

# **HIGHBURY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**

**Oxford Street  
Cheltenham  
GL52 6DU**



## **ANNUAL REPORTS AND ACCOUNTS 2023**



## Highbury Congregational Church

Making connections in friendship, faith and mission, with Christ at the centre and open to all.

### Ministry Leadership Team

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Discipleship	Helen Bloxham	
Pastoral Care	Laura MacLeod Louise Middleton Rachel Jacques	

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Secretary	Mary Buchanan	buchananm37@yahoo.com
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Minister	Jason Boyd	revdjasoncboyd@gmail.com
Deacons	Adrian Blazey, Sue Cole, Iain MacLeod, Darryl Mills, Ruth Wyatt	

### Others

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# **The Charitable Objects of Highbury Congregational Church**

The principal purpose of the church is the advancement of the Christian Faith according to the principles and usages for the time being of Congregationalism and in accordance with any specific requirements in the foundation trusts. The church may also advance education, relieve need and carry out other charitable purposes in the United Kingdom and other parts of the world.

## **Structure, Governance and Management**

The Governing document, THE DECLARATION OF TRUST, was adopted by Congregational Federation Limited on the 13th day of June 2009 as a recommended governing document for Congregational Churches who are members of the Congregational Federation and for whom Congregational Federation Limited are appointed as holding trustees, the form having been previously agreed between Congregational Federation Limited and the Charity Commission and also having been approved by HM Revenue and Customs.

Highbury Congregational Church began in 1827 and has been part of the Congregational Federation since 1972. The church is also a registered charity 1159085. We have adopted the Congregational Federation's Declaration of Trust of 2009 as our Governing Document, supplemented by our own Working Practices Document (updated September 2022).

Whilst we work closely with other Congregational Churches, all we do is decided and funded by our own Church Members. We have no outside source of funding and we do not have any outside body over us. All who belong are welcomed into church membership on confession of faith in God and Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Quarterly (and as required), Church Members meet for Church Meeting to seek the mind of Christ in shaping the life of the Church and setting the future direction of Church life. The Deacons serve the Church as Managing Trustees and ensure all the Church does is in keeping with its Charitable Objects as a Congregational Church and with reference to finances, safeguarding, health and safety, disability, employment and other legislation.

## **Our Mission**

Our Mission is consonant with our Charitable Objects (as above):

Highbury Congregational Church is a community connecting in friendship, faith and mission, with Christ at the centre and open to all.

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## **Minister's Report**

I begin my sixth annual report to the Church Meeting with gratitude to God. It is a privilege to have a good team of Deacons and Ministry Coordinators who, along with the Secretary and Treasurer, give the best of themselves in the service of this congregation.

The year has been full of the normal responsibilities of ministry: preaching, teaching, prayer, pastoral care (visiting and bereavement), oversight of the various congregations at Highbury, community connections (Schools/Scouts/Guides), commitments to the Congregational Federation (SWMA Chair, Tutor for the Congregational Institute of Practical Theology), and teaching and PhD supervision at the Nazarene Theological College.

Several areas of ministry have been a source of encouragement:

- The worship planning group has established itself and is meeting regularly. The feedback from the worship conversations were considered by the group. What is clear is that not much is clear: Highbury is a diverse community with as many preferences as there are people. It was recognised that we cannot be everything for everyone. Our aim is to ensure that there is some form of worship that is accessible to various tastes.
- The pastoral care group has bedded down under Laura's leadership. There is such excellent support being given that goes unseen.
- The Café Church team has been established. It is a source of delight to see how Café Church has become such a vital part of the different styles of worship. It is good for the spiritual development of our existing congregation and provides an entry point for those less familiar with church. This second aspect is yet to be exploited to the full.
- The Deacons and Ministry Coordinators carefully considered how to open up the conversation on same-sex marriage, as agreed at our last AGM. It began with a survey at the December meeting and a planned discussion evening in January 2024.
- Participation in morning worship has been steady between 35-45. It has been good to have a couple of families visiting and then staying. The evening congregation is steady with 10-15 people. Messy Church has developed relationships with families and it has been joyful to have a good number of Highbury folk participating. This changes the dynamic. Andrea leads the team with a 'can-do' attitude.
- Andrea has re-started Film Club. Attendance varies but the atmosphere is always warm and friendly. Do come along. Enjoy a film and make connections with people from our community.
- Those of us who participated in the Highbury Community Celebration at the end of September went home buzzing. Thank you to Mary for the vision and organisation and to the team that made it all happen. Since then, I have met numbers of people in other contexts who mentioned what a special day it was.
- The connection with Scouts and Guides has been building. I have been invited to speak to various groups, telling stories, talking about Canada etc. It was a pleasure to participate in the Beaver Sleepover and then to have them join us for our Scratch Nativity.
- The relationship with St. John's School is firmly established. The school has used the church during SATS and had presentation services in the church. I have weekly involvement in RE Assemblies. Mary, Chris, and Rachel are the team that make the church events happen and for that I am so very grateful.
- Andrea, Mary, June, and I went to the joint School Fete which included St. John's and was held at Pittville. We had significant conversations with children, parents, teachers, and staff. When it is advertised this year, would there be any others willing to come and support Highbury's presence?

- The Christingle Service took an unexpected turn. We had planned for Messy Church and Guides to be part of the service. Days before the service, the Church Office was contacted. After a flurry of emails Pittville School were involved with their newly formed choir. The church was full. The atmosphere was the soft glow of candle light and hope in the dark.
- Helen Bloxham's passion for Thy Kingdom Come met with energy. About 18 people gathered to pray and plan for the week beginning on Ascension Day and concluding on Pentecost. Highbury Church kept its doors open from first thing in the morning until about 6 pm every day. Thank you to all who 'held the space'. We had numbers of people drop in. Some prayed. Others simply looked around. The Prayer Labyrinth and a dog bowl provided welcome for those who simply passed by. There is a meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> February to which other churches have been invited. Please pray for participation and that this wave of prayer will wash over Cheltenham.

