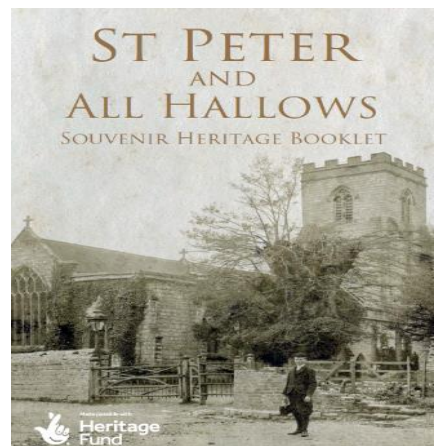


West Huntspill Church

Saving the Heritage,
Sustaining the Community

Final Evaluation Report



OL-18-06842



Heritage & Community - June 2025

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Without the funding the project team were able to secure, it would not have been possible to maintain this beautiful historic building or adapt it for today's community needs.

It was evident that the community needed a hub to reduce isolation and grow a united community. This carefully designed reordering of the west end of the church will do that.

The real highlight for me was the opening celebration of the hub – it was the culmination of all the work we'd put in and it was what we'd intended.
We'd really achieved something.

An extraordinary amount of time and energy has been given by the local community and volunteers to save this significant historic church from further deterioration, which will now remove it from Historic England's Heritage at Risk register.

An awful lot of interest has been generated as a result of the project - there's a lot of life in the church – it's better than I'd thought.

FOREWORD

As Rector of The Huntspills & Mark, I arrived in West Huntspill in February 2021 amidst the end stages of the COVID lockdown. Despite all the challenges that the pandemic brought to this rural Magnificat parish, which had just been through an extended period of vacancy, I found a small but resilient team, working on behalf of the Parochial Church Council, leading an exciting project to save and develop St Peter & All Hallows Church. It has been my honour to join them, and to journey with them, as 'Saving the Heritage, Sustaining the Community' has become a dynamic reality.

David Lemon (Project Manager and Churchwarden), Mel Wall (Treasurer for this Project and for the Parochial Church Council) & Sara Puddy (Benefice Administrator and Grant Application Officer for this Project) dedicated vast amounts of time and energy to develop the concept, put together a credible vision, gain the permissions necessary and secure the funding for the project. Drawing on expertise and experience, locally and further afield, surveys were utilised to gather opinions and ideas. The ground was prepared and the church and village communities involved at every stage. Once the project was underway, these three were joined by Ginny Power (Activities Co-ordinator) whose commitment, energy and expertise enabled many of the community aspects to flourish.

By focussing initially on developing the inside of the church, a community area was created, now known locally as 'Huntspill Hub', which includes a servery and toilets. This is capable of being transformed back into rows of seating for the larger church services or community activities, and provides an accessible and friendly space both for community and church events and for the stream of visitors that appear throughout the week. A small pop-up Café had been piloted previously, and this space has facilitated the development of a weekly Café, staffed and populated primarily by local villagers and regularly catering for 50+ members each Monday Morning, as well as being available on a self-service basis for the remainder of the week. The Monday gathering also involves a variety of supports to the community including visits from the Village Agent, an IT adviser and local Police, as well as a group interested in local history (much of which has been captured and made available through the touch-screen interface) and another participating in a variety of crafting activities. Wi-Fi provision (available 24/7) also supports those who may not have access elsewhere.

Far from negating the sanctity of the church as a Holy Space, great care has been taken to maintain and enhance the different worship areas in the church. The east-side of the church still has its traditional pews, high altar and choir stalls, such that if you stand in the centre of the church and face east there remains a sense of timelessness. In addition to this, it now has far more regular visitors – many of whom feel very much at home!

Whilst the essential building work was conducted on the Church Tower, use of the Huntspill Hub developed further. In addition to the Café Team, the Social and Fundraising Group have made great efforts to expand an already active programme - regular 'Tea and Talk' events on a wide variety of topics have proved particularly popular, benefitting greatly from the newly installed projector and screen. There are also plans-a-foot to initiate a village film club. Links have been developed with Farmers across the area, seeking to combat isolation through a soup lunch, and involving them in worship at a rogation service. Local school children helped design the floor map in the children's area, and were delighted to see this in situ, along with photos of their school activities on the display boards, when they visited for their Carol Service. A Christmas Tree Festival has proved very popular with local clubs and groups, providing a beautiful backdrop for our Community Carol Service, as well as a way of promoting village activities.

As I reflect on my first four years here in West Huntspill, this project has been key to us supporting and growing community connections and has been an amazing means of new life being breathed into this place. Although this stage of the building work, and the project that has enabled this to happen, is drawing to a close, the legacy it has endowed and the potential for further development are immense. This church has 800 years of history behind it – a heritage that, thanks to the National Heritage Lottery Fund and all who have provided match funding, we have been able to protect – and an equally important future ahead, to which we look with great hope.

Rev'd. Christine Judson

Rector of The Huntspills & Mark

INTRODUCTION

As summarised in the NLHF application, this project is intended to be the first of three phases, with the aim of sustaining the building for greater community cohesion and becoming a hub for village life. The project is intended to:

- tell the story of the church in its parish, through inclusive activities once again becoming the heart of the village, addressing social and deprivation issues exacerbated by COVID;
- deliver a programme of targeted activities for elderly/ isolated residents, primary school children, young people, disadvantaged adults and those with learning difficulties, walkers, local people and holiday makers interested in history and the environment through permanent interpretation and temporary displays;
- also focus on the natural history in our graveyard/village including six species of bats and a heronry, encouraging walkers from the nearby coastal path to our honesty café, as well as local people to enjoy circular walks and our café to improve wellbeing;
- tackle urgent masonry repairs to the tower, install essential toilets and kitchenette.



An interim report covering the capital works and early activities was written in April 2023, this final evaluation report summarises the whole project including later activities and the success of the honesty café.

Writing this in early summer 2025, and looking back over the whole project, including the planning phase, it is possible to see how far the organisation and building have been changed and transformed. Gaining permission to start in early 2022, the West Huntspill project had been developed at the height of the pandemic and met a real community need that had been exacerbated by the social constraints of lockdown and isolation.



A bigger shock to the project was the unexpected post-pandemic surges in inflation, materials and labour shortages, and economic uncertainties that erupted during the course of the capital works partly as a result of the war in Ukraine. These could have been disastrous had it not been for the excellent working relationships among the professional team members (and project team) who liaised closely and ensured that things kept on track.



Once opened, the Huntspill Hub has gone from strength to strength, reaching new audiences and with new ideas and activities being suggested by local residents, many of whom are not part of the church congregation. This is testament to the warm welcome and genuine desire for the community to flourish. The capital works and activities have been delivered as planned, and a promising legacy is already underway. The success of the project is inspiring other NLHF applicants who regularly visit the church to meet the project team and see the honesty café in action.

METHODOLOGY AND CONSULTATION

Heritage and Community was appointed as evaluation consultants by the West Huntspill project in September 2022. Having been involved in planning the project as business, activity and process consultants since mid-2018, Heritage & Community is well placed to understand the project and the people involved. This is the final report for Saving the Heritage, Sustaining the Community and acts as both a summary and an evaluation of the project. The interim report covered the conservation works, internal re-ordering and initial activities and contains more detail on the early part of the project and is summarised in this report.

