**St Swithun’s Church, Sandy**

**Minutes of Parochial Church Council Meeting**

**Tuesday, 5th March 2024 at 7.30 p.m.**

**PART A: NON-CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES**

**1. Attendance and Apologies:**

Present: Colin Osborne (Chair), Rev’d Philip Macaulay, Sandra Watson, Jennifer Watson, Elizabeth Adams, Julia Bickerdike, Matt Bushby, Elizabeth Gammell, Anthony Lock, Ruth Lock, Carole Martin, Jean Peckham, Lynsey Sheppard, Stephen Snow, Sandy Sopher and Karen Varley

Virtual: Abigail Davies

**2. Introduction and Opening Prayer.**

Philip read from the Gospel of John (7:53 – 8:11). We discussed this lesson and Prayed.

**3. Confidential and Non-Confidential Minutes.**

Colin proposed that the Minutes of future PCC Meetings should be split into Non Confidential Minutes (Part A) and Confidential Minutes (Part B). Instead of a Congregational Bulletin, Part A will, in future, be displayed on the Notice Board and on our Website. This proposal was accepted unanimously.

**5. Minutes of the meeting held on 6th February 2024.** These were signed off.

**6. Matters arising from 6th February 2024.**

6a. Secretarial Position. Colin reminded the PCC that Stephen Snow will not be renewing his membership at the next APCM. A new Secretary **MUST** be appointed and preferably before the APCM so that they can Minute this. Stephen is happy to give as much guidance and support as required.

6b. Bell Chamber. An application to the Diocese has yet to be made for approval of the modifications required to install the new lighting. A Carpenter is due to attend St Swithuns this weekend to inspect the trapdoor in the floor and ensure that this is safe,

6c. Soakaway drains. Jean has applied to the Beds & Herts Historic Churches Trust for financial support to service the drains to our Church Building. B&HHCT have requested a report for this & Jean was quoted £130 +VAT for a report on each drain by Drain365 Limited. It was felt that we should at least get a report on the drain to the North West wall where pools of water up to 2 feet deep remain for a fortnight after heavy rain. Everybody was happy for Jean to call Drain365 and request an inspection and report.

**7. Finance.**

Ruth advised that the Finance Committee met on 22nd February 2024 to discuss:

* Finalising the accounts for 2023 and preparing for the audit.
* January 2024 Figures
* A draft budget for 2024.
* Gift Aid Claims from HMRC.

Sandy and Elizabeth A expressed their thanks to Ruth for all she is doing as our Treasurer, recognising that taking this role over has been a hard slog.

**8. Safeguarding**.

The following Minutes were sent to Stephen Snow from Sandy Stopher:

**DBS checks:**

All church officers are up to date including Open the Book and Junior Church helpers.

**TRAINING:**

Colin (and Phil) have now completed the safeguarding leadership training. Although all church wardens are expected to do this in interregnum I feel with several of us (including Jane and Andrew) fully trained we are well covered until July.

I attended a St Albans training session on the Safeguarding Dashboard and Hub. These are web-based and record what we have in place, such as policies, and who does what and has what training. It will create an annual action plan for us when we are ready. If anyone wants a look at this I’m happy to show you round.

**SAFEGUARDING SUNDAY:**

Phil and I are planning for this to take place on Sunday 5th May.

As PCC members who have had safeguarding training you will be mentioned.

**9. Vacancy Update and appointment of New Rector.**

Colin expressed his thanks to all who helped out on the 2nd Interview day (19th February 2024). Some 30 people were involved.

Rev’d Jodie Brown will be licensed as our Rector at a service on Wednesday 10th July 2024 by Bishop Alan of St Albans Diocese. The Congregation attending the Service could be as many as 200 people. Valerie Haygarth has kindly volunteered to lead on refreshments. The Church Wardens will liase with Rev’d Les Oglesby and Rev’d Andrew Holford to ensure that all wedding services around the time of Jodie’s arrival at St Swthuns receive the required support and resources.

We don’t yet know the arrangements for when and how Jodie and her family will move in to the Rectory, but Philip encouraged all to lend a hand with any fixing or decorating chores.

**10. Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill – Standard Tier, Government Consultation**

St Albans Diocese have forwarded a hyperlink to a Home Office Standard Tier Consultation on Martyn’s Law to us. As a public worship building for more than 100 people St Swithuns Church have been invited to respond to this. Elizabeth G had kindly completed a Precis of the Consultation for the PCC and this is attached as Appendix 1. Elizabeth talked the PCC through her Precis and, after taking notes of all that PCC Members had to say, Elizabeth was formally authorised by the PCC to respond to the Consultation on behalf of St Swithuns Church.

