



WOOTTON PARISH COUNCIL



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Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 16th April 2025 at 7pm at Wootton Community Centre, Harris Way, Wootton.

	The Annual Parish Meeting is a statutory meeting of the parish electorate (Local Government Act 1972, Part 1, s9(1)). It is not a parish council meeting. The Annual Parish Meeting must be held between 1st March and 1st June (Local Government Act 1972, Sch12, Part III, p14(1)). The parish council chairman calls the meeting and if present, chairs the meeting (Local Government Act 1972, Sch12, Part III, p15(1) + p17(1)). If the parish council chairman is absent, the vice-chairman if present, shall preside. If neither are in attendance, the meeting may appoint a person to take the chair and for the purposes of this meeting, that person will have the powers and authority of the chairman (Local Government Act 1972, Sch12, Part III, p17(1) + (3)). Parish meetings have a general power to discuss parish affairs and pass resolutions, however there is no prescribed format for this meeting, and its recommendations are not binding on the parish council. Any such recommendations can, if appropriate to do so, be taken forward for consideration by the parish council or any of its committees. All local electors are entitled to speak and vote at the Annual Parish Meeting; others may attend but not speak or vote.
Present	Gareth Lloyd, Chairman Wootton Parish Council – in the chair. Donna Lincoln, Member Wootton Parish Council. Stuart O'Dell, Member Wootton Parish Council. Keith Randell, Member Wootton Parish Council, Speed Watch, Wootton Vale Healthy Living Centre Patient Participation Group. John Wheeler, Member Wootton Parish Council and Bedford Borough Councillor for Wootton and Kempston Rural (Speaker effective May 2024) and including Adult Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Corporate Parenting Executive Panel, Education Transport Appeals Panel, Fostering Panel, Joint Consultative and Negotiating Committee for Primary and Secondary Education and Schools Forum, Bedford Sports Foundation, Community Voluntary Service Bedfordshire, East Anglian Reserve Forces and Cadets Association, SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education), Wootton Lower School, Governor (Vice-Chairman), Wootton Upper School (Vice-Chairman), Robert Edward (Bob) Lunniss Charity, St. John's Hospital Trust and Wootton Church and Poor's Land Charities. Sue Edgar Playford, Clerk to Wootton Parish Council. Jo Roberts, Forest of Marston Vale.

Chairman (Wootton Parish Council).....

Date.....

	Mark Lehai, Wootton Academy Trust. Malcolm Chalmers, Speed Watch, Wootton Good Neighbour Scheme. Tom Roberts, Wootton Baptist Church. Hayley Allen, Wootton Vale Healthy Living Centre. Anne Strong, Wootton Vale Healthy Living Centre.	
Agenda no	Agenda item title	Comments
APM25/001	Apologies for absence. Bob Wallace, Member Wootton Parish Council, Wootton Village Hall. Michaela Kugeniek, Good Life Sorted. Diane Murray, Administrator for St. Mary's Church. The Revd Canon Peter Ackroyd, Vicar of St. Mary's Church. Carol Wallman, Stewartby Amateur Operatic Society. Sue Randell, Wootton WI.	Noted for the minutes.
APM25/002	Minutes of the previous meeting. <i>Minutes are published on the Wootton Parish Council website:</i> http://woottonpc.bedsparishes.gov.uk/ . Members are asked to receive and adopt the minutes of the Annual Parish meeting held on 17 th April 2024.	The meeting agreed the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 17 th April 2024.
APM25/003	To receive the following reports from Wootton Parish Council. Chairman's report. Responsible Financial Officer's Financial report.	It was noted both the Chairman's report and Responsible Financial Officer's financial report would be detailed in the 2025 Annual Report. The Chairman, Cllr Lloyd, provided the following updates in relation to projects listed within the Parish Council's Business Plan (available to view online here): <u>PARTIALLY COMPLETE</u> SAFETY: Defibrillators (outstanding at Burgoyne Avenue). FACILITIES: Real Time Passenger Information Units (outstanding at Burgoyne Avenue). <u>COMPLETE</u> SAFETY: Average Speed Cameras. SAFETY: Introduction of 20MPH speed limits. ENVIRONMENT: Hedgerow planting – Lorraine Road cemetery. FACILITIES: Keeley Lane entrance sign.

Chairman (Wootton Parish Council).....

Date.....

		ENVIRONMENT: Sedum Roof Bus Shelters. FACILITIES: Synthetic, floodlit sports pitch. <u>OUTSTANDING</u> SAFETY: CCTV changes for the recreation ground (awaiting completion of the Changing Rooms refurbishment project). FACILITIES: Changing Rooms refurbishment (tender process currently live). ENVIRONMENT: Crown Estate land transfer (discussions ongoing). ENVIRONMENT: Keeley End Pond (maintenance ongoing).
APM25/004	To receive reports from outside bodies. • Bedford Borough Council – Borough Councillors Abood and Wheeler; • Bedfordshire Police; • Forest of Marston Vale.	<u>Bedford Borough Council – Borough Councillor Sue Abood</u> No report received. <u>Bedford Borough Council – Borough Councillor John Wheeler</u> No report received. <u>Bedfordshire Police</u> No report received. <u>Forest of Marston Vale</u> Refer to Appendix One. Jo Roberts confirmed the Community Fund had a broad eligibility criteria and Community Groups applying for funding had a good chance of being successful.
APM25/005	To receive reports and/or accounts from village/local organisations.	<u>Liloom Home Care Ltd</u> No report received. <u>Robert Edward (Bob) Lunniss Charity</u> BBCllr/Cllr Wheeler confirmed, following Cllr Tyerman’s resignation from the Parish Council and the Revd Canon Ackroyd’s imminent departure to a new parish, two new Parish Council representatives would need to be appointed at the upcoming Annual Council Meeting in May. He thanked all sponsors who helped with 2024’s Christmas luncheon event. <u>St. Mary’s Church</u> Refer to Appendix Two.

