,639 and total expenditure of £101,697 give a deficit of receipts over payments of £13,058 at 31 December 2024.

If receipts and payments net of Building Project and restricted income are taken into account, Church and Centre receipts £87,386 and expenditure of £85,607 gives a surplus of receipts over payments of £1,779 on Unrestricted Funds at 31 December 2024.

Restricted Funds

Mission Fund. The only addition to this fund was Interest. As at 31 December the fund had decreased by £447 on 2023 closing balance.

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 Fund

The original fund held in this account was used up in 2024. £2,245 was transferred into this fund from the CCLA General Fund during 2024. Funds to cover the remainder of the fixed term in September 2026 will be moved into this fund from the CCLA General fund as necessary. Funds have been ring-fenced within the General Deposit Account to cover the Community Worker until September 2026.

Defibrillator Fund

This fund was opened in 2024 as a place to hold funds raised and expenditure incurred to purchase and maintain a Defibrillator which is now mounted on the wall adjacent to the main entrance to the church. The remaining balance is being held to cover future service and maintenance.

Balance Sheet and Reserve Funds Policy

£234,668.14 was held in Deposit funds of which £227,712.12 was in the unrestricted General Deposit Fund. In 2024 £31,800 was withdrawn, £26,655 of this was transferred into the General Current Account to cover Building Project costs and £5,145 to pay for the Community Worker. After interest accrued the net reduction in 2024 in the General Deposit fund was £20,743.

The closing balance on the Current Account, net of Restricted Funds, was £11,000.07. On 31 December a total of £23,8712.19 was held in Unrestricted Funds, compared with £24,7522 at 31.12.23. After taking sums set aside for the Building Project and Community Worker into account there are sufficient funds 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

It's been a busy year. The ministry team has welcomed in Anna whilst also sending off Dan. There have been new groups started, more guests welcomed and so much more. We truly are an incredible group of people.

Reverend Anna's Lent course is currently in progress and is facilitating good conversations and fellowship. It really is a good way to meet other people and to hear their stories and experiences. We look forward to other possible opportunities to do the same again.

Building wise we are seeing traction on multiple projects now. While we do refer to it as a building project in the singular term it is in fact a combination of three or four phases. Internally we have had some clear outs and planning more to better improve the usage and efficiency of the cupboard space.

Those of you who volunteer your time in one of the many groups, sound desk, band or making tea and coffees through the week really do help to make our Church a special place, somewhere safe and somewhere to help the community. And we still have plenty of space for more people to join in with any volunteer work; please do speak to Anna or myself if you would like to be more involved.

Final bit of change for this year is Martin Kerins time as warden has come to an end. He has served as Warden for his full term and I know we all thank him for his work and devotion to his tasks.

*Ian Brown
For Ian Brown & Martin Kerins
Churchwardens*

Safeguarding

In the current climate and in the light of recent events, safeguarding has never been more important. I do believe, however, that at St Stephen's we are in a strong position from which to improve further as guidelines and expectations evolve. Much progress has been made in the processing of the necessary DBS checks and the central record is now showing many more 'green boxes' and far fewer red ones! Folk are coming forward, wanting to access training and it has been my privilege to guide them towards the most appropriate resources. We must remain alert to situations and concerns within our community - and true safeguarding is exactly that - a whole-community effort. Please don't hesitate to talk to me or any member of the PCC if you have any questions or concerns and thank you for your support as we navigate our way forward in faith.

God bless

Michael Watkins
Safeguarding Officer

Church Administration

The day to day administration has continued to run smoothly throughout the year with the wide range of routine tasks, regular inspections etc. all happening as needed. Small scale projects, such as the new cooker installation, has been overseen and arranged by the administrator with time also invested in the meeting and planning for the larger building project which will hopefully commence during 2025 (please see later article for more information about this).

The new Presenter software used largely for Sunday morning worship now seems to be well embedded and working well and has been found to be invaluable for other events such as Singing For Fun and Christmas Hub Cafe.

