

Summary of 'future finder' reports on St Peter's church, Caversham submitted for PMC

INTRODUCTION

St Peter's church looks out over Caversham Court to the River Thames. It has been the site of worship for over a thousand years and is the historic mother church of Caversham. It has a reputation for liturgical tradition and musical excellence with the spirituality of the English choral tradition and seeks to grow by welcoming people through the church doors.

St Peter's is a reasonably thriving church and community but there are many more people to reach out to with God's message in the local community. Our main purpose is to provide worship which nourishes the soul thereby helping us live our lives as faithful disciples of Christ. We strive to uphold our three core values, generous, life-giving and inclusive.

The congregation community is defined by churchmanship and style of worship as well as location. Most people are close by but some come from Emmer Green, Tilehurst and Calcot. The location of much of the congregation should allow it to participate in what God is up to in its community

DEMOGRAPHIC AND DEPRIVATION DATA

The areas of Caversham that correspond to the historical parish of St Peter have a population of around 4760 (Reading Borough as a whole is about 156,000), in about 1895 households: roughly 39% detached houses, 25% semis, 19% terraced, and 17% flats/apartments/maisonettes.

About 80% of households own their homes, either outright or with a mortgage, which is higher than for Reading as a whole.

From 2011 census about 82% of residents were born in the UK, 2.8% in another EU country, and 12.2% outside the EU. By ethnic group, about 89% were classified as White, 2.7% Mixed, 6.2% Asian, 1.6% Black and the remainder Arab or Other. This is a significantly higher proportion of ethnically 'white' people than Reading as a whole (75%).

50% of the population has a degree or higher i.e. professional, ~70% are in employment, ~17% are retired. The congregation are mostly professional, 'middle class' and relatively well-off but it does not reflect the large proportion of 25-49 age group (34%) in the community nor the number of children produced by that group. Roughly 20% of these (in 2011) were aged <16 compared with 10% <16 in the congregation, 8% 16-24; 34% 25-49; 16% 55-64; 23% >65 i.e. ~80% 16 – 65. Parish data shows ~69% Adults 18-69 but by observation there is a bias towards the older population.

People feel a place and a need for the church at significant points in the year, Christmas and Easter, people who perhaps were brought up with the tradition and don't feel complete without it. The number of people attending over the Christmas period, 1170 compared with electoral roll 250, and regular Sunday attendance of ~130. 230 people at Easter service. 15 weddings during the year (2015).

We need to determine how to make the church more relevant and meaningful at other times of the year. God is keeping the older generation active within the congregation, the retired sometimes have more time to volunteer. There is a growing number of younger families and children joining the congregation

BUILDING USE AND TRAVEL

The church is the only building in the parish of which the St Peter's church family has exclusive use and responsibility. The building is a simple layout: a chancel, a nave, about 20m in length with north and south side aisles, with 2 side chapels one used for services and the other for a variety of other uses. The south porch is the main entrance with timber outer doors. It is fully enclosed and has glass inner doors into the church. All major services are held in the main body of the church as are, weddings, funerals and baptisms. The choir sings mostly from the chancel. The Lady Chapel has an altar used for communion as an additional rail during the main services, for Sunday said Communion and Morning Prayer, for weekday services and for extra seating when required. It is also used for small prayer meetings and it contains the War Memorial.

The Vanderstegen Chapel is a plain, functional space, glazed all round, in the north-east corner of the building. It is the choir vestry where practices are held and also occasional meetings. The small clergy vestry which

adjoins this is also used for Sunday Club. Steps at the west end lead to a small kitchen and toilets. The church is generally regarded with great affection by both church members and other locals.

The west end is used for refreshments after services and for Saturday morning coffee. The annual Christmas Fair uses the whole building. Special occasions can utilise the Canoe Club. The Rector sometimes hosts events in the rectory and garden. The Church may also use parish owned facilities: the Parish Room, a small meeting room adjoining the Rectory and the hall at Church House above the Parish Office which is also let out on a commercial basis. Focus is generally on the lack of dedicated space for children's activities and the lack of a Church Hall. St Peter's and St Margaret's hold an annual summer fete in Caversham Court.