Consultation

Christine Judson, Rector

David Lemon, Project Manager

Mel Wall, Parish Treasurer and Project Financial Controller

Virginia Power (Ginny), Activities Co-ordinator

Sally Brown, West Huntspill Primary School

Dave Paul, IT volunteer

Carrie Cavill, Secretary, West Huntspill Horticultural Society

Denise Godby, WI

Chris Billingham, Somerset Botany Group

Ann Hopwood, Hub Café volunteer

Bronwen Wright, Tea and Talk organiser

Imogen Davis, illustrator and artist for the floor map

Russ Liley, Freeline Graphics, interpretation designer

Attendees at the weekly coffee morning

Laura Hetherington, NLHF consultant

As well as the following people who contributed to the Interim report in 2023:

Sara Puddy, Benefice Administrator and Project Fundraiser/ non-HF grants manager

Marcus Chantrey, Director in charge, B2 Architects

Leila McLelland, Project Architect, B2 Architects

Ian Walker, Project QS, Ian Walker Associates

Andy Dalgarno, Site Manager, Ellis & Co

Joel Garrett, Carpentry Apprentice, Ellis & Co

Laura Collins, West Huntspill Primary School

The interviews were a mix of in-person meetings, Zoom/Teams calls and some updates by email. All the key members of the project team have been interviewed on more than one occasion. Comments from those consulted are reported in italics or speech bubbles, and kept anonymous where possible. Comments have been adapted only to make sense and give context where appropriate.

CELEBRATING SUCCESS



They're a brilliant example of a grass roots community group that's made things happen.

Overall, it's really been a delight to work with the Huntspill team.

If I'd known at the beginning, eight years ago, what was involved I wouldn't have done it, but I'm very pleased with the end result – I've done my best. It justifies all the effort.

The Activity Plan was ambitious but not super ambitious – it was written with their capacity in mind.

It was a superb community project meeting a real need.

They are a very small team of volunteers who have never done anything like this before – they kept at it and surpassed everything we thought they'd do.

Holding both a launch party for the opening of the Huntspill Hub in December 2022, and an end of project celebration in July 2025, the project team have been exemplary in recognising the contributions of a wide range of people - from volunteers, community groups, contractors, funders to village residents and Lottery players. As their invitation above says – EVERYONE is very welcome.



CONSERVATION AND CAPITAL WORK

The project originally developed as a result of the Quinquennial Reports indicating an urgent need to address the decaying blue lias stonework of the tower. The tower at West Huntspill was in a poor state with the top sections (especially the parapet) in critical condition. The footpath below the tower had been cordoned off with Heras fencing due to falling masonry a couple of years before and the church was on the Historic England Buildings at Risk Register.

Only ever intended to be the first phase in repairing the building, the second phase (re-roofing) is yet to enter the planning stages.

Internally, minimal pew removals had shown the PCC that there was a demand for increasing social, secular and wider community use of the church building. Occasional coffee mornings were organised which were proving popular, but were hindered by fixed pews taking up space and putting the font at risk. There were no wc facilities and the kitchen was very old, which hugely limited any attempt to use the building more. The capital project also aimed to address those internal issues: to make the building fit for purpose by providing facilities and a flexible space, able to deliver the activity plan and enable events beyond the project. The pew ends from removed pews were recycled to form the servery and other cabinetry.

The philosophy of undertaking whatever was necessary at high level and continuing down until the money ran out served the project well, as at the end of the project it was agreed with the NLHF that remaining funds could be used to continue works to the tower including repointing, repairing the stone on the South side of the tower, repairing the stonework surrounding the entrance door to the tower, and making some repairs to the North side lower stage. These works took place in May and June 2025 (bottom photo).

The conservation works were on time and on budget, and communications and decision making processes worked smoothly. Both professionals and volunteers stated how much they had enjoyed the process and how they felt as though their involvement (although hard work) had been fulfilling and resulted in personal growth.

- *The interaction between the architect and client was really good, with the decision making working well, with a good momentum. The clients accepted delays, everyone's worked well and it's benefited everyone.*
- *The tower work is less visible than the café but it's really important.*



What worked well during the capital phase

The focus of the PCC and the team is now very much on the Huntspill Hub and community activities, and it is easy for the work involved in conservation repairs to fade from memory. With the project team moving smoothly into the post-project phase, it is important to look back as the organisation has transformed since its successful Round One application to the Lottery in 2019. It's been a long journey with the main capital phase finishing in early 2023, and reflecting on the capital works there were key themes that came through from all those consulted:

- Having constructive, respectful and positive working relationships
- The quality of the advice and work produced
- Timely support from the NLHF

Overall, the capital phase of the West Huntspill project went exceptionally well. The small client team with the leadership of Christine Judson, as Project Director, the tenacity of David Lemon as Project Manager, calm competence of Mel Wall as Treasurer and meticulous attention given to match funders by Sara Puddy, Parish Administrator, worked supportively and well. The experienced professional team of Architects Marcus Chantrey and Leila McLelland, backed up by Ian Walker as QS created an ideal working relationship with the excellent services of Ellis and Co as main contractor.

- *We've come a long way – achieved the unachievable. Andy Rainsford (formerly of Diocese of Bath & Wells) was previously planning for faculty to take the tower down.*
- *David, Leila, Marcus, Ian and Ellis all communicated and worked well together – no tensions or clashes.*
- *The PCC trusts the project team and are aware of the enormity of the responsibility. I'm very impressed with the characters here.*
- *The interaction between the architect and client was really good, with the decision making working well, with a good momentum. The clients accepted delays, everyone's worked well and it's benefited everyone.*

Towards the end of the project it became apparent that there were small pots of money left under different cost headings after the various elements of the project had been completed. With the NLHF agreement, works to the tower that had been cut in 2022 were reinstated:

- *Ellis were told the maximum they could spend - £18,000 – and they kept rolling along until they had spent all the money.*

What could have happened differently

Overall the project went well, with the no major issues, disputes or concerns. Issues arose that generally could not have been predicted, but were dealt with calmly. The main challenges included unexpected problems once the work started; increased prices caused by uncertainty in global markets following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine; programming and weather.

- *There were one or two surprises including the concrete roof, and the floor was worse than expected, with all supporting timbers rotten underneath. We replaced 25%.*
- *At the start of the tower work, we found a lot more iron than expected despite earlier surveys. Initially we couldn't get the iron out of the stone – it was cement mortar and soft stone – that led to early delays of several weeks.*
- *During the cold snap in December, the saws froze at the quarry, then it flooded and water had to be pumped from one area to another – it's a shallow open quarry at Somerton – there are no others for blue lias, which will be an issue for the future.*

- *We could have run the two parts of the contract concurrently – the internal works used a different team of a carpenter, joiner and decorator. We needed to dig the trench for the drainage before the scaffolding went up –maybe we could have enabled that earlier.*
- *Because we did the internal works first and we didn't start the tower in the spring, we ran the risk of foul weather. The lime mortar needs temperatures higher than 2 degrees, and dries slower and needs protection.*
- *The costs of everything have gone up –some elements of the contract were fixed cost, and inflation was included in some areas. We've spent more on labour and materials. We've had to give two pay increases last year as we need to retain the work force. All materials have gone up – steel by over 100%, timber by 50%, nails, everything - no item is the same as a year ago. Stone costs have gone up because of labour costs. The inflation allowances have helped.*

As explained in more detail in the interim report, there were two specific issues that could have been disastrous if they hadn't been resolved in time, both outside of the team's control, and both relevant to many other church projects:

Permissions – Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC)

There was a general feeling during feedback interviews that the DAC was unhelpful in its approach and bureaucracy. Little flexibility was offered despite the planning and process happening during the COVID pandemic with all its restrictions. This was further exacerbated by there being no attempt to understand that the project was entwined with strict deadlines or accommodate those deadlines in its processes.