There are many signs of growth in our community of communities. My prayer is that the Vision Weekend will clarify our vision and galvanize our purpose in living the Good News wherever we are. Growth inevitably involves growing pains. As the community grows there is change. Some of that change is easier to accept than others. May the Spirit give us openness of heart and mind so that we can receive and give with humility. Particularly, may the Holy Spirit guide us in our conversations about same-sex marriage and, in our differences, may we be held together in the tenderness of God's love. Lord, please give us patience.

On a personal note, Viviane and I are grateful to the congregation for prayerful support during a year marked with health challenges. We continue to value your prayers in our fostering journey. Be assured of our prayers for you. God bless you.

Peace



Jason C. Boyd

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## **Worship Ministry**

Report by Maureen Williams, Worship Ministry Coordinator

The year has again gone very quickly, and it would seem that our Congregation at both morning and evening services remains about the same. There are still people who prefer to listen in from home via YouTube, some out of preference, others because of frailty or ill-health, and because of that we continue to stream mainly the evening service. However, it is always good to be together and experience the fellowship of other Christians, and hopefully with the better weather, lighter nights and Spring just around the corner, people will feel like returning. Discussions have been held about what people would like in the services. It was interesting that many supported having the organ played in the morning along with HySpirit. It was also decided that Cafe Church should occur once a month. Thanks must be given to those who prepare the Church on those occasions and to those who do the groundwork for each presentation.

The Advent Carol Service was well attended, as was the Christingle service which is an opportunity to have Messy Church, HyTec and Pittville school choir sharing with us also. Knowing that many people are away over Christmas, the services were quite well attended.

During Jason's period of recovery after foot surgery, we were very thankful for those who kindly stepped in to take services, and will be again whilst Jason is in Canada in February. We are pleased that Jason is now fully recovered and we thank him for his leadership.

Many members and adherents prefer to worship in a more contemporary style and so our morning service is designed to meet that need. Others in our Church prefer a more formal style and so the evening service is an opportunity to sing hymns rather than songs, and to enjoy a more reflective space. As this attracts the older members of the Church, the numbers are decreasing. All our worship, however, needs the Holy Spirit to give it life and to bring glory to God, and so prayers are needed from us all.

Special thanks must go to our organists, Alan Berry, Ian James and Mary Buchanan and also to Adrian Blazey and Helen Bloxham in HySpirit who give so much of their time to provide the joy that music brings to worship.

Finally, I would like to say a big THANK YOU to all those people who so readily agree to read the lesson, or prepare the prayers of intercession or help in other ways at both services and in the running of Highbury. It requires commitment and dedication, and I know a lot of time is spent in preparation. Also on special occasions the flowers and decorations around the Church have been spectacular and I wish to thank all who provided these at any time, which as part of the ministry to the Congregation also reflects the glories of God's creation.

It has been my privilege to serve in this office for six years, but now it is someone else's turn. As Congregationalists, we all have a part to play if we are to see our Church flourish and grow.

There are two Bible verses which spring to mind...

"In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths"

"With God all things are possible"

We ask God's blessing as we step out in faith for the future.

## **Flowers**

Report by Karen Wilkes, flower coordinator

Little has changed during the last year. We continue to mark the Church calendar as we always have. I am delighted that the younger members of our church are now involved during the Christmas period.

It is great that Church members have arranged a vase of flowers from time to time. Remember you can always bring a bunch with you on Sunday morning, as long as you have removed the leaves before arranging in a vase. If you decide to bring a plant to church, please ensure you are responsible for its health and well-being. If you have garden flowers/shrubs they are just as



acceptable as a purchased bunch. I do hope more church members give this consideration as it is a focus for people and a welcoming sight.

Thank you to everyone who has provided flowers and plants in 2023.

(NB. If you are really enthusiastic and arrange in a bowl using oasis, it's your responsibility to provide, remove and dispose of the oasis; if re-using oasis it must be kept wet and totally covered by a plastic bag. Oasis is not environmentally friendly and not biodegradable.)

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## **Children and Youth Ministry**

**Report by** Andrea Lacey, Children and Families Worker

**Aim of ministry or group:** To help children share Christian Friendship, explore Christian faith and enter into Christian Mission as a full part of the Church family. To help the Church to be fully supportive of children, as a child friendly Church, with Christ at the centre and open to all. Build on and develop children's work, build on relationships with other appropriate local links, such as uniformed organisations.

### **Report of activity for 2023**

2023 (April 2023 to February 2024) continued building on established activities (reflecting changed hours; 15 hours per week).

#### ***Messy Church***

Messy Church has continued to run and has a good number of families attending regularly. These families share in fellowship with each other and the team hold good relationships and conversations with them. We are able to share prayer concerns as well as enjoy worship songs together during the celebration. Relationships made through the Baby and Toddler group sees new families joining us throughout the year.

The services follow the plans provided by the BRF Get Messy magazine. The Messy Church team has grown during the last year and meet at the start of the month to plan for the session ahead. We use the plan from the magazine and study the Bible theme together before selecting or adapting the activities to suit. The activities chosen are either crafts, puzzles, games or experiments! We try to focus on all age activities in our selections and always have a prayer tent.

In April we celebrated the theme "Everyone is welcome" from Luke 14:1-23 making happy face pancakes and newspaper dress up. April was also a time of sharing the Easter message with each other and some families joined us on Good Friday to walk the Experience Easter Outside trail. In May, we celebrated Pentecost and, with the help of Viviane and Jason, used a prayer Labyrinth which also became a part of the Thy Kingdom Come activities. We celebrated harvest and caring for God's creation through the story of Johnny Appleseed. Following on from this and subsequent services, the Messy Church congregation hope to build on the community aspect and plans are underway to create a vegetable garden. In December we had a very busy Christingle service welcoming so many different groups connected with Highbury into one service, including Messy Church past and present, HyTec-ers, Toddler Group families as well as families from Pittville School to name just a few. It has been a wonderful year of seeing the Messy Church congregation growing together and sharing in fellowship.

#### ***Baby & Toddler group***

We have a lovely group of parents and grandparents for the Tuesday morning Baby and Toddler group. We consistently have around 10-12 children weekly with a consistent core group with others joining on a less regular basis. Realistically, the numbers connected to this group are more like 20 children. This group helps to build on children's work and we are fortunate to be able to support parents where needed. These conversations have also led on to Messy Church connections.

