



St Michael and All Angels, Ledbury

Minutes of Parochial Church Council – 13 April 2026

Present: David Houghton (Chair) (Churchwarden)
Cath Beech (Churchwarden)
Andrew Beech
Sonia Bowen
Stephen Cheetham
Sue Cooper
William Hopkinson
Ian James
Richard Nightingale
Anne Scull
Will Wake

Apologies: Sue Simpson, Christine Walters

1534. The meeting opened with Colossians 1:1-14 and prayer.

Minutes of meeting held on 18 March

1535. These were agreed unanimously and signed.

Safeguarding

1536. No safeguarding issues had been reported. The church is still seeking a safeguarding officer.

Communion server

1537. Ed Nolan was unanimously recommended to the bishop for appointment as a communion server. The churchwardens will seek the bishop's agreement, and inform Ed.

Action: Churchwardens

Service books

1538. In the absence of a screen (see below), service books were being used each Sunday. Some celebrants prefer the use of service books anyway in place of the screen, even when this is operational. The PCC noted this approach.

Volunteer co-ordinator

1539. Sonia Bowen offered to become volunteer co-ordinator. David Houghton, seconded by Ian James, proposed that Sonia should be appointed. This was agreed unanimously.

Welcome team

1540. Sonia Bowen suggested that a team of people should be present before services inside the church, to welcome people, hand out service books and the like. This would be a separate group from those welcoming in the church porch, and also from the weekday stewarding team. Sonia will draw up a job description, for discussion at the May meeting.

Action: Sonia Bowen

Finance

1541. Stephen Cheetham presented the financial report. Giving remains below budget, although he expects the church to break even over the course of the year. He felt that the PCC should address the decline in giving, and seek to reverse it. The church had received £33,000 following the surrender of the lease on St Katherine's Hall. This had been added to the General Fund.

1542. The church has a number of Designated Funds, where money had been allocated for a number of activities/projects. The PCC has the power to merge these should it so desire. Stephen proposed that these funds all be amalgamated into the building and fabric repair fund. It was suggested that some of the Alpha Evangelism Fund might be retained to fund, for example, meals for some attending ManChat who could not afford their meal. But it was agreed that any such costs could be met from the General Fund.

1543. David Houghton proposed, seconded by Will Wake, that all the Designated Funds be merged into a Fund, now to be entitled "Buildings and Fittings Fund". This was agreed with one abstention.

Action: Stephen Cheetham

1544. Stephen Cheetham confirmed that, unless the church receives additional donations exceeding £1 million during the year, no full audit would be required of the 2026 accounts.

Investment strategy

1545. Stephen Cheetham introduced the draft investment strategy (see Annex A). After discussion, Stephen proposed the following resolution: "The PCC delegates authority to Stephen Cheetham to invest the sum of £1.5 million. The PCC notes that the strategy is to keep 20-30% of the funds in a money market fund. The remainder will be invested in an appropriate global passive equity fund". This was seconded by Sue Cooper and agreed unanimously.

Action: Stephen Cheetham

Charitable donations policy

1546. The church needed to determine which external charities it should support. Traditionally, charitable giving had been divided equally between an overseas charity, a UK based one, a Herefordshire based one, and one suggested by the congregation. Ian James pointed out that the PCC had agreed in recent years to give 10% of general income to charity. Stephen Cheetham pointed out that this was not possible where the General Fund was not breaking even; charity law requires the church not to run at a loss. It was agreed that Ian and Cath Beech would consult about which charities should be supported, and that PCC members should feed ideas to them.

Action: All PCC members

Offertory collection

1547. Members felt that the church should make more of the opportunities to encourage members and visitors to give to the church. Stephen Cheetham agreed, and volunteered to encourage people to give.

Action: Stephen Cheetham

Bat survey

1548. No developments to report.

Catering

1549. Sonia Bowen presented a report (see Annex B) detailing the facilities that the church needs to meet its catering commitments. The catering group, and especially Sonia Bowen, were thanked for their report.

1550. The PCC being content with what was required, it was agreed that the next phase would be to determine where the catering facility should be located within the church. For this, it was agreed that the existing group should be reconvened, with the addition of one or two members of the Fabric Sub-Committee, who could advise on where suitable power, water supply and drainage might be provided, together with the acceptability of any proposal to the diocese for the purpose of obtaining a faculty. Sonia Bowen indicated that, because of other commitments, she would be unable to continue as a member of the group. For further discussion at the May meeting.

