

**The Parish of All Saints, Birchington,
St Mildred, Acol and
St Thomas, Minnis Bay**

“Sustaining the Future”

Consultation on the Closures of St
Mildred’s Church, Acol and St Thomas
Church, Minnis Bay.

August 2023

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The Consultation Process

At its June 2023 meeting the Parish of All Saints Parochial Church Council (PCC) agreed the following timetable for consultation with each local church community; two will be held after Sunday worship at **12 noon** in the following churches:

Sunday 13th August 2023: – All Saints Church.

Sunday 20th August 2023: – St Thomas Church.

The first consultation meeting about the future of **St Mildred's Church** will be held at **3pm** on:

Sunday 6th August 2023: – Acol Village Hall.

After these meetings, a **PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETING** will be held on **Wednesday 20th September 2023 at 7pm at Quex Hall, Birchington CEP School, Park Lane, Birchington, CT7 0AS.**

During August, letters will be written and sent to all on the Church Electoral Roll, and to other stakeholders and interested parties, and residents are invited to send their comments **in writing by post or by email** to the contact details provided under the heading - "How to let us know your views" at the bottom of page 4.

The Consultation Process will close on **Monday 30th October 2023 at 12 noon.**

From the 1st November to 8th November 2023, conclusions from the Consultation Process will be reviewed, a Parish response formulated, and final recommendations made to the PCC meeting at the end of November 2023. PCC recommendations will be sent to the Diocese to enable further discussions about the way forward for the Parish.

I appreciate that this news has caused upset, anxiety and uncertainty. I am available to speak to any parishioner who would like to talk to me individually about the process of consultation or about how the news is impacting on their wellbeing or who can find an alternative way forward for the Parish. If you have any views or need any support please do not hesitate to contact me via **Church House, Kent Gardens, CT7 9RS** or by email parishconsultation@gmail.com

With every blessing,



The Reverend Mark Ham

Priest-in-Charge

The Parish of All Saints, Birchington

Consultees

All residents of the Parish of All Saints, Birchington, St Mildred, Acol and St Thomas, Minnis Bay.

All registered on the Church Electoral Roll.

The Parish Clerk on behalf of Birchington Parish Council.

The Parish Clerk on behalf of Acol Parish Council.

Thanet District Councillors for Birchington North and South.

The Bishop of Dover.

The Archdeacon of Canterbury.

Diocesan Secretary, the Diocese of Canterbury.

Strategic Property Director, the Diocese of Canterbury.

Area Dean and Lay Chair, Thanet Deanery.

Parochial Church Councils of the Churches within the Seamarsh Cluster (The Wantsum Benefice & St Saviour's Church, Westgate).

Secretary on behalf of Birchington Churches Together.

The Brothers of Birchington (the Lodge of Freemasons in West Malling, Kent).

Rt. Hon. Sir Roger Gale, MP.

The Parochial Church Council, the Parish of All Saints.

Birchington CEP School.

How to obtain copies:

Paper copies of this document are available from the Parish Office (Telephone (01843) 840777, there is an ansaphone facility) or may be e-mailed on request by contacting parishconsultation@gmail.com

Copies are available to view in Birchington Library, 17 Alpha Road, Birchington, CT7 9EG.

An electronic copy is available on the Parish Website ([All Saints Birchington - All Saints Church - Birchington](#))

Large print copies of this Consultation Document are available on request – please contact parishconsultation@gmail.com or telephone (01843) 840777 (there is an ansaphone facility).

How to let us know your views:

By letter – please send to **Church House, Kent Gardens, CT7 9RS** and mark it **“Consultation.”**

By email to parishconsultation@gmail.com

Executive Summary

1. This Consultation Document **“Sustaining the Future”** outlines the case for the closures of St Mildred’s Church, Acol and St Thomas Church, Minnis Bay and provides the rationale for advocating this course of action. **All Saints Church, Church House and Kearns Hall are not under threat of closure.** All Saints Church is consecrated and has been in the Village of Birchington for centuries and stands as the focal point of the Village and brings a **unifying presence**. Both Church Halls are not only valued and appreciated by the community, local organisations and small businesses that use them but are also a source of income for the Parish; a joint Business Plan will be developed for our Church Halls to explore their future potential.
2. At its 22nd March 2023 meeting, the PCC concluded that because of the on-going **financial pressures** and the **high-cost backlog maintenance works** required at all three churches, excluding Church House and Kearns Hall, that the Parish did not have sufficient funds to cover these costs nor would have the potential to in the foreseeable future.
3. **The Parish has arrears in its payment of Parish Share** (used to fund the costs of ministry & mission, including paying for Parish Priests, safeguarding, training, accommodation, and other associated costs) to the Diocese of Canterbury. Arrears from 2019 to 2022 total **£70,805** and could increase to over £90,000 by 31st December 2023. **This position is not sustainable.**
4. The Parish is using **restricted funds** which could be used to maintain our buildings **to subsidise its payment of Parish Share** which ought to be funded from its general revenue account.
5. **Parish income will not cover its expenditure if its Parish Share Quota is to be paid in full** without reductions in existing tight budgets or increases in individual giving and improved profitability from our Church Halls.
6. Across the three churches of All Saints, St Mildred’s and St Thomas and Church House there is a **backlog maintenance** requirement of **£687,948**. Kearns Hall requires window and floor replacements and estimates are awaited. **There is no immediate prospect of funding these works.** The works identified in the **Quinquennial Reports require action** as otherwise our churches will deteriorate further and become unsafe.
7. **Our congregations are declining** and are not being renewed with increases in families, young people and children coming into our churches. Church numbers have not recovered to pre-Covid-19 levels and are unlikely to.
8. **Our Vision is unlikely to be realised** because of the ministerial and PCC time spent on matters of finance and estate rather than on mission planning and delivery. **Young people, children and their families and our older people are our priorities.**
9. Although **the closure programme** may cause upset and distress, and there may be some legal complexities to remedy and overcome, it **will sustain the future viability of the Parish.**
10. A firmer financial footing will help **release missional potential for the future.**