### ***Christmas***

A freshly painted photo board featured on the Highbury Christmas card asking the question "Where am I?". The board was displayed outside during December and received a very positive response from passers-by (including refuse collectors), as well as those using the building for various events. The scratch nativity was also very well supported with plenty of interaction from all ages of the congregation.

### ***Family Film afternoons***

Family film afternoons were brought back in September as a bi-monthly event to help serve the community and act as an outreach event. Following Covid-19 lockdowns, it was felt that there may have been a gap in terms of word-of-mouth communication of events. The family film afternoons hope to bridge this gap in making our local community aware of what we have to offer. We saw families who had previously come to Toddlers but whom we hadn't seen since, so it was lovely to be able to reconnect with them and remind them that Highbury is very much still here. It was also great to welcome some new families and respond to their questions of "what else do you run here?" The first of these films was a one-off in Spring which welcomed around 35 people to watch Disney's "Encanto"; a perfect telling of the Prodigal Son who was welcomed back to his family. "Super Mario Bros." followed the story of 2 brothers who work together helping others in need (Luke 10:25-37 and John 15:13). An extra film was shown for Halloween during half term; "Coco" focuses on forgiveness and celebrating the memory of loved ones who have died, under the Day of the Dead theme. "Rise of the Guardians" was the film for November. The guardians (Santa, Easter Bunny, Jack Frost and the Sandman) work together to hang on to one boy's belief; the mustard seed of hope. January saw Disney Pixar's "Elemental"; welcoming everyone from different backgrounds.

### ***Sunday worship***

Children continue to be present during Sunday services. Activities are focused on the theme of the service. We occasionally take children out to explore activities that might not be possible in the church space, or just to burn off some energy before re-joining the service.

### ***Planned activities for 2024***

We continue to build on strengthening relationships with new and established contacts through Messy Church, Toddlers and or other activities such as family films, engagement with St John's School, Angel Day Nursery etc. Particular aims are:

- Help to equip parents with skills during Toddler Group to encourage children's development, such as in taking turns and literacy skills.
- Build on outreach for Café Church.
- Continue Family Film afternoons during the winter months (September to March).

As always, I am grateful to Jason for his Ministry, guidance and support for my work. Thank you to Mary B as my line manager and her continued commitment. Thank you also to the committed and growing Messy Church team (Jean and Roger, Laura M, Helen B, Marguerite and Louise) and for others who help as required.

## **HyTec (Highbury Youth – The Eternity Club)**

**Report by:** Mary Buchanan, HyTec Leader

**Aim of group:** To provide safe space for teenagers/young adults to develop their potential and explore Christian faith.

### **Activity in 2023:**

**HyTec** for secondary school age (years 7-13) meets on a Sunday evening. We have 14 on our books, with between 6 and 10 attending each week. The group is in turns fiercely competitive and mutually supportive, boisterous and thoughtful; we always include times of prayer together and still enjoy sharing food together at our monthly cafes. The themes for 2023 were:

Journeys (first 6 months) considering life as a journey and exploring the significance of maps/directions, overcoming obstacles, with activities indoors and outdoors (including the hazardous journey of the annual Duck Race)

Hide and Seek (autumn term) pivoting off a favourite game to consider some of the things we might be looking for and what things we might try to hide.

**Connect/Discipleship Group** for over-18s. Up to seven of us meet regularly online, connecting various parts of the UK, Germany and, for a time, the US. We sometimes follow a theme, but our tendency to explore unrelated tangents is legendary. This year we have delved a bit into how the Bible came to be and how the two testaments link together. We have developed a strong network of support for each other.

As we go into 2024, both groups continue to evolve as the young people grow, move to college, settle in other places. But being part of 'The Eternity Club' never leaves you!

### **Thanks to .....**

- HyTec team: Ruth Wyatt, Carolina Schubert, Adrian Blazey, Jason Boyd, Heather Rendell
- Everyone who has prayed for us, encouraged us, helped out on an evening
- Parents who have helped out and supported us
- All the young people themselves for their engagement, enthusiasm and encouragement.

## **11th Cheltenham (Highbury) Guides – 2023**

**Report by** Tania Ashdown, Guider

Last year one of our Guides was selected to join a County International trip to South Africa and after a lot of fundraising, this year she joined a group of Rangers and Guides from Gloucestershire on the visit, spending Thinking Day (22<sup>nd</sup> February) enjoying activities with South African Guides as well as visiting museums and taking part in a safari. Kitty shared photos, souvenirs and stories (including being stuck in a hotel lift during a power cut) at one of our Guide meetings and taught us a game she had learnt from the South African Guides. We were also proud to present Kitty with her Gold Award – achieved with a lot of hard work on her own and taking part in unit activities. Kitty is our first guide to achieve the Gold Award since the new programme was launched.

During the year the Guides have continued working on badges – completing the "Take Action" skills builder badge in the spring and "Live Smart" skills builder badge in the autumn. In the summer term we did a lot of activities based around the Coronation, including a Coronation patrol bake off, making guardsman peg dolls and designing patrol logos (based on the ideas behind the coronation logo). We had our own Coronation party and attended the Battledown District Coronation activity evening with the other Rainbows, Brownies and Guides from the area.

In March most of the unit joined a County trip to Woodhouse Scout Activity Centre, where we spent the day trying different activities including go-karting, climbing, abseiling, fire lighting, zorbing and

soap carving. One of the Guides made her promise whilst at the top of the climbing wall (the leader stayed safely at the bottom!). We were very lucky with the weather as it stopped raining as we arrived and only started again as we left. The unit also took part in the County "Bubbs Hill Bash" in June, working in patrols to complete various challenges around the County headquarters. Everyone had a fun but exhausting day.

In August we joined with Cornerstone Guides for our first camp since the pandemic. We spent time during the summer term learning how to make gadgets and bedding rolls, and during the camp all the Guides completed their "Backwoods cooking" badge, cooking some of their own meals over a campfire. Although we had some rain, everyone enjoyed the experience and we hope to have another camp this year.

Other activities during the year have included a fundraising Beetle Drive, a movie evening, making "Twiddle Muffs" to donate to a local care home and a quiz evening, as well as Christmas and Easter themed meetings.

