

Community Audit task group meeting in Holy Trinity Church on 16th May 2023

Present

Richard Snow, Liz Newman, Chris Benson, Richard Murray, Simon Drakeford, Ken Humphris and Gill Sykes.
Apologies: Stephen Evans and Lisa Lodge.

The task group is very keen to have more volunteers.

Introduction

The purpose of the meeting was to start the task of preparing a community audit with the objective of establishing how the Church and the Village Hall fit into the community and how then it would like to make use of these spaces in the future

It was agreed the process should be fully transparent to the community with summary minutes and full minutes published on the village website.

It was clarified that the Diocese owns both the Village Hall and the Church but that each space has its own management committee.

Background

There is a village church service on the 4th Sunday of the month. Also there are services for the festivals and occasional concerts, weddings (mainly former pupils of the school) and funerals. However, in common with many churches, Casterton's active congregation has declined substantially.

The Sedbergh Prep School currently uses the church for a Friday morning assembly and for special events and concerts for which it makes an annual contribution of £6,000.

This usage alone does not make the church financially sustainable. Hence the need to consider whether the church can be used in other ways.

The Carlisle Diocese is solely responsible for the cost of running closed churches. It is hoping to still have the Holy Trinity Church in 5 or 10 years but it needs to be economically viable and for there to be sufficient volunteers to be responsible for Health and Safety, safeguarding and general stewardship.

The Diocese, and more widely the Church of England, has a policy to identify other ways that churches can be used by the community. Increased usage offers the potential to help cover the costs of running the church, as well as providing a potentially valuable space for community groups or events.

If our community decides that the church has no future other than its current church and school use, eventually there would be a formal closure of the building. The closure would follow a standard Church of England protocol. If the church were closed, the graveyard would remain open.

Task Force Actions

It was agreed that there are a number of things that need to be investigated by the Task Force.

It needs to identify how the local community would be able to make more use of the Church and/or the Village Hall.

If sufficient demand was identified, the mechanics of making these two village spaces complement each other would need to be considered.

The phrasing of questions in the community audit would need great care so as not to be leading questions.

ACT Cumbria are a body that specialises in 'Community Led Planning' and could advise us in the process, they will be contacted for input.

The Task Force will think about a list of questions to ask the community.

Information about the project will need to be shared. Several methods could be used such as knocking on doors, village noticeboards, preparing something for AKL, preparing a newsletter and posting on the parish website.

People could be invited to register to complete the questionnaire online, either named or anonymously. The community questionnaire could also be made available on paper for villagers who do not have access to the appropriate technology.

Post survey, a 'Meet and Greet' could be arranged to discuss the results.

Next meeting: Date to be agreed.