Hall hiring enquiries have remained relatively strong and consistent with the number of actual bookings for the year being in the low 30s and in line with 2003. Regular hiring remains solid with the hall and other parts of the building being well used by both regular hirers and Church groups. There is still capacity, especially on a Friday to further grow this, which if we could find hirers for some of the gaps during the week would help further with income generation. We are blessed by our regular users who all work closely with us and with whom we have an excellent relationship.

2025 will see our fixed term contracts for both gas and electricity coming up for renewal with the expectation that the rates will rise (quite significantly for the gas as we come to the end of a 4 year contract). In support of the treasurer, all day to day costs are closely monitored by the administrator.

Andrew Topple
Church Administrator

Fabric Report

The Church always needs more and more work every year. Outside of the large scale roof project and PV panels/heating. We have had many new bulbs installed, chairs glued and toilets unblocked! Routine and ongoing maintenance this year has included:

Gas boiler service, inspection and repair as needed

Fridges repaired

New coffee machine and water boiler in the kitchen

New ovens installed – part funded by a grant from the Diocese

Cupboards sorted out and new shelving in the Music Room

Defib machine fitted – monies raised from the Danceathon

Front metal work repainted – thanks to the Community Payback Teams

Lights in hall replaced with low energy LED units

Hall floor sanded and varnished

Various replaced radiator valves and new heating controllers installed

New cleaning contractors appointed

On-going tap and washer replacements and toilet repairs

For further details about the planned building works, please see John Clifton's 'St Stephen's Building for the Future' comprehensive report below.

The amazing team of Mal, Eddie, Martin, Chris and the gardening crew and many others cover most of these issues often saving the church a lot of money in fees.

Martin Kerins & Ian Brown

'St Stephen's Building for the Future'

What the project is all about

This is a major building project with the ambition to address two main issues.

The first is water leaking into the worship area and a number of places covered by the flat roof in the middle of the centre. This has been happening for many years but has been getting worse as a result of wear and tear and climate change. Its main cause is faulty construction at the time the new church was built around 25 years ago. In addition, the flat roof needs replacing. If these issues are not addressed the church will deteriorate and eventually become unusable for worship, mission activities and community use.

The second is that we will soon have to replace our inefficient and ailing gas boilers. This provides an opportunity (in line with the Church of England's to plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030) to cut our carbon footprint and move to renewable energy sources for space and water heating.

Progress during the year

In the middle months of 2024 we shared our outline plan for structural repairs and renewable energy with the Diocese who visited and suggested that we appoint a surveyor to ascertain the problems to be resolved and help us create and manage a detailed plan to carry out the necessary works.

Following a competitive process, we appointed a surveyor, Richard Bedford, in September. He produced a thorough "defect report" identifying serious problems in the parapets and the window ledges which surround the octagonal roof of the worship area. He also examined the flat roof over the lobby, kitchen and other central rooms, concluding that it needed replacement rather than patching.

In November, the PCC agreed to the creation of a building sub committee to oversee the project. This consists of John Clifton, Building Project Manager, Martin Kerins and Ian Brown, Churchwardens, Denise Asquez, PCC Secretary, Andrew Topple, Church Administrator and Eddie Weller, PCC member.

On Richard Bedford's advice, we appointed consultants for particular aspects of the project. Garland, a company that manufactures roofing systems, was asked to create a plan to over-cover the roof, parapets and ledges. Williams Holloway's task was to assess the heating requirements for each part of the building and suggest non-fossil fuel sourced solutions to space and water heating requirements. A Quantity Surveyor was also commissioned to estimate the cost of the project. Having clarified the task in hand and introduced consultants whose role it would be to produce a specification of works for the roof and for the energy system, Richard Bedford decided to leave the project. This was unexpected, but members of the building sub committee have taken over Richard's role with no difficulty to date and will keep under review whether it is necessary to appoint another professional in the future.

Where we are now

Regarding the roof repairs, Garland have now devised a specification of works. This will need elucidation of the preliminary building tasks to be completed before new roofing material can be laid. This will include the replacement of smaller skylights and vents extruding from the flat roof and the removal of the dome over the children's playroom. When all of this is complete, Garland will help us to put the work out to tender to three suitable builder/roofing companies.