I would like to thank all of the Highbury Guide Leaders for all they have done this year again and we would like to thank everyone at the church for their continuing support. We look forward to trying new challenges as well as returning to old favourites in the year ahead.

We are happy to welcome any girls between the ages of 10 and 14 to Guides to join our activities this coming year and any adults interested in volunteering. Please get in touch if you are interested in finding out more about the unit.

Tania Ashdown, Guider

Contact us at [11cheltenhamguides@gmail.com](mailto:11cheltenhamguides@gmail.com)

## **1st Cheltenham (Highbury) Scouts**

Report by Jeremy Gibbs, 1st Cheltenham Group Scout Leader

This year saw the Scout group complete its first full year for Squirrels. We awarded 15 Chief Scout Acorn, the top award for Squirrels, making it one of the most decorated groups in the country. Our Squirrels have taken part in exciting activities throughout the year that can only be found in Scouting. They have worked towards their first bit of knife work, learning how to use them safely whilst creating nice sculptures out of soap. They have had birds of prey visit, pollution scientists and banks. The waiting list unfortunately remains at over 2 years!

Beavers – see below

Our Cubs and Scouts continue to link up providing 2 separate joint camps this year, as well as exciting sessions such as caving, climbing and laser tag.

In February, the Scouts will also be welcoming Alex Chalk MP when they will interview Alex as part of their Media badge.

The Scouts are right in the middle of fundraising for their Jamboree in July when they will spend a week in Essex. We have over 20 Scouts attending including some that will only be 10 by a few days! The Scouts ran a successful Burns Supper raising over £600 and are doing charity collections at Tesco and Cheltenham Town football. Watch this space for more fundraising!

We are still on the lookout for a couple of leaders to help assist in opening an Explorers section at Highbury (age 14-18). If you, or anyone you know would be interested then please get in touch - in addition to the rewarding aspects of running an Explorer section, it allows you to bypass any one of our waiting lists. Support and training will be provided.

## **1st Cheltenham Scout Group Beavers**

Report from: 1st Cheltenham Scout Group Beaver Leadership team

1st Cheltenham Beavers have had a busy year! We have maintained a full Colony of 24 Beavers (both boys and girls aged 6–8) and have welcomed two new leaders, Becky and Alex. Sadly, due to work commitments, we said goodbye to Andrew who had been volunteering with us for 5 years. Beavers took part in our annual summer sleepover at Prestbury Scout HQ, incorporating a hike to see the steam railway at the Racecourse. Our winter sleepover was at Highbury Church when we visited a local residential home and took part in the Christmas-themed church service. Our sessions have included a visit from the Digibus team, local hikes, a visitor from the Borough Council's 'Care for our Air' team, cook badge activities, creative badge, nature surveys, plus many more!

We are looking forward to continuing our work with the Beaver Scouts into 2024.

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## **Pastoral Care Ministry**

Report by Laura MacLeod on behalf of the Pastoral Care team (Louise Middleton, Rachel Jacques and Laura)

The pastoral care team is headed up by Jason, as minister, and regular meetings are held throughout the year, as we keep a check on the general welfare of Highbury members, regular adherents and their families. We also know and care for those that we meet through various church groups such as Toddlers, Messy Church, and HyTec.

A regular prayer chain is issued weekly, and cards of support are sent to those we feel are in particular need. In addition, birthday cards and a Christmas gift are sent to anyone known to us who is over 85. Regular visiting is undertaken to those who are unable to get to Highbury services, and others who may be ill or just in need of a chat and friendship.

Although we have a pastoral care ministry team at Highbury, in reality all of our congregation are involved in caring for each other in one way or another and we thank each of you for that. This is illustrated by the events that are supported by, or suggested by others. For example, the teapot buddies, the Connect groups, Highbury café, various social events and just generally keeping an eye out for each other. This is what makes Highbury a real family community

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## **Discipleship Ministry**

Report by Helen Bloxham

**Aim:** To help everyone in the Church to grow and develop in their Christian faith, their prayer life and their discipleship as they explore the Christian faith and seek to put Christ at the centre of their lives.

The various Connect@Highbury groups are now well established and meet in various ways and at varying times to support one another, pray together and study God's word. I am grateful to the leaders for their continued commitment and welcome anyone interested in joining or even starting

a new group to contact me for support. There are materials you can use linked to the Holy Habits and even DVD Bible studies – one group has been watching the dramatization of Jesus' life 'The Chosen' and have really enjoyed the discussions that have followed. It has been great that the groups have been involved in leading services and it has been good to hear from a variety of Church members – thank you!

Our first Alpha course to be run for several years came to its end in the Spring Term and although our team of volunteers were keen to run another in the Autumn unfortunately there was not the interest. This continues to be something for the Church to pray about and at least we are prepared should it be called for again. Thank you to Janet in particular for her enthusiasm and commitment for getting this up and running.

In May we came together to take part for the first time in the Thy Kingdom Come prayer initiative. A creative team came up with some prayer stations in Church and volunteers helped to keep the Church open to visitors as much as possible for 10 days until Pentecost. Thank you to Jason for holding daily prayers in the morning and evening and to all those church members who came along and were praying at home. We are hoping to be able to do the same in 2024 and have invited other churches in Cheltenham to come and find out more at a meeting in February.

A year of Connect@theteapot was celebrated by an afternoon tea in the Café in July. A special thank you goes to Ruth who has paired up interested church members most months to meet up either at home or at cafés to get to know one another better over a cuppa. It is something I have enjoyed and everyone who has even tentatively joined now looks forward to.

The latest group to start up in 2023 is the Highbury Cr-afternoon another opportunity for fellowship over cake and to bring friends and neighbours along to. It has been lovely to have Tricia back with her crafting ideas to be part of a small team introducing simple activities to all ages and abilities. We pray that the conversations here and in all the activities we invite people to at Highbury may lead to a developing relationship with God.

Looking forward (please pray for):

All Church members to join a Connect group.

- More people to add their names to the Connect@theteapot.
- Outreach activities like the Cr-afternoon to be welcoming and well attended.
- Thy Kingdom Come prayer initiative - for joint opportunities with other churches and creative prayer stations, enough volunteers to enable the church building to be open for 10 days.
- For us all to develop our faith, prayer life and be good disciples of God!