Introduction

Jesus said, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10.10).

The Parish of All Saints Birchington, St Mildred, Acol and St Thomas, Minnis Bay has launched this Consultation Process **“Sustaining the Future”** to seek the views of the local population; this ‘listening’ exercise is in response to the recommendation of the Parochial Church Council (PCC), approved on 22nd March 2023 by a vote of 71% in favour, to close St Mildred’s Church, Acol and St Thomas Church, Minnis Bay. The wording of the resolution was as follows:

“To ensure the financial viability of the Parish, this PCC approves the closure of St Thomas and St Mildred’s Churches, to enable the appropriate re-ordering of All Saints Church and Church House. A strategic vision and business case will be formulated with the full involvement of the church communities.”

“Sustaining the Future” outlines the case for the closures and provides the rationale for justifying this course of action. **Its fundamental and primary purpose is to sustain the Parish for the future** so that it may give life to others and enable the Gospel to be passed on afresh to the future generations of the village of Birchington. The PCC concluded that because of the on-going financial pressures and the high-cost backlog maintenance works required at all three churches, excluding Church House and Kearns Hall, the Parish did not have sufficient funds to cover these costs nor would have the potential to in the foreseeable future. We are not the only church community in the Diocese of Canterbury, in Kent, nor in the United Kingdom that is facing these pressures, although that ought not to be taken as a message of reassurance. Therefore, closures were considered as the most viable solution and the use of sale proceeds to begin the re-ordering of All Saints Church and the start of an exciting new vision for the Parish from 2025.

Our consultations across the Parish are to be framed in terms of a series of ‘conversations’ and, hopefully, will be discursive in nature; the PCC wishes to hear, and receive in writing, views, opinions and ideas from all parts of our community; it is hoped that our Consultation Process will help the PCC to be fully informed of people’s feelings before it makes its final decisions later this year.

If the PCC reaffirms its commitment to the 22nd March 2023 resolution after the Consultation exercise has concluded, it will following the development and approval of a business case, plan to re-invest sale proceeds into **All Saints Church** to provide a reinvigorated and refreshed worship space and community hub for local people for our community to use and enjoy. It will be a **unifying presence** for the Village. Although it is understandable that the decision of the PCC may be viewed with sadness, it is an **opportunity for the future**. Christians are people of hope after all, and we believe that after death comes resurrection and new life. While there is the real possibility that our Church’s estate will be reduced, there is the exciting prospect that we can see, not only a rejuvenated and revitalised All Saints Church, which fulfils one of the bold outcomes of the Diocese of Canterbury and the Church of England, but a **sustainable and missional church fit for the 21st century**. There will also be opportunities for developing new church communities with the school, care homes because of our working through one church and two church halls.

The release into the public domain and media outlets of the news about the PCC’s decision stimulated many questions from people in the Village and many queries about the status of Kearns Hall. The resolution passed by the PCC, however, did not permit the closure of this Hall and it is therefore not part of this specific consultation exercise.

Our Dimensions

The Parish consists of Acol, Birchington and Minnis Bay. Birchington-on-Sea is a village in Thanet in North East Kent, Minnis Bay has a family beach and many local attractions including a sailing club and windsurfing, and Acol is one of the smallest communities in Kent with a population of less than three hundred people. 10,400 people live in Birchington and Minnis Bay, with a large proportion of elderly and retired. See Tables 1 and 2 below. It is anticipated that the population of Birchington in particular will increase with the proposed plans for extra housing to be built, although there is little evidence that new builds result in more people crossing church thresholds.

Table 1

Birchington North



Source: Office for National Statistics - Census 2021

Table 2

Birchington South



Source: Office for National Statistics - Census 2021

The Parish benefits from its excellent relationships with the local Church of England Primary School which has a caring Christian ethos and vision at its centre. The school has been rated as 'Outstanding' in its most recent SIAMS Church Inspection and it has also been rated 'Good' in its Ofsted Inspection.

The Church Estate

The Parish of All Saints Birchington with St Mildred, Acol and St Thomas, Minnis Bay has three churches and two church halls (Church House located in Kent Gardens and Kearns Hall on Grenham Bay Avenue).

All Saints Church, Birchington

The Parish Church in Birchington stands at the focal point of the village and is situated at the junction of the main shopping street and the A28 throughroad between Margate and Canterbury.