Action: Andrew Beech

Fabric

Upper room floor

1551. Andrew Beech reported that the work to repair the upper room floor will commence on 13 July and last for five to six weeks. During that time both of the upper rooms and the western part of the meeting room below will be an official building site (hard hat area). The upper rooms will be inaccessible to the church throughout the duration of the works. Anything stored there that is required during the works will have to be removed beforehand and stored elsewhere. The cupboards in the meeting room will be inaccessible

from Monday to Friday during the works, and the same consideration applies. The material currently stored loose in the downstairs meeting room will need to be removed for the duration of the work and stored elsewhere. Andrew Beech will write to those thought to be affected.

Action: Andrew Beech

1552. The north porch will be inaccessible from Monday to Friday during the duration of the works. Access to the church will be through the door to the Chapter House. The contractors will provide signage redirecting visitors to that entrance. It would make sense for stewards to be positioned in the Chapter House to welcome visitors. For funerals/weddings etc. the west doors would be used.

1553. The contractors have agreed to let the person unlocking and locking the church each day through the meeting room lobby (which will be part of the hard hat site) for that purpose.

Heating within the nave

1554. The church architect had quoted £1,600 for design work to increase the amount of heat delivered to the nave, probably using finned radiators within the existing ducting. Andrew Beech proposed, seconded by Ian James, acceptance of this quote, which was agreed unanimously.

Radiant heaters

1555. A quote was awaited for the removal of the radiant heaters from the nave. David Houghton expected the cost to be less than £3,000. To avoid delay he proposed, seconded by Andrew Beech, that the PCC authorize expenditure of up to £3,000 on this work. This was agreed unanimously.

Action: David Houghton

Projection

1556. Problems were still being experienced with the projector, which was no longer being used whilst the problem persisted. David Houghton expressed satisfaction at the work of API, who had repaired the sound system. He proposed, seconded by Stephen Cheetham, that API be invited back to get the projector working again. This was agreed unanimously.

Action: David Houghton/Richard Nightingale

Churchyard

1557. An approach had been received from Ledbury Town Council, on behalf of Sheds Together, who wished to install a bench in the churchyard. It was agreed that the footpath from the churchyard gates towards the Garden of Remembrance was much used by members of the public, and that placing a bench beside that path would be a good idea. David Houghton will liaise with the Town Council.

Action: David Houghton

1558. The PCC had previously agreed a proposal from Maria Dineen about making the churchyard more attractive to wildlife. The Town Council had now asked whether the PCC could agree to a “no mow” area being set aside somewhere in the churchyard. This was agreed in principle, subject to detailed arrangements being agreed. Sonia Bowen will liaise with the Town Council.

Action: Sonia Bowen

Open the Book and Experience Easter

1559. Andrew Beech expressed concern that LEAF were claiming “ownership” of OTB and Experience Easter. The PCC had said that it still wished to maintain an active mission to the town, and these two expressions of mission were a part of that. It was, however, acknowledged that people from other churches contributed to both works. It was agreed, with one vote against, that the churchwardens would meet MaryAnne Keyes to discuss this.

Action: Churchwardens

Other business

1560. Andrew Beech will provide Stephen Cheetham with details of a bookbinder who might repair worn hymnbooks used by the choir.

Action: Andrew Beech

1561. The Rev. Canon Dr. Stuart Currie, chaplain to the Bishop of Worcester, had been licensed by the Bishop of Hereford to officiate in the Ledbury with Eastnor benefice. Andrew Beech will notify James Hervey-Bathurst (PCC secretary at Eastnor) of this.

Action: Andrew Beech

Date of next meeting

1562. The next meetings will take place on Monday, 18 May, and a short meeting after the APCM on Wednesday, 27 May. David Houghton will be absent from the meeting on 18 May. The PCC agreed unanimously that Cath Beech would chair that meeting.

The meeting closed in prayer.

Investment Strategy January 2026

Background

In February 2025 Stuart Heaton left St Michael's £1.5m. This is split into two funds, £0.5m to the existing Arthur and Bidy Heaton fund, and £1m to a new fund "The Stuart Michael Heaton Bequest". The Arthur and Bidy Heaton fund was formerly a separate charity but was transferred to the Rector and Churchwardens some years ago: as at 31/12/24 it amounted to some £14,000 and was shown in the PCC accounts as a restricted fund.