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## **Mission and Outreach Ministry**

*Currently no specific lead for this area of ministry*

## **Community Cafe**

Report by Angela Pickles

Throughout 2023, Community Cafe has been held every Thursday morning from 10.15 am in the dining room, giving church members and friends, as well as people from the community, an

opportunity to meet informally. Hot drinks and homemade cakes are always available and there is plenty of friendly conversation.

If you have not tried our cafe do come along, by yourself or with a friend, as you will receive a warm welcome. Some people just pop in occasionally while others come every week. Our age range can span 90 years, so everyone is included!

A big thank you to the small team of volunteers who make Community Cafe possible.

## **Highbury News**

Report by Susan Cole

**Aim:** Dissemination of news and reports to Church and other interested parties. Also to inform, notify and encourage.

2023: Eleven editions produced. Distributed to most recipients by email. Hard copies also made available for delivery by hand, by post or picked up at church.

2024: Plans to continue to produce monthly editions (except August).

Thanks to contributors, to Mary Buchanan for in-office printing and to those who arrange subsequent distribution.

## **Hy-Speed (Highbury Digital Scalextric club)**

Team headed up by Adrian Blazey and Iain Wallington.

Report by Adrian Blazey.

**Aim of Hy-Speed:** Our Mission is "to demonstrate God's love in the local community through slot car racing". Our objectives are:

- a) To build and strengthen relationships between Highbury Congregational Church members and between HCC and the local community.
- b) To provide space for a shared activity between parents/guardians and their children and strengthen family bonds.
- c) To create a non-judgmental, accepting environment in which everyone can relax and have fun racing slot cars.

2023 Activity: We met for a couple of race meetings at Highbury in 2023 which were reasonably well attended as well as running the track at the Celebration afternoon in September, all of which were good fun. We are still reliant on a very small team of regular helpers which limits what we are able to do. As ever, offers of help would be greatly appreciated; please contact Adrian or Iain for more information. We should be back for 2 or 3 more meetings in 2024, check our Facebook page for up-to-date information.

## **Open the Book**

Report by Jean Gregory, on behalf of the team – Sue Cole, Mary Michael, Elaine Schonbeck, Karen Haden and Brian Wood (from Prestbury St Mary's)

The team goes into Oakwood school every Thursday morning in term time to share a Bible story during school assembly. Each story has a simple message for the children to take away with them, for example being kind, saying sorry, asking for help etc. During 2023 the Bible Society published a new set of material for us to use, still using Bible stories, but with a simpler and all-inclusive introduction and closing prayer. Open the Book fulfils both OFSTED and church schools' inspections for collective worship. Oakwood is a multi-faith school and we are enthusiastically welcomed by staff and pupils alike. We all think that our Thursdays begin well by doing Open the Book together - if you would like to join us please let us know and you'd be welcome to see what's involved.

## **Christian Aid**

Report by Louise Middleton

Cheltenham Christian Aid has undergone some changes this year. It is run by a small but dedicated team, which includes two members of Highbury who serve on the committee: Louise Middleton and Marguerite Brown. Laura MacLeod is the Christian Aid rep for Highbury.

At the beginning of 2023 our treasurer, Howard Bartlett, retired after thirteen years of service, and we thank him for that. A replacement has still not been appointed and we continue to seek someone to take on this role. Without a dedicated treasurer, the way contributions are collected and remitted has had to change, and most is now remitted direct to the national Christian Aid bank account. This means that it is not always possible to know exactly how much money has been raised by Cheltenham alone, making it difficult to assess the success of some of our local campaigns.

Following the pandemic, we needed to regroup as an organisation, not just to focus on fundraising. With this in mind, two fellowship walks were undertaken to allow people just spend time together. The first was planned and led by Highbury and the second by St Phillip and St James', Up Hatherley. It is expected that these walks will become a regular feature of the Cheltenham Christian Aid calendar. Another regular social event is the summer Christian Aid picnic in the park. This was very well attended in August 2023 with around 30 people, about double that of 2022. This is a very good way of socialising between members of many different churches, exchanging ideas and giving support to those ideas.

**Christian Aid Week** has evolved and with online giving now the preferred way of donating, the effort of collecting envelopes of cash or cheques is no longer warranted. Cards/envelopes with information on how to make a donation will continue to be posted through letterboxes to prompt people to donate and raise awareness of the work of Christian Aid. The total amount donated to Cheltenham Christian Aid during the week was just over £7,000, excluding made directly to Christian Aid central. Christian Aid Cheltenham aims to increase the number of envelopes delivered this year, and for this to happen more volunteers are needed. I hope that Highbury members will rise to the challenge.

The Christian Aid Fair was held a month earlier on 14 October 2023 in the hope that there would be more passing trade from the Literature Festival. This was not the case and attendance was down on previous years. It is not possible to separate takings from each stall but the unwanted gift stall manned by Highbury took more than £100.00 in cash and more was paid by card. The total raised was £1041.48 (£1,351.05 was raised in 2022). In 2024, the date will return to November.

**Carol Singing** Pre Covid, Highbury used to sing at Sainsbury's Oakley, but so far it has been impossible to engage with them again. Other churches have also had difficulties returning to previous supermarkets. Therefore, all church carol singing took place at Waitrose on Saturday 16 December. This arrangement worked well as it meant that there was singing from 9.00am–3.00pm with different churches taking different time slots (Highbury shared 9.00-10.00am with



Christchurch). We hope other supermarkets will support us again next year. The total raised on the day was £1,360.00, so well worth it and very enjoyable, too.

Ecumenical carol singing took place outside and inside John Lewis on 14 December 5.00–6.30pm and was well attended as Anne Vine had acquired a choir to support us. The total raised was £168.04.

**The Christian Aid AGM 2024** is on **Tuesday 16 April at Christchurch at 19.30**. This is later than usual as it was decided to move the date, as February is such a miserable month weatherwise. We hope that the change will encourage more people to attend.