It is listed grade II as a building of special historical and architectural importance. It is thought to be within a Conservation Area. All Saints Church is consecrated¹.

All Saints Church is a significant building in the village constructed over many centuries. The oldest fabric is probably the Tower which is understood to have been constructed circa 1250. The spire was added in 1350. The South Porch is understood to have been built around 1450 but the inner door was rebuilt and repaired in 1863. The south wall of the Nave may date from the mid-14th century and incorporates many of the materials from the earlier church on the site. The Nave dates from the 14th century. Originally there was an intention to have the Tower on the south-west corner, but this was abandoned after 1347. In 1863, much of the North Aisle was repaired and restored.

The Quex Chapel (circa 1250) has substantial medieval monuments; the adjacent Chancel has the remains of the medieval rood screen that was brought back to the church in 1905.

The Rossetti Memorial close to the South Porch is of great significance. There is a Rossetti window which attracts much interest from visitors.

The church is primarily of flint and reused materials.

Access into the church is relatively straightforward and those in wheelchairs have access to the Nave and Aisles but not to the east of the building. The church has good lighting levels, sound reinforcement but does not have accessible toilets or other facilities.

The Churchyard is closed and managed by Thanet District Council and has an active group of volunteers to keep it tidy and well maintained. There are four Gardens of Remembrance, and one remains active.

The boiler was replaced in February 2019.

Service pattern: This Church offers one 10.30am Sung Eucharist service every Sunday. On Sundays (weeks 1 and 3), a Book of Common Prayer (BCP) Holy Communion service is available at 8am. A full pattern of services is held during Holy Week and Christmas and other Feast Days. Services for baptisms, weddings and funerals are available on request.

¹ The setting aside of land or buildings for sacred use in perpetuity.

The school makes good use of the Church and holds its end of term services which are extremely well attended by children, families, and staff.

Activity:

2022 Average Attendances: Morning Prayer/All-Age Worship 38; Sung Eucharist 43; Joint Eucharist 69; Book of Common Prayer Holy Communion 15.

Baptisms:

2018: 23; 2019: 6; 2020: 3; 2021: 16; 2022: 29 (post-Covid-19 impact?); 2023: 2. Two also planned for the remainder of 2023.

Weddings:

2018: 7; 2019: 2; 2020: 3; 2021: 3; 2022: 5. 2023: 1; two planned (August and October 2023).

Funerals:

2018: 2; 2019: 13; 2020: 4; 2021: 4; 2022: 2; 2023: 3.

Other:

Carols by Candlelight 2022: 114.

Christingle: 2022: 330.

Sundays to date: Sung Eucharist: Up to 50. BCP Holy Communion: Range 12-20.

Capacity: This Church can accommodate up to 300 people.

Church House, Kent Gardens

Church House is a Church Hall with a sizeable car park which is used not only for church purposes but is hired out to local community groups and charities. It was built in 1971, although it is beginning to show signs of deterioration, particularly with its pitched roof which requires replacement. However, the Parish is very grateful to its volunteers who have spent many hours redecorating and making good areas of Church House which have required attention. In the medium to long-term, Church House requires replacement.

Church House is well used which reduces during school holidays; use, however, could be increased through proactive marketing. In 2023, Church House yielded an £11,744 profit after deducting expenditure incurred. Current hire fees will be subject to review as part of the business planning exercise.

St Mildred's Church, Acol

St Mildred's Church was built in 1876 and was constructed not only as a place of worship but also as a school for the local children. It is in the small village of Acol which has a population of approximately 300 people. This building is not listed and is not within a conservation area. St Mildred's Church is not consecrated but is dedicated. It does have a Garden of Remembrance which currently has 6 interments of ashes.

The key constraints of St Mildred's Church are its lack of car parking, inadequate heating facilities and no toilet or access to hot water.

Service pattern: Weeks 2 and 4: Tuesdays: Office of Morning Prayer; Sunday Week 1: Morning Prayer service at 10.30am and in Week 3: 3pm Prayer Service. Services are held for Easter, Harvest and Christmas and its Patronal Festival). Eucharistic services are offered for the St Mildred Patronal Festival in July and most Feast Days. Services for baptisms, weddings and funerals are available on request.

Activity:

Office of Morning Prayer (range 2 to 12 attendances); Morning Prayer: (9 to 16 attendances); Prayer Service (6 to 10 attendances).

Baptisms:

2018: 2; 2019: 0; 2020: 0; 2021: 0; 2022: 2; 2023 - One planned in August 2023.

Weddings:

2018: 0; 2019: 0; 2020: 0; 2021: 3; 2022: 0. 2023: 1.

Funerals:

2018: 0; 2019: 1; 2020: 0; 2021: 0; 2022: 0; 2023: 1.

Other:

Christmas Carol Service 2022: 60.

Capacity:

The Church can accommodate up to 60 people.