A similar process is well advanced with Williams Holloway regarding the heating system. One important change has been made to the original concept for heating the church centre. Prior to the Williams Holloway's assessment, a plan had been proposed to heat the centre with an air source heat pump sited on a platform on the flat roof over the kitchen area which used the existing pipes and radiators (an air to water system).

However, on balance, an air conditioning system (air to air) is judged to suit the buildings better. Both systems run on electricity but the air conditioner system will produce more power per Kw of electricity. It can be used to cool areas during heat waves. Also, the power units would not need to be sited on the roof which greatly simplifies engineering challenges and allow us to tackle each part of the project separately. This means that roof repair, heating installation and photovoltaic panel installation do not have to be done in any particular order. This is a big help with planning.

Sources of funding

How much will it all cost? The quantity surveyor, working earlier in the process calculated that it would cost £730,000. However, the recent simplification of the heating proposal and other savings lead the subcommittee to the belief that the QS estimate is now too high. Following the shortly-to-be-commenced tendering process we will have a much more accurate figure for the true cost. That will also help us with grants application.

We have reserves as a result of a bequest. The Colchester Churches Trust has committed to £10,000 payable when work starts. We are through to the next round of application for Demonstrators Church which is worth up to £84,000 for renewable energy. Other grant applications are in the pipeline.

Your donations and fundraising are really important not just for the meeting the target but also to demonstrate to grant providers that we are all committed to renewing our church building and making it suitable for worship, mission and for the multifarious activities which already happen and will evolve in future. We are much encouraged by a recent donation of £10,000. Also by contributions from fundraising events so far.

Prayer for the project is vital: wisdom for those in the sub committee and PCC; for the finance to allow us to complete the work. We also need a person or persons to coordinate fundraising activities.

John Clifton
Project Manager

Messy Church

Messy Church is still very popular with our youngest and oldest taking part. I think we normally have at least 50 people attend and we see some people that only come to Messy Church.

We have tried to follow the church calendar and explore all the church festivals and important seasons, as well as using the Messy magazines for tips and ideas.

We have a nice team of helpers which makes the service possible. It has been lovely to have Brickman as a regular member of the Messy Team and he is always a popular activity. We still have our Lego Jesus and Lego-stained glass cross proudly on display.

Louise Foster and Sarah have also joined the team of volunteers.

It was lovely to have Reverend Anna take one of our Messy Church services in March too.

Messy church is always a pleasure to lead and a great way to express church.

Rev Belinda Kerins

Kids' Club

Since last summer, we have been delighted to welcome Rachel to the Kids' Club team. Rachel helps Emma on the fourth Sunday of the month.

Recently, Lesley, Beryl and I discovered that several of the children enjoy acting. As a result, on the second Sunday of the month, the children use drama to act out the Bible story. This is followed by activities, puzzles and crafts based on the theme of the day. After Communion, the children share this with the congregation.

It has been lovely to see the children growing in confidence, faith and understanding.

Alison

Ecumenical Working

Our Ecumenical working with Wimpole Road has continued to develop with Lent & Easter activities (including the Lent Course) being joint and co-ordinated. The joint Pentecost service on the Recreation Ground went well and we concluded with the wonderful joint Christmas Carol Service. The joint ALPHA courses led by Rev Belinda & Rev Hannah have been a blessing.

On a practical basis our Churches are working well together supporting each other with community events such as Toddler Groups, Coffee Mornings, Community Day, the Foodbank and Soup Run and our schools work.

Andrew Topple
Church Administrator & Member of Wimpole Road Methodist Church

Community Worker

It has been another busy year since last writing for the APCM report as the Community Worker and the list of activities and events is quite a long one!

There have been three Slow Cooker events taken place this past year; both St Margaret's and St Stephen's simultaneously and with another running currently at St Margaret's with thanks to local councillors for the grant funding for this project. Some of the members from the past Slow Cooker Groups are still present at events that we host, as well as attending some of the services we offer too!