Finally, thank you to everyone at Highbury who supports Christian Aid in whatever way. It is the charity at the very heart of what Christianity means and is a global movement of people, churches and local organisations working together for dignity, equality and justice to enable people to live a full life free from poverty. Please visit the website to find out more:

[www.christianaid.org.uk/our-work/about-us](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/our-work/about-us) or the Cheltenham Christian Aid website for local information: [www.cheltenhamca.com](http://www.cheltenhamca.com)

### **Room Hire**

Report by Mary Buchanan

**Team:** Adrian Blazey, Viviane Boyd, Mary Buchanan

**Purpose:** To serve the community through the letting of Highbury's building

2023 has seen a return to near full capacity in terms of lettings after all the disruption of Covid. To mark this, we held a very successful Highbury Community Celebration afternoon in September 2023, at which church and outside users were able to share what they were doing and make good connections with each other.

A particular highlight has been the return of St John's Primary School for special events and exam time space. We also hosted a public meeting with Cheltenham Borough Council Recycling Department and our local councillors in February.

### Current Tenants (regular and occasional)

Narcotics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous

Scouts, Cubs, Beavers, Squirrels; Guides, Brownies

U3A Groups (Bridge (x 2), Economics, Art, Shakespeare reading, Ukulele, Folk Groups)

Hearing Aid Clinic

Upholstery Classes

Art Workshops

Patricia Newman Dance School

Exercise classes (Heart 2 Heart, Balance class, Shibashiqiqong, NIA Sensory movement and dance)

Dramatots

Cheltenham Fostering Support Group

First Aid training

NHS Retirement Fellowship

Pittville Townswomen's Guild

Cheltenham Horticultural Society

Zion Church

St John's School

Angels Day Nursery

Cheltenham Bach Choir

## **Secretary's Report**

**Purpose of role** - to enable the whole ministry of Highbury Congregational Church, by supporting the church leadership team and coordinating a variety of other roles and activities.

Report by Mary Buchanan, Church Secretary

### **Membership**

New members: 0

Resignations: 0

Deaths: 4

Membership at the end of 2023: 95 (around 70 'active')

Regular adherents: around 35 (including Messy Church)

### **Highbury Leadership Team**

At the AGM in March 2023 Janet Partington and Angela Pickles completed their terms as Deacons. Thanks to both for their contribution to church life in this way. Darryl Mills and Ruth Wyatt were elected to the Diaconate, Darryl after a well-deserved break and Ruth for the first time.

The structure of the Ministry Leaders' Team was reviewed during 2023, with the primary aim of improving the interaction between that team and the Diaconate. The following changes have now been implemented:

- Ministry Leaders have been renamed Ministry Coordinators
- Instead of being appointed for an unspecified period of time, each will be appointed for a three-year term, renewable for a second term (in line with the pattern for Deacons)
- Two Deacons' Meetings per annum will be combined Diaconate and Ministry Coordinators; Ministry Coordinators will be invited to other Deacons' meetings if there is a particular emphasis on their ministry area; each Ministry Coordinator will be linked to a specific Deacon and aim to have approximately annual informal reviews.

At the end of 2023 the Highbury Leadership Team consisted of:

Minister (ex-officio member of Diaconate and trustee): Jason Boyd

Secretary (ex-officio member of Diaconate and trustee): Mary Buchanan

Treasurer (ex-officio member of Diaconate and trustee): Roger Gregory

Elected Deacons (and trustees): Adrian Blazey, Sue Cole, Iain Macleod, Darryl Mills, Ruth Wyatt

Worship Ministry Coordinator: Maureen Williams

Children and Youth Ministry Coordinator: Andrea Lacey

Discipleship Ministry Coordinator: Helen Bloxham

Pastoral Care Ministry Coordinator: Laura MacLeod (Rachel Jacques, Louise Middleton)

### **Administration**

With increased activity during 2023, both by the Church and by other tenants, the need for effective administration and organisation has increased. Keeping the church office tidy and the noticeboards up to date, managing the accumulation of clutter around the building, keeping our waste and recycling tidy, and monitoring cars in the car park is an unending task and a big thank you to Rachel Jacques for her contribution to this.

The church website is a bit more up and running than it was, although it is not yet as dynamic as we would wish. We continue to have a presence on YouTube and Facebook. Internal

communication is a combination of email, hardcopy letters, whatsapp and telephone. Improving our communications generally is a work in progress.

### Health and Safety

During 2023 we updated our fire risk assessment and produced for the first time a general risk assessment (which replaced our very specific COVID risk assessment). Peter Harrison continues to oversee our fire safety equipment and Rachel Jacques is overall responsible for our First Aid equipment (including the defibrillator inside the building). In autumn 2023 we had an external defibrillator installed which is connected to the Circuit and thus accessible to the public/emergency services if required. Kitchen hygiene and general cleaning is overseen by Jean Gregory and team, including our excellent cleaner Helen Roberts.

We are grateful to all those above, plus those involved in Maintenance and Safeguarding (see below), for doing largely unseen but crucial jobs.

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## **Maintenance**

Report by Angela Pickles, Maintenance Coordinator

It is essential that the church buildings are kept in good condition which involves constant maintenance.

During 2023, the outer dining room doors have been repaired and the emergency exit doors in the hall replaced. After complaints from the neighbours, the outside lights were adjusted to their satisfaction while maintaining safe lighting in the car park.

There have been many plumbing issues and the heating system has required frequent attention.

In 2024, work is scheduled for the hall. Wooden cladding is due to be installed to protect the walls. The floor is to be sanded and varnished. New LED lights are to be fitted on the ceiling. The ensuite bathroom in the Manse is to be upgraded.

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## **Safeguarding**

Report by Nephesha Mary Michael, Safeguarding Officer

Highbury Church takes our Safeguarding responsibilities very seriously and adheres to our policy which is updated annually. All church members and users of our premises agree to abide by it. A hard copy is kept on the kitchen windowsill for anyone who finds that easier than accessing it online. When our updated policy has been agreed at our Annual Church meeting it will also be uploaded onto our website.

When I became the Safeguarding lead for Highbury it was also very much part of my professional practice. I am no longer working so keep up to date by online courses. These courses are also used by members of our pastoral care team and children's and young people's workers.

I am hoping that someone who can have more consistent direct contact with our children and young people than I am able to offer will be able to take over the Safeguarding Lead from me. Please feel free to discuss it with me if this is of interest to you. I would like to be able to step down whilst I am still available to support my successor.

