

The parish church and ministry – note for Albury Parish Council

1. Past ministry

- From 1998 to my retirement Albury has been a ‘House for Duty’ parish
- The minister was provided with the Vicarage but received no pay.
- House for Duty is part time, though the last two ministers worked many more hours.
- Funding ministry provision is a challenge (see below) and at the moment it is unclear whether the parish can afford to replace me.

2. The Church of England

- The Church of England is not a corporate body, but a collection of parishes, gathered into Dioceses, led by its Bishops.
- Each parochial church council is an independent corporate body paying its own way.
- There is no central funding of parish running costs.
- The Church Commissioners are a separate statutory and charitable body managing historical assets for the support of ministry in the Church of England. They typically fund special needs, initiatives, and projects, rather than regular running costs. Some press reporting of their activities is misleading.

3. Funding of C of E churches/Albury’s position.

- Nearly all church funding has to come from members of the church and community.
- Costs include a ‘Parish Share’ paid to the Diocese, calculated on a formula. This is pooled to pay clergy, provide their housing, and contribute to shared Diocesan services. The Diocese has recently informed the PCC that Albury’s Parish Share as a House for Duty parish will go up by 70% and will in the future be approx. £55K per year.
- As well as Parish Share, each parish must fund its own building maintenance (including church buildings), administration, and activities.
- Albury’s routine running costs including parish share will be in excess of £85K based on a House for Duty model.
- Prior to the recent uplift in Parish Share, the church could cover its running costs mainly from congregational giving, with some help from bank interest and its share of fees from weddings, funerals, etc.
- Reserves have recently been depleted and fundraising has become necessary for non-routine expenditure such as big repairs, new projects, and the like.
- There is a significant projected deficit in 2024 because of cumulative changes, and in particular congregational deaths and movements out of the area from 2022/23. The projected deficit for 2025 is even greater. The reality is that the church now faces challenges with covering routine expenditure, let alone covering the future uplift in Parish Share if we carry on as a House for Duty parish. The PCC is currently considering alternatives other than a House for Duty Minister in order to continue the ministry of the Christian community for Albury Parish.

4. Albury Churchyard

- Every resident in the parish has the right to be buried in the churchyard, regardless of faith or churchgoing practice.
- The churchyard requires significant expenditure because of its large size compared to many, and the slopes and walls.
- Like many churches Albury has sought to encourage wildflower growth and habitat improvement by leaving some areas unmown for periods, and other measures. It secured a bronze eco-award from the charity A Rocha in January 2024.
- The typical annual maintenance cost including grass cutting, and tree and hedge maintenance, has been around £4,400 over the last couple of years, with additional non-paid work carried out by volunteers (and occasionally privately funded work)
- Recent financial challenges have led to compromises on both routine and eco-maintenance, leaving a budget of c £1,000 for annual maintenance
- Cemetery provision is a function of parish and district councils. For this reason many will give grants to churches for their churchyards if they have undertaken this service in their area. Albury PCC has been grateful for APC's contribution of £250 annually (last rec'd in April 2024) but this falls far short of the actual costs.
- Practice on amount varies but as a nearby example Shere PC splits the cost 50/50 with Shere PCC.

5. Parish Magazine

- The Parish News has been a community service run by the church for many years.
- It is distributed free of charge monthly to every house in the parish (except for a few who have opted out) using a network of volunteers. Contributing to the cost of production is voluntary. Some sale copies are available in the village shops.
- The annual cost to the church has been £4-5,000 gross. This may change now that the printer (Surrey Hills Print) is ceasing to exist in Albury. The PCC is currently reviewing other local printer costs vs continuing with Surrey Hills Print's mother company Careprint which would incur additional postage costs from the Isle of Wight.
- So far this year the church has collected £1.8k from advertising, and from the suggested £15 annual contribution per household towards the costs. Last year it collected £1.4k (with an annual contribution of £10 per household).
- The church has spent £2.8k on the magazine so far this year against last year's total of £5.1k. This year's budget is £4.1k.
- The church is grateful for APC's annual £100 contribution in recognition of the bi-annual distribution of 'Albury Matters' and other one-off Council communications with the magazine.
- Our long-term editor, Denise Chamberlain, is currently recruiting additional members to the editorial team as she wishes to give up editing.
- Because of the resourcing issues and costs, the future format and frequency is under review along with the cost structure. It is clear that the current arrangement is no longer possible for the church to run alone.

6. Christmas services

Christmas is always a popular time for the community of Albury to make use of Church activities. **Historically** Albury has put on the special services and activities listed below. It is currently reviewing how many can realistically continue to be offered.

- Carols in the Drummond (in partnership with the Drummond)
- Messy Church at Christmas
- Carols in the Old Saxon Church (in partnership with Friends of Albury Old Saxon Church)
- Christingle Service on Christmas Eve at Albury Church
- Christmas Day services at Albury Church and St Michael's in Farley Green

Since my retirement all Church matters are being dealt with by Tim Heaney, Rector of the United Benefice of Shere, Albury and Chilworth (rector@parishofshere.com) and the Albury churchwardens (wardens@alburychurches.org). They would welcome a further discussion to see how the Church and the Parish Council can work more closely together to continue to offer services that benefit the community of Albury (e.g. Churchyard, Parish Magazine and Christmas related activities) and help you as the Parish Council to provide a breath of community services.

I hope this note from the immediately past Minister on questions raised at the September APC meeting is helpful. The more up to date information about costs and activities has been contributed by the Churchwardens and Rector, and as mentioned above it is they with whom any discussions or queries should now be raised.

Andrew Pearson
October 2024