Hosting a 'Summer Lunch Club' was well received in August and from conversations recently I am looking to run another event on a Monday at St Stephen's alongside Lunch Club and Singing For Fun. Watch this space for more information soon.

There have been great meetings and link ups with others - including Social Prescribers at local doctors surgeries, Sodexo and local councillors too! Sodexo were a wonderful support to the New Town Community Day hosted by Wimpole Road Methodist Church supported by us at St Stephen's and covered the costs and running of the BBQ with support from members of our church. This is just one example of how beneficial the links that are being made with local organisations and the opportunities to come from these.

Lego and Warhammer clubs at The Hub are going from strength to strength with both having evening meet ups once a month now too - and we have just added in a new Pokemon TCG session at The Hub too! It is wonderful seeing everyone together during the Saturday at The Hub and the conversations had with so many who attend. The Knit & Natter ladies are currently working on a project making poppies for Remembrance Day.

It is always lovely to visit or to have the local schools visit the churches too and it's been great to be involved with these sessions; with more booked in to take place soon!

Christmas was a time of amazement really with what was achieved over advent - the people we reached whether through delivering Christmas cards, The Hub @ Christmas activities each Saturday, the Carol Services, or the very popular Breakfast With Santa which was supported with gifts from Emmaus was just some of the activities that were held at St Stephen's!

I am looking forward to the year ahead, and looking back on everything that has taken place this year mentioning some of it to you now I am really proud of the work that we have done as a church in sharing God's message and mission welcoming so many people into our church. I would like to say thank you to those who have helped organise, be present and take part in the events we have run, for the support day to day.

Let's see where 2025 takes us!

Louise Brown
Community Worker

Over 60's Luncheon Club

The Over 60's Lunch Club has once again proved to have had a promising year with 60 people now on the register. We have actually had to start a waiting list due to the capacity of the catering for such a large number. The price of the meal was increased to £6.00 from September 2024, but all who attend still agree that this is a fair price for a two course meal with tea & coffee and added entertainment once a month. We receive lots of lovely compliments regarding the meal and the time spent at the lunch club by those that come and we hope to continue this service into the 2025 financial year thanks to our amazing helpers and team.

Jill Liddamore

Neurospicy

I started Neurospicy because it was becoming apparent that a lot of the people attending various groups at St Stephen's and Wimpole Road had neurodiverse children or are neurodiverse themselves. And, that they felt very unsupported.

When the group began we were regularly getting 5 or 6 parents along every week although this has decreased since Christmas. We have 12 members of our WhatsApp group and 47 following our Facebook page.

Autism Anglia is attending on the third Tuesday of each month (unless it falls in the school holidays) but it's been hard to get other charities to commit. However, Autism Anglia are going to be doing some publicity campaigns which should help.

I started the group with the intention that the groups members would really decide how it would evolve, and the other helpers and I are going to start preparing short conversation starters for each week so that we can advertise them in advance. This follows a session on Mindfulness for which received good feedback.

The money received from the co-op was spent on some resources that I have collected to share with members. I've also put together a box of fidget toys which lives at the back of the worship area for use by anyone during services. Ideally it would also be helpful to have a permanent notice board in the foyer where I can put signposting to other services and somewhere to keep books that group members can borrow.

During the short time the group has been going, there has been a real sense of support and a growing sense of community. It has been a privilege to help those on the edges of the church's reach, with some of their daily struggles. And, while the group is small, it is helping those who come.

Annie Porteous-Butler

Hub Café (The Saturday cafe)

The Hub is going from strength to strength and is such a lovely way to express church. There are people from all walks of life, and we have between 50 - 100 people come through our doors each Saturday.

We have Harry, Lilly, Michael and Denise as regular baristas, with other people helping out where they can. We have also had lots of help in the kitchen from Liovet and the girls and of late Jane has become a member of the kitchen team too. Without them all it would not be possible.

We still have our knit and natter group, the War Hammer group, the Lego club and as of this week we now have a Pokémon club added to our activities; this is run by one of the ladies that has been attending the Hub with her son. I have also been approached by a dad who would like to start something similar for adults. These clubs seem to organically grow from the interests of the community. It is a real expression of community and amazing to see so many attend, and love being together on a Saturday morning.