St Thomas Church, Minnis Bay

Following the gift of land in 1924 by Ida Kearns in memory of her husband, Thomas, to the Diocese, the Foundation Stone was laid on 29th October 1932 and the first service held in the church on Christmas morning, 1932. The Bishop of Dover conducted the Service of Dedication on 5th February 1933. The Brothers of Birchington, Freemasons, financially supported the building of the church and make a small annual donation. Before the onset of Covid-19, the Freemasons held a biannual service led by their own chaplain; in 2022, however, an Evensong Service was held commemorating the 90 years since the laying of the Foundation Stone led by the St Thomas Church community.

St Thomas Church is not listed and is not within a conservation area and is dedicated. There is a Garden of Remembrance which has 11 interments of ashes.

Service pattern:

Every Sunday - 10.30am Morning Prayer. Services for baptisms, weddings and funerals are available on request.

Activity:

13 to 25 Sunday attendances.

Baptisms:

2018: 0; 2019: 4; 2020: 0; 2021: 0; 2022: 1 2023: to date: 0.

Weddings:

2018: 1; 2019: 0; 2020: 0; 2021: 0; 2022: 1. 2023: One planned in September.

Funerals:

2018: 0; 2019: 0; 2020: 3; 2021: 0; 2022: 1; 2023: 0 to date.

Other:

Christmas Carol Service 2022: 32.

Thanet Inner Wheel & Rotary Club Carol Service 2022: 119.

Capacity:

The Church can accommodate up to 120 people.

Kearns Hall

Kearns Hall belongs to the Parish and is used for church purposes and is hired out to local community groups.

This Church Hall is used to support the annual two-week ministry of the Scripture Union Team. Kearns Hall is used as its base, and the event concludes with their final service, led by the Team, in All Saints Church on the final evening. 2023 is its 129th year in Minnis Bay. It has grown remarkably over the last decade, although its impact upon local churches does not follow through after the event finishes with very little increase from young people and children attending worship services.

In 2023, Kearns Hall yielded a profit of £9,921 after accounting for its operating costs. Based upon an analysis of diary bookings from August 2022 to February 2023 the Hall has an average utilisation rate of 44% based upon 12 hours availability daily, Monday to Saturday, and 6 hours on Sundays; utilisation at Kearns Hall will be increased with more marketing planned to increase its profitability. Current hire fees will also be reviewed as part of the business planning process. Its appearance will be enhanced too; it is proposed to revamp and renovate Kearns Hall by allocating a proportion of the £26,783 (source: 2022 Accounts) held in the St Thomas Church restricted fund for improvement works subject to PCC approval.

Kearns Hall is highly valued as a community asset, and it is for this reason that it is **not** included as part of the proposed closure programme currently. It is multi-functional and could be used for worship purposes if St Thomas Church is closed subject to permission from the Bishop of Dover.

The Rationale for Closures

Delivering Our Vision

In September 2021, the PCC approved the 2022-2025 Mission Plan and its Vision was as follows:

“In our three churches we wish to help people come to know the love of God in their lives. We want to provide a place where the spirituality of all our members is encouraged and nurtured but a place where people can seek God too for the first time. We are eager to bring all people to come to know Jesus, to be confident in their faith and worship, to be prayerful and spiritual with a strong faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and for them to feel valued and yet challenged in our worshipping life and discipleship together.

We wish to be a Christian influence across the Parish, welcoming people and being a friendly and inclusive place for the community, seeking to work with other churches and those outside our churches.

Our Vision is of a community where everyone benefits from the opportunities the future holds and where no one is ignored, excluded, or forgotten.

Our Mission is to use our churches to help people reach their full potential and so contribute towards making a cohesive, vibrant, and successful community.

In two to five years, we would like to be:

- A mixed, outward looking congregation.
- A lively, growing church, in both numbers and in spirituality.
- Accessible to the community with offering all types of hospitality and outreach to the community especially to the lonely, to older people and to schools, young people, and their families.
- A church where people can turn to with confidence when they are vulnerable or in need.
- A place where people want to go, with worship that is adventurous and invigorating enough to meet the needs of a wide range of people, but that remains prayerful and spiritual and offers all age groups an opportunity to experience the living God.”

Although the Parish is committed to this Vision there have been continuing difficulties with realising its aspirations because of financial pressures which have consumed a significant proportion of ministerial and PCC time. Furthermore, the pressures from maintaining the fabric of three Church buildings has increased demands upon the Parish's limited resources and has absorbed the time of our Churchwardens and members of the Standing Committee and detracted them and the PCC from missional activities. Since the adoption of the Mission Plan, it has become very apparent that to secure its future, the Parish needs to ensure that all its work and activities can be delivered in a **sustainable** way not only in terms of its finances, but also the functional suitability and safety of its buildings and the supply of ministerial cover to officiate at its Church services.

The Financial Challenges

This Parish has been considering the future shape of its estate since 2021. A conversation began within the PCC about the financial pressures that it has faced historically which became more acute as a result of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the Parish's major items of expenditure is paying the Parish Share Quota to the Diocese of Canterbury which is used to fund the costs of ministry & mission (including paying for Parish Priests), safeguarding, training, accommodation and other associated costs. Over the years, the Parish has had difficulties meeting its Parish Share obligations in 2014, 2015 and 2016, and it was in 2017 that income from the Church Lands Account could be used for religious and other charitable work of the Church of England which also included Parish Share.

