

THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH OF ST LAWRENCE IN WEST WYCOMBE

The Church of St Lawrence has been part of the community of West Wycombe and Piddington for many hundreds of years. Many generations of families have sat in its pews and celebrated both personal and community events and festivals. Like other Church of England churches, St Lawrence's and St Paul's are run and cared for by a Parochial Church Council (PCC) - a group of dedicated local volunteers. However, over recent years the pool of people from which the PCC can be drawn has decreased and the present PCC numbers only 6 elected volunteers who share the responsibilities for both churches in the parish. As a PCC we no longer feel able to sustain both buildings and would like to focus our energies on St Paul's church, situated in the heart of the village, and we are excited to nurture its life as a Parish Church with continued regular worship, services to celebrate the rites of passage and to explore new opportunities for community outreach.

Whilst St Lawrence's Church is a much loved and valued building, over the past 10 years its modest congregation have struggled to maintain the church to any acceptable level and we, the PCC, no longer feel able to support its running. In order to discuss options regarding the future of the building we will therefore be holding a public consultation meeting, at **St Lawrence's Church on Monday 11th October at 6.30pm.**

RUNNING COSTS The current arrangements for caring for St Lawrence's are no longer viable. Like all parish churches, St Lawrence's receives no centralised funding towards running costs. Instead, income comes from individual regular and one-off donations and fundraising activities. In recent years, income has steadily declined, and so our ability to meet the running costs has lessened year on year, a situation which cannot continue any longer. In the last financial year, our regular income was £26,000 while our running costs amounted to £18,000.

Like all other PCCs, in addition to meeting the running costs of our buildings, West Wycombe PCC also contributes to a common fund, known as Parish Share, towards the cost of clergy and support from the Oxford Diocese. Because we are a small parish we receive more as support in kind from the Wycombe Deanery than we contribute so we are a net beneficiary of Parish Share. As a Grade 1* listed building, St Lawrence's has significant and ongoing maintenance and repair costs. A recent inspection has highlighted that repair work exceeds £1million. However, there are no funds available to address this and the current volunteers are not able to organise and run such a major project without securing significant ongoing funding (though increased income, giving or grants), as well as additional volunteers to help.

We recognize that St Lawrence's plays a role in the community beyond the PCC and we would welcome your views so that they can inform the way forward. Therefore, we ask you kindly to take a few minutes to answer the questions overleaf. You are free to remain anonymous, but if you would like to be kept in touch with developments, or would like to be involved in any way, please leave your details at the end of the survey. ***When you have completed your survey, please either leave it in the box at the back of St Paul's Church, or at the Village Stores in the High Street, before September 30th.***

Comments from the Archdeacon of Buckingham, the Ven Guy Elsmore. St Lawrence's, West Wycombe is, without doubt, a wonderful building, a significant landmark and an important part of West Wycombe's heritage. I hope that this survey and the public meeting which will follow later this year will serve to draw out support and interest from the community of West Wycombe and perhaps even further afield. It is clear that the Parochial Church Council are no longer able to look after the building but my hope is that interest, expertise and resources from the wider community might now be forthcoming in order that another option, short of full closure, might be achieved in order to preserve St Lawrence's both for future generations and for the benefit of the public. Your interest in and participation in this survey is very important to us and I am grateful for any and all ideas and offers of partnership and support.

Comments from the Wycombe Deanery Lay Chair, Mr Graeme Slocombe. The Wycombe Deanery completely supports the West Wycombe PCC in its aims to focus attention on making St Paul's church the centre of activity for its mission work and closing St Lawrence church. St Lawrence is no longer sustainable as a parish church, and is a huge burden on the PCC's efforts and finances. This is the right time to discuss how this building should be used in the future.