The terms of the bequest are slightly different for each amount but the overall intent is clear: we, the Rector and Churchwardens or PCC are not permitted to spend the capital amount bequeathed and are instructed to preserve the real (that is, inflation-adjusted) value of the capital. We are, however, entitled to spend any surplus income from the funds.

Current Situation

The £1.5m bequest is currently invested in a BlackRock money-market fund (MMF): this is a portfolio of government and corporate bonds which yields a better rate of interest than that available from bank deposits, and enables us to access the money at a few days' notice. It is very slightly higher-risk than a bank deposit, but crucially it avoids the issue of the £120k limit on government deposit insurance which leads some charities to split their deposits up between multiple banks. So far to end December the MMF has yielded just under 4% on an annualised basis.

However, the MMF does not provide an adequate long-term hedge against inflation: a portfolio of stocks and shares is the only investment that has been proven to provide a real return in the long run. Since we are charged with preserving the value of the bequests, we must invest in the stock market.

Investment Fundamentals

We face a choice in our investment strategy: whether to delegate investment authority to a manager or to invest it on our own behalf.

There are plenty of investment managers who would be pleased to invest our money for us but there are two issues with this: performance and fees. Most discretionary managers perform no better than a passive fund, and many perform significantly worse. (A passive fund is one which simply holds all the shares in a given stock market index in proportion to their relative sizes and does not seek to beat the market but rather "goes with the flow"). Discretionary managers do, however, charge high fees for their supposed expertise: between 0.5 and 1 percent annually, plus whatever fees are payable on the funds they invest in on their clients' behalf. In total, fees on a discretionary mandate will be between 1 and 2 percent annually. This may not seem very much, but the fees are deducted regardless of performance and given that the likely real return on a portfolio is in the region of 4-5%, fees can easily eat up half or more of the investment return. By contrast, the fee on our current MMF investment is 0.2% annually, and that on a passive equity fund would be similar.

Proposed course of action

As a retired fund manager, I qualify as an “appropriately qualified person” under Charity Commission guidelines: in fact I already perform this function as treasurer of another registered charity (The Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways Trust). Having researched the issue in some detail, my conclusion is that the interests of St Michael’s PCC are best served by investing in a low-cost passive equity fund without employing a discretionary manager. My proposal is that we place the Heaton funds in a global passive equity fund such as the FTSE AllWorld Index. There is something of a tactical issue in that global stock markets are currently believed by most commentators to be over-valued. As a consequence of this I would be inclined initially to place £750,000 of the Heaton funds (i.e. half) in an equity investment and to retain the balance in the MMF. Should there be a significant price correction, I request advance approval from the PCC to place the remaining MMF funds in the equity fund.

Annual Calculation

If we are to preserve the real value of the Heaton bequests we should spend only the inflation-adjusted return on our investments. With UK inflation currently running at approximately 4%, this is a tall order. It is proposed that we review the investment portfolio on an annual basis and calculate how much, if any, return has been made in excess of inflation for us to spend on our mission. It should be borne in mind that stock market investments can be volatile, and although it is expected that our investment will make an inflation-adjusted return in the long run, this cannot be guaranteed.

The Future

Clearly, I will not be Treasurer of St Michael’s forever, and it is possible that my successor may not feel as comfortable with investment decision-making as I do. The proposed investment strategy has the benefit of simplicity – the fund could be liquidated at any time within a matter of days if the PCC so decided and the proceeds allocated to a different strategy.

Stephen Cheetham
5/1/26

Catering – report to the PCC meeting on 18 March 2026

Members involved: Sonia Bowen
Margaret Chapman
Stephen Cheetham
Christine Walters

Terms of Reference laid out in PCC Minutes dated 19 November 2025:

- 1. To advise the PCC on (a) the minimum catering facilities necessary for the church to be able to provide its existing level of catering, both to the congregation and to visiting organisations using the church for occasional events, and (b) any additional desirable elements that would enhance the level of catering provision. In the case of (b) the Group should provide an explanation of why each element is thought desirable and the extent to which use of it might be expected. This is to enable the PCC to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of each.*
- 2. In all cases the Group should ensure that its recommendations meet all legislative and good practice requirements for the provision of catering.*
- 3. The Group is not asked to advise on where, within the church premises, such facilities should be located, nor details as to preferred make, model etc. of equipment.*
- 4. The Group is asked to bear in mind that Ledbury has a considerable number of commercial catering businesses, and that the PCC does not wish to be seen to be operating in competition with established businesses.*
- 5. The Group is asked to present its final report to the PCC at its meeting on 18 March 2026.*