- *DAC is inflexible and not collegiate around people juggling really complex multi-grant projects.*

Natural England – Unexpected need for a bat license

The ecological survey at development stage showed that there were no bats present in the tower or any areas where works was proposed. As a consequence, no bat license was required. During the works however, an itinerant juvenile bat negotiated the (bat-accessible) scaffold screening and caused a 6-week delay. The bureaucracy was not able to acknowledge the facts that it was an itinerant bat (despite application notes by the retained ecologist) or that work was on-site, money tight etc. Despite relentless attention from the ecologist and architects, the license went to the wire and was granted just as the site was about to be closed.

- *The license took full 6-weeks of nagging – should have been much quicker (48 hours).*
- *The situation was rescued by Ellis working around it, but could have been really serious.*
- *The bat incident was hugely stressful and unnecessary.*

David has given up many hours of his time over many years and continues to do so. David was the driving force to gain the Heritage Lottery grant for St. Peter and All Hallows Church which has enabled the repairs and repurposing of the church which we are all enjoying today. It really has been an amazing achievement.

(Local resident)

ACTIVITIES

Virginia Power was appointed as a self-employed Activities Co-ordinator in late summer 2022, remaining in post throughout the project until the end of June 2025. The extension of her contract was possible as she had been appointed some months after the project began and was therefore able to use unspent budgets.

As well as delivering the heritage and community activities outlined in the Activity Plan, Virginia (Ginny) was instrumental in creating and delivering additional community events which are covered in this report under 'Unexpected outcomes and activities' on p22. These included the now annual Christmas Tree Festival, Huntspill Heroes and the Farmers' Soup Lunch. It should be acknowledged that she put in considerable number of volunteer hours above her contract.

People were very complimentary not only about the amount Ginny achieved but particularly about her exemplary written communications and record keeping, updating the regular Project Report and Calendar. The format was easy to understand and made it easier for people to follow what was happening, to see where there were challenges and to see progress being made.

One of the biggest challenges for Ginny was the changing requirements or unavailability of community groups who had been keen to engage at the planning stage but needed considerable amounts of perseverance and tenacity to track down.

Despite these setbacks, the achievements have been significant and long lasting, with all members of the project team taking the delivery of the activities and the post-project legacy seriously, and really wanting to make a difference for their rural community.

During the project 69 people, volunteering multiple times and in different roles, have contributed at least 2317 hours. Divided by 7.5 gives 309 days, slightly above the application estimate of 276 days. At the development stage it was estimated there were 50 volunteers – many of the new supporters are from outside the congregation.

ST. PETER AND ALL HALLOWS, WEST HUNTSPILL
HUNTSPILL COMMUNITY HUB MONTHLY PROJECT REPORT: MARCH 2025
Meeting: Friday 4th April 2025 at Mel's house at 10.00 am

Present: Mel, Ginny, Chris and David

CHURCH INTERPRETATION – OUTDOOR PANELS AND LEAFLET

We have now received feedback from the community at both the café and the Church members and evaluation. Amendments to be compiled by Ginny and sent to Russ as soon as possible. We would like to have a colour image on the front of the leaflet which was approved as a trifold (DL) leaflet. Some adjustment to the yellow trails on the leaflet – direct across not around the land needs to happen. Agreed no more amendments after this stage as this needs to be printed – Russ needs to return this as a proofread to Ginny ASAP. Confirm with Russ how many we are having printed for the walk and report back.

Outstanding Actions:

- Ginny to collate amendments and send to Russ no later than 11th April 2025
- Inform Russ that we would like to have a colour image on the front of the walking leaflet
- Russ to return for final proofreading to Ginny and to confirm how many leaflets we are having printed for the walk.

CHURCH HERITAGE ACTIVITY

- Family Activity booklet draft has been circulated for comment. Agreed that A5 would be the most appropriate, available on the website, QR code, and answers on the inside of the back of the leaflet. It was discussed that this is very much designed as a family activity and that the activities are appropriate.
- Blue Lias box to be done and completed before Ginny steps down.
- Heritage Open Day 2025 – registered including this year with Tower Tours. Small micro-grant applied for to pursue non-conformity work in line with current themes.
- Handrail discussions – Chris to talk to Pat Hancock and liaise with David and Janet to move towards an end date of June – project end. This has already been done and it is hopeful that we will be able to offer Tower Tours with the handrail in situ.
- Paddle boards of Church information history – possible University project. Ginny to investigate with students, although majority of students have chosen their topics. She will explore possible History students who might take this on. David has provided previous University study work on which things could be built.

Outstanding Actions:

- Ginny to give feedback to Russ about the Family Activity booklet
- Ginny to explore possible History students involvement or perhaps local community interested in history might do this (timing now for University is not good as we head towards summer vacations).

SCHOOL LIAISON/CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACTIVITIES

Outstanding Actions:

- Ginny to complete the Heritage box for Blue Lias
- Ginny to research opportunities for extending the ideas of the boxes to reflect heritage, community and care home engagement. We agreed that this will form part of our sustainability strategy once the project ends.
- Chris to have an early discussion with local care home to explore how we can better connect with the residents with our Church and community. Possibly discuss with any existing Activities Co-ordinators within the home.

SECTION 3: ACTION PLANNING FOR OUR PROJECT (annotated September 2023)

2022 CALENDAR Main Priorities: permission to start, recruitment of contractor, recruitment of Evaluation Contractor, opening of café, repair of church fabric and capital phase activities, recruitment of research volunteers to work with interpretation designer, focus on local residents

Area of Work	January – March	April – June	July – September	October – December
HLF Procedures and Communications	Get permission to start. N.LHF joint press release agreed. Grant acknowledged on website	Monthly reports and drawdowns start	Evaluation of behind-the-scenes tours and early thoughts on the café	Evaluation interviews with design team start
Quarterly meetings of Activities Group – Monthly Meetings taking place with reports provided	Appointment of Activities Co-ordinator and Evaluation Consultants	Completed	Completed and regular evaluation sought from café attendees for ongoing development and activity planning	Completed
Work on the church fabric	Church cleared and made ready for Contractors	Internal work finished allowing café to open in June	Exterior tower work continues until February 2023	Completed
Local people	Recruitment of volunteers for café and activities	Photographic recording of project	Behind the scenes tours, including event for Lottery players	Evaluate prototype interpretation
	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed and amendments being actioned
	Plan WEA training for volunteers	Ongoing	WEA courses for disadvantaged adults start	
	Basic hygiene and food handling awareness training conducted in house with consultant	Huntspill Art Group contacted to plan exhibition for 2023	Revisiting to promote online WEA offers for Autumn 2023 and renew discussions	
Elderly and/or isolated residents	Contact CCS, Sue Hunt to plan IT Village Agent – once a month IT support – starts June 2023	Talking Café opens from June	USA start looking at walks routes	
Schools	School children design artwork for hoardings	Recruiting teachers for KS1 & 2 resources	Somerset Coast Festival walk planned for 23.09.2023	Learning programmes written and designed for pre and post visits, as well as onsite
	COVID affected – unable to take place	Creation of resource boxes for school, community & church use	Teachers in primary and pre-school resources	Completed-photographic evidence of evaluation by schoolchildren of visits.
Young People	Children visit to 'meet the builders' and see varied traditional crafts	Completed	Revised action due to non-availability of personnel – resource boxes	Evaluate prototype interpretation
			Behind the scenes tours to meet crafts people	Completed and amendments being actioned
			Completed	
			Walks being planned	
			Somerset Coast Walk 23.09.2023	
			Geocache being planned and installed	
			Outstanding but geocache website actioned and waiting on Scouts involvement	

