

THE UNITED PARISH OF EAST HARPTREE WITH WEST HARPTREE AND HINTON BLEWETT-ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL FOR 2024

Aims and Purpose

The PCC and the rector have the responsibility of promoting the whole mission of the Church (pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical), in the United Ecclesiastical Parish of East Harptree, with West Harptree and Hinton Blewett and the promotion of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the doctrines and practices of the Church of England.

The PCC is a charity and was registered with the Charity Commission in 2019. The main activities undertaken by the PCC are those reflected in this report which the PCC consider furthered the PCC's aims for the public benefit. The PCC has had regard to the Charity Commission public benefit guidance, where relevant.

In February 2024 Rev Katrina Dykes was installed as the rector of the United Parish, and of the neighboring parishes of Compton Martin and All Saints North Mendip (Blagdon, Charterhouse and Ubley). We are all now working together as the Benefice of Chew Valley South. The formal creation of the benefice will follow in due course.

Structure, Governance and Management

The PCC operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure and the Church Representation Rules. It is a corporate body established by the Church of England. The PCC membership consists of the rector, the churchwardens of the three churches (if appointed) and other members (who are on the Parish Electoral Roll) elected by the PCC and proposed by the Friends of East Harptree and the VCCs of West Harptree and Hinton Blewett.

Last year there were 54 people on the Parish Electoral Roll. Following the preparation of a new electoral roll there are now 53 people on the Parish Electoral Roll.

Specific responsibilities of members of the PCC during 2024 are set out in the section below entitled "Administrative Information". That section also sets out the responsibilities of others, not on the PCC, for particular areas of responsibility. All business of the PCC is conducted at its meetings referred to below. There is no separate standing committee.

The PCC is committed to enabling as many people as possible to worship at our churches and to become part of our parish community. The PCC maintains an overview of worship throughout the parish and considers how our services can involve the different groups that live within our parish. Our services and worship put faith into practice through prayer and scripture, music and sacrament. We try to enable ordinary people to live out their faith as part of our parish community through worship and prayer; learning about the gospel; and developing their knowledge and trust in Jesus and by the provision of pastoral care for people living in the parish.

To facilitate this work, it is also important that the PCC maintains the fabric of the three churches in our parish. The PCC has the legal responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of the three churches in the parish, although for all practical purposes the activities involved have been delegated to the Friends of St Laurence and to the VCCs of West Harptree and Hinton Blewett. They report to the PCC, who deal with faculty and

grant applications and all formal matters, and the PCC generally oversees and ensures that the PCC's obligations are satisfactorily discharged by the Friends and VCCs.

The PCC meets five times a year with an extraordinary meeting after the APCM to elect officers. There is an agreed and set list of issues which are dealt with at particular PCCs throughout the year to ensure that the key issues for the PCC are not overlooked. This is managed by the PCC secretary. In addition, there are reports at each PCC meeting from the Friends and VCCs.

Administrative Information

The correspondence address for the parish is now Church Farm, Church Lane, East Harptree, Bristol, BS40 6BD.

Membership of the PCC in 2024

Chair	Mary Cookson (churchwarden East Harptree)
Vicar	Rev Katrina Dykes from February 2024
Secretary	Elaine Avery (elected representative from West Harptree)
Deanery Synod Representatives	Mary Cookson
Electoral Roll Officer	Elaine Avery
Treasurer	Guy Stobart (churchwarden East Harptree)
Other Members	Hazel Rider and Gill Stobart (elected representatives from East Harptree). Graham Sage (point of contact at Hinton Blewett) is copied into PCC papers and consulted where appropriate

Others Supporting the PCC

Safeguarding Officer	Gill Stobart
Parish News Editor	Gill Stobart
Parish Administrator	Joanna Brown resigned with effect from the end of January 2024 and the position is not being replaced.

House Group	Richard Martin
Open the Book	Murray Bennett during 2024, who has now resigned, and with Mary Cookson now taking this over.
Messy Church	Mary Cookson, Tilly Joskey, Hazel Rider, Guy and Gill Stobart, Jenny Cruse, Diana Martin

Huge thanks to all our volunteers who give their skill, experience and time to make our church community what it is.

We are ever more conscious of the risk that our small and relatively elderly congregations poses to the future if the parish. With this, comes the pressing need to grow and to be relevant to our wider communities.

Safeguarding

The parish and benefice have worked hard to create a culture where all in our church family understand what safeguarding is, how abuse might present itself and what to do if there are concerns. This means that safeguarding is the responsibility of all within the Church, not just those who work with children, young people or vulnerable adults We do this by making sure that all those working with children and young people and, if appropriate, certain work with vulnerable adults, are safely recruited and have the necessary DBS checks. Training is paramount and all those who have any role within the church family are asked to undertake the appropriate level of training for their role every three years.

Our Safeguarding Policy is reviewed on an annual basis, the appropriate safeguarding notices are displayed in all our three churches and the appropriate information is on websites where we have a presence.

Achievements and Performance

At a gathering in April 2024, representatives from across the benefice, considered and discussed how 'loving one another' might guide our life together in this new benefice. A consensus formed around the following expressions of loving one another:

- creating a culture of encouragement where we are willing to try things
- being outward facing rather than inward looking
- serving others with humility and forgiveness
- being creative and having fun!

Priorities were also agreed:

- developing sustainable worship patterns, which includes trying new things
- growing our connections with children, young people and their families
- developing resources
- reviewing governance

Developing sustainable worship patterns – worship and payer

A new pattern of services has been agreed across the benefice, enabling a spread and range of services across all the benefice churches as well as an opportunity for more lay-led services and with that the possibility for more people to be involved in planning and taking part in these services. We are blessed with a team of lay-readers, who bring their experience and creativity to our worship and to our wider work.

We generally have three Sunday morning services in the United Parish each month – a Holy Communion, an Iona Communion and a Morning Service. These are augmented by a monthly Evensong and by other, special, services at key times of the year. The third Sunday of the month is set aside for a benefice wide service in another of the benefice's churches. The opportunity to come together as a larger gathering has been hugely encouraging. Other highlights have included the benefice Good Friday Pilgrimage to Charterhouse and the Advent Carol Service at East Harptree.

A Benefice Pilgrimage from one end of the benefice to the other in September was an enjoyable and encouraging day involving over 20 walkers for some or all of the route. They were joined by others for prayer, reflections and refreshments in all the benefice churches. During Advent the benefice was able to offer two groups for discussion and prayer. Members of the groups enjoyed them so much they continued into 2025.

Our choir continues to support services and thrives as a 4-part (SATB) choir; the only one in our whole deanery and quite possibly the only remaining regular such choir in any of the rural parishes in the diocese. With the introduction of the new schedule of services across the benefice, the choir has worked hard to adapt in order to continue to serve the regular round of Sunday services including evensongs. Looking to the future, they would like to develop the partnership with the school and the choir of the Benefice of North Mendip, continue to nurture and mentor the talent within the choir, to develop 'Come and Sing' events both within and outside the immediate local area and to explore the choir becoming a recognised organisation for the purposes of Social Prescribing for the local GPs.

Our other worship activities include a house group which has met every fortnight, and those who want to, take it in turn to lead the discussions. Believe it or not we have fun.

Growing our connections with children, young people and their families – and with the wider community

Our rector leads worship on a weekly basis in East Harptree C of E School. She has also joined the board of governors as a foundation governor and sits on the school's ethos committee, with a view to strengthening the links between the churches and the school communities, helping to promote and embed Christian values, and to create more opportunities for us to support one another and work together.

Messy Church and Open the Book are two important strands in our outreach work with children - our outreach to the school being a vital area of growth. They are both delivered to the pupils of East Harptree school once a term, supported by a number of dedicated volunteers from our congregation. Messy Church has continued to be well attended and enjoyed by the children and numbers remain stable. Open the Book has continued throughout the year. We are delighted to welcome the school into St Laurence church for these sessions and are always pleased at their response to our stories. We all believe it is vitally important that we can share bible teaching with the children in this way and we're glad that the school welcomes this link with the Church. We try to link the chosen story to the school's current value. We are hoping to develop a bigger team by working with people

from Ubley who are interested in providing OTB for the children at the school there. We hope this may grow into a lively cross benefice initiative.

Our churches continue to give support to members of the community at life's milestones – in baptisms, marriages and funerals.

Wider community engagement comes via our monthly Parish News, produced as a printed magazine and delivered to about 320 households across the United Parish. It contains information about church and community activities as well as articles of church and local interest.

Our various fund-raising activities also remain an important part of our outreach, as well as raising much-needed funds for our three churches. Our suppers, coffee mornings, lunches fêtes etc have been well supported by individual villages and by the wider parish. Our thanks to all who run and support these efforts.

Developing resources

People from the United Parish have been involved in a number of cross benefice working groups to inform and support planning in the benefice. These have included the PCC treasurers working to agree parish share and safeguarding officers supporting one another in their roles. In addition, a worship working group co-ordinated a process of consultation and agreement for the new pattern of services for the benefice. As we entered 2025, a communications working group has begun work to consider how we can improve and develop our communications beyond the churches as well as between the worshipping communities.

In September 2024, following a safer recruitment process, a Benefice Administrator was appointed. She works part-time from home and is proving to be of great benefit.

Reviewing governance

It is felt that a strong governance structure would be the foundation for the future development of the new benefice. A governance working group made recommendations to PCCs for a way to collaborate in this area, but it has not yet met with universal approval, so there is more work to be done.

Deanery Synod

Our PCC Chair sits on the Deanery Synod, providing the PCC with an important link between the parish and the wider structures of the Church.

Our Church Buildings

St Laurence, East Harptree

Although practical completion of the capital works to St Laurence was achieved in April 2023, snagging dragged on and was not finally completed until February 2025. The other aspects of Project Newton, in particular the activities set out in the Activity Plan, are ongoing. Notably, a new website and touchscreens, the completion of a research project, work with East Harptree Primary School, Learning Partnership West (an alternative

provision school) and with Valley Arts. The National Heritage Lottery Fund has recently agreed to an extension to the completion of the whole project to May 2026, when the Bishop of Bath and Wells is due to come to mark the occasion. The National Heritage Lottery Fund has also increased their grant to enable two smallish additional building projects to be completed – the creation of steps up from the footpath on the northern boundary into the churchyard and the installation of a permanent exhibition of historic stones discovered during the building works.

Our Quinquennial inspection was completed in 2024 and the most pressing work identified has been undertaken under the guidance of our church architect. Our heating system continues to limp on, we hope for a bit longer. Thanks to a generous gift from a local kitchen cabinet company we have new kitchen units in our vestry.

A footnote – we continue to operate The School House Trust, whose trustees are all the churchwardens and the incumbent and which continues to support Christian education in East Harptree financially, notably EH School and it is also providing some support to Project Newton.

St Mary's West Harptree

Our ancient oil boiler and the flue were condemned in March and with the Church of England's push to become carbon neutral by 2030, various alternative forms of heating were investigated in succeeding months. Sadly, the lack of heat has meant services could not be held at St Mary's this past winter.

A leak in the porch roof was repaired and the porch light replaced. The sound system and hearing loop were tested and new corner posts were fitted to mark the cremation plot. Gutters & gulleys were cleared. It was decided to delay servicing the organ until services are due to resume. All Health & Safety tests were carried out including PAT testing, lightning conductor and fire extinguishers, and all reviews completed. A new full Fire Risk Assessment was carried out.

St Margaret's Hinton Blewett

The building is in good order and well cared for with flowers always displayed at the appropriate times. Sadly, the organ has reached the end of its life and despite every effort it appears it will have an ignominious end in being scrapped. The churchyard has continued to be sensitively cared for by nearly 20 volunteers. The church has had its electricity, lightning conductor, fire equipment all checked appropriately during the year.

The VCC has met regularly as required and are investigating the installation of toilets by visiting other sites. This would be a huge commitment of both time and money so it is essential to establish St Margaret's usage and role in the benefice.

Financial Review

This is covered in the separate financial statements