Arrears have accumulated in our Parish Share payments in 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 and total £70,805 (source: 2022 Accounts). The Parish struggled to pay its 2022 Parish Share of £75,476 despite an £11,276 (13% reduction on the 2021 quota). For 2023, it is anticipated too that our Diocesan Parish Share requirement of

£80,013, uplifted to fund cost of living pressures, will not be met in full resulting in a projected shortfall of £20,000 which will increase our arrears to over £90,000.

Table 3 below shows the Parish Share Quotas from 2019 to 2022.

Table 3

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Parish Share Quota	£ 87,628	£ 87,628	£ 86,752	£ 75,476	£ 337,484
Source of funds					
Church		£27,000	£46,000	£47,000	£120,000
Restricted funds		£23,000	£19,000	£20,000	£62,000
Unrestricted funds		£0	£0	£1,000	£1,000
Total	£83,679	£50,000	£65,000	£68,000	£266,679
Arrears in Parish Share Quota Payments	-£ 3,949	-£ 37,628	-£ 21,752	-£ 7,476	-£ 70,805

Table 4 shows the source of funds for paying our **actual** Parish Share Quota by % by year.

Table 4

% Source of funds for paying Parish Share	2020	2021	2022
Church	54	71	69
Restricted funds	46	29	29
Unrestricted funds	0	0	1

From 2020 the Parish has relied upon its restricted funds to assist with paying its Quota; as a short-term measure this is prudent, particularly when helping cushion the impact, and the after effects of 'Lockdowns' on the activities of Church, Kearns Hall and Church House and its financial implications. But from January to June 2023, although the Parish has paid £30,000 towards its £80,013 requirement, 63% has been sourced from Church funds with the remainder from restricted funds. In the longer term, however, this strategy is not sustainable; it masks the ability of the Parish to fund its Quota in full drawing upon its own general revenue account. Furthermore, there are the opportunity costs (i.e., the forgone benefit that would have been derived from an option not chosen) of using restricted funds in this way as they could be used for other purposes in support of the religious and other charitable

work of the Church of England (e.g., in support of work on the building fabric; preventative maintenance programmes or with specific missional projects and initiatives subject to Diocesan approval).

Although the application of specific accounting treatments to our Annual Accounts has shown that the Parish is in surplus, they do not record the arrears in Parish Share to the Diocese of Canterbury. Similarly, for each church there are deficits between income received and expenditure incurred.

The financial impact of paying Parish Share in full for 2022 has been modelled to demonstrate its effect upon our budget (**see Table 5 below**). Actual income and expenditure data for 2022 have been used, which reconciles with our Annual Accounts, and the full payment of the Parish Share quota of £75,476 is factored in. The total Parish Share requirement has been allocated to each of our Churches based on All Saints Church, 50%, St Thomas Church, 40% and St Mildred's Church, 10%. The use of restricted funds to subsidise Parish Share payments has not been included. This model demonstrates that the Parish would have been in deficit or would have had to identify over £27k of reductions or appeal for increased donations to deliver a balanced budget. It needs be noted that the Parish Share Quota arrears from 2019 to 2021 have not been included in this modelling (£63,329) and continue to be a financial liability to All Saints Parish.

The Parochial Church Council is a registered charity and has obligations towards the Charity Commission including the "duty of prudence" and in not over-committing the charity. As a Christian community in Birchington, the PCC has an obligation to administer and have oversight over the resources that we are charged with and to manage them responsibly and effectively for the 'economy of God' (derived from the New Testament Greek οἰκονομία) and the purposes of his Kingdom. Therefore, the Parish has a responsibility to respond to the financial challenges it faces and sustain the Anglican church in Birchington for future generations.

Table 5

2022							
Income	Parish	All Saints	St Thomas	St Mildreds	General	Church Hse	Kearns Hall
Collections	8,011	5,243	2,109	659			
Planned Giving	32,841	19,456	13,385				
Income tax recovered	10,935	6,500	4,400	35			
Donations & legacies	4,323	500			3,823		
Fundraising/magazines etc	5,069				5,069		
Fees weddings/funerals	1,662				1,662		
Sundry/charity collections	4,874				4,874		
Investment interest	1,198				1,198		
Rent from land	424				424		
Rental income	31,203					16,455	14,748
Total Income	100,540	31,699	19,894	694	17,050	16,455	14,748
Expenditure	Parish	All Saints	St Thomas	St Mildreds	General	Church Hse	Kearns Hall
Utilities (gas/electric)	13,185	4,941	1,751	403		2,767	3,323
Water	692	173	173			173	173
Insurance includes halls	9,321	5,810	2,516	995		See AS	See St T
Cleaning	2,743		780			923	1,040
Grass cutting	2,050	140	1,600	100		210	
Service costs	1,994	997	898	99			
TV licence	159		159				
CCLI licenses	470	306	164				
Salaries/Honoraria	3,758	3,158	500	100			
RSCM membership	134	67	54	13			
Fire action (extinguishers)	546	339	186	21		See AS	See St T
Supplies for halls/repairs	929					638	291
Repairs/heating contract	2,324	1,162	930	232			
Loan repayment	3,000	1,500	1,200	300			
Sundry/charitable giving	6,630	3,315	2,652	663			
Administration	4,431	2,216	1,772	443			
Parish Share Quota Required	75,476	37,738	30,190	7,548			
Total expenditure	127,842	61,862	45,525	10,917	0	4,711	4,827
Income less expenditure	-27,302	-30,163	-25,631	-10,223	17,050	11,744	9,921