		<u>Stewartby Amateur Operatic Society</u> The Society recorded its thanks ahead of the meeting – stating it was very appreciative of the inclusion of its articles in the Wootton newsletter. It was equally appreciative of the time and trouble taken with the photographs and layout of the same. This helped to keep the society in the public eye and encourage new members. <u>Wootton Academy Trust/Wootton Upper School</u> Refer to Appendix Three. Mark Lehain asked that he be informed of any students seen acting inappropriately and it was noted there may be a connection with fires recently started in local woodland. <u>Wootton Baptist Church</u> Refer to Appendix Four. <u>Wootton Church and Poor’s Land Charities</u> Clr O’Dell confirmed he, alongside BBClr Wheeler and Clr Noakes were trustees of the charity, representing the Parish Council. The charity was long-established and existed to support children of families in financial need, residing within the parishes of Wootton or Stewartby. Its main activity was the distribution of Christmas hampers to those who met the aims and objectives of the charity. With the imminent departure of the Revd Canon Ackroyd it would be necessary for the charity to secure a new Chairman. <u>Wootton Good Neighbour Scheme</u> Malcolm Chalmers reported the scheme was still very low on volunteers – with a core of only 5 or 6 on its books currently, although a further two had recently expressed a wish to join. Tasks included helping with trips to the dentist or shopping. Anne Strong (Wootton Vale Healthy Living Centre) confirmed they would be happy to help with publicity and Clr Lloyd recommended separate posters – one for volunteers and one to advertise the service. Clr Lincoln recommended a weekly publication on all local Facebook pages also.
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		Malcolm agreed to ensure publicity material be sent to the Clerk to the Council who would share the same with Wootton Vale Healthy Living Centre and Cllr Lincoln. BBCllr/Cllr Wheeler also recommended the scheme contact CVS Bedford (Community Voluntary Service) who would also assist with publicity. <u>Wootton Neighbourhood Chat Group and Memory Gym</u> Refer to Appendix Five. <u>Wootton Patient Participation Group</u> No report received. <u>Wootton Speed Watch</u> Malcolm Chalmers confirmed a number of speeders had been caught on the Wootton Road as Gibraltar Corner to Irongate was a known hot spot. <u>Wootton Village Hall</u> No report received. <u>Wootton WI</u> Refer to Appendix Six.
APM25/006	General Parish Issues.	No issues were raised on the evening.

Meeting closed at 7.28pm.

Forest of Marston Vale

- Our staff and contractors have been busy since autumn delivering Year 5 of the Government's 'Trees for Climate' project. This year 31 schemes were planted, with almost 114ha of new woodland created, along with 7km hedging. Schemes of all sizes and types are eligible, including wood pasture, agroforestry, small scale and school planting.
- We now have a Community Forester, Luke Quenby. He's been working at Holcot Wood near Cranfield, to begin bringing the ancient woodland back into management. Unmanaged ancient woodlands tend to lose their biodiversity as they become overgrown, darker and single-aged. By coppicing on rotation, removing some of the dead ash (with some left to decline in a managed way), the woodland will once again be managed as it was hundreds of years ago, and habitats within the woodland that were lost will be restored. So far this season, one coupe has been coppiced, and one of the woodland rides has been opened up.
- Phase 1 of our new woodland at Silsoe is almost complete. Around 45ha has been planted this year, and almost the same area will be planted next year. The site is on Cranfield University's land and will include some experimental planting to see what will do well in a changing climate. The site will be used as a resource for Cranfield's teaching and ongoing research into the production and cultural benefits from trees, agroforestry, biodiversity, soil quality and carbon capture. Unusual species planted will include Hungarian and Turkey oak, and Macedonian pine.
The new woodland area will help to capture carbon from the atmosphere whilst providing an accessible green space for the local community through a series of footpaths and access rides.
- We are working on updating our Forest Plan. Each Community Forest has a non-statutory plan, approved by Government, which describes the proposals for developing each forest over the next 30 years and which guide subsequent implementation.
- Our fabulous volunteer group goes from strength to strength, with them giving nearly 7000 volunteer hours in 2024/2025.
- On a more local level, we have had a run of reports of motorbikes in Ridgeway and Wiles Wood, including 4 dumped, presumably stolen motorbikes. When one of our Rangers was up there recently with the Police, collecting a stolen motorbike, 2 people on motorbikes went past! The key thing if you see motorbikes (or any illegal activity in the woods) is to call the police at the time. If they have enough phone calls, they will allocate some staff time to addressing the issue.
- At the Forest Centre, the sensory garden has had a makeover. There are new features (and some sculptures) to look at, and a little willow tunnel which is already proving really popular with smaller children!
- The Community Fund has allocated funds to 2 projects from Wootton this year: Wootton Methodist Church (for a defibrillator, comfy chairs, and Memory Gym equipment), and Wootton Upper School (for repairing a damaged wall around an existing flower bed).

Jo Roberts,
Community Engagement Officer, Forest of Marston Vale.

St. Mary's Church



Knowing Jesus Making Jesus Known to All



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The Vicarage, Church Rd, Wootton, Bedford, MK43 9HF

Who we are

St Mary's is a family of ordinary people brought together by the extraordinary, life-changing good news of Jesus Christ. We come from a range of backgrounds and places. None of us has it all sorted. Everyone is welcome. We try to sum up who we are and where we are going in the following statements:

Our Mission

Knowing Jesus; making Jesus known to all

Our Vision

For St. Mary's to be: a united body of worshipping disciples, rooted in the Bible and prayer, growing together in holiness and every-member ministry to become a family of:

- **loving care**, welcoming and caring for one another with the love of Jesus Christ.
- **passionate proclamation**, reaching the people of Wootton, Stewartby and beyond, with the good news of Jesus Christ.
- **glad service**, dedicated to being salt and light in the world for Jesus Christ.
- **global heart**, supporting the worldwide mission of making Jesus known, including sending men and women into gospel ministry.
- **sacrificial change**, giving generously of ourselves to realise this vision



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Our Values

We believe that we are reconciled to God the Father through faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, and therefore we value:

The Bible	as the written word of God and our supreme authority in following Jesus in the whole of life.
Prayer	as the prime expression of faith in Jesus and of our dependence on God's loving grace and sovereign power in all things.
Church	as a family of wholehearted worshippers and disciples of Jesus Christ committed to mutual encouragement, care, and accountability.
Evangelism	as the proclamation of the good news of God's salvation in Christ for all people
Service	as a family of God's people caring for people in Wootton and Stewartby and beyond with the love of Christ.

Our Identity

We are...

Christ's church:	the church is the bride and body of Jesus Christ; it is through him alone, revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures, that we know God; it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we worship and serve Christ; and it is Christ's future return which is our hope and motivation for life.
A local church:	a full and authentic expression of the universal church, called into being and sustained by God's word. We have a specific responsibility to proclaim and demonstrate the love of God in Christ among the people of the parish of Wootton. We are also called to involvement with the world-wide mission of the whole church.
An Anglican church:	while we welcome Christians of all backgrounds, our permanent and most visible connection is with the Church of England. We accept and uphold its founding documents (The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal) as authentic expressions of orthodox Christian belief. We are committed to supporting and encouraging biblical faith and practice in the Anglican Communion, both within and beyond the diocese of St Albans.
An evangelical church:	we recognise the convictions of historic evangelicalism as crystallising and expressing the kernel of orthodox Christianity, including: the supreme authority of Scripture; the universal nature of human sin; the grace of God, seen above all in the substitutionary atoning death of Jesus Christ; and the gift of justification and new life in Christ, received and enjoyed only through repentance and faith. We value the examples, among others, of the sixteenth-century reformers, the eighteenth-century evangelists, and the nineteenth-century social reformers. We are committed to gospel partnership with evangelical mission agencies, as well as with our patron, the Martyrs' Memorial and Church of England Trust, and the Church Pastoral Aid Society.