**12. Fundraising.**

Lynsey advised that the Coffee Morning held last weekend was attended by 22 people, the fortnightly craft meeting is going well and the Team are looking into the possibility of a Lady’s Meal.

Karen asked if some parts of the Summer Festival (eg, Crazy Kitchen, Tombola, certain stalls etc) might be held in the Church Yard to make the Festival more visible and encourage people to come inside. This was authorised. Colin expressed the PCC’s thanks to Lynsey and Karen for all they do.

**13. Churchwarden’s Report.**

Fortnightly Meetings continue. All matters discussed have been flagged up above.

**14. Curate’s Report.**

Philip’s Curacy is coming to an end. He will need support as he hands his responsibilities over to replacements. He has already withdrawn from Sandy Charities and CTISB. Bravers has finished whilst KWB will be taken over by the Parent Helpers. Increasingly, he will be absent visiting other Churches as he seeks out a new role. It is possible Philip may leave us altogether by the end of June 2024 and he will be more of a supplementary figure after the APCM. Whilst the present intention is to retain the 08:15am and 11:00am services after the APCM, this will really depend on Jane, Luke, John, Les, Andrew and Elizabeth G. Philip will solicit their thoughts about this and advise the PCC so this can be discussed at the April meeting. After this (perhaps in May) the PCC might consider ideas that can be suggested to Jodie for her to put into place in the short term.

The Church Wardens have agreed for Philip to conduct the Ascension Day Service on Thursday 9th May 2024.

Matt asked if the Church newsletter might transition to digital dispersion, perhaps with some hard copies held at the back of the Church. This was agreed upon. Future printed copies will include an invitation to sign up to receive soft copies going forward.

**15. Wi-Fi in Church.**

Philip intends to report next month about how Wi-Fi might be installed into St Swithuns Church building.

**16. Choir Stalls.**

An enquiry was made about restoring the fronts to the Choir Stalls. Some of the Choir members would support this whilst others are not so keen. Colin observed that the worship in St Swithuns has moved on. The Contemporary Service requires the usage of Keyboards, guitars and drums and it would be harder to set these instruments up with the Stall Fronts back in place.

A decision must also be made about storage areas. Interest has been expressed in using the Lady Chapel more for worship so it’s usage for storage is to be discouraged.

Whilst it was felt that it should be left to Jodie to make a final decision, it was agreed that a Working Group should be compiled to consider:

* Whether to restore the Fronts to our Choir Stalls.
* Whether instead to remove the front seats of the Stalls and leave only the moulded seats in place. (This would have to be approved by the Faculty – our Quinquennial Report indicated that the Choir Stalls are of note).
* How to relieve storage pressure on the Vestry, The Lady Chapel and the Rectory Garages.

The Working Group may then report to Jodie and the PCC.

Sandra Watson, Abigail Davies, Elizabeth Gammell, Ruth Lock, Carole Martin and Karen Varley all kindly volunteered to be the Working Group for this.

**17. Deanery Synod Report.**

The Deanery will meet on Thursday 7th March in Blunham where John Wood will introduce the Light & Life project. CHUMS will be represented at St Swithuns on Sunday 14th April 2024.

**18. Any Other Business**. None.

There being no other business, the meeting closed with The Grace.

**Signed Correct: Dated:**

**Appendix 1.**

**Precis of Home Office Standard Tier Consultation on Martyn’s Law by Elizabeth Gammell.**

**Background:**

On 22 May 2017, Salaman Abedi, an Islamic extremist, perpetrated a suicide bombing at the Manchester Arena, killing 22 and injuring 1,017. First suicide attack since 7 July 2007, in London.

In the wake of accidents or tragedies where everyone agrees that the State might be at fault for not having anticipated a threat, bereaved families, injured people and surrounding communities campaign for legislation. They naturally attract widespread support.

Such is the case with what’s become known as **‘Martyn’s Law’**, or to give it its official title: the [**Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill**](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/martyns-law-standard-tier-consultation)**.** Martyn Hett was one of the victims of the terror attack at the Manchester arena, and his mother has spearheaded a tireless campaign both inside and outside Parliament. There has been much engagement and consultation; in May 2023 a [draft Bill](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6450cf2b2f6222000ca6a35d/Terrorism__Protection_of_Premises__Draft_Bill_-_Command_Paper.pdf) was published. Changes have since been made to the original proposals and the current consultation, focused on the Bill provisions in respect of smaller premises (those accommodating 100-799 people) closes on 18 March 2024.

Few people dispute the core objective – to enhance public safety by ensuring there is better preparedness for, and protection from, terrorist attacks. The debate has mostly been about the ‘**proportionality’** of the proposals. It’s a difficult judgement to make and so varied are the different circumstances of cinemas, shops, nightclubs, **churches**, and village halls that many have been exercised as to whether the burden imposed by the new requirements will be out of proportion with the element of risk. As a result of earlier rounds of engagement, the requirements for smaller venues have been reduced – though many argue they are still far too onerous.