Repairs to Churches and Church Halls

In addition to the pressures on the Parish's revenue budget, there are significant backlog maintenance costs identified in the Quinquennial Survey Reports and there is a requirement for a new heating system at St Mildred's Church as current provision is inadequate. Headline figures are summarised in Table 6:

Table 6

Church:	Estimated Costs:	Type of Repairs (Summary):
All Saints	£499,135	Church roof and steeple replacement – external.
St Thomas	£67,508	Internal ceiling replacement/doors/internal repairs and removal of Bell Tower and making good site. Gutters.
St Mildred's	£78,305 £13,000	External roof repairs and installation of new heating. Dividing external wall between church and neighbouring garden.
Church House	£30,000 TBC	Replacement rubber roofing for the pitched roof.
Kearns Hall	£TBC	Replacement floor and windows.
Total:	£687,948(*)	

(*) 20% VAT has been included in some of the estimated costs received but it is currently redeemable.

Incumbents and Churchwardens have an obligation under Church Measures to ensure that buildings are safe and well maintained, and therefore, remedial works must be budgeted for and completed to maintain safety and lessen the impact of deterioration. Maintenance and restoration are the most effective prevention against the deterioration of our sacred places, and it is prudent to implement the recommendations from the Quinquennial Reports. Sadly, the recommended Quinquennial Report repairs from the past were not undertaken in this Parish because the reports were not available to Churchwardens to action. All the works from our most recent Quinquennial Reports need to be completed within 5 years (£137,590 per year at 2023 prices assuming that the works can be phased in this way which is unlikely) except for the heating at St Mildred's Church.

The Parish holds fundraising events each year, but profitability levels are relatively small. It is unlikely that the PCC can develop sufficiently ambitious plans for fundraising that can fund the phasing of all works required at our churches although every effort will be made for attracting funds for the steeple at All Saints Church by

launching a local appeal. The 'Friends of the Parish of Birchington' (FoPB) was launched in August 2021 with a specific remit to fundraise for the upkeep and maintenance of the three church buildings across the Parish. To date, however, FoPB has raised just over £1,800 and is still establishing itself. It is difficult to estimate fundraising potential locally as the motivation, and willingness to donate, might be influenced adversely, not only from current macro-economic uncertainties, but also because of the impact from many 'negative' newspaper articles referring to the 'wealth' of the national Church and the Church Commissioners. It is important to recognise though that although the Church Commissioners and the Church of England may have financial reserves and endowments the money would not last long if every church that required repairs or needed support to pay Parish Share approached either organisation.

Within the Accounts of the Parish significant **investment and permanent endowment funds** are reported and in 2022, £747,258 is shown. However, these funds have been gifted to the Parish on the basis that the capital of the funds cannot be spent and only the income generated from the investment can be used and the Parish has done so from the Church Land Account and has topped up its Parish Share contributions since 2017. However, the PCC is exploring the adoption of a Total Return approach which allows the charity to invest its endowment funds without being constrained by the distinction between capital gain and the income in its returns. The embracing of a Total Return approach will not yield sufficient funds to cover the total Quinquennial costs, and the future use of its endowment funds will be subject to the PCC's Statement of Investment Principles which is in preparation currently.

Grant applications to fund building repairs remain a possibility but often require 'match funding' from the Parish; it must be acknowledged that it is very likely that there will be many applications from other parishes throughout England given the aging stock of churches, particularly as they face similar financial pressures to this Parish. The funding 'pools' that most parishes are approaching are becoming ever smaller, and the criteria for supporting grant bids ever tighter. Additionally, there will be a requirement for a 'dedicated fundraiser' in this Parish who will not only have sufficient time and experience to complete grant applications but also be able to monitor their passage through the rigorous submission processes, answer queries and approach other possible donors and agencies.

Clearly, there are difficulties accessing funds for the repair of our churches and all opportunities must be explored. There was the possibility of this Parish applying to the Diocese for funds that would have flowed from the sale of glebe land at Canterbury Road for a housing development of 9 units that could have yielded considerable funds for church use. This avenue is no longer available because Thanet District Council rejected the planning application submitted by the Diocese of Canterbury.

The Parish, therefore, must assume for planning purposes that its fundraising initiatives will not yield a sufficient pool of funds for delivering the major and intermediate repair works required across its three churches and at Church House and Kearns Hall nor has the funds available from other sources to do so. Closures, therefore, can provide funds for sustaining the future of this Parish.

Declining Congregations

This Parish is also experiencing, like so many other churches declining congregations, exacerbated with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Former parishioners have not returned to church as hoped since the first Lockdown in March 2020.