Examples of updated activity reports submitted to the project team on a regular basis.

Huntspill Hub

Activities are well advertised on the church website, with a separate page for community activities, and also publicised in the local village monthly magazine.

Coffee Morning and Honesty Café

The Community Café takes place every Monday morning: before the reordering, trials of the coffee morning attracted 12-20 people who sat in pews. Now 40-50 people come each week. Activities such as cream teas have also taken place, with the option of seating outside, and can be planned with more certainty due to the back-up of an indoor space.

Finances

Initially there were concerns that the coffee morning was barely breaking even, with any profits in the summer used for heating in the winter. Although most cakes are donated so catering costs are low, people were not always generous with financial donations for their coffee and cake, and so polite notices were put up with amounts suggested.

- *It's more than paying for itself, covering the heating and one hour a week cleaning – we're making £2000 a year profit.*

Despite initial concerns that people weren't contributing sufficiently, one month the takings were £341 from the coffee morning, honesty café and a raffle – although this was unusual.

Meeting place

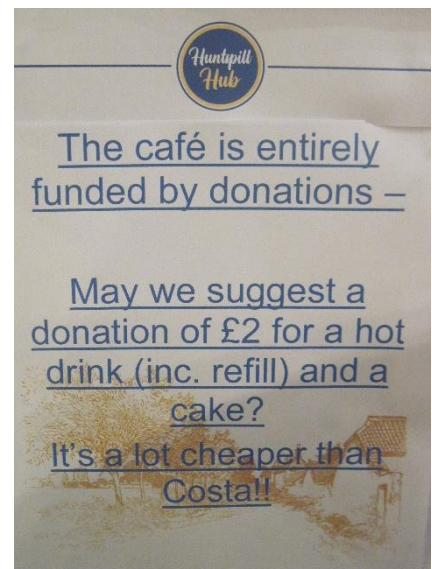
The project team estimate that 80% of the people coming to the coffee mornings are not 'church people' which demonstrates the church's ambition and success in reaching a wider range of people through this project.

- *We'd lost a lot of village life – people were out of the habit of coming to church so wouldn't come in. The majority of people here aren't members of the congregation.*
- *It used to be shut all week – now look at it!*
- *The church is now a real community asset, it's not just for services so I'm thrilled about the changes.*
- *I've met loads of new people – before I knew a name but now I know them as people.*

Volunteers:

There are about ten regular volunteers who sign up on a flexible basis, without being tied in to a particular day.

- *I make cakes and help with coffee. I just love it – it's just lovely seeing people coming together.*
- *Everyone mucks in – sometimes people come for coffee for a few months, get more confident and then volunteer.*




Monthly Activities

As well as coffee and homemade cake, village residents are able to access other services at the coffee morning.

IT Support

IT Doctor Dave Paul will be back offering some IT advice! He will help if you have troubles or questions about common problems with computers, tablets, phones and printers. BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) if you would like (laptops, tablets, phones) but if you are having issues with a desktop PC or printer we should discuss the issues before bringing it along. Contact Ginny for date of next IT Surgery

powerv23@gmail.com



Examples of issues he can address:-

- Errors reported by devices/software
- Slow device performance
- Difficulties with printing
- Backup strategies (i.e. your photos from phone, or computer files)
- Security such as Anti-Virus, VPN
- Cleaning up software clutter
- How to use common software and apps (i.e. Word, Excel, Publisher, Photo editing)
- Discuss purchasing new devices (specification depending on the budget you have)

We are also keen to find out if there are any specific IT classes or courses that you would like us to run – we are also open to considering different days and times. Please contact Ginny Power with any suggestions/requests via powerv23@gmail.com

IT volunteer (Dave Paul) is on hand to answer tech questions. Originally planned to help people who had no computers at home and needed help with online forms etc, COVID meant that many people got smart phones in order to stay in touch with friends and family and now need help with getting the most from their devices. Free Wi-Fi is also available.

- *The need has changed over the years – a lot of it is now phones: how do I do a screenshot? How do I get apps?*

Local police officers have also attended and make themselves available for questions.

Visits by the Village Agent from the Community Council for Somerset (CCS), Gina Pring, take place on the first Monday of the month giving the opportunity for local residents to ask for advice and be signposted to other services.

- *Visits by the Village Agent and the PCSO are only possible because the café exists.*
- *She gives advice on benefits, and collected knitted blankets that people had made.*

A craft group meets at the coffee morning each week and has seen its numbers grow through the increased visibility in the community.

The Huntspill Hub team are keen to develop the Hub in other ways so that the building remains the heart of the village. The Repair Café came as a one off and attendees to the Monday Café have many ideas how the church could be used in the future (see next opportunities p33).



Comments about the Coffee Morning

It's made a huge difference to the village – I've met a lot more people. If you don't have a dog and walk around, you never see anyone.

Monday café is now my only venture out during the week except for shopping.

I love this church – it's beautiful.

I've just moved back here and it's excellent to be able to come and meet people.

I'd be very upset if it closed, I work my Monday around it, it would be very boring without it.

I come most weeks to meet people and catch up, it's a lovely social thing: it's brought the community together.

A lot of people reminisce and bring in photographs.

It's grown the community in the village.

The café reduces the sense of isolation, it plays to a certain demographic.

People at the café made boxes for the Christingle – there was a sense of involvement.

You can't get away from the fact it's a church building which can be a problem for some people. The atmosphere is good – people aren't preaching at you or pouncing on you – people now realise the hub is a community hub not a church hub.

You come in and think – wow, the whole village is here.

I love to bake but my husband has diabetes so I bring a cake nearly every week.

The coffee morning is very well supported and a great way of catching up with friends over cake and coffee.

The cafe is going from strength to strength and is very successful.

We all bring our different (craft) projects but sometimes someone has an upset so we down work and talk. Nothing's off limits to discuss.

Daily Visitors

With CCTV installed, members of the project group can keep an eye on security but also how people are using the church. Observing people using the honesty café, reading the interpretation and enjoying the Christmas trees has provided evidence of use and is reassuring that people are enjoying the new facilities on offer.

CCTV has also meant that the team have been able to tackle isolated incidents of anti-social behaviour such as teenagers messing around, taking the loo roll etc, and has resulted in measures being taken to mitigate and prevent similar occurrences in the future, e.g. with all spare supplies now locked away.