Preamble:

In September 2023, a meeting was held to consider what improvements could be made to the church's catering facilities. Attendees included the rector, church wardens and users of the kitchen. The Fabric Sub-Committee prepared a paper in February 2024 detailing the findings. See Appendix A. There is no material change in circumstances since September 2023 and the findings of the 2024 report are still valid.

A definitive decision about changing the current kitchen facilities must be made within the context of the vision of the church interior as a whole.

This report has been compiled following further consultation with current kitchen users, many of whom contributed to the February 2024 report.

Current catering provisions:

- Coffee/tea & biscuits after 10 am Sunday service (average 30-40 people)

- Coffee/tea & cake for choir before Evensong on 3rd Sunday evening of each month (average 20-30 people)
- Coffee/tea before Saturday morning concerts on average 8-10 times per year (average 20-30 people)
- Coffee Stop on first Friday of each month – tea/coffee/cake (average 30 people)
- LEAF events (average 50-60 people)
- Warm mulled wine and mince pies at Town Carol service (average 200 people)
- Other ad hoc events

(a) The minimum catering facilities necessary for the church to be able to provide its existing level of catering, both to the congregation and to visiting organisations using the church for occasional events.

Based on the above current catering provisions the minimum necessary facilities are as follows:

- Dedicated kitchen separate from the rest of the building to avoid ‘traffic’ from clergy, congregation and particularly children.
- Solid serving counter/hatch to enable hot drinks to be served safely with access only to those serving
- Position of kitchen should be as close to the area where people will be eating/drinking to reduce risk of spills and accidents carrying hot liquid.
- Access to the kitchen should be locked to secure provisions.
- More storage (drawers, not cupboards) to ensure everything required for catering is in the same place and close at hand.
- Fridge
- Adequate lighting to ensure safe working
- Larger, easy to clean, preparation and drying area (stainless steel?)
- For hygiene reasons, everything should be air-dried instead of cloth-dried
- Hot running water for hand washing and washing up
- Double sink for use in rinsing
- Separate hand-washing sink
- Electric urn for making instant tea/coffee/filling teapots
- Hand-soap dispenser and paper towels or hand-dryer
- Sufficient crockery, cutlery, tongs, serving plates, etc
- Separate storage for cleaning products
- Hand drying facility
- Appropriate drainage (expert review required)
- If possible, enclosed kitchen so preparation and tidying up can be done without disturbing church service

A Food Allergy Warning must be displayed, disclaiming liability. For example:
Please note these cakes are all produced at home using traditional techniques and recipes. Therefore, no special measures have been taken to allow for allergens, and it cannot be guaranteed that any food is allergen free.

Recommendations for consideration:

- Risk-assessment to identify potential hazards and to put in place necessary precautions to ensure we comply with current catering guidelines
- Check church insurance to check any specific requirements regarding kitchen use
- Nominate designated ‘Catering Manager’ for all catering, ordering supplies and setting procedures

- Check if we need to register as a Food Business Operator with the local council.
- First aid kit required in kitchen

(b) any additional desirable elements that would enhance the level of catering provision. In the case of (b) the Group should provide an explanation of why each element is thought desirable and the extent to which use of it might be expected.

- Industrial dishwasher to cater for larger numbers. Quick and more hygienic than cloth drying.

Recommendations for consideration:

- Strict cleaning and disinfection procedure.
- Procedure in the event of fire
- Procedure for ordering supplies and monitoring sell-by/use-by dates
- Agreed procedure for removal of waste
- Agreed procedure for disinfecting surfaces
- Allergen information
- Food safety policy

Key Details for Herefordshire Food Safety Inspections:

Inspection Focus: Inspectors check compliance with food safety legislation, including hygiene, structural cleanliness, and management systems.

Contact Information:

Email: ethelpline@herefordshire.gov.uk

Phone: 01432 261761

Address: Environmental Health and Trading Standards, Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane, Hereford HR4 0LE