

SOUTHOE & MIDLOE PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of the ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Held on WEDNESDAY 2 April 2025

at 7.30pm

at Southoe Village Hall

Present: B Butler (Chair) plus 11 members of the public

MINUTES

1. Welcome by the Parish Council Chairman

2. Reports from the Parish

The Report for the Parish Council was given by B Butler (A Marnes had sent apologies)

The Village Hall Report was given by C Faux

The Hub Report was given by Canon Annette Reed

The Church Report was given by Canon Annette Reed

3. Questions

There was an enquiry regarding the vacancy for the Parish Council Clerk position. B Butler stated that the vacancy had been advertised and that A Marnes would carry out the role of clerk alongside the RFO role in the short term until the vacancy is filled.

All individuals asked to email reports given to include in minutes.



Southoe & Midloe Community Hub Project – Annual Report for the Parish Council

1. Introduction

This report outlines the progress of the Southoe & Midloe Community Hub Project over the past year and highlights plans for the coming year. The aim of the project is to convert the nave of St Leonard’s Church into a functional and welcoming community hub with facilities including accessible toilets and a small kitchen, while preserving the historical and architectural integrity of the building.

2. Community Engagement and Support

Community engagement has remained strong throughout the year. Numerous events—ranging from speaker evenings to seasonal gatherings—have fostered local participation and raised both awareness and funds. Thank you to all the individuals and groups who have supported the initiative and these events, including the Community Hub Group, Rev. Annette, the PCC, and other local volunteers. Their continued efforts have demonstrated the strong communal spirit and commitment within the parish.

3. A reminder of the rationale for the project

St Leonard’s Church holds both historical and cultural significance within the village. Although it serves a religious function, it also provides a central and symbolic space for the entire community. With the closure of key public amenities over recent decades—including the school, pubs, post office, and local public transport—the development of a community hub is a necessary step to ensure all residents have a shared, accessible space to gather and participate in communal activities.

The building, dating from the 12th century, features important Norman architecture including the chancel arch and south aisle door—one of the oldest Norman doorways in England. These features underscore the importance of a sympathetic yet practical development approach.

4. Progress (Feb 2024 – Feb 2025)

- A diverse series of community events were held, including talks by East Anglia Air Ambulance, Shepreth Hedgehog Hospital, and The Bat Conservation Trust.
- Regular quiz nights, themed events (e.g. cheese and wine tasting), seasonal celebrations (e.g. Christmas lights switch-on), and plant sales contributed to both engagement and fundraising.
- Total project funds have now surpassed £80,000, including over £20,000 awarded in March 2025 from the Huntingdonshire District Council Net Zero Villages Grant Scheme.

5. Infrastructure and Planning Updates

Substantial preparatory work has already been completed, including:

- Assessments for structural integrity and the initial interior tower strengthening work completed January 2024.
- Utility planning and preparation for water, sewerage and electricity installations
- Consultation with architects, sustainability experts, and Ely Diocese regarding design modifications. The redesign package has been fully approved through the Diocesan Faculty system

An incident involving a bell slipping from its wheel required unexpected remedial work. The necessary repairs have been arranged and funded by a grant from the Ely Diocesan Association of Church Bell Ringers.

6. Design Revisions and Environmental Considerations

The project has undergone a sustainability-led redesign. Notable updates include:

- Replacement of the proposed air-source heat pump with a more efficient overhead infrared heating system
- Refurbishment of the existing nave floor rather than full replacement

These changes result in significant cost savings and reduced environmental impact.

7. Challenges and Funding Environment

Post-COVID changes in grant-making processes have affected the timeline. Some funding organisations have requested resubmission of applications once greater seed funding has been secured. These are now being revisited, taking advantage of the offers of assistance from funding bodies.

8. Future Plans (2025)

Plans for the coming year include:

- Continued community events, including educational talks, craft workshops, and social gatherings
- Further grant applications to supplement existing funds
- Planned commencement of building works including for the toilet facilities

All events will be promoted via local communication channels, including social media, WhatsApp, Grapevine, and printed leaflets. Community input and involvement continue to be encouraged.

9. Acknowledgement

The project team would like to formally acknowledge the late Dick Saw, a respected and deeply valued member of the community. His contributions to the parish and this project were considerable, and he will be remembered with great affection and gratitude.

Prepared by: Rachael Horsman, Chair, Southoe & Midloe Community Hub Group

Date: March 2025

St Leonard's Church Southoe
Report for year ending 2024
for the Southoe annual village assembly on April 2nd 2025.

Events and Activities.