Two local people popped into the honesty café having walked from Highbridge.

The café is increasingly used by cycling and walking groups.

Ginny has done an amazing job delivering the Activity Plan and more with very limited time - her enthusiasm and hard work have moved you to a place where the Hub is developing a life of its own, with people now coming to you with suggestions and ideas.

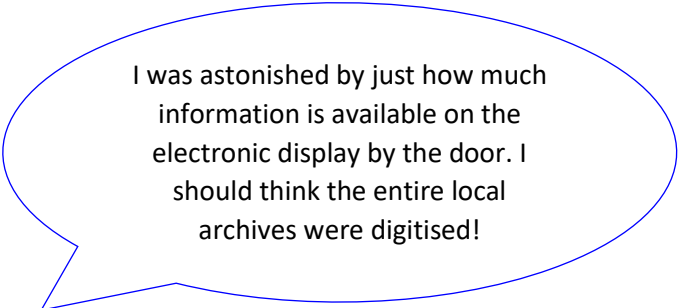
The Community Café is incredibly successful and breaking even financially - with lots of extras added including IT workshops, a Village agent attending from the Somerset Community Council - the sense of value and connection is creating excellent outcomes for the local community.

Working with the Village Agent, we are providing freezer-space for free emergency meals for those in need.

INTERPRETATION

Russ Liley of Freeline Graphics wrote the Interpretation Plan for the Development Phase and was contracted to deliver the following interpretation:

- Heritage interpretation wall hangings
- Floor map with illustrations by children
- Touchscreen
- Website
- External noticeboards
- Circular walk leaflet



I was astonished by just how much information is available on the electronic display by the door. I should think the entire local archives were digitised!

The original intention was to set up a research group of volunteers who would investigate local stories, and digitise the themed folders of information gathered by local historian John Lamb. The material would then be sorted to find significant and interesting themes and information.

- *We had hoped the history group would do a lot of the work, but that hasn't happened. Russ has done most of the writing himself, and it all takes a while.*
- *The reality of the delivery phase compared with the optimism of the development phase unravelled a little as we'd assumed the recruitment of volunteers would have been easier and that there would have been a few interested people to get involved in the research process and steering the process.*
- *The heritage group we attempted to form fell away – maybe everything had already been gathered by John Lamb and maybe people deferred to him.*
- *John Lamb's folders were gold dust – he'd spent thirty years gathering exactly what we needed for this project, and without this opportunity there would have been no outlet, now people know his work exists.*
- *The amount of information that's come out and the stories we've found have been great – people are really interested in the project.*

Seven of the existing twenty four folders were digitised, with priority given to folders focusing on the church and the village rather than the wider area. In reality Russ did much of the sifting of material and writing of the text, with the PCC signing off the text and illustration for the different elements.

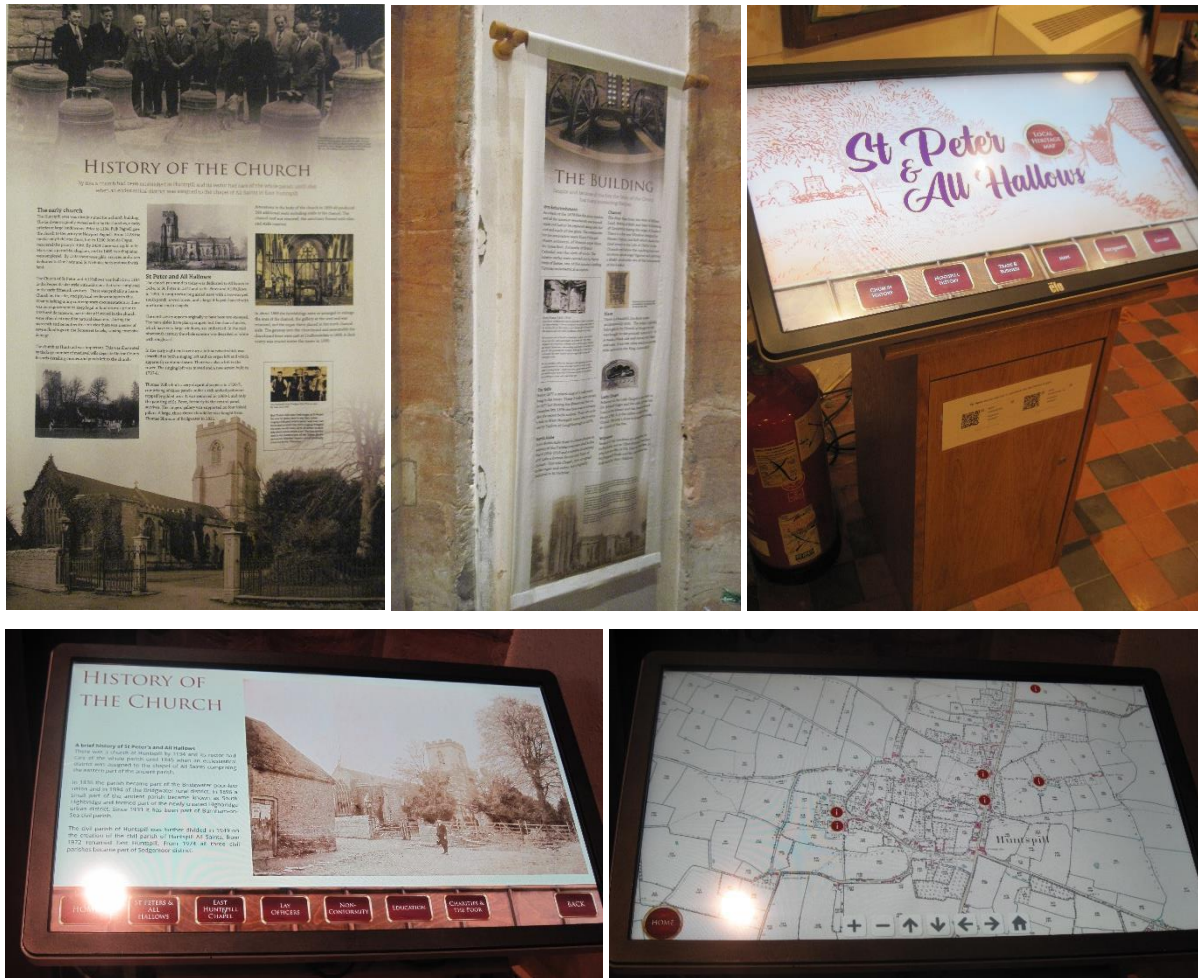
- *They didn't have the manoeuvrability to fund more support – they needed greater contingency in the activity budgets to increase the Activity Co-ordinator's pay and hours, or to pay for a commercial editor or mentor.*
- *The downward pressure on budgets when applying for the grant & the pressure on fundraising restricts the resources and extra capacity that would really help small voluntary groups.*

The wealth of documents in the folders was hugely significant and beneficial, as documents held by the South West Heritage Trust proved difficult to access and the cost of the licence for the 1840 tithe map was quoted as £3000. This poses an interesting conundrum for local organisations who might wish to deposit historical documents but may be wary if future access for interpretation becomes prohibitively expensive.