Church members are the most prevalent users of the building but school carol services and occasional concerts by visiting choirs occur. Making the seating flexible may offer possibilities for more community use.

About 130 regular weekly adult worshippers and 14 children attend in total with Sunday and weekday services. Various groups perform weekly tasks: the cleaning team, flower decoration, building maintenance, choir practice and Church Watch – 4 volunteers who make it possible for visitors (about 5 per week) to look around the building.

The church is positioned about half way up a steep, busy road (St Peter's Hill A4074 towards Oxford), about 400 yards from Caversham town centre where there is a stop for buses which cover the main church catchment area and Reading itself. Buses to Oxford also go past the church which is concealed in a dip from this important road by a copse. Access by car is from a side road and the churchyard is a quiet, pleasant cut into Caversham from the west for pedestrians - and bikes!"

Accessibility for disabled is tolerable only. The main entrance is on a steep hill. There is an awkward threshold into the porch and a removable ramp down into the worship area, which is assembled at considerable noise and inconvenience to everyone. There are no disabled toilet facilities.

There is no dedicated car-park and there is only a very limited amount of parking space for the existing congregation in two roads off the main (A4074) thoroughfare, The Warren and St Peter's Avenue, which is private. Parking by worshippers on Sundays and other services causes irritation to residents, but a few are members of the congregation. The church is within easy walking distance for many of the church family. There is disabled parking but alongside a steep bank.

Standing by the porch to the main (South) door of the church, you look across the well maintained churchyard and old gravestones between trees over a waist height 'crinkle-crankle' wall above enclosed community allotments. Beyond the wall part of Caversham Court Gardens is visible. Across the river is meadowland with a rowing club to the left and the leisure centre further back on the right, in the distance. It is a very fine view, mostly in glimpses between trees.

The west entrance to the churchyard looks up St Peter's Avenue – quiet and residential. The east entrance looks down towards the period Rectory and houses leading down to the town of Caversham. The church seems a little remote from the centre of Caversham.

View 250 yards, looking West on the north side of St Peter's Hill from opposite the Rectory:

A good view up to the upper half of the church tower rising above the walls separating Caversham Court Gardens from the main road. The road sweeps round to the right of the church and you can see some old mews buildings below the churchyard. To the right of these is the East entrance to the yard.

The church is not very visible to motors on the main road to cars from the west, being concealed in a dip by trees in what is a conservation area. By-laws limit signage to the East churchyard entrance and the porch area. Views of the church from St Peter's Hill have been opened up by clearance of the churchyard on the north of the church. A headed noticeboard has been erected on the corner of The Warren and St Peter's Hill.

A significant volume of foot traffic passes by the church as people walk through the yard. Parts of the south elevation and tower of the building are just visible from both sides of the river in summer and slightly more so in winter when the foliage of the deciduous trees dies back.

There are no public buildings within 250 yards. The Canoe Club, whose reception room is occasionally used for church functions, is 200 yards down the Warren. Caversham Court Gardens, a Borough facility is next to the churchyard. It is used for the annual church fête – a major enterprise in the neighbourhood. Christmas carols, a Borough organised event lead by St Peter's Choir and the Salvation Army band also take place annually in the Gardens unless weather prohibits the activity, when the event moves into St Peter's church. These gardens, adjoining the church, are also a venue for a number of community events, sales, outdoor film shows and so on.

There is a pavement on the main road to the north of the church (St Peter's Hill), direction E-W and a handful of pedestrians use this road.

A side road off St Peter's Hill (The Warren) flanks the West elevation of the building and church yard, direction North-South. Most of the foot traffic is through the yard, past the south door to the church. The surveys were made on different days, but deployed to make up a full continuous weekday.

Totals in a 12 hour period:

Male 294; Female 272; Toddlers 42; Schoolchildren 19 = 627 people

Observations include:

Toddlers were accompanied by adults who were included in the adult count!

A few of the adults came down in pairs, talking together

The walking was generally purposeful as opposed to a leisurely stroll and it is fair to assume that the majority of pedestrians are on an errand and would return on the same day along the same route.