Aims and Purposes

St Marys Church Wootton exists to glorify Almighty God through the proclamation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to all people, and through the pastoral care of members of the congregation and the local community. This is our mission, which we sum up as 'Knowing Jesus and making Jesus known to all', and which is our privilege and joy.

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility of cooperating with the incumbent, Canon Peter Ackroyd, in promoting this mission - pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical - in the ecclesiastical parish of Wootton, which comprises the two civil parishes of Wootton and Stewartby.

Objectives and Activities

The primary objective of the Parochial Church Council is the promotion of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the doctrine of the Church of England. The PCC is committed to enabling as many people as possible to worship in the parish church, to providing opportunities for adults and young people to hear the gospel and grow in discipleship, to caring pastorally and practically for people in need, and to supporting Christian mission within and beyond the parish. The PCC regularly reviews the effectiveness of the church's ministry in the light of its own Mission Action Plan, and the three themes of the Living God's Love vision of the Diocese of St Albans: Going Deeper into God, Transforming Communities, and Making New Disciples. In planning and overseeing the mission of the church, the incumbent and PCC consider the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and, in particular, the supplementary guidance on charities for the advancement of religion.

St. Mary's Vision Statement

This was revised by the Church Council during 2024, and can be found on the inside cover of this booklet.

In fulfilment of this vision the PCC identified three strategic priorities: Deeper Discipleship, Loving Evangelism, and Generous Space. Deeper Discipleship relates to the need to foster confidence in the gospel and in gospel-centred life and service. Loving Evangelism expresses our intention to reach out to those beyond the church community with the life-transforming good news of Jesus Christ. Generous Space recognises that the facilities in the church building are ill-suited in many ways to the achievement of the church's mission and vision.

Achievement of this vision depends, under God, on the willing service of many church members, led and served by the vicar and the staff team. The staff team consisted of the vicar (Peter Ackroyd), part-time administrator (Diane Murray), and part-time youth and children's worker (Emma Hearn). Jim Hignett continued to serve as licensed Reader, including significant ministry at Stewartby United Church. The council considers that the continued employment of a part-time youth and children's worker should take precedence over offering to train a curate. The council also employs the staff of St Marys Preschool.

To facilitate the ministry of the church the PCC maintains the fabric of both the church building and the church hall, which is on a separate site. Maintenance of the churchyards, which are closed, is the responsibility of Wootton Parish Council. The PCC also owns a residential two-bedroomed house, originally purchased to accommodate a curate and family; the property is currently let.



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Ministry and Mission in 2024

Worship and Prayer

Public worship was offered at 10am in the church building every Sunday morning, and at Stewartby United Church twice a month. Towards the end of the year, attendance in person at St Mary's averaged around seventy adults and fifteen children under sixteen on Sunday mornings. The service continued to be livestreamed on the church's YouTube channel.

Ministry at St Mary's is founded on expository preaching of the Bible. Sermons series during the year included series covering some of the psalms, 'The Jesus Revolution' - Luke's account of the early ministry and teaching of Jesus (cc4-6) as well as his Passion, 'Alive to God' (Romans cc6-8), and 'The God who Loves to Show Mercy' (Micah). Topical series included the Means of Grace, sermons on following Jesus in a world of war and conflict, authority, work and artificial intelligence, 'The Generous Life' (Christian discipleship and giving) and, as a prelude to Advent, the 'Four Last Things' - heaven, hell, death and judgment. During the course of the year we welcomed as visiting preachers Barry Funnell (The Word for the World bible translators), Canon Vaughan Roberts (St Ebbe's Oxford), Phil Knox (Evangelical Alliance) and Revd Rupert Shelley (Crosslinks). Other visitors during the year included our mission partners Bishop Alf & Hilary Cooper (CMS, Chile), and YP & Jude Gayet (Belgium).

The Lord's Supper was celebrated monthly. Three children and one adult were baptised during the year. Only two weddings were celebrated in church. Between them, the Vicar and Reader officiated at fifteen funeral services held for present or former parish residents at St Marys, Stewartby United Church, or Bedford Crematorium.

Early in the year the monthly Sunday evening prayer service was replaced by 'Hallowed be Your Name' - mid-week days of prayer every other month. On these days, short prayer meetings were held in church at 8am, 12noon, 4pm and 8pm, following a published pattern of prayer which church members were invited to use in their homes and workplaces where possible. This initiative fostered a greater sense of a common prayer life among church members.

Services in Holy Week and Easter included All-Age and Hour at the Cross services on Good Friday, and Easter Communion on Easter Day. Sadly, we were unable to hold a Sunrise Service as the regular site is now less easily accessible.

Services at Christmas - Christingle, Nativity, Carols by Candlelight and three services over Christmas Eve and Christmas Day - were well-attended. For the first time for some years, carol-singers led by Allyson Cable brought Christmas cheer to many village streets, concluding with a short recital in local pub.

At the invitation of the Speaker of the Borough Council, local councillor John Wheeler, we hosted the annual Civic Carol Service, welcoming to St Marys on 8 December the Mayor, Councillors and Aldermen of Bedford, the Deputy Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, many invited guests and musicians from the Wootton Lower and Upper Schools.

The parish council Act of Remembrance on Sunday 10 November at the War Memorial in Church Road, was led by the vicar and preceded by an all-age service in church.

School events in church included regular Preschool services, and a Wootton Lower School Christmas assembly.

Regular worship as well as occasional services at St Mary's was enabled by many volunteer helpers, and especially by musicians and singers. In November John Robertson retired as Organist after sixteen years of dedicated service. His retirement was appropriately marked by a well-attended and captivating organ recital in his honour given by Gary Sieling, President of the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Organists Association, by the presentation of a garden armchair given by the congregation in appreciation of his service, and by appointment as Organist Emeritus. Ian Harris succeeded as organist.

During the year the following church members undertook the diocese's Lay Leader of Worship training, were authorized by the Bishop of Bedford to lead services at St Mary's, and were commissioned in church for this ministry: Martin & Hazel Sanders, Ant Hall, and Allyson Cable.

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Families, children and young people

This year we moved back to running 3 groups on a Sunday for the first time since before Covid. All groups use Mustard Seeds and Faith in Kids material and we now have Climbers-age 2-Yr 1, Explorers-Yr2-Yr 5 and Pathfinders -Yr 6-Yr 9. The separation of ages has been positive for the children and leaders enabling more age targeted teaching.

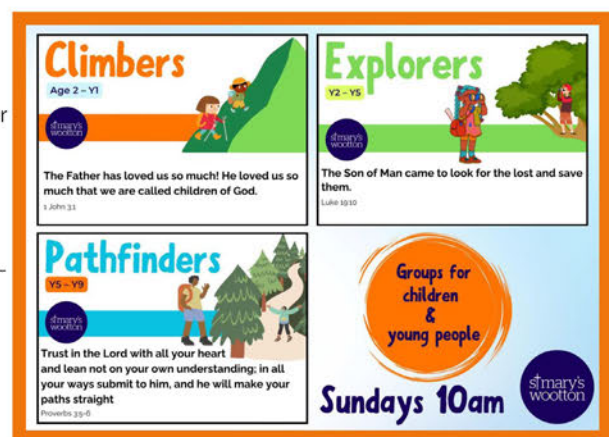
We ran a series of Wild Church afternoons as a follow-up from Holiday Club, these were an outreach event held outside with a series of 'forest school' type activities enabling families to explore various themes with a collective time of worship with a short talk. The target audience wasn't really reached but it was appreciated by those who attended.