The final elements of the interpretation were some of the last parts of the project to be delivered. This is very similar to other projects where good intentions of delivering the capital works followed in quick succession by the interpretation proves to be too difficult for a small team.

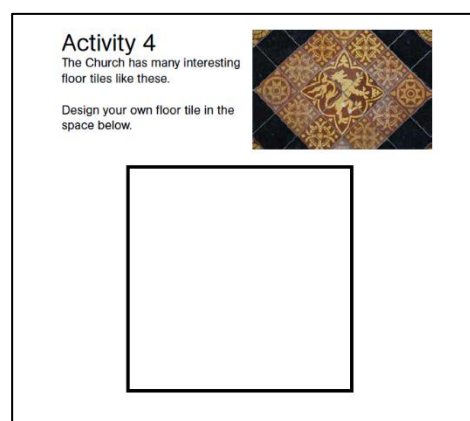
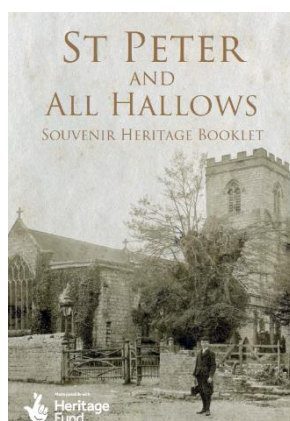
- *It was wise to run capital works and interpretation separately, one after the other, and to give more time for the information to come out.*

- *There was a difference between the gold standard for interpretation wanted by the Lottery and what the community wanted. They wanted the detail because they were interested – maybe we could have done more layering as the casual visitor might not want all that detail.*



The wall hangings, touchscreen, noticeboards etc in the Interpretation Plan were all delivered on budget – although there had been some cost creep because of inflation for materials, much of this was absorbed, with the majority of costs being staff time.

- *I really enjoyed doing this project – the people you meet are absolutely lovely and pleased with what is happening.*
- *The interpretation is better than what they had before and the community seem proud of it and like it – it's what they said they wanted.*
- *I hope the team have learnt a little about interpretation and will be able to edit text for themselves in the future.*



Budget was found from the interpretation costs for a 24 page Souvenir Heritage Booklet containing many historical photographs, and a Family Activity Book (extract left).

WORKING WITH THE WEST HUNTSPILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Consultation at the planning stages coincided with COVID and its impact on teachers, parents and children. The cross-curricular activities submitted in the application evolved during the delivery phase partly because the school became part of a larger multi-school academy with a more rigid curriculum, partly because the teacher involved at the planning stage was on long term sick leave and continuity of ideas was lost, and partly because the passage of time and the appointment of the Activities Co-ordinator led to new ideas coming forward. For example, the intention of using the children's drawings on hoardings transformed into the drawings of the village being made into a floor mat, with longer term benefits. Cross-curricular activities and a focus on local history (WW2, the 1607 tsunami, geography etc) changed into themed boxes, including one on building materials.

As with many church projects, there was a concern that school activities were initially straying from a heritage focus more towards RE and the major festivals within the Christian calendar, but over the three years of the project a strong working relationship and trust has developed between the church and the school.

- *I know it's their purpose and job to weave religion in, but remember it's a heritage project and that element needs to come through strongly.*

Behind the Scenes during the Capital Works (summary from interim report)

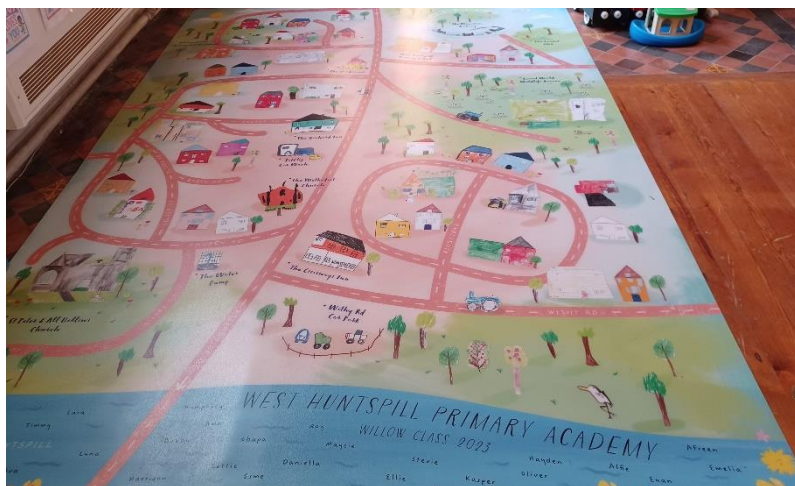
During the capital works two school visits took place, one for Reception/year 1 class, and one for Year 5/6 class. The teacher involved with organising the trips was very positive about the experience.



- *They went up the tower with the contractors in small groups if they wanted to go up. Some children were SEND, and some didn't want to go up initially but then succeeded and had a great sense of achievement getting out of their comfort zone.*
- *The younger children hadn't had a trip before – we needed somewhere safe and nearby because of logistics. They're a challenging group because of COVID and issues around socialisation.*
- *It was about 50/50 who had been in a church before.*
- *If the money wasn't there for the coach we couldn't have gone – we're being really careful asking parents to pay. It was a deal breaker.*
- *A highlight was seeing the children's faces coming down from seeing the pointing on the tower – it was a totally different experience from what they're used to, there was a real sense of pride.*



The Floor Map



West Huntspill Primary School worked with Imogen Davis, a local illustrator, to design a map of the village using children's drawings. The map was then turned into a floor mat for the children's corner of the church.

The benefits have been twofold: partly in the process of making the mat, and also in the finished product which is much used and enjoyed by local children.



The project sparked conversations about the local area, the children's favourite places, and the activities they enjoy.

Seeing their own drawings of places and things that were meaningful to them be featured on the final map within the church made it feel all the more special and encouraged them to engage with the space in a new way.

- *COVID played its role in the momentum of the project – the floor map took a long time. Perhaps it's the nature of project funding?*
- *The map really built on opportunities for children to engage – it was wonderful.*
- *The children are really proud of the floor map and enjoy seeing it. They'll remember it for ever: something they did in the classroom is now in the church. There's real sense of shared ownership.*
- *The map was an exciting and collaborative experience for the children, encouraging them to work together to imagine and create a shared vision of their village.*
- *A highlight for me was definitely working with the class, sharing my drawing skills and learning from their ideas and creativity.*
- *Watching them interact with the final printed map in the church and spotting their own contributions was a joyful moment.*
- *The final reveal was especially memorable, with lots of smiles and excitement as they saw their individual pieces come together in one big collaborative artwork.*
- *I feel the project went really smoothly. The team, including the organiser, the teacher, and the printer were all fantastic to work with. Clear communication throughout helped make the whole process efficient and enjoyable from start to finish.*

Relationship with the School

- *The main link teacher with the project was away for a year with ill health.*
- *Things are more settled now.*
- *Without a doubt the children are more comfortable going to the church. Squash and biscuits are very exciting for them. Parents and children are very relaxed now at staying in the building.*
- *You (the church team) couldn't have done anything differently – it's not been easy and you've done well.*
- *The regular assemblies with Rev Chris have been good and when she brought the old bible in – the children were fascinated by that.*

Please say thank you to the Lottery for allowing the children to be involved in this project – there's a sense of pride and feeling part of the community whether they're church goers or not.