Furthermore, the Parish continues to be challenged particularly with growing its number of children and young people attending church and the Diocese of Canterbury has initiated a study into Children's and Young People's Ministry. Its headlines are as follows:

- The decline of those within the 20 to 30 age profiles has increased over recent decades.
- 91% of individuals affiliated with the Anglican Church are over 34 years old.
- Under 16 attendances from 2014 to 2019 in the Diocese of Canterbury is shown below in Table 7 and is showing decline.

Table 7

Year	Attendances
2014	1,613
2015	1,484
2016	1,399
2017	1,425
2018	1,337
2019	1,144

(Source: Diocese of Canterbury, 2023)

In a six-year period 469 under 16-year-olds have been lost from the churches in the Diocese. All Saints Parish has launched a small working group and is developing its strategy for young people and children and is preparing a funding bid to support a Young Person and Children's Worker. It is vital for the future of the Parish that we can attract young people into the church community while supporting our older congregation. We have excellent working relationships with the local school and several initiatives including Breakfast Time, Supper Club, the Intergenerational Group, and our Junior Church, can offer a firm foundation from which a Young Person and Children's Worker can build upon and develop a new and exciting ministry in Birchington.

Furthermore, less and less people identify with the Christian faith or wish to attend Church on a regular basis which impacts upon attendances but also involvement in the life of the church including tithing or regular giving. In the 2023 Census over 58% of the residents of this Parish identify as 'Christian'; however, Sunday attendances in All Saints, St Mildred's and St Thomas Churches register at less than 1% of the total Birchington population. There is an apparent discrepancy between church attendance and identification with the Christian faith in Birchington, Acol and Minnis Bay which may take several years to turnaround before more people cross our church thresholds and become active disciples of Christ and stewards of the church.

The Feasibility of Closures

“Sustaining the Future” has provided the justification for closing St Mildred’s and St Thomas Churches and the rationale behind the decision of the PCC. The Parish faces significant cost pressures, particularly paying its Parish Share in **full**, the funding of high backlog maintenance requirements that have accumulated over time, and declining congregations and income levels. **The Parish must become sustainable for the future.** Because both churches are dedicated there is no need for Church Commissioner involvement prior to their disposal. However, for St Thomas Church, the decision rests with the Parochial Church Council, and for St Mildred’s Church, the Bishop of Dover; the Diocese will be informed of the outcome of this Consultation Process and its conclusions, which ends on the 30th October 2023, and any PCC recommendations on the way forward. However, before recommendations are made to the PCC for final approval, it needs to satisfy itself on several important legal issues that need to be addressed and remedied in relation to:

- Restrictive covenants on the title at St Mildred’s Church restricting use to Church and/or Church School.
- Restrictive covenants on the use of the St Thomas site as a church for Church of England purposes only and the objects of the Trust held by the Parochial Church Council as Managing Trustees.
- The status of the Freemason Memorials at St Thomas Church.
- The exhumation of ashes from the Gardens of Remembrance at St Mildred’s and St Thomas Churches.

Professional advice will also be needed on the feasibility of obtaining planning permission for the St Thomas Church site in order to sell for residential development or alternatively on whether any prospective sale would be more likely and easier without change of use of the existing buildings. Similarly, planning advice will be sought for the St Mildred’s Church site and how any sale potential may be optimised.

The Financial Benefits from Closures

St Mildred’s Church

The financial benefits to be realised from the sale of St Mildred’s Church still need to be established and data is awaited.

There would also be revenue savings.

St Thomas Church

In the current market, which is declining, an estimated sale price in the region of £780,000 could be realised for the Church site in isolation. This estimate is on the assumption of having obtained detailed planning permission for housing development on the site. If Kearns Hall is included, the estimate would increase to £1.2 million for the entire site.

Both the Church and Hall have an existing use value and there is demand generally from other church groups and Christian organisations that could generate a figure in the region of £500,000 for St Thomas Church and £325,000 for Kearns Hall. An overage facility could be put on the property restricting use if a purchaser were to subsequently receive planning permission and the Parish would receive a percentage of any uplift in value.

Furthermore, as part of this Consultation Process, the Parish must consult with the Brothers of Birchington as the land at the St Thomas Church and Kearns Hall site is held on trust. The PCC are Managing Trustees.

There would also be savings in running costs.

The Implications of the Charities Act 2011

Under Section 119 of the Charities Act 2011, the PCC as charity trustees must before entering into an agreement for any sale obtain and consider a written report on the proposed disposition from a designated professional advisor. This requirement is applicable to both Churches and Kearns Hall and will be sought in due course.

The Impact of Change

A Revitalised Vision

The closure of St Mildred's and St Thomas Churches will have a significant impact upon the communities that they have served for many years, and been part of, and on the parishioners who have worshipped in them faithfully. For St Mildred's Church there are 147 years worth of celebrations, of prayer, events and memories, and 91 years for St Thomas Church. Despite the pain and distress from the closures there will be new opportunities for the Parish that will contribute towards delivering our vision and purpose for the future, not solely as the Anglican centre of worship for the Village, but as a revitalised community hub too stretching out and making its contribution towards the flourishing of the Parish and proclaiming the Gospel afresh to current and future generations. The Parish has been held back for too long because of historic financial problems, and restricted by not only too much estate, which cannot be managed sustainably within existing resources, but from its disrepair and deterioration over several years that has exacerbated our challenged situation and detracted us from our missional aspirations.