Everyone is probably weighing up for themselves – that equation between the risk of something dreadful happening and the inconvenience of the proposed precautions. To help them the consultation paper says that the threat of terrorism is ‘**enduring and evolving’**. Does this really help?

The Consultation opens with a **Threat Picture** – “*to ensure better preparedness and raise the public safety bar, a broad range of premises and events need to be ready to act to reduce harm*”.

It then explains the **Purpose of the Bill** – “*to ensure premises will be better prepared and ready to respond in the event of a terrorist attack*” and says that a phasing-in period of at least 18-24 months will allow those responsible for premises and events to understand their new obligations, plan and prepare.

After that details the **Scope** – saying which premises will need to meet specified conditions. Primary qualifying conditions are a capacity of 100 individuals or more and are wholly or mainly used for one or more specified use, falling into 14 categories. Category 10 is churches. They get a special mention: “*places of worship will be Standard Tier premises irrespective of their maximum capacity unless they charge a fee for admission* (e.g.**cathedrals**) *Places of worship are significantly different to other premises within scope and there are a range of procedures and measures in place, including those funded by Government, to work with and support places of worship to reduce their vulnerability to terrorism and hate crime*”. Places of worship occupy 16% of the estimated 278,800 premises in the Standard Tier. It says, “*Standard Tier procedures have been developed to recognise a diversity of premises and their occupants, delivering meaningful outcomes across this broad range of premises where lives could be saved in the event of an attack.”* This is extremely broad!

The next section explains how things have been revised since the publication of the draft Bill in May 2023. *“Revised obligations are designed to be low-to-no financial cost and low burden to put in place.”* Good news. So, this consultation seeks specific feedback to ensure proposed requirements strike the right balance whilst ensuring lives could be saved by having proportionate obligations. This is where things need to be understood in the light of what is really being said!

Then it goes into what will need to be done.

*Procedures at particular premises may vary in line with the activities they undertake etc. At venues for hire, the person responsible for the venue might include procedures in their contracts…and ensure relevant information is displayed appropriately…eg on posters.* [This is like our **Fire Safety** obligations.]

*Those responsible for Standard Tier premises have in place such procedures that may be expected,* ***so far as is reasonably practicable****, to reduce harm to the public and staff at the premises in the event of a terrorist attack. This will include procedures for:*

* *Evacuation*
* *Invacuation*
* *Lockdown*
* *Communication*

*This moves away from focus on completion of a form … concentrate efforts on outcomes and development of effective plans and procedures…tailored to particular premises (how they operate, their resources and the types of acts of terrorism that could occur there.)*

*Having these procedures in place also means ensuring they are appropriately communicated to staff and maintaining their awareness of them through training and in some cases, practice runs…guidance will be adapted to specific premises.*

Then the consultation explains the role of **Guidance**, and makes reassuring noises about policies, procedures and plans that are ‘reasonably practicable’.

After all that we come to the elephant in the room, training. The published draft Bill contained onerous requirements for “terrorism protection training”. This has now been recognised as inappropriate for the broad types of premises and sectors in the scope. So, the revised approach is for “*premises to put in place procedures to be followed, should a terrorist attack occur or be suspected.”* Training or instruction has to be ‘reasonably practicable’ (again!) The focus is now on ensuring those working at the venue are aware of the actions to take in the event of a suspected attack…more flexible, but problematic!

There is a **sanctions regime** designed to ensure compliance – but presuming instances of non-compliance will be rare, and the Regulator will take steps to work with those who need help. If this fails, the Regulator can issue compliance notices and monetary penalties (not exceeding £10,000.) Penalties must be reasonable and proportionate.

**Revised requirements for the Standard Tier are:**

* To notify the Regulator that they are, or have become, responsible for premises within scope of proposed legislation and so subject to the relevant requirements therein.
* To have in place procedural measures that could be expected to reduce, so far as reasonably practicable, the risk of physical harm to individuals at the premises in the event of an attack.
* No requirement to ensure that people working at the premises are given any specific training – but they need to be sufficiently instructed or trained to carry out the procedural measures.

There is an **Impact Assessment** detailing the costs, benefits, and effects of this policy. Standard Tier premises need to have completed a standardised template of having procedures in place, were an attack to occur and making sure staff are aware of these procedures. For an individual site it is estimated to cost between £160 and £525 per year, with a central estimate of £310 per year.

The consultation response (which it says takes 10 minutes!) is done online by following a link in the document.

I recommend we respond on behalf of St Swithun’s as this is a serious and, sadly, important matter reflecting the increasingly uncertain times in which we live.

**Elizabeth Gammell**

5 March 2024