Changes to the Curriculum

- *There was a change with the school joining the Trust.*
- *Education has become much more structured, the school became part of a multi-academy trust in 2021, with a new Head.*
- *The curriculum is so full that anything extra is difficult. Across the Priory Learning Trust we all need to be in Week Three at Week Three – it makes less work in planning, but we're not allowed any freedom. It's changed beyond all recognition since planning.*

Image left showing temporary display of the children's work at the church before Christmas 2024.

Distance from School

- *The biggest problem is getting children up there because of the distance and spray from lorries. The roads have changed with increased traffic.*
- *We can't afford transport so we have to do activities after school for those who can come. A lot of parents walk from Highbridge – in the dark and cold it's a long way. Not all the children will come so if we want to include all children it has to be at school.*

Overall, despite the difficulties of transport, the school programme has been successful, with all agreeing that progress has been made and that visits and projects will continue in the future.

BIODIVERSITY AND NATURE CONNECTION

Despite the work to the tower, bat surveys show that the bats continue to thrive, with eight species now known to visit the church rather than six as originally thought. The latest survey as part of this project took place in May 2025 with clear evidence of recent bat activity found throughout the tower, with droppings and many moth and butterfly wings indicating use of this room as a feeding roost by long-eared bat species. The DNA analysis confirmed the bat droppings collected from within the tower were from brown and grey long-eared bat species.



The report (27th May 2025) by Clarkson and Woods states that 'The three bat boxes on trees within the churchyard were checked and a single Natterer's bat *Myotis nattereri* was found roosting in one box (the same box as found in 2024) on a beech tree; see photo.

This is evidently an established roost used by this bat. The other two boxes also contained bat droppings attributed to pipistrelle species. As such, all three boxes are now being used by bats for roosting, which is a great result.'

The static detector inside the Bell Chamber recorded long eared, serotine, common and soprano pipistrelle, *Myotis* and *Barbastelle* bats.

The report concludes:

'The 2024 and 2025 monitoring surveys have shown that the mitigation strategy for the tower repairs has been very successful. The roost enhancements, i.e. bat boxes, have also been successful and we know that at least eight bat species roost within the church and its grounds (although the noctule roost needs reinstating), which is impressive! This has been a very interesting and satisfying project, made all the better due to the support and genuine interest and concern for the bat's welfare by the church wardens, especially you, David, and also Ellis & Co. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all involved; the project's success has been down to the excellent team work.'

Huntspill Hub News

Churchyard Survey – Spring 2025

Whilst we are still working on developing the Heritage interpretation of St. Peter and All Hallows with the help of some fabulous local historians in our community, we haven't forgotten the rich heritage that exists within the churchyard!

In the Spring of 2025 our friends at Somerset Botany Group, in association with the Wilder Churches initiative from Somerset Wildlife Trust and the Diocese of Bath and Wells, will be conducting a survey of the flora and fauna that exists within our beautiful churchyard. We will let you know what we find!

We are also working on some information panels for the churchyard that will provide visitors with facts about the nature that exists within the churchyard, and there will also be an opportunity in June 2025 to take part in Churches Count on Nature (4th to 12th June 2025) – more details will follow in the May edition of the Huntspill News.

Monitoring of the biodiversity in the churchyard is also continuing with the help of Somerset Botany Group and Wilder Churches, as explained in the screen shot of the church website.



The church has done well in linking with external events, harnessing their energies and marketing, and proving a good model to follow in the future.

Good examples of this include the Hub's collaboration with the Coast Festival and the coast path passport scheme - although not directly on the coast, the Honesty Café is a short walk from the coastal path and by connecting with other organisations and their activities, gradually the amenities will become better known.



Huntspill Hub Festival Tea



Event type

*Dog Friendly, Exhibitions or Museums,
Food and Drink Events, Talks &
Presentations
Accessible Locations, Family Friendly*

Date & time

Saturday, 23rd September

Cost

Free to visit + Honesty Café

Venue & Location

The Hub, St. Peter & All Hallows
Church, West Huntspill

SOMERSET COAST PATH PASSPORT – HUNTSPILL HUB INCLUDED!

We are very excited to announce that the Huntspill Community Hub will be featured in the new reprinted version of the Somerset Exmoor Coast Path for 2024! The passport has spaces in it for visitors to collect souvenir stamps. This is being funded by the Somerset Trails Partnership so will be **FREE** and is being distributed via visitor information centres along the route (we also hope to have some passports available in the Huntspill Community Hub).

As we are located close to the path we thought that it would be great if we could be included as a stamping point. We will be providing an individual stamp and ink plus a notebook to record who has visited us. The idea behind it is to get people who are walking the trail to visit businesses along the route collect a stamp, hopefully take a photo and share on social media using #SomersetExmoorCoast. You can see all the current stamping points here <https://nationaltrails.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/uploads/SomExTrail-Passport-Stamping-Stations.pdf> and we will be added very soon!

Circular Walks

Huntspill Church River Walk

A Circular Walk from St. Peter & All Hallows

- 1 Starting at the main gates of the churchyard, turn left and walk straight through the cemetery keeping the Balliol Hall and car park on your left. Cross over the narrow bridge into the field that will lead you into Sloway Lane.
- 2 When reaching the lane turn right into Sloway Lane. Continue walking past Laburnum House on your right over the Huntspill river. On your right you will reach the footpath that will lead you to the sluice gates.
- 3 When you get to the sluice gates turn right, and follow the river Parrett which will be on your left; keep walking and you will see Burnham-On-Sea in front of you.
- 4 When you get to the river Brue continue walking to the right (or you will get very wet!) - the Brue will be on your left hand side. Keep walking and then you will reach the lock gates at the top of the Clyce. Continue past the lock gates into the field.
- 5 When you get into the field turn right, and walk across the field back towards West Huntspill. Continue along the pathway and you will reach Alstone Road.
- 6 Cross the road and follow the public footpath which is signposted. Pass the phone box and follow the narrow path to the right of the phone box.
- 7 Cross the road on Alstone Lane and continue on the footpath straight ahead of you. Cross over the stile and continue over the ditch, walking diagonally across the field until you see the next stile. Carry on over the stile and you will reach Maundrills Farm. Continue straight over the metal gate and stile through the farmyard. Over the next stile, continue into the next field, go over another stile and go through the metal gate in front of you. Then go through another field and continue to the next metal gate.
- 8 Cross over Church Road slightly to the left and follow the footpath. Cross over Grange Road and continue straight over the bridge and through the wooden gate (there may be lots of sheep in the field).
- 9 Continue through the field. Keep walking! There are lots of gates, but simply follow the footpath which is marked. On reaching the tarmac, turn right and continue when you see the sign for Plymmer Road where you will need to turn left. This will take you into Silver Street.

Continue to the end of the road, turn right and you will have reached your destination back at the Church.

Time to complete walk 2 Hours 6 Mins
Distance 7.46Km
Easy to moderate walk
Dog friendly



Within the Activity Plan was the intention to create a circular walk around the village, and ideally another walk to Burnham on Sea along the coastal path. Originally the idea was for the research to be done by the Burnham on Sea U3A walks group, with the route to be trialled by the local scouts' group.