We led a residential trip alongside St Peter and Paul's Church (Cranfield) to Chellington with 17 children and 7 leaders. We had various activities including a trip to a local country park and a silent disco. Our guest speaker led talks based on Jonah and we led devotional times with the children in small groups plus had a session to answer big questions about Christianity.

Our annual Holiday Club had approximately 100 children with a team of 55 volunteers. It was Olympic themed and covered various gospel passages using Scripture Union material. We invited families to bring a picnic to enjoy on the last day of the club. This was well attended, we had activities for the children and it was a great opportunity to talk with families.

A summary of activities during 2024 include:

- Weekly Sunday Children's groups
- Weekly JAM sessions
- Open the Book assemblies at Wootton Lower School
- Chellington residential trip
- Church away day with CYP sessions
- Holiday Club
- JAM trip to Sorted (4 young people & 2 YCM leaders)
- Christingle Service
- Wootton Lower School Christmas visit to Church
- Nativity service with congregational involvement
- Family Carol Service



Discipleship, Pastoral Care and Training

Christians grow in their discipleship as they engage with one another and with the Bible's teaching in a number of settings. The PCC accordingly aims to support a range of pathways accessible as widely as possible to support, teach and encourage this lifelong process of 'spiritual formation'.

In June around fifty church members including young people attended 'Faithfull', a church away-day at the Harrold Centre. Tony Watkins, Fellow for Public Engagement at Tyndale House, Cambridge, led two sessions reflecting on Christian mission today in the light of the early church's experience in Acts.

Midweek growth groups are central to our aim to support one another in following Jesus. Five Growth Groups met during the year, weekly in the evening or daytime, to study the Bible, pray, and support one another; around half of regular church attenders are growth group members. Leaders met termly to receive training and support, and to pray together. A group for some Lunch Club members met fortnightly, and towards the end of the year offered 'Hymns we Love' to Lunch Club members. Growth Groups generally used bible study material connected to Sunday sermons; in the autumn groups also engaged with the video-based Generosity Project.

The monthly Men's Breakfast continued to meet, and attracted up to a dozen men for mutual support and encouragement.

During the first weekend in May, church members once again attended the Bible by the Beach conference in Eastbourne.

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A number completed the Crosslands Training Pastoral Care Course, led by Diane Murray. On account of other commitments, it was not possible to form a new Pastoral Care Team.

Social events were held during the year enabling church members and their guests to build relationships and to foster mutual support. These included occasional church Sunday lunches, a summer barbecue at the vicarage, and a Harvest Lunch in the church hall. In November a bonfire party was held for church families in the vicarage garden.

A bookstall was maintained in church. At Lent and Advent, church members and families were able to purchase and study daily devotional readings.

The PCC encourages church members, especially those with leadership responsibility, to attend relevant training events, in line with its Training Policy. During the year, staff and ministry leaders attended conferences run by Growing Young Disciples, Proclamation Trust, the Four Counties Gospel Partnership, St Albans Diocesan Evangelical Fellowship, and Biblical Counselling UK, as well as the Christian Resources Exhibition. Church members attended day events mainly in support of youth and children's ministry.

Mission and outreach

PCC continued to pursue St Mary's mission - 'Knowing Jesus; making Jesus known to all' - through a range of activities.

Enquiry courses for people exploring the Christian faith were offered throughout the year, using the Christianity Explored and 3-2-1 courses.

The occasional alternative and outdoor outreach and worship events, 'WILD Church' initiated in 2024 under Emma Hearn's leadership concluded with an Easter-themed event. Following a review, it was noted that though these events had attracted a number of families who did not regularly attend church, repeat-attendance was rare and no community was accordingly forming. Grateful for all that had been achieved, it was agreed to discontinue this venture.

The Lunch Club for the over 50's met monthly, preceded by a short 'thought for the day' and prayer led by team members.

Mission & Mission Partnerships

The PCC tithes its income from regular giving to support Christian mission beyond the parish, in line with its Global Mission Policy. During the year the PCC began a delayed review of the church's support for mission beyond the parish, in line with its Global Missions Policy. This review is expected to conclude in 2025.

In 2024 the following mission agencies or partners continue to receive financial and prayer support:

- Faith in Kids – resources and training for church youth and children's work
- IMPACT – Christian workers supporting local schools.
- Jude and YP Gayet - youth ministry in Belgium.
- Bishop Alf and Hilary Cooper - supporting church planting and evangelical unity with CMS in Chile.
- Speak Life – UK evangelistic ministry (Director: Glen Scrivener)
- The Church Pastoral Aid Society
- Festive – UK agency supporting discipleship and evangelism in sixth form and FE colleges
- Tearfund

PCC's support for former church member Martin Teh 2023-24 in his service as ministry intern at ChristChurch May-fair, came to an end in August.

Throughout the year church members supported the work of Bedford Foodbank through a collection point in the church, and contributed to periodic 'red bucket' appeals for the relief of countries hit by natural disasters. Church members participated in the annual Operation Christmas Child (Samaritan's Purse) appeal, and at Christmas supported the Prebend Centre SMART appeal for the homeless in Bedford.

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Church buildings

The PCC is responsible for the upkeep of the Church building, Church hall, grounds, and a residential house currently rented to a member of the congregation.

To better align with our current resources, the PCC decided to pause the Generous Space Project and refocus on the North Porch, addressing the long-overdue roof repairs recommended in the Quinquennial report. The Premises and Facilities Committee has effectively overseen various projects on behalf of the PCC, including installing new worktops, cookers, and heating in the hall. Electrical remedial work was completed in the house, while the Church benefited from electrical repairs, fibre broadband installation, and a new water meter. Progress has also been made on several issues highlighted in the Quinquennial report alongside ongoing routine maintenance.

To further support the efficient management of responsibilities, the PCC purchased a new mobile phone, two laptops, and secured a new photocopier lease.

Ecumenical Relationships

The PCC aims to strengthen Christian witness and service in the community through membership of Wootton and Stewartby Churches. Though there was no joint activity during the year, healthy relationships were maintained, and since the year end the WSC committee has reconvened, welcoming incoming pastor of Wootton Baptist Church, Tom Roberts to its meeting.

The vicar attended regular prayer meetings for leaders of Bedford Churches in sympathy with the doctrinal basis of the Evangelical Alliance, of which St Mary's is a corporate member.