The Loss of St Mildred's and St Thomas Congregations

With closure of these churches there is the risk that their former congregations will not attend church at All Saints or may go elsewhere to worship. However, we will remain a Parish, and have always been so, and it is hoped that people will come to appreciate the beauty and numinous of All Saints Church and come to worship God in that place that has been the centre of the Village for centuries and a **unifying presence**.

Remembrance and Celebration

If the closure programme is reaffirmed by the PCC, exhibitions and events will be arranged to remember, and commemorate the life and witness of each church, and final services of celebration and thanksgiving will be held before the life of each church ends and closes.

On a yearly basis, the Patronal Festivals for St Mildred and St Thomas will be celebrated at All Saints Church in remembrance of its daughter churches.

Advice will be obtained from the Diocese and Diocesan Registrar on the relocation of Memorial stones, plaques and other ecclesiastical items into All Saints Church after consultation with all key stakeholders.

Pastoral Support

Pastoral support will be available from clergy and others to all affected by the closures. In particular support will be provided to those partners and families who have remains of loved ones in the Gardens of Remembrance before options are discussed regarding exhumation and re-commitment elsewhere (subject to advice from the Diocese and the Ministry of Justice where appropriate).

Accessibility - Getting to All Saints Church

Because of the lack of buses on Sundays to All Saints Church from Acol and Minnis Bay it is likely that many parishioners from St Mildred's and St Thomas Churches will not feel able to come to All Saints nor feel inclined to. However, car sharing will be encouraged and lifts offered to all who want to come to church. Results from the 2021 Census show the number of cars and vans available to people in Birchington and are shown in Table 8 below, and it is hoped that many of our parishioners, including those who attend St Mildred's and St Thomas Churches, have access to cars and may offer lifts to those without any means of transport so that they are able to attend worship at All Saints Church.

Table 8

	Birchington North	England	Birchington South
No cars or vans in household	18.3%	23.5%	21.5%
1 car or van in household	43.6%	41.3%	48.7%
2 cars or vans in household	27.5%	26.1%	22.5%
3 or more cars or vans in household	10.6%	9.1%	7.3%

(Source: 2021 Census)

Environment - Lack of toilet facilities at All Saints Church

The lack of toilet facilities at All Saints Church has often be presented as a major drawback and concern, and is significant enough to demotivate parishioners from attending worship services at this church, particularly from the St Thomas community. However, if the PCC reaffirms its commitment to closing St Mildred's and St Thomas Churches consideration will be given priority on how to overcome this problem through temporary measures prior to any re-ordering scheme at All Saints Church where more permanent solutions will be identified.

Other Options

If the Parish cannot close and dispose of either St Mildred's and St Thomas Churches or both the following less than optimal options are possible.

Allow 'At Risk' Churches to remain 'fallow'

Both churches would remain open but would only receive minimum maintenance to maintain their upkeep. This option is less than ideal. Over time there would be health and safety issues from their continuing deterioration which could have reputational implications for the Parish with unkempt and poorly maintained buildings on display to the public. Also keeping buildings under frequent inspection to assess deterioration and arrange repairs would be time consuming for the Churchwardens and expensive to the Parish with the need to fund repairs on an ongoing basis. There would still be revenue consequences (heating, upkeep, Parish Share) from this Option.

The Parish would still face challenging financial problems, backlog maintenance costs, declining congregations (potentially exacerbated with deteriorating buildings), reduced income levels and a sustainable and flourishing church for the future could not be facilitated.

'At Risk' Churches to become Festival Churches

Churches would only open for certain religious festivals during the year (e.g., Easter Sunday, Harvest, Patronal Festivals, Christmas) and for baptisms, weddings and funerals. However, the challenges would remain and be identical to the drawbacks the 'fallow' option describes above.

Suspend worship in St Mildred's and St Thomas Churches

If this course of action was proposed instead of closures, worship could be suspended at both churches subject to permission from the Bishop of Dover, and the buildings no longer used for these purposes. However, there would be little benefit from this option and many of its disbenefits would be the same as the 'fallow' option above.

Conclusion

"Sustaining the Future" has sought to justify the decision of the PCC at its 22nd March 2023 meeting and has drawn upon empirical data to explain the challenges the Parish of All Saints, Birchington faces.

It is hoped that the facts offered in this Consultation Document will generate constructive and thought-provoking discussions about the future shape of the estate of this Parish. Our consultations will be framed in terms of a series of 'conversations' and, hopefully, will be discursive in nature; the PCC wishes to hear, and receive in writing, views, opinions and ideas from all parts of our community and our consultation will help the PCC to be fully informed of people's feelings before it makes its final decisions.

This work has been underpinned with prayer, but the most basic and fundamental motivation behind all of it over the last two years, and which has driven it, is to establish a viable and sustainable basis for this Parish from which it may flourish for the future so that God's love may be made known to all, and for some perhaps for the very first time. A firmer financial footing for All Saints Parish will help **release missional potential for the future in a sustainable way.**

“Mission is putting love where love is not.” – St John of the Cross (1542-1591).