

Friends of Sutton Veny Church - First Annual Report – April 2020

Origins

With the approval of the Parochial Church Council (PCC), given at their meeting in October 2018, The Friends of Sutton Veny Church group (FSVC aka The Friends) was formally established on 2nd April 2019. The PCC retains the ultimate responsibility for the care of St John's church, and against this backdrop the stated purposes of FSVC are:

To help conserve, maintain, and improve the fabric, furnishings and fittings of St John the Evangelist's Church and to:

- 1) support the upkeep of the building and its grounds;
- 2) foster public interest in the building and its grounds.

Under the initial chairmanship of George Brooks, five trustees were identified to undertake the tasks necessary to establish the group in support of its purposes and as a registered charity. At their July 2019 meeting George Brooks stood down as chairman and the trustees elected Christopher Elliott, who had previously been Treasurer, as Chairman. They also welcomed Alick Moore as a sixth trustee and a volunteer to take on the Treasurer's role. The current trustees are:

Christopher Elliott – Chairman
Alick Moore – Treasurer
Peter Hopkins – Membership
Patrick Clarkson – Governance
Richard Jackman – Secretary/PCC link
George Brooks

Membership

The Friends group was established as a charity separate from the PCC because it was felt that there were many within the village and beyond who, though not overtly religious, were supportive of initiatives to keep the church building at the centre of village life. The membership list would appear to vindicate this view, although several members of the worshipping community have also chosen to be FSVC members. This is welcomed. However, it is apparent that some who previously donated to the PCC have now either switched or divided their previous level of giving between the two organisations, with a consequent fall being seen in the PCC's income.

As well as publicising the formation of The Friends in the Village Newsletter and also the Parish News, a tri-fold flier has been made available in church and delivered to every household within the parish. Take-up to date has been modest with approximately 40 names currently on the membership list. Most live in the village but a few live elsewhere. Some have links to the church through relatives buried in the churchyard and others through memories of a happy wedding day in Sutton Veny.

Formally, and in an effort to establish a dependable base income, membership involves a commitment to a regular donation of at least £10 per annum, but some generous one-off donations have also been received. Notwithstanding the financial conditions for formal membership, the trustees are mindful of those who donate their time and effort in the care of the church buildings and churchyard, and endeavour to ensure that this group as well as the worshipping congregation are, as far as possible, treated as members.

In the coming months trustees will endeavour to promote both a higher level of take-up locally and also to encourage increased membership from those living further afield (potentially as far away as Australia, bearing in mind our strong ANZAC connections), who might want to maintain a linkage with our church. Whilst finance is a major driver, our aim is also to stimulate interest and engagement. This report serves to promote the latter.

Governance and Charitable Status

A constitution document was signed by the trustees on 2 April 2019 and the Friends group has been run in accordance with the constitution in every respect save that in respect to the Annual General Meeting. This was advertised to be held on 31 March 2020 but, due to the Coronavirus restrictions imposed by the government, it had to be cancelled. As an expedient alternative a resolution was circulated electronically and approved by trustees. This confirmed both acceptance of the annual accounts and also that all trustees were prepared to stand for a further year.

The Friends group was established with a view to obtaining formal charitable status and, with the necessary criteria having been met, The Friends of Sutton Veny Church was entered on the Charity Commission Register of Charities on 31 Mar 2020 with a registered charity number of 1188816.

The wording of the constitution recognises the requirement to maintain strong linkages with the PCC, who retain the ultimate responsibility for the church building and churchyard. The Secretary is also a member of the PCC and acts as a conduit between the two groups. The standing agendas of both the PCC and the FSVC trustees' meetings now include items respectively to generate requests for support and to respond to them.

Activities - Past

Initial activity focussed on raising awareness of The Friends and encouraging membership through personal engagement by trustees, displays in the church and leafleting village households.

As part of the awareness campaign, on Saturday 28 July the trustees organised, in conjunction with the normal Produce Stall, which raises funds for church projects under the auspices of the PCC, an outdoor summer party. With tents set up in the corner of the Alexander Field adjacent to the churchyard extension, drinks and light refreshments were served and musical entertainment was provided by the Steeple Rocks choir. It was much enjoyed, and the intention is to repeat this on an annual basis, both as a means of saying thank you to all who contribute to the upkeep of the church and also to raise the profile and encourage membership of The Friends.