During the lunchtime period on one of the days, 6 people stopped to look at the notices outside the church or actually went in. Although the church is normally locked, there are days when a volunteer is in attendance, allowing visitors to come in and look around or sit quietly in meditation or prayer. People do use this facility and a 2 hour period of 'Church Watch' will see, perhaps, two to four visitors. Obviously it would be preferable if the church were kept open during all daylight hours.

Based on the St Peter's listing in the Parish Register, of the worshippers in this church:

68% are from within the parish,

18% are from adjoining parishes (St Andrew's, St Barnabas)

14% are from outside the area.

Note that there is a small overlap in the congregations across the parish itself: that is, some worshippers at St Peter's may be geographically closer to St John's or St Margaret's.

Nursery schools

New Bridge Nursery School

Chiltern Nursery

State Primary schools

Caversham Heights: currently based in temporary accommodation in Lower Caversham,

Thameside: also in Lower Caversham

Caversham Primary

State Secondary

Highdown

Independent

Hemdean House; Girls reception to 18yrs, Boys Reception to 13yrs

Queen Anne: Girls 11yrs to 18yrs: one of the ministers in the parish is chaplain at this school. The closest schools are about half a mile away. Others up to a mile. No school within the immediate vicinity.

Apart from Queen Anne, we are unaware of any close links with schools other than one of the ministers taking the occasional assembly.

St Peter's is a member of Churches together in Caversham and thus supports schools work through the REinspired worker/s. Church members form part of the Holiday Club team.

The space is under used and needs rethinking to accommodate other activities. There is a project underway to assess the needs and to potentially produce more useable areas for eg children's activities. It is a relatively

inflexible space not easily accessible to the community, there is no proper disabled access, only ramps into church though space has been made for wheelchairs in front of the front pews.

It is an attractive building steeped in history but with limited scope for reorganisation to enable more activities. It is very cold in the winter so any eg children's activities would be limited to warmer weather, unless more confined space could be made and therefore more easily heated. We are limited by the absence of a church hall.

Building is not very approachable. Doors too often closed, separate from the rest of Caversham. Foot traffic goes passed but building largely ignored? From the Mount to St Peter' requires crossing a busy road.

NUMERICAL GROWTH AND DECLINE

in 2011 Easter communicants were 322 and attendance was 442, compared to 177 and 230 in 2015. Christmas attendance 1580 with 527 communicants in 2011 compared with 1170 with 275 communicants in 2015. Used to be at Midnight Mass there were always extra seats at the back of the church, about 15-20 years ago. This year no extra chairs were needed.

Sunday attendance is ~130, midweek is ~11. The congregation seems to be stable at the moment with 10 people, (5 adults and 5 children) joining through the year. One person left through illness or death,

Other local churches include Roman Catholic, Methodists, Baptists, Grace Church, New Testament Church.

Generally all churches are suffering a decline in numbers; anecdotally there is a higher proportion of older people and not many young people and families.

Long term the numbers have declined. There are no numbers for the past hundred years but a decline in recent years has been recognised.

There are roles that people participate in that help keep people motivated to attend services regularly, choir, sidesmen, readers, Sunday club, making coffee, arranging flowers, cleaning. The sermons are good and often thought provoking.

These days people lives are many faceted and finding time to fit in church attendance is challenging. Many people are juggling busy lives and multiple commitments.

There are significantly larger attendance and communicant numbers at Easter and particularly Christmas. The wider community like to mark the more significant milestones through the year and will make the effort to attend. Special services seem to attract large numbers, ie 416 during Advent for congregation and local community and 340 for civic and school organisations. Eg crib services

Weddings 16, Funerals 18, baptisms 15 infants and children. Approx the same number of weddings and baptisms as funerals. Many of those who are married or baptised do not seem to come back again. We need to do more follow up and provide toddler services to encourage attendance and make people feel welcome and valued. There used to be more groups in the church, St Peter's Wives, Mothers Union, Cherubim that do not currently function. Olive Branch provides a visiting service for people who are sick, housebound or in need of extra help.

Numbers of people are important but the individual is also important, 'when two or three are gathered in my name'. Worship doesn't need large numbers. Each of us is counted.

The worship and attendance patterns have in recent years been generally declining. It is people who are not listening rather than what God might have been up to. He is patiently waiting for us to notice and listen.