We have had lots of Baptisms from the Hub, requests for prayer and counsel, a wedding blessing coming up, and people attending church who didn't come before they joined the Hub.

It is a pleasure and a joy to run.

Rev Belinda Kerins

Lego Club

Lego club started in September 2023 and has grown with regular families attending every weekend . 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.



I also started Bricks and beer last year and it too has been a wonderful success with adults coming along on the last Friday of every month, just to relax and have a drink and be creative. We have also had some generous contributions of Lego which we are extremely grateful for.

I have also had a lot of help from my Brick Bro Danny. I look forward to continue building on the success we have started.

Brick Man aka James Maddison

Warhammer Club

This year Warhammer Club at the church has seen an incredible increase in members ranging from children on a Saturday morning or more adults on a Friday evening. We have been arranging games for beginners all the way up to tournament players, casual games for fun and soon we will be playing a story-based game played across multiple evenings.



We look forward to our first outing as a group to the Salute Wargaming Convention in London in April.

Tom Galvani

Rainbow Tots

This year Rainbow tots has been running successfully with more than 3 volunteers. Laura Coles, Amie Ward and Shauna Shelley have started stepping in to help with the group as and when available. Louise Brown and myself are still the core volunteers to this group and we ensure that there are 3 or more volunteers when we meet.

We have a small core of parents and children who attend on a weekly basis. This group has decreased as children have started preschools and school. We have had a few first time parents attend and come back and some that have started attending regularly. Attendance varies weekly but I would say we average about between 5 - 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, the Hub, Warhammer, Lego, Knit and Natter and the fund raising events that are on.

Denise, Louise, Amie, Laura and Shauna

Foodbank

Regrettably, despite the aspiration of the Colchester Foodbank to be closed by 2030 as it will no longer be needed, the Foodbank sessions on Monday evening and Thursday remain busy. We are well supported by volunteers from St Stephen's, Wimpole Road and the wider community, with volunteers working on a rota basis. There is always space for more volunteers if they want to join the team. This is important work and a real opportunity to invite people into a safe space and "meet them where they are" in their time of need.

Through these engagements we are also able to share with visitors more details of what other support we are able to offer locally and encourage visitors to come along to our Hub Café, Wimpole Road's Warm Space Coffee Morning and other events locally. We are also able to use this as time to offer space and a time of community fellowship to a range of other people who want to come in for a drink and a chat.

We are eternally grateful to the main Foodbank at Tollgate who provide the pre-packed food parcels and also the support we get from Citizen's Advice.

*Andrew Topple
Local Foodbank Co-Ordinator*

Youth Club (run by the YMCA on behalf of the Church, with support from the Church)

Highlights from this academic year:

St Stephen's had a really positive start to the year. We welcomed Lucy as Lead Youth Worker; her training, experience and passion for youth work has really helped the club to thrive.

Relationships with young people have really flourished, resulting in positive attitudes, mutual respect and greater engagement. Activities are varied and engaging for young people and they really enjoy attending. At Christmas, one young person announced "This is the best youth club ever!! Everyone should come here!"

Popular activities at this club:

- Baking & cooking e.g. cookies & pizza
- Sports such as dodgeball, football & badminton
- Biscuit decorating
- Chatting and catching up with friends
- Glow in the dark disco (Christmas party)

What support has been given this term?

We have had many conversations around families and different family dynamics. We have also had many conversations around relationships and friendships, including what a healthy friendship looks like and how we can build further friendships. This has been particularly valuable to those in Year 7 who didn't know many people at secondary school or who have found themselves in different classes to their primary school friends. We've also had open discussions about the choices we make and the impact our choices can have on our futures. This was insightful for some of our young people who may be easily led by others or are subject to peer pressure.

*Becky Whitaker
YMCA Essex
Youth Services Manager*

Report Document compiled by: Andrew Topple on behalf of Rev Anna Davis

March 2025