The Four Counties Gospel Partnership, whose launch St Mary's had sponsored, offered a number of events to support local churches, hosted by Kings Church, Flitwick.

St Mary's Preschool

The PCC (as Registered Person) operates the St Mary's Preschool which serves local families five days a week during term time from the Church Hall under the experienced leadership of the Manager, Tracey Kerins. The Preschool roll in the autumn term comprised thirty-three children. There were eight members of staff. Staff are regularly appraised, supported to complete all required training, and encouraged to undertake professional development and progress as Preschool practitioners.

During the year, deputy manager Lina Rosato retired after thirty years' service to the Preschool and its predecessor, St Mary's Play Group, and was presented with gifts at a farewell reception. Allyson Cable and Caroline Kavanagh were appointed as Senior Deputy and Deputy Managers from 1 September.

Tracey Kerins was due to retire at the end of the year. However, recruitment of a successor proved challenging, and PCC was grateful that she agreed to continue in a part-time capacity for the winter term 2025.

Oversight of the Preschool is undertaken on behalf of the PCC by a management group comprising the Preschool Manager and deputy managers, and three members of PCC: Peter Ackroyd (Nominated Individual), Pauline Kendall and Nina Rodrigues. The management group reviews all Preschool policies annually. Members visit the Preschool during its operating hours to observe practice and support the staff, and complete relevant Educare training modules as recommended by Bedford Borough Council.



The vicar visits weekly to lead a Bible story, prayer and song. At Christmas and Easter a Preschool Church Service is held for children, staff and parents.

Holywell Church of England School, Cranfield

The PCC nominates a number of governors at Holywell School, a school serving years 5-8. Continuing Wootton PCC Foundation Governors were: Pauline Kendall (Chair of Governors), Martin Sanders, Fiona Frossell and Isabel Turner. The Vicar regularly met with the Head, Mike Simpson, and in partnership with Cranfield Parish Church provided support for Key Stage assemblies.

Three-tier education is being phased out across the Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire local authorities. During the year, the Holywell board and senior leadership team, with the support of the diocese, continued to prepare for Holywell to become a Church of England Secondary School, serving years 7-11 predominantly from Cranfield and Marston. With schools in Wootton switching to a two-tier structure, Wootton's connection with Holywell is expected to become progressively less significant. The PCC keeps this under review and responded to a consultation on the transition.

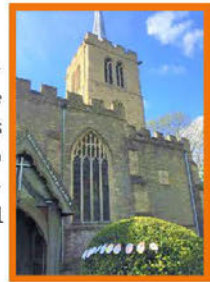
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Deanery Synod

St Marys was represented on Bedford Deanery Synod by its licensed clergy and three representatives of the laity. During the year the Synod met four times. The vicar and Pauline Kendall are among the Deanery's representatives on Diocesan Synod. Regular reports of the proceedings of Deanery Synod were made to PCC.

Structure, governance and management

The PCC met nine times in the year. Some of the work of the PCC is carried out through the following sub-committees: Standing, Finance, Youth Council, Preschool Management, and the Premises and Facilities Team. The Standing Committee met between PCC meetings, and is made up of the vicar, wardens, treasurer and secretary. The role of the Standing Committee is to prioritise items for the PCC meeting, discuss and make decisions on items of a confidential nature or look in more detail on matters that have been brought to the PCC. The Youth Council met three times.



Following the election of new members to PCC at the Annual Meeting, PCC reviewed its committee memberships and PCC officer appointments, and engaged in some training on the purpose of PCC.

The safeguarding of young people and vulnerable adults was a standing item on the agenda of every meeting. At the beginning of the year the PCC conducted an annual review of our safeguarding practice and approved updated Safeguarding and related policies. The Parish Safeguarding Officer is Kate Wilson. She was supported by Emma Hearn, Pauline Kendall and Martin Sanders as deputy safeguarding officers. Training on safeguarding arranged by the Diocese has been attended by members of the PCC, as well as by leaders of young people's groups and others as required under the church's safeguarding policy and by the Church of England.

Issues discussed during the year by the church council included: evangelism and pastoral care; renewal of the church Mission Action Plan; the Church of England's proposed Prayers of Love and Faith; church staff contracts and salaries; St Marys Preschool; PCC finances; the care maintenance and development of the church and church hall, including the Generous Space project; youth and children's ministry, including the appointment of leaders and helpers; health and safety; proceedings at Deanery and Diocesan Synods; arrangements for Christmas and other special services; mission partnerships review; installation in the church hall of new cookers and a new heating boiler.

At the beginning of the year, following growing concern among evangelicals and others in the Church of England over the House of Bishops proposals for Prayers of Love and Faith, and in line with the PCC's 2017 Resolution on Human Sexuality, the PCC recognized that St Marys was in a state of impaired communion with the bishops serving St Albans diocese. The PCC accordingly requested alternative spiritual oversight from the Church of England Evangelical Council, and support is now being provided by Revd Canon Vaughan Roberts, Rector of St Ebbe's Church Oxford. This is a temporary and informal arrangement, pending the agreement of suitable provision for parishes maintaining the church's historic position on human sexuality. Relations with St Albans diocese remain strong: as noted elsewhere in this report, several church members participated in the Lay Leaders of Worship programme, while the Vicar served on both Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod, and in October was elected as a member of the Vacancy in See Committee.

The PCC employs a part-time administrator, part-time Youth and Families Worker, the staff of the Preschool, and a church hall cleaner. Jim Hignett serves as a licensed Reader and attends regular diocesan events.

The PCC and staff work in partnership with teams of volunteer helpers, appointed by the PCC and the vicar.

The PCC and Administrator comply with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) regarding the privacy of church member's information.

Electoral Roll

A revision of the Electoral Roll took place in April 2024. Following the revision the roll numbered 134. At the end of the year, the total was 133.

Partnership with Stewartby United Church

Ministry at Stewartby United Church, a local ecumenical project, is provided under the terms of a Sharing Agreement in which the Church of England and the Methodist Church are the remaining active partners. Licensed ministers and congregation members from St Mary's continued to support Stewartby, leading the monthly Sunday afternoon service, speaking at the monthly T@3 event, serving on the church council and participating in other events.

Financial Review

Total receipts of unrestricted and designated giving and income amounted to £139,427 whilst restricted giving totalled £17,951, giving our church a total income of £157,678, which included £19,947 from Gift Aid eligible donations. While this was an increase, it was short of what was anticipated based on pledged donations (this was as a result of a number of church members leaving St Marys during the year) where the total funds anticipated came to £164,959 (a shortfall of £7,281). Our total income increased by £5,809 versus the previous year - this was largely due to increased investment interest, rent for church buildings and assigned fees; by £2,638, £1,280 and £1,002 respectively, totalling £5,820 more than last year.

Our total expenditure for the year was £149,847, including Parish Share payments of £68,000. For the first time for many years, we were unable to pay Parish Share in full, owing to lower than budgeted giving income, and concerns over cash flow. The total shortfall was £11,572. Overall expenditure was £10,099 lower than 2023.