FINANCE AND LEADERSHIP

2011: At £86,000 the Giving Income remained approximately the same as the previous year but the income from £16,000 from the Gosbrook Road property was transferred to Parish. The income in 2015 was £85,000 but the Parish share rose by £13,000. There was expenditure of £46,500 contribution to Parish costs in addition to the Parish share. We have currently stopped giving 10% of our income from church funds to charitable causes, but £7000 was raised through special events. The parish has a few restricted funds (e.g. the Balmore Hall Fund) and recently our treasurers have been trying to release some funds for specific purposes which come within the remit of those restricted funds. The good thing is that we do have such funds which could be used in the future provided they fulfil the requirements. However, that money cannot be used for everyday running costs. There is also Church House income which provides grants for specific purposes.

When finance is raised at Forums, there is either stony silence or dogged questions about why we have to pay so much quota – lots of explanation is given and yet people still feel the diocese asks too much even though Mike has explained that it is the deanery which sets the level of quota.

Since 2011 the church has made a regular deficit of £1000 - £4000.

The revenue account out of which regular expenditure is paid was £37000 in 2015. We have managed to control our running costs (with the exception of the Parish Share) by good husbandry. At this rate of spend our Revenue account will have shrunk to £20000 within 18 months and this is the minimum sensible contingency, so we need to solve the problem in this time and we are a very rich parish in comparison with other areas. Just £1 increase per week by all of those on the electoral roll would raise more than £7000 a year.

The shortage of regular income is a major problem, and the annual stewardship tries to address this. There is more work to be done to encourage people to sign up for stewardship and that includes encouraging those already signed up to review their giving in line with C of E guidance. 14 people only out of 121 are responsible for one third of all the giving. Two thirds of all giving pledges are at or below £10.00 week and approximately a quarter are only up to £2.50 a week. The Church of England average is £11.10 a week and for the Oxford Diocese is £12.80 a week. As a church we are generous at giving for special appeals, eg Christian Aid, WaterAid. It seems that the more mundane day to day running of the church does not enliven as generous a spirit. Stewardship is our response to God's goodness to us and not a matter of housekeeping. If the congregation were to respond generously – or even in line with Bishop John's suggestions on levels of giving, our cup would be overflowing!

Young families are becoming more comfortable in church, and we are seeing a notable rise in children in church. There are some excellent events in the church calendar (church fete, Christmas market) which raise large sums of money. Our music is in fine health with the Junior choir and the new organ and this attracts new worshippers. God is already working in our community and church life but like any other business we can't operate without sufficient income.

LEADERSHIP

From 1962 to 2007 there were only 2 incumbents, John Grimwade and Richard Kingsbury. Dan Tyndall was installed in 2008 followed only a few years later in 2014 by Mike. There is hope that with Mike and Rachel there will again be a longer incumbency and stability and growth both with congregation numbers and income. There seems to be good relationship between lay and ordained leadership.

The PCC is the decision making and responsible body which delegates matters to the church leadership team which in turn canvasses the views of the congregation via Forums. The CLT members are not elected and possibly the views of the CLT are not always representative of the congregation. We have forums for discussions and Mike has a policy of openness and likes to keep the congregation informed.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND CULTURE

TIMELINE EVENT

"The History of St Peter Church starts at the advent of the 12th century, with several additions and extensions over subsequent centuries including the first stone tower in 1280. The building was severely damaged in 1643 as Royalists defences were battered by Parliamentary cannon fire. The damaged tower was rebuilt in wood in 1663, repaired again in 1787 but by 1856 was very dilapidated and much of the church and tower was rebuilt