## **Treasurer's Report**

### **Accounts to Year ended 31st December 2023**

*Note this is just the narrative summary. The full accounts, including the auditor's certificate, are available in a separate booklet.*

#### **Financial Summary**

A strong performance against Budget for the year, but still very reliant on Room Booking receipts to balance the books.

Without Room Bookings we would break even on the day to day expenses but not be able to provide for any Church maintenance, so obviously not a viable way forward.

Highlights included:

- Large legacies and smaller gift received in the year
- Room hire bookings very strong
- Dividends and interest receipts much improved by increased interest rates
- Able to increase contributions to CF South West Midlands Area to shore up their ailing finances
- Gas and electric costs well in check and still enjoying fixed prices negotiated in December 2022.
- More regular cleaning required to support increased room booking activity

#### **Review of the accounts - Income & Expenditure, All Funds**

Below is a summary of overall financial performance:

	Year 2023 £	Year 2022 £
<b>Incoming Resources:</b>		
Offerings	61,036	60,993
Legacies	15,000	0
Gifts	1,300	1,250
Room letting	18,498	16,254
Investments and other income	8,010	6,232
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>103,844</b>	<b>84,729</b>
<b>Resources used:</b>		
Charitable objectives	-51,133	-46,851
<b>Support costs:</b>		
Maintenance	-10,531	-9,609
Project costs – Flat Roof	0	-6,697
Other support costs	-21,218	-21,589
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>82,882</b>	<b>-84,746</b>

#### **Excess of Incoming Resources over Resources used**

**Net movement      £20,962                      £-17**

**Total net movements in the year of £20,962 surplus include;**

General Fund £16,493 surplus

Fabric Fund £10,530 deficiency  
Gift and Legacy Fund £14,000 surplus  
Organ and Visuals Fund £1,000 surplus

Early in the year we produced a budget for the **General Fund**, day to day income and expenditure excluding maintenance and legacies and gifts, to reflect our best estimates of how the year may turn out. There were many swings and roundabouts, but I am able to report a better than budget surplus to fund our requirements under the 5-year plan for maintenance. Thank you for your support in making this possible.

### **Movements in funds;**

#### **A) General Fund**

Total year produced a surplus of £16,493 which was £7,038 better than budget.

#### **Variances from budget include;**

##### **Income - £5,453 better includes;**

- Standing orders/tax refund down by £678. The budget included increases from April that have not been realised in the year; which I guess is a reflection of the current economic uncertainty.
- Eric Burton's gift of £1,300
- Grants received down by £670 – year end claim not made to Bennington Hall Trust
- Miscellaneous income better by £381 – includes Community Event of £166 and £75 contribution from Girl Guides for anniversary frame
- Room Hire considerably better by £1,462 from increased activities and new clients.
- Wedding and funeral receipts £664 better than budget – includes Janet R and Barbara C memorial services.
- Outreach income £618 better than budget
- Dividend and interest receipts £2,386 better than budget from increased rates (currently 5.1%) and transfer of legacies to the current account

##### **Expenditure - £1,585 less includes;**

- Savings of £381 on Junior Church.
- Savings of £108 on piano tuning.
- Savings of £738 on Minister's retreat and subsistence expenses, and £188 on car mileage allowances
- Gas £437 savings, and electric £71 savings
- Savings of £387 on Manse water rates
- Savings of £122 on CF Ministry and Society Fund and SWMA subscriptions from a reduction in declared member numbers
- Church cleaning £482 more reflecting an increase in weekly hours from 1st August to cope with the increased room booking activity.
- Savings of £146 on Ministry Leaders expenses
- Miscellaneous expenditure £217 more than budget includes £150 spent on Girl Guide frame commemorating their recent anniversary
- Outreach expenditure £291 more; in line with increased income above
- Savings of £153 on Manse community charge from increase in rates less than budgeted for.
- Office equipment £126 more from increased printer consumables and website costs
- Photocopy hire charges £222 more from extra copy costs, particularly colour

#### **B) Fabric Fund**

##### **Expenditure of £10,530 included;**

- A&E annual inspections and call outs - £633
- Void Projects 5-year plan - £1,410
- Void Projects – doors, windows - £555

- Dave Mason, Manse boiler service and repair - £192
- Stallard & Co lighting and PAT testing – £1,932
- Elmtree Joinery hall fire doors - £5,400
- Other miscellaneous expenditure - £408

It is recommended that we transfer in £10,644 from the General Fund surplus to meet the 5-year maintenance plan requirements for 2023 – thank you for making this possible!

In addition, we would recommend a further transfer of £3,000 to cover extra activity and church wear and tear from increased room bookings, and to reflect that the 5-year maintenance plan is based on historical figures before current high inflation

Future work could include making the church more environmentally friendly by extensive insulation – in an old building like ours this would be very expensive, requiring extensive funds both by external grants and internal funds.

### **C) Organ and Visuals Fund**

- The organ is considerably old and may soon require a refurbishment. Alan Berry has obtained a quote for refurbishment in the order of £7,000 to £7,500
- It is recommended that we transfer a further £2,500 from the General Fund to increase this Fund to £7,500
- Mary Clifford's estate left a legacy of £1,000 for organ and piano maintenance.

### **Giving to Others**

#### **Giving to others in the year amounted to £6,703 which included;**

- £608 to the CF Mission and Society Fund
- £1,520 to CF South West Midlands Area
- £1,379 to local monthly charities
- Earthquake Appeal Turkey/Syria - £263
- Harvest Appeal to Agape hospital in Myanmar - £531
- Ukraine Appeal Christian Aid - £1,119
- Christmas Appeal Cornerstone - £538

#### **Memorial services;**

- Janet Rhodes Alzheimer's Research - £75
- Barbara Cullis Christian Aid - £306

#### **Other giving/collections;**

- Listening Post - £100
- World Day of Prayer - £264

This giving is 6.6% of our income

### **Unrestricted Funds**

All the church funds are unrestricted.

The trustee policy is to retain at least 3 months' expenditure as "free" reserves within the General Fund to meet future shortfalls in income, or unexpected expenditure for 2024. The balance, after recommended year end transfers at 31st December, represents 6 month's current day to day General Fund expenditure.