The first major fundraising event was held on Friday 29 November. It comprised a free and open-to-all talk in the church by Andrew Campbell on the operation to relieve the siege of Malta in WW2, followed by a ticketed supper in the Village Hall. This was deemed not only a financial success, with approximately £1,480 being raised through a combination of supper tickets and donations, but also very enjoyable by those who attended. A number of lessons were identified that will be borne in mind for future events. Key amongst these is the organisational and supporting effort involved in staging such events and hence the need to ensure that volunteers are not over-burdened.

Carol singing around the village has not taken place for many years, but this was re-introduced on Saturday 21 December 2019. Billed primarily as an event to foster community

spirit, almost 50 people (including 20 children) turned out on a night with foul weather to sing their way from the church to The Woolpack, raising approximately £130 for FSVC in the process.

Activities - Planned

Looking forward, the events diary reflects a repeat of the Summer Party on Saturday 25 July and a light musical concert, 'Tinkling the Ivories', by Michael Lunts that is planned to be held in the church on Saturday 12 September.

The third strand of activity, namely providing practical support to the PCC, has been understandably limited at this early stage. The maintenance of the churchyard has become an ongoing task delegated to the Friends, but expenditure awaits both the build-up of funds and also the project to enhance the facilities within the church reaching a level of maturity within the PCC for them to formally ask the Friends to undertake the task of fundraising for it. The focus of the project is the space at the rear of the church, where the installation of a toilet, catering facilities and improved localised heating would significantly improve the utility of the church building for the benefit of the whole community.

Once the design and approvals process yield defensible cost estimates, it will be possible to launch a formal fundraising campaign that will both make approaches to grant-giving bodies and also generate the evidence of local engagement and support that such organisations generally require to see. This will be a very major task and one for which members with particular skill sets and energy will need to be recruited.

Finances

The income and expenditure documents set out in detail the financial status of FSVC as at the end of the 2019 calendar year. In summary, they show a total funds figure of £5,725 and reflect a healthy base income from regular donors that, in the first year, has been more than matched by profit (including additional donations) from events. The progress made in building FSVC reserves and also in gaining formal charitable status means that an application to HMRC to become eligible for relief through the Gift Aid scheme is likely to be successful soon. The reclamation of Gift Aid will provide a significant and enduring enhancement to FSVC's future income. It is recognised that the size of the membership base and the financial success of FSVC will become a key means of demonstrating community support and attracting matched funding when applications for grants are made.

The figures reflect very limited expenditure to date. With the main focus of expenditure likely to be in support of the enhancement project at the rear of the church (described above), the small outgoings, reduced in many cases by the generosity of trustees, have primarily been in support of events. They do, however, show the quick-win purchase of two infra-red portable heaters that now provide a degree of localised heating at the rear of the church where social events are held. Their purchase was triggered both out of necessity and also as a result of a generous donation by the Sutton Veny Flower Show Committee, who were keen to support the church through the Friends. The heaters were presented to the church on 5 October as part of the final Produce Stall gathering.

Summary

The Friends of Sutton Veny Church have achieved the objectives set at their launch in April 2019. Now a registered charity and with eligibility for Gift Aid likely to be granted in the near

future, it has a firm governance and financial footing on which to further expand its membership, both locally and further afield.

The cancellation of the AGM represents a missed opportunity to seek support from the membership to take some of the load that currently rests with the six trustees and those within their network who they enlist to help them. The efforts to encourage this load sharing, hopefully in the form of the creation of social and fundraising sub-committees, will continue informally in the coming months.

Considerable challenges lie ahead but there are also opportunities. Key amongst these is the way in which either membership of the Friends or simply participation in the events that they hope to arrange will provide the conditions for improved community participation and spirit.

10 April 2020

Enclosure

1. Income & Expenditure Statement and Financial Report

**Friends of Sutton Veny Church
Income and expenditure statement
Year ended 31 December 2019**

Income

	£	£
Regular donors	1,867	
One off donors	2,920	
General donations	665	
Event entry	835	

Total Income **6,287**

Expenditure

Event costs	(141)	
Purchases for Church	(422)	
Administration	0	
		(563)

Surplus/(Deficit) **5,725**

Represented by

Bank	5,740
Cheque not cleared	(15)
Total Funds	5,725

Report on Financial Activity for the first year of the Friends of Sutton Veny Church.

This report covers the first nine months of the FSVC activity from the 2 April to 31 December 2019. Future annual financial reports will be based on calendar years, 1 January to 31 December.

Income was established by regular donations to the Bank by standing order and direct debit and was boosted considerably by general and single donations, associated with the two organised events.

Expenditure was deliberately small in the first year but included the provision of portable heaters in the Church and minimal costs of supporting the major fund-raising event.

It is expected that future Annual Accounts will be able to give more details of expenditure on specific improvements to the Church structure and its environment.