and extended in 1878. A final extension was built in 1924. The first readable gravestone dates from 1719 and by 1885 the churchyard was closed as it was declared full. In 1856 the population was declared 'almost entirely agricultural'. In 1947 the church was locked when unoccupied because of thefts and in 1957 the church was listed as a building of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. Following a period of gradual extension and rebuilding over 800 years, as the community of Caversham expanded, the last 60 years have seen a decline in church attendance and pews have been partially removed from the church to allow more open and flexible use of the interior, both for worship and social events. This has been accompanied by a loss of external space for parish use such as the closure of Balmore Hall. Following these changes there is now more activity within the church such as meetings, social activities and some very successful special events that draw a large number of irregular / non church attenders such as the annual Christmas Market and Flower Festival. Each change of Rector has brought sadness and uncertainty, but has also provided a stimulus for fresh ideas and innovations in worship and parish life. Two periods of interregnum in 07-08 and 13-14 both lasting over a year, have challenged the congregation but also tapped into the considerable lay resources within the congregation, improving its confidence and self-reliance. Red letter days mark the high points of parish life. Many of these are centred around baptisms and weddings of parishioners, but even times of sadness such as funerals have been deeply spiritual and supportive. Special occasions, especially Christmas and Easter periods, are always well attended with increasing numbers in recent years. The choir provides an important focus and features in many happy memories, both in services and social life of the parish. Small groups were launched in 2003 and the Olive Branch in 2015 to provide for the 'at home' community. Formal clergy led worship is a central feature of St Peter, enhanced by a very good choir and choirmaster/organist; recently about £50,000 was raised to buy a new electronic organ showing the support and enthusiasm for this aspect of our worship. Blue letter days mark the low points of parish life. The Parish formed by the merger of St Peter with St Margaret and St John in 2010 to form the large parish of Caversham, Thameside and Mapledurham has caused some difficulties and stress to those concerned. These changes also impose a heavy workload on the clergy in serving such a widespread and diverse parish. Cherubim, St Peter Scouts and church parades have all been the victim of falling numbers, as well as the loss of space for Sunday Club. Proposed plans for building work in the 1980's were rejected, limiting facilities for church activities. Green letter days represent the hope of the congregation for the future. The increasing number of families with young children is encouraging, as well as the growing membership of junior choir who may in future lead to a 'youth group'. Our new Rector Mike, his wife Rachel who is also ordained, and their young family have brought new life and fresh ideas to our parish; hopefully to be followed by a new transitional priest and also a curate later in 2016. There is a sense that the Holy Spirit is moving in our church with more focus on prayer and spirituality from Mike and our Associate priests Marion and John, well organised lay led services and the vitality of small groups. The introduction of PMC within our parish alongside other neighbouring parishes in our diocese brings the hope of further spiritual renewal.

"Caversham, once a village described in 1850 as being 'almost entirely agricultural' is now a suburban community, administered within the Borough of Reading. This thriving town has a major shopping centre, many large employers, and affords excellent rail and road links to London and the South of England enabling many residents to commute daily. However, Caversham is separated from Reading by the River Thames and still retains its 'village' identity with its own shops, bars and restaurants, library, churches and other public amenities. There is easy access, and a sense of affinity to, the largely unspoilt rural area of South Oxfordshire. The congregation is largely drawn from the more affluent suburban parts of Caversham, but quite a few members of the congregation are attracted from other parts of Reading or the more outlying rural areas. The community itself, while largely white and middle class, is quite diverse with a large number of commuters who work in London, leaving early and arriving back late each day leaving little time or energy for weekday parish activities. As well as families with children, there are many retired people living at home in large houses, sometimes alone while many others are in apartments or sheltered accommodation for the elderly or those needing more care. There is a low population of university students as there are no colleges of tertiary education nearby.

"The River Thames is the most defining feature, marking the separation from our 'big brother' Reading. The other churches in our parish are also sited beside or close to the River Thames giving our parish the name of 'Caversham, Thameside and Mapledurham'. There are many riverside walks, picnic areas, children's playgrounds and wildlife areas which are well used and enjoyed by the community. There is a lock in Caversham and various boating activities are enjoyed by way of boat hire, rowing and canoeing clubs as well as Sea Scouts. The link with Reading is Caversham Bridge, an important local landmark leading to Caversham's