Despite the scouts group being originally eager to participate in the project they were difficult to contact during the Delivery Phase. Local volunteers provided written details and photographs and the text was brought together by Russ Liley.

Steven Allen from U3A led the inaugural walk starting from the Church on Saturday 23rd September 2023. Linked with the Somerset Coast Festival, refreshments were offered in the church.

Two formats of a circular walk have been produced - one as a downloadable leaflet and the other designed to work as paper copies printed for TIC and church



UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES AND ACTIVITIES

Social Capital

Many of the people attending the coffee morning also are members of/or are connected with other organisations in the village. The coffee morning provided the perfect opportunity for cross-pollination, networking and publicity:

- *I can put out leaflets for the plant sale or Flower Show – so it's really useful.*
- *We had twice as many entries from children in the Flower Show because there was an activity at the coffee morning.*
- *Lots of groups meet now, the links are so important.*
- *Two 16/17 year old young men from Mark College (a specialist secondary school for boys and girls aged 10-19 with a diagnosis of autism & associated complex needs) come once a month to polish the wood in the church.*

Community engagement was key – the community consequences were unexpected.

Numbers to the Remembrance Day Service increased as people feel more comfortable in the space.

Hospitality



The improved flexibility of the space and the new servery have increased opportunities to be welcoming and offer hospitality:

- *We can now offer hospitality if people are visiting graves or burying ashes.*

Ashley Fox, MP for Burnham & Bridgwater, held a surgery at the Hub (see photograph left), demonstrating how the Hub is becoming an established and accepted part of everyday village life outside of traditional church services.

Huntspill Heroes

Linking to the national 'Thank You Day' the Hub team hosted a celebration afternoon on Sunday 7th July 2024 to say a big thank you to people who village residents recognised and nominated as Huntspill Heroes. Thirteen people were nominated and received awards, including a man who works at the local school and runs boxing lessons for young people, 'Kind, caring and very thoughtful neighbours', the local landlord and landlady from Crossways Inn, a sheep rescuer, and Les and Margaret Roper (church volunteers) as well as people associated with this project: David Lemon, John Lamb, David and Anne Paul, and Nigel Maddocks, which is an acknowledgment that local people appreciate the Hub and all the work associated with it.

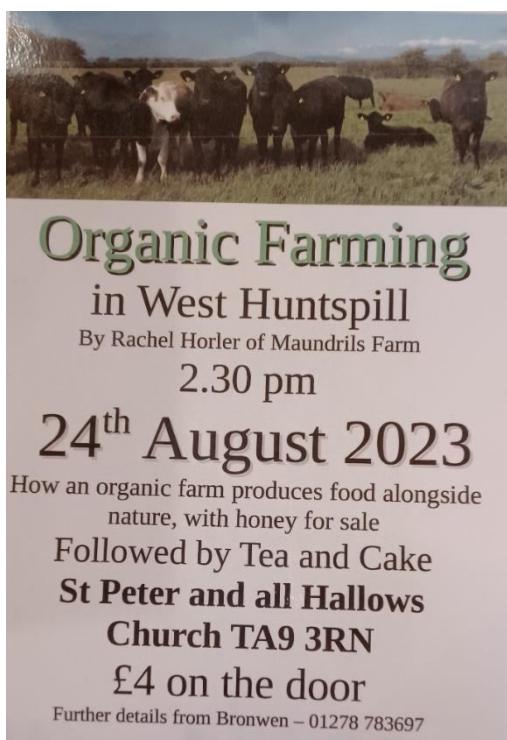
- *It wasn't expensive to run and we awarded everyone who was nominated, and testimonies were read out.*
- *I've loved doing things that have made a difference – the Thank You Day for Huntspill Heroes with a ceremony and medals.*
- *Dave has given of his time to support IT issues at the Hub but not only this, he has taken on the organisation of the annual Classic Car Show which I think is quite a task. He has also taken on being the Chairman of the Friends of St. Peter and All Hallows to help raise funds to preserve the fabric of the church.*

Christmas Tree Festival

One of the first things Virginia Power (Activities Co-ordinator, below) organised, was a Christmas Tree Festival, which now takes place annually with 14 organisations or businesses taking part, each decorating a themed tree. Although not in the original Activity Plan, this popular event is now firmly established in the village calendar.



IT and equipment: Tea and Talk and other events



With money left over from other activities, the team were able to buy a new screen and projector which have enabled community activities that were not included in the Activity Plan.

- *We managed to get a new sound system, screen and projector – it's a really big asset. It works really well, not just for services but for Tea and Talk, and our new Silver Screen Club just starting.*

A laptop was bought for the project to help people with internet access during the coffee morning – it is now used to back up records and to operate the new screen/projector.

Once a month 20-80 people come for a themed talk covering a cross-section of topics, for example 'Did King Arthur really exist?' or the Battle of Sedgemoor, followed by tea and cake.



The photograph to the left shows the screen being used during the recent VE Day Celebration and Tea and Talk.

- *I started it for older people to come to during the day – so many of us are singletons and need to get out of the house and stretch our little grey cells and have a chance to talk.*

Farmers' Lunch



Initially funded by a grant from the Farmers' Community Network, a lunch event was held at the Huntspill Hub for local farmers, with a soup and roll, addressing the issue of rural isolation. This is an example of the legacy of the project continuing to meet the needs of local people developing from an idea suggested by residents.

Photography exhibition



West Huntspill born photographer, Don Bishop, held an exhibition of his work in the church, 31st May to 2nd June 2025, with an extra digital presentation on Saturday evening between 6pm and 8.30pm. The 'Visions of the Landscape' exhibition showcased his images from around the UK, including Somerset.

The church benefited from a hire fee of £160, although sales of the work were so successful that a commission basis might be more profitable another time.

- *He made a killing at the café as there were 78 people that morning.*

Other projects asking for advice

An unexpected outcome has been the number and variety of projects recognising the success of the Huntspill Hub and asking for advice – although many have been churches about to embark on NLHF applications, the variety of questions reflects the all-round success of this project (touch screens and digital means of interpretation, kitchens and toilets, fundraising, honesty cafés and regular community coffee mornings, DAC and gaining faculty, reusing pews within new furniture, and churchyard management plans/bats/Wilder churches). Other projects include churches in Lymsham, Keynsham, Porlock, Stockland Bristol, Bridport, Watchet & Williton, and Stowey in the Chew Valley. All commented on the generosity of the team sharing their knowledge and experience.

We called in to West Huntspill to see the honesty café. It is a magnificent church, If I may, we might come back to you at some stage about the café and AV, because I suspect we shall end up making a lottery application one day. I truly admire your success in fund-raising.

Mel was incredibly generous sharing information and advice on operating budgets and project costs.

COMMUNICATIONS

Internal

As with many projects, at times there have been internal frictions, but these seem generally to have been ironed out and resolved over time. The interim evaluation report stated:

‘Communications: whenever there have been issues during the project so far they have been overcome by people getting together and talking them through, rather than by people getting frustrated. If people don’t know about issues, then they can’t be resolved.’

This approach seems to have continued during the duration of the project as the team settled into a pattern of work that suited their skills and interests.

- *Communications between the different factions has been tricky at times – the PCC, the Social Committee, the Friends and the Huntspill Hub.*
- *I do feel that a key recