

St Richard's

1. A public meeting was held at 6pm on Wednesday 27th October at Winchelsea Beach Community Hall to discuss the future of St Richard's Church. The meeting was co-chaired by the Rector, The Reverend Jonathan Meyer and Mrs Celia King, a Churchwarden. It was attended by 42 people, 29 of them being Winchelsea Beach residents. Prior to opening for general discussion, the Rector made the following points:
 - a. The recently completed 5 yearly structural survey by an independent architect, had revealed a range of defects, estimated to cost in the region of £40-80K to rectify. This sum was unaffordable in the context of the Joint Benefice (Winchelsea, Icklesham and Winchelsea Beach).
 - b. Even if a generous donor did come forward, with a regular congregation of just 5 at St Richard's, the rationale for spending such a sum, plus ongoing maintenance had to be carefully considered.
 - c. There were 3 aspects to local ministry, namely the provision of services, the provision of a location for those services and the provision of support to local people in times of need. Whilst not preferred, all of this could be done without a church building.
 - d. Any decision to close would be made by the Parochial Church Council, in concert with the Diocesan authorities and, while he regretted the need to consider this possibility, the situation could not be ignored.
2. During open discussion the following points were, often severally, made:
 - a. Could more not have been done in the past to have avoided this situation? In fact, a considerable amount of time and money had been historically invested in St Richard's, but the real point is that such a small congregation could not sustain the maintenance of a 1960s building, which had not be completed to a high specification. Efforts had also been made to increase the size of the congregation, but to no effect.
 - b. If the church did go, could not the site remain marked as a place of occasional worship? This is an option that should be considered and that option would be informed by local opinion.
 - c. If the site was vacated, could not some covenant be placed upon it to prevent the construction of unsuitable buildings? There was every sympathy for this view, but if the site were fully vacated, any redevelopment would be a matter for local planners to consider, rather than the church authorities.
 - d. St Richard's was an integral part of the village, along with the Co-op, the pub and various retail outlets. This point was appreciated and any decision to move away from it would be much regretted, but the church was simply not being used. There was not the money to retain it purely as an edifice, particularly as spiritual activities could be conducted elsewhere. Over the years, a number of businesses have closed in Winchelsea Beach, or their purpose has been changed and economics must have played a part in these decisions.
 - e. What would be done with ashes interred at the Church? If the building was closed, any remains would be properly transferred, as legally required and advised by the Diocesan Chancellor.
- 3 In drawing the meeting to a close at 6.45pm, the rector thanked all those attending for their comments. He stressed that no decisions had yet been made and the next steps would be

considered by the Parochial Church Council, advised by this meeting, at its November meeting. Options would then need to be developed with Diocesan and local authorities, as well as technical specialists.

In response to a question as to how decisions would be disseminated, the Rector encouraged people to visit the Church website winchelsea-icklesham-churches.org.uk. Information would also be placed in the Parish Magazine, which is published on the website www.winchelsea.com.