narrow shopping street, often severely congested with through traffic. The heavy traffic and lack of easy parking in Caversham is reflected at St Peter which can make access by car and parking rather challenging. Caversham Court is a delightful public garden beside the river, adjacent to extensive allotments, leading directly to St Peter by means of a well-used public footpath and thoroughfare. The church tower can easily be seen from the busy Reading railway station, the River Thames and its adjacent public spaces, Caversham Bridge and Caversham Court Gardens, and is often seen as a symbol of Caversham. As well as hosting many open air events such as theatre, films, shows etc.; these public gardens are used for many well attended parish activities such as the annual Parish Summer Fete, Christmas Carol Service and Easter Dawn Service. Caversham has a prominent Public Library which is a prominent local landmark set in the heart of the village which is well known for its wide range of shops, pubs and restaurants; all are well supported by the congregation. In using those local amenities there is the opportunity to meet with fellow members of the congregation in the village, as well as many other friends and acquaintances within the local community. A well known annual event is Reading Festival, held over August Bank Holiday. Whilst this is held nearby in Reading, many hundreds of young music fans flock to the village to buy provisions and bring a feeling of excitement and a party atmosphere to the whole area.

"The congregation comes together in shared worship. In addition to this formal setting, members of the congregation come together in mutual support and friendship be it bell ringing, walks etc. or informally. The formal service set up in which music plays an important part is appreciated by a number of the interviewees. People also appreciated the spoken early Sunday and mid-week communion services set in an intimate small group setting. The congregation is mainly made up by middle class and professional people, the majority of which reside within the Caversham area. A number are long term residents and worshippers. Thus their children may be married at St Peter's and the children and their children will attend services when visiting the Caversham grandparents. The survey revealed that many people prefer a settled and ordered worship. Thus there were some adverse and regretful comments about the various interregnums and the fact that due to unfilled clergy posts lay led services take place. On the other hand, it is encouraging that people have stepped forward to lead services. So it is not just a church whose congregation expects worship and drawing nearer to God's presence to be the sole preserve of the clergy team.

Where has God been and where is he currently visible in this church community?

Whilst there have been and are projects in which St Peter's involved in such as Caversham Good Neighbours, Churches Together in Caversham, Christian Aid, Fairtrade and others this tends to be done by committed individuals with some parish support rather than a "team effort" by the whole congregation. We believe that there should be greater openness, involvement and engagement with the local community as a whole congregation, rather than individual efforts. We can build on our strengths such as music, traditional liturgy and special services. We need to be more welcoming and avoid any form of rejection or judgementalism which has alienated some people in the past. Any change has to be with consensus and introduced with sensitivity.

STEERING RESPONSE TO THE CONGREGATIONAL INTERVIEWS

CONGREGATIONAL DISCOVERY

"Consider the accumulated insight provided by these respondents. What does it tell you about what God is up to in this congregation?"

- God is stirring up change
- God is calling a wide range of people
- Many people are motivated and inspired to serve in a committed way in a variety of ministries in the Church
- God is stirring up the lay people to be involved
- God is challenging us to evolve in the light of demographic changes in the congregation and also in patterns of life in society as recognised by the people interviewed
- God is making us a more friendly, welcoming Church
- Sense of the Holy Spirit touching people
- God is touching and inspiring different people in various ways at different services"

"How do these responses show how God's love is lived out in this congregation?"

- Generally an inclusive and welcoming congregation with a wide spectrum of Christian traditions despite our rather narrow age and cultural demographic
- Fellowship and genuine care for others from individuals and through organised groups

☒ Humble service in many unseen ways by many people to the Church to enable it to function effectively"

"How has worship impacted these congregation members?"

☒ Choir has a very positive impact on worship

☒ Special services with deep resonance for many in different ways – many different services throughout the Church year were mentioned

☒ Negative comments made about recently-introduced lay-led services whilst others have commented favourably and understand the need for them

☒ All our regular services are appreciated and provide a framework for congregational worship

☒ Services at key points in people's lives, such as baptisms, weddings and funerals, are much appreciated at these significant times."

"What does the way people fight tell you about the congregation's ability to enter into and come out of conflict?"

☒ Some issues are not really handled or aired, others referred to grumbling and muttering in small cliques

☒ Forums give the opportunity for issues to be raised and improve transparency

☒ There will be conflicting opinions in a diverse group of people and there is recognition that compromise will be needed

☒ Lay-led services and Dwelling in the Word are both controversial – some are willing to go with it whereas a few will grumble and resist."

"How does that affect the congregation's ability to live out its mission?"

☒ Focus on mission will inevitably provoke fear of change which will need sensitive handling and good, open communication."