Overall, the level of giving, excluding that given for specific projects, remained broadly flat on the year. Given the small decrease in the number of members, and the cost-of-living impact upon the congregation at this time this is encouraging.

For 2024 our church set a budget of £164,959 for income and expenditure and by the end of the year we were left with a surplus of £7,830, however, without the withheld portion of the Parish Share this would have been a deficit of £3,742.

The funds we're able to utilise in our day-to-day operation and mission activities increased on the year from £18,773 to £22,471. It is noted that following on from reductions in 2021, 2022 and again in 2023 our continued ability to meet our obligations has changed from being at risk - it has now been impacted in 2024 as we were unable to meet our Parish Share in full.

We have, during the 2025 budgeting process, communicated the need for increased giving to the congregation.

Reserves Policy

Throughout the year we maintained our reserve fund at £10,000, this allows us to meet our obligation in terms of staff salaries and church running costs for a period of two months. Our cash reserves, excluding endowments, remain strong with a total of £267,891 on deposit at the end of the year, with £245,278 of this being funds restricted to specific expenditure. During the year we continued to operate two current accounts with our Metro Bank account as the main account while we maintain the NatWest Bank account to ensure no account has funds exceeding £85,000, the limit set under the Financial Services Compensation Scheme. In terms of a deposit account, we continue to invest in the CBF Church of England Funds through CCLA.

Safeguarding

St Mary's is committed to safeguarding all whom God has placed in its care. The PCC has complied with its duty to have 'due regard' to the House of Bishops' Safeguarding Policy and Practice Guidance.

Ultimately, the PCC has overall responsibility to ensure all safeguarding requirements are fulfilled. The safeguarding and related policies are reviewed annually by the PCC as is the effectiveness of the church's safeguarding practice. Safeguarding is a standing item on all PCC agendas and the Parish Safeguarding Officer reports any matters arising. The Parish Safeguarding dashboard supports Parishes to have due regard to the House of Bishops' safeguarding requirements. St Mary's use this to good effect. We are also looking to adopt the safeguarding hub, a bolt on to the dashboard which assists us with safer recruitment processes.

The PCC have appointed a Safeguarding Team, Kate Wilson (Parish Safeguarding Officer and Lead recruiter), Emma Hearn, Pauline Kendall and Martin Sanders to ensure a good safeguarding culture is maintained at St Mary's. The lead recruiter for the parish ensures all volunteers are safely recruited to their roles and they complete the relevant safeguarding training for their role. All volunteers, including PCC members and group leaders have attended the relevant training for their role. A central record of DBS checks and training is held by the lead recruiter. Contact details for the safeguarding team are prominently placed around church and details of how to contact the team can be found on the parish website (St Mary's safeguarding team). Within our fortnightly bulletin, there is also a statement which highlights St Mary's commitment to safeguarding and provides web links to the safeguarding policies and the safeguarding team.

Opportunities are taken throughout the year to mention safeguarding and issues of abuse during other services. Safeguarding matters and good practice are regularly highlighted at all church activities and meetings.

St. Mary the Virgin Parochial Church Council Independent Examiner's Report of accounts for January to December 2024

**Independent Examiner's report to the Parochial Church Council
of St Mary the Virgin, Wootton, Bedford**
Charity Commission no. 1150817

This report on the accounts of the PCC for the year ended **31 December 2024**, which are set out on pages 1 to 4 is in respect of an examination carried out in accordance with the Church Accounting Regulations 2006 ('the Regulations') and **s.145 of the Charities Act 2011** ('the Act').

Respective responsibilities of the PCC and the examiner

As members of the PCC you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts; you consider that the audit requirement of the Regulations and **s.144(2)** of the Act does not apply. It is my responsibility to issue this report on those accounts in accordance with the terms of the Regulations.

Basis of this report

My examination was carried out in accordance with the General Directions given by the Charity Commission under **s.145(5)(b)** of the Act and to be found in the Church guidance, 2006 edition. That examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the PCC and a comparison of the accounts with those records. It also includes considering any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts and seeking explanations from you as trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently I do not express an audit opinion on the view given by the accounts.

Independent examiner's statement

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

- i. which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements
 - ▣ to keep accounting records in accordance with section **130** of the Act; and
 - ▣ to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the requirements of the Act and the Regulations have not been met; or
- ii. to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed _____ Independent Examiner – L. Richardson

Date 24/03/2025

Signed on behalf of PCC _____ Incumbent – P.M. Ackroyd

Date 24 March 2025

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St Mary's Church, Wootton

Balance Sheet to 31st December 2024

		As at 31/12/2024	As at 31/12/2023
Endowment assets			
	1509: Wootton Armstrong Fund	1,711.08	1,672.79
	1510: Wootton Church Cottages	27,516.01	26,900.31
	Total Fixed assets	29,227.09	28,573.10
Current assets			
	1501: NatWest Current	83,623.01	82,076.04
	1503: CBF Capital Fund	125,771.97	119,432.68
	1504: CBF Studley Road	1.88	1.79
	1508: Cash Book	—	—
	1511: Metro Current	58,494.78	58,731.01
	Total Current assets	267,891.64	260,241.52
Liabilities			
	1650: Loans for Stonework	—	—
	6899: Agency collections	142.59	322.90
	Total Liabilities	142.59	322.90
	Net Asset surplus (deficit)	296,976.14	288,491.72
Reserves			
	Excess / (deficit) to date	7,830.43	(8,078.06)
	Z01: Starting balances	288,491.72	294,093.10
	Z02: Other gains/(losses)	653.99	2,476.68
	Total Reserves	296,976.14	288,491.72

Represented by Funds		
Unrestricted	22,471.16	18,773.61
Restricted	245,277.89	241,145.01
Endowment	29,227.09	28,573.10
Total	296,976.14	288,491.72

St Mary's Church, Wootton
Statement of Financial Activities
For the period from 01 January 2024 to 31 December 2024

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Endowment funds	Total funds	Prior year total funds
<i>Incoming resources</i>					
Donations, Legacies and similar incoming resources	116,628	3,789	—	120,417	119,380
Activities in furtherance of the charity's objects	23,098	—	—	23,098	21,967
Activities for generating funds	—	—	—	—	—
Investment income	—	7,132	—	7,132	4,493
Other incoming resources	—	7,029	—	7,029	6,027
Total income	139,727	17,951	—	157,678	151,868
<i>Resources used</i>					
Grants payable in furtherance of charity's objects	8,840	—	—	8,840	8,200
Activities in furtherance of the charity's objects	117,586	13,693	—	131,279	141,731
Support costs	5,924	527	—	6,451	7,207
Expenditure on managing-administering the charity	3,276	—	—	3,276	2,807
Total expenditure	135,627	14,220	—	149,847	159,946
Gains / losses on investment assets	—	—	653	653	2,476
Net income / (expenditure) resources before transfer	4,099	3,730	653	8,484	(5,601)
<i>Transfers</i>					
Gross transfers between funds - in	2,275	1,395	—	3,670	3,724
Gross transfers between funds - out	(2,677)	(993)	—	(3,670)	(3,724)
<i>Other recognised gains / losses</i>					
Gains on revaluation, fixed assets, charity's own use	—	—	—	—	—
Net movement in funds	3,697	4,132	653	8,484	(5,601)
<i>Reconciliation of funds</i>					
Total funds brought forward	18,773	241,145	28,573	288,491	294,093
Total funds carried forward	22,471	245,277	29,227	296,976	288,491

