

**Vicar's report – Revd Caroline Risdon
St John the Baptist Church, Eltham
APCM to be held on 17th May 2026**

Review of the past year:

In preparation for writing this report, I read through all my reports over the past five years. So much has happened in that relatively short time together. We have grown in numbers from a small Church to a medium sized Church. It is now our norm to have approximately 90 people in Church on Sundays as well as confirmation candidates, baptisms, and early admission to Communion annually. These are all signs of growth and they continue year on year.

More importantly we have drawn nearer to one another as the Church family of this place. How wonderful it is that so many people are taking a chance and leading in Church; whether that be reading the lesson, administering communion or leading the prayers. I'm especially heartened by the way in which we enjoy having the Lord's prayer accompanied by one of the great variety of home languages represented in our congregation. This is perhaps a natural extension of our beloved shared international lunches- where we delight in trying foods from our different homelands. They have been great occasions for learning more about one another.

Parish Development and Renewal Programme:

The national Church divested several million pounds to a few Dioceses across the country for work on developing Parishes. We were chosen as one of the first four Churches in our Diocese to take part in the Parish Development and Renewal Programme (PDRP).

So far the team (Alberta, Andy, Cate, Tom and I) have attended three weekend residential training sessions. We have learnt a variety of tools which will help us gather information and use it strategically to build up our networks and place on the High Street.

The PDRP team has already presented to the PCC and will shortly be approaching some groups in the Church as a first enquiry. Any information gathered by the PDRP team will be used to enhance our shared life as a Church community, while also helping us build up our infrastructure and ways of working.

We are about to enter the final year of this two-year programme.

The Building project:

The context-

Our boilers failed in autumn 2023. There was no option to replace or restore them as they were over 40 years old and no longer being produced. The national Church and the Diocese are aiming to be carbon net zero by 2030 and therefore we were advised to investigate eco-friendly heating options over another gas boiler.

As we tried to heat the Church using electric fan heaters in winter 2023, this overloaded the electrical system and we then discovered that we had failed our electrical surveys for over 20 years. In 2024 then, we were able to rewire the entire Church to make it safe and fit for purpose. We also fundraised £13 500, via the Give to Go Green campaign, for our heated pew cushions.

During 2024, we were visited by many Diocesan advisors regarding our building and heating- the heating Advisors; Organ advisors; Carbon Net Zero manager; Building and Heritage worker; Eco Church champion and our Archdeacon. Our Architect was present for some of these visits and quoted around £20 000 for all the technical reports needed

for our heating options, installation, and rebuilding to include toilets/ kitchen points/ access.

At that point, we did not have £20 000 to cover all the technical reports, so I completed an initial enquiry/application to both the National Churches Trust and the National Heritage Fund for this sum. Neither bids were successful and hence I sought the assistance of a Heritage Consultant.

2025 was the year of planning and applying. Working with a Heritage Consultant, I submitted two applications to the National Heritage Fund on behalf of the PCC. The first was for around £1 million for the complete heating work as well as making our building more accessible. Due to the level of national competition, we were not successful in this bid.

The next application was for a smaller grant of roughly £87 000, to include all the building reports we needed for the heating project but with an emphasis on safeguarding our archive, especially our records for the graveyard. We were invited to progress to the next stage with this project.

As it stands now-

The heritage project is fine-tuning into something exciting! We are asking for funds to digitise our original hand-written records of the graves in our graveyard, as well as to archive and safely store all the information our Honorary Archivist holds. Part of the work includes a measured survey of the entire site, which will give us all the technical drawings of the building and graveyard we need. It will also include a fundraising plan so that, once we have estimates for the heating etc, we know how to gather the funds needed.

As the heritage project has refined its' focus on the graveyard and records, it has become clear that the heating options study is unlikely to be funded by the National Heritage. So, the standing committee of the PCC has agreed to take it out of the project and fund it separately.

This brings us full circle in many ways. We started off the Heritage applications to fund the technical reports we needed for the heating and building work. Now, it has become clear that these are unlikely to meet the funding aims of the National Heritage Fund (NHF). The good news is two-fold:

- we have an exciting, achievable and meaningful archive project to present to the NHF;
- costs for heating options appraisals have decreased as demand for them has increased. This has also coincided with a change in the PCC funds, meaning that we are in a financial position to pay for this work (unlike in 2024).

So, over the next few months, we expect to have an outcome for the Heritage project; as well as a heating survey which will allow us to make an informed choice about our future heating.

Ongoing work:

- The Places of Worship Security Funding scheme (which we applied to in 2023) has approved the installation of external CCTV; and internal burglar alarms with panic buttons. The site has been surveyed for the installation of these safety features, and we are now awaiting faculty approval from the DAC.
- Work on improving the website continues- it is a modern and accessible site so please do have a look, especially for the events listed on our calendar.
- As part of establishing ourselves online, we are developing a logo for the Church.

- Children's Ministry- the number of children attending our Church remains steady (and large!). We use Diddy Disciples materials for our youngest children. The older children often help with serving.
- Safeguarding- over the past year, we have moved to an online portal and received phase two accreditation from the Diocese for our continued work to enhance and embed a culture of Safeguarding.
- Anti-Racism charter- this year we used the anti-racism charter parish resource for our Lent study groups. We remain committed not just to welcoming all, but to including all people at every level of our shared life.

St Johns continues to be a Church family that is both stable and dynamic. By that I mean, we have settled into our communal life, yet we strive to become evermore the people and Church God would have us be. There remains much to do and become over the next few years, and I ask once more for your prayers, patience and energy as we continue building up our Church on the Hill together.

God bless, Caroline

30th April 2026