2024 was a busy year for Southoe Church with a combination of services and community activities.

The PCC are very grateful to The Southoe and Midloe Community Hub Planning Group for organising a variety of talks and social events which were very well supported.

The PCC ran a regular monthly coffee morning, held a flute concert in the autumn and are delighted to continue to host the Southonian Singers for their weekly Tuesday evening rehearsals and seasonal concerts. Thank you to everyone who gives their time and resources to making these events happen and to everyone who supports them.

A service is held in Southoe Church at least once a month and we much appreciate the company of those who join us.

Church Fabric.

There was a 5 yearly inspection of the church building by our architect on March 5th. Following that, the specification for QI repairs was drawn up and tenders sought for all aspects of the works required.

During 2024 all necessary checks were made to the church fabric which includes:

- February – the exterior alarm system serviced
- February PAT testing
- March - boiler serviced
- March Abbey Roofing cleaned out downpipes, small mortar repairs on south porch wall.
- May – volunteers cleared out downpipe on north nave wall.
- Mid-August the tenor bell fell out of its frame whilst ringing was in progress. The fall of the bell was cushioned by the new safety platform which had been installed as part of the interior tower works. The wheel and stay for the tenor bell were damaged beyond repair.
- Following the award of a grant from the Ely Diocesan Association of church bell ringers of £810.00, a new wheel was manufactured by Whites of Appleton in Oxfordshire and was introduced into the tower early in 2025. Works were carried out by Geoff Burn and colleagues from the Hunts Bell Restoration Group.

The PCC are actively working to carry out essential QI repairs not least to the south aisle roof where there were some persistent leaks during bouts of heavy rain in 2024.

Most of the works above benefited from vat being claimed back from the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme.

Our thanks to those who clean the church on a regular basis.

The PCC continue to do all they can to keep the 900 year old church in good order for present and future generations.

Southoe Churchyard.

In March 2024, the Rector discovered that the churchyard had never been formally closed although from c 1975 it was assumed that it was. This would have been an oversight by the then Rector and the Parish Council. Around that time, the cemetery was developed to the west of the churchyard and the Parish Council took over the grass cutting and other aspects of churchyard maintenance as well as administering the new cemetery.

In discussions with the Parish Council during 2024, it was agreed that the PCC would apply to the Ministry of Justice in London to formally close the churchyard.

This process should be completed by the summer of 2025 when a formal closure document will be issued.

The PCC subsequently write to the Parish Council to invite them to take over the maintenance of the churchyard.

During 2024, discussions with residents, the PCC and Parish Council led to the creation of a plan to rewild parts of the churchyard headed up by PCC member George Lendrum.

This plan will be put into action from spring 2025 onwards, with care taken to ensure there are clear paths to tended graves.

Finance.

Southoe PCC paid all of their ministry share (their portion of the cost of Vicar in the Paxton's benefice) of £3,195.00. They also paid their insurance costs and running costs of the church. The PCC are very grateful to the Parish Council for the grant towards fuel costs which enables the many community events to happen in the building not least in winter.

Our thanks to everyone who supports the church through regular monthly giving and one off donations and to everyone who supports the church through participation in the 100 Club.

Into the future... 2025.

Annette Reed, who has been Rector of Southoe Church since June 2025, is retiring on July 29th, her 71st birthday. The PCC are grateful for the extra year she was granted by the Diocese of Ely. Usually clergy retire when they are 70 years old.

However, after negotiations with the Diocese, Annette has permission to retain a role with Southoe PCC and the Community Hub Group as project advisor and grant administrator.

This will enable the various proposed works to continue with the planning and implementation process.

It is important to stress that Annette will not be incumbent or be licensed to take services. She will be operating as a lay person.

Once Annette has retired, the process will commence in collaboration with the Diocese of Ely to appoint new Vicar of the Paxton's benefice. There is often a vacancy of 12 months.

Our thanks to Kay Lightfoot for her tireless work as church warden, often supported by Charlie.

To Fiona Flynn who is our PCC treasurer. During 2024 Vicky Dawson, who had been our PCC Secretary, moved away from the village. We are delighted to report that Jane Barlow has taken on the role of PCC Secretary for which we are very grateful.

Finally, mention must be made of the great loss of Dick Saw to the PCC, church and village life earlier in 2024.

Dick had served the church alongside Andy for numerous years and had been treasurer for many of those years.

Serving as Rector at Southoe has been a great privilege and a personal thankyou to everyone who has been so kind and supportive. I am pleased to continue to be involved with Southoe Church for a little longer and will do all I can in retirement to see our projects completed.

March 28th 2025.