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St Mary's Church, Wootton
Analysis of income and expenditure
Selected period: 01 January 2024 to 31 December 2024

						Total
	Unrestricted	Designated	Restricted	Endowment	This year	Last year
Incoming resources						
Donations, Legacies and similar incoming resources						
101 - Gift Aided	69,530.00	—	—	—	69,530.00	72,089.00
102 - Tax recovered	19,647.03	—	300.00	—	19,947.03	20,203.01
103 - Other giving	10,175.00	—	—	—	10,175.00	8,335.00
104 - Loose Collections	5,588.70	—	—	—	5,588.70	5,622.54
105 - Gift days- Sundry giving	7,457.21	—	—	—	7,457.21	5,071.76
201 - Given for specific projects	386.07	3,844.44	3,489.50	—	7,720.01	8,059.19
Donations, Legacies and similar incoming resources Totals	112,784.01	3,844.44	3,789.50	—	120,417.95	119,380.50
Activities in furtherance of the charity's objects						
302 - Rent for church buildings	19,868.18	—	—	—	19,868.18	18,587.95
401 - Monies for books	293.55	—	—	—	293.55	325.20
404 - PCC fees Weddings/ Funerals	2,937.00	—	—	—	2,937.00	3,054.00
Activities in furtherance of the charity's objects Totals	23,098.73	—	—	—	23,098.73	21,967.15
Investment income						
301 - Interest	—	—	7,132.55	—	7,132.55	4,493.98
Investment income Totals	—	—	7,132.55	—	7,132.55	4,493.98
Other incoming resources						
106 - Wootton Charities	—	—	2,000.00	—	2,000.00	2,000.00
405 - Assigned fees	—	—	5,029.00	—	5,029.00	4,027.00
Other incoming resources Totals	—	—	7,029.00	—	7,029.00	6,027.00
Incoming resources Grand totals	135,882.74	3,844.44	17,951.05	—	157,678.23	151,868.63
Resources used						
Grants payable in furtherance of charity's objects						
1001 - Overseas Mission	4,290.00	400.00	—	—	4,690.00	4,350.00
1003 - Home Mission	2,850.00	1,300.00	—	—	4,150.00	3,850.00
Grants payable in furtherance of charity's objects Totals	7,140.00	1,700.00	—	—	8,840.00	8,200.00
Activities in furtherance of the charity's objects						
2001 - Diocesan Quota	68,000.00	—	—	—	68,000.00	76,562.00
2002 - Working Expenses of Incumbent	2,762.54	—	—	—	2,762.54	3,254.34
2004 - Assistant Staff	20,916.74	—	5,745.50	—	26,662.24	26,473.45
2005 - Church Running expense	6,692.42	—	—	—	6,692.42	5,995.37
2006 - Church Maintenance	1,246.23	—	731.76	—	1,977.99	1,034.82
2007 - Upkeep of Services	2,771.65	—	—	—	2,771.65	2,632.75
2009 - Costs relating to books	617.67	—	—	—	617.67	425.41
2010 - Church hall	12,297.08	145.50	780.00	—	13,222.58	11,993.04

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	Unrestricted	Designated	Restricted	Endowment	This year	Total Last year
2012 - Major Works	—	—	2,400.00	—	2,400.00	9,477.69
2016 - Honoraria, Assigned fees	59.37	—	4,036.00	—	4,095.37	3,318.00
6000 - Studley Road	2,077.41	—	—	—	2,077.41	565.05
Activities in furtherance of the charity's objects Totals	117,441.11	145.50	13,693.26	—	131,279.87	141,731.92
Support costs						
2017 - Support Costs	2,003.26	3,920.95	527.06	—	6,451.27	7,207.76
Support costs Totals	2,003.26	3,920.95	527.06	—	6,451.27	7,207.76
Expenditure on managing-administering the charity						
4000 - Administration	3,276.66	—	—	—	3,276.66	2,807.01
Expenditure on managing- administering the charity Totals	3,276.66	—	—	—	3,276.66	2,807.01
Resources used Grand totals	129,861.03	5,766.45	14,220.32	—	149,847.80	159,946.69

St. Mary's Pre-School
January to December 2024

EXPENDITURE January - December 2024	
Salaries January - December 2024	102437.94
Pension	4209.64
Employers National Insurance/TAX	10702.63
Church Hall Rent	7946.58
PLA Membership Fee + Ofsted	113.00
Equipment and supplies	7464.28
Milkbar	1208.44
Photo developing	241.99
Staff Training	938.50
Petty Cash	0.00
DBS	338.60
Trip	1194.00
Cash in Hand - 31 December 2024	14.05
Balance in Bank - 02 January 2025	46997.79
TOTAL	183807.44
INCOME January - December 2024	
Cash in Hand - 1 January 2024	14.05
Balance at Bank - 1 January 2024	29879.81
Received from Fees	15087.76
Received from Bedford Bourough	138217.82
Donations	25.00
Trip	545.00
Refund	38.00
TOTAL	183807.44

Manager/Treasurer: [REDACTED] Date: 7.1.2025
TRACEY KERINS

Deputy Manager: [REDACTED] Date: 9/1/2025
ALLYSON CABLE

Auditor: [REDACTED] Date: 29.1.2025
LESLEY REES



Administrative Information

St Mary's church is situated in Wootton village, Bedfordshire.
It is part of the Diocese of St Albans within the Church of England.
The correspondence address is :
The Vicarage, Church Road, Wootton, Bedford MK43 9HF.

The Registered charity number 1150817

office@stmaryswootton.org.uk

PCC members who served during the year were:
Revd Peter Ackroyd (chair), Allyson Cable (churchwarden), Tim Dillistone (churchwarden; Deanery Synod), Matt Hearn (Treasurer, Deanery Synod), Hazel Sanders (PCC secretary) Jim Hignett (Reader; Deanery Synod), Pauline Kendall (Diocesan Synod), David Baylis, Jenny Yang, Charlie Bellwood, Elaine Sullivan, Jean-Michel Rodrigues, Charles Ashbrook, Ant Hall, Nicola Johnson, Jon Joy, Nina Rodrigues, Claire Brice.

Independent Examiner: Lynden Richardson

Wootton Academy Trust/Wootton Upper School

It's been a really positive year for Wootton Upper School.