# Highbury Church

## Income & Expenditure Account - all Funds

12 months to 31st December 2023

INCOME Header	A/C code	TOTAL THIS YEAR	TOTAL LAST YEAR
		£	£
<b>Offerings, Legacies and similar incoming resources</b>			
Envelopes & loose change	1101	648	376
STO & single cash/cheque	1102	49,224	46,106
Tax refund	1103	11,164	10,739
Gifts - Other	"	1,300	1,250
Legacies	1122	15,000	
Grants received	1200	366	2,436
Miscellaneous income	6110	536	357
<b>Total - Incoming resources</b>		<b>78,238</b>	<b>61,264</b>
<b>Activities in furtherance of the charity's objectives</b>			
Other room hire	1141	17,028	15,152
Church users room hire	1143	1,470	1,100
Weddings & Funerals	2801	1,069	485
Highbury News income	3402	95	25
Highbury News advertisers	3403	180	240
Scouts insurance	6105	134	172
Outreach Income	6700	2,844	2,236
<b>Total - Incoming activities</b>		<b>22,820</b>	<b>19,410</b>
<b>Activities for generating Funds</b>			
Fund raising	1131	0	
<b>Investment Income</b>			
Dividends & Interest	1151	2,786	282
<b>Total Income</b>		<b>103,844</b>	<b>80,956</b>
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EXPENDITURE Header	A/C code	TOTAL THIS YEAR	TOTAL LAST YEAR
		£	£
<b>Activities in furtherance of the charity's objectives</b>			



<b><u>Ministry salary etc:</u></b>			
Minister's gross salary	5101	29,694	27,887
Minister's employers NI	5102	0	
Minister's pension EE and ER	5103	3,332	3,079
Car mileage allowance	5401	269	384
Children's Worker gross salary	5801	11,535	9,766
Children's Worker employers NI	5802	0	
<b><u>Other expenses:</u></b>			
Preaching	2101	315	267
Junior Church/Sunday Special	2302	64	513
Video licence	2304	559	530
Organist	2501	425	527
Music	2502	0	
Piano/Organ Maintenance	2503	270	252
Pastoral	3201	0	
Pastoral gifts	3202	88	198
Ministry Leaders exps Joint	3216	0	122
Publicity/advertising	3404	0	
Neighbourhood cards	3405	0	
CF affiliations/SW Midlands area	3501	2,408	1,651
Other affiliations	3502	170	170
CF Ministry and Mission	3504	633	656
Worship resources	5115	261	235
Church equipment/furnishings	6109	0	
Miscellaneous expenditure	6801	259	35
Outreach expenditure	6800	851	578
<b>Total - Outgoing activities</b>		<b>51,133</b>	<b>46,850</b>

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<b>EXPENDITURE Header</b>	<b>A/C code</b>	<b>TOTAL THIS YEAR</b>	<b>TOTAL LAST YEAR</b>
<b>Support costs</b>		£	£
<b><u>Ministry expenses:</u></b>			
Travel, excluding Car	5116	71	
In -service training/retreat	5117	0	612
Subsistence	5118	0	126
<b><u>Manse expenses:</u></b>			
Manse insurance	5301	306	251
Manse - water	5304	261	698
Manse - community charge	5305	2,947	2,817
Manse - maintenance	5307	252	3,310
<b><u>Other expenses:</u></b>			
Project	6100	0	6,697
Church - Maintenance	6101	10,279	6,299
Gas	6102	3,339	3,560
Electricity	6103	2,225	2,378
Insurance	6104	2,663	2,536
Trade disposal	6106	479	409

Housekeeping	6301	147	182
Cleaning materials	6302	913	839
Cleaners gross pay	6501	4,912	3,950
Stationery/directory	6601	17	12
Postage	6602	25	52
Telephone	6603	716	622
Office equipment	6604	312	788
Payroll costs	6606	288	288
Photocopy hire/copy charge	6611	1,338	1,208
Photocopy paper	6612	57	48
Bank charges	6701	202	214
Legal costs	6702	0	
Recruitment costs	6703	0	
Professional fund raising	6705	0	
<b>Total - Support costs</b>		<b>31,749</b>	<b>37,896</b>
<b>Total Expenditure</b>		<b>82,882</b>	<b>84,746</b>
		7	

## Income & Expenditure Account - all Funds

Income/Expenditure Header		TOTAL THIS YEAR	TOTAL LAST YEAR
		£	£
<b>Income</b>			
Incoming resources		78,238	61,264
Incoming activities		22,820	19,410
Fund raising		0	0
Dividends & interest		2,786	282
<b>Total Income</b>		<b>103,844</b>	<b>80,956</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>			
Outgoing activities		51,133	46,850
Support costs		31,749	37,896
<b>Total Expenditure</b>		<b>82,882</b>	<b>84,746</b>
<b>All Funds surplus/(deficiency)</b>		<b>20,962</b>	<b>-3,790</b>
<b>Less transfers to other funds:</b>			
Fabric/Flat Roof		10,531	4,413
Gifts and Legacy		-15,000	
Organ and Visuals		0	-4,000
Year end transfers 2023		-16,144	14,644
<b>Gen. Funds surplus/(deficiency)</b>		<b>349</b>	<b>11,267</b>

# **Independent Examiner's Report to the Trustees of Highbury Congregational Church**

## **Respective responsibilities of the Trustees and the Examiner**

As Trustees you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Accounting Practice: Accounting and Reporting by Charities (SORP 2005) issued in March 2005, UK Accounting Standards and the Charities Act 2011. As Trustees, you consider that an audit is not required for this year under section 144 of the Charities Act 2011 (the Charities Act) and that an independent examination is needed.

It is my responsibility to; ☐

- examine the accounts under section 145 of the Charities Act,
- to follow the procedures laid down in the general Directions given by the Charity Commission (under section 145(5)(b) of the Charities Act, and
- to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

## **Basis of this report**

My examination was carried out in accordance with the General Directions given by the Charity Commission. The examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the Trustees 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:

(1) 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

(2) to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed  \_\_\_\_\_

Date 12/02/24