Approval was granted to become a Y7 – 11 secondary school from September 2026. The necessary planning and works for this are well underway – including curriculum and staff modelling, a new block of classrooms, and other site works. The Trust is working closely with Wootton Primary and Marston Vale Middle School to ensure a smooth transition for their students.

Student attendance is up again compared to previous year, enabled by lots of hard work by staff with students and their families. It is significantly above the national average for Y9-11. The culture and behaviour around the school is much stronger – students and staff report that they feel safer and happier, and much better able to get on with learning.

Ofsted visited in November and judged the school to be “Good” across the board, noting how much progress had been made in recent times.

The Performing Arts continue to thrive, with a successful three-night run of We Will Rock You in December, and growing number of students choosing these subjects for GCSE.

We have a range of sports teams who are experiencing lots of success with local schools and wider. This includes boys' and girls' football, netball and basketball.

The wider enrichment programme sees a record number of students taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, a growing number of other clubs, and trips around the country and beyond – including Disneyland Paris.

The 4G pitch was completed in the early autumn and has been heavily used by community groups and others since then. It is a wonderful addition and a great asset for the village.

The governing body has successfully recruited a number of new members recently, with a diverse range of experience and expertise, strengthening further its ability to support the school.

Planning is underway to celebrate the school's 50th anniversary in 2025/26, and there will be a number of events for the wider community to take part in and mark the occasion.

Finally, reflecting the improvements seen over the past year, the number of applications for places in Year 9 this autumn are up on last year, exceeding the Published Admissions Number.

Mark Lehain,
Executive Headteacher, Wootton Academy Trust.

Wootton Baptist Church

We give thanks to God for His faithfulness to our church fellowship throughout 2024.

A significant milestone in the life of our church was the calling of our new pastor, Tom Roberts. Tom began in a part-time role in June, and thanks to a successful grant application to the Particular Baptist Fund, transitioned to a full-time position in January 2025. Our church had been without a pastor for over a century, so Tom's appointment has brought great encouragement. We hope to see the church renewed as we reach out to the village and serve our community.

Special services this year included:

- Easter Sunday (31st March)
- Church Anniversary (5th June)
- Harvest Festival (22nd September), followed by a shared lunch in a beautifully decorated church.

We continue to run two midweek Bible study groups, as well as a regular coffee morning on Tuesdays (10am–12pm). Our Adventurers after-school club (Thursdays, 3.30–4.45pm) has gone from strength to strength, regularly welcoming up to 25 children. On Tuesdays (4.30–5.45pm), we have also launched Ignite, a new youth group for Years 5–8, which currently has 5 regular attendees. We hope to see this grow as the first Year 5s join Wootton Primary School in September.

Other highlights from the past year include:

- A Family Fun Afternoon in June, with games, prizes, and hot dogs, which drew over 100 attendees.
- Participation in the Real Lives Mission in October, hosting two inspiring evenings with Roger Carswell and guest testimonies from Fred Gill (with his Harley Davidson) and singer Rose Illingworth.
- Our Christmas celebrations, which were well attended by many from the village. These included a Carol Service with Bedford Brass, Carols by Candlelight, and a Christmas Eve Family Service.

We look back with thankfulness and forward with hope. Through the joys and challenges of the past year, we have seen God at work in our fellowship – answering prayers, guiding our steps, and giving us fresh encouragement for what lies ahead.

Tom Roberts.

Pastor, Wootton Baptist Church.

Appendix Five

Wootton Neighbourhood Chat Group and Memory Gym

Our chat group is now regularly attended by up to 50 people each week. We ensure anyone walking in is made welcome. Jan and Jean regularly supply us with top-quality home-made cakes.

Last July we were asked by a Wootton resident who had cared for her partner, having dementia, if we would consider working with Tibbs Dementia Trust Foundation. As a result we can now offer a monthly Memory Gym, a social event, for people with memory issues not just from dementia but also from the effect of memory loss through age, strokes and brain injury.

With training and support from Tibbs and The Methodist Church we have now have a wonderful team of volunteers that produce fun activities, including quizzes, singing, and dancing. It is difficult to explain the joy that everyone, whether volunteer or service users, experiences from coming to the Gym.

These are some comments from attendees

'Always doing something different and always very welcoming. Thank you.'

'We enjoy the games we play and the puzzles ,and the music, singing and dancing. We also come to the weekly Wootton Neighbourhood Chat Group. With Tibbs they started the memory gym. We meet and talk to old friends and new. Both events are very friendly, and we enjoy them a lot. Thank you very much'

The WNCG is grateful to the support that we have received from Wootton Methodist New Life Church and John Wheeler and other generous donors. A grant from Marston Vale Forest Centre Community Fund will enable us to buy resources for the Memory Gym. Also, to all the entertainers and musicians that are giving their time to entertain members of the Gym.

Some Forthcoming events for 2025

5 th May	Modern Music Hall at the Memory Gym, a one man show featuring Steve Bartlett.
10 th May	The return of the 'Coffee Morning with Classic Cars in the Carpark' with a sale of cakes and plants to raise funds for Dementia UK's 'Time for a Cuppa' -Wootton Methodist Church, from 11-2.00pm.
2 nd June	Emma Robbins returns to the memory Gym, to sing 'Musical memories of our Youth'.
16 th June	Afternoon Tea at The Hub. A joint event with Ridgmont Heritage Railway Museum to bring the afternoon tea experience to members of the community that cannot get to Ridgmont.

There are other events planned throughout the year which will be posted on our Wootton Neighbourhood Facebook page.

Kath Pearce.

Wootton WI

At our Annual meeting, our committee was elected and officer posts filled. Our member numbers have slowly increased throughout 2024, with new people visiting and often joining, with our Facebook page helping by advertising each monthly meeting.

We held several crafting and social evenings through out the year, trying out different crafts each time. These ranged from painting positivity rocks, cards and glass painting. We also held our annual Sausage and Mash Bash which has become popular and frequently have cakes and scones to sell at our regular Bring and Buy table at our meetings.

This year, our members learnt about therapy ponies, who are beautiful, trained Shetlands, that their owners take into care homes and schools to provide emotional and physical support to people who may have depression, anxiety or to evoke memories to dementia patients. Canine Partners also came to demonstrate how they can benefit people with disabilities with dogs being trained specifically to each person's needs. We've listened to talks on the role of the ARP warden during the war, the decoding of patterns in quilting and a visit from Bedford Street Angels who support young people if they get into difficulties when on nights out clubbing.

Every year our Federation hold competitions, which several members entered and were placed in the top three with their cakes, lemon curd and craft items.

We were lucky enough to be asked to provide refreshments at the Christmas Craft fair in the community hall, our wonderful members providing home made cakes to sell. This has become our main fundraiser, along with a craft stall there, and we are very grateful to be given that opportunity.

We also held another successful Wreath making workshop in December that helped add to our funds to enable us to give members a full and varied programme through the year.

Wootton WI meet on the third Wednesday of the month at the Memorial Hall at 7-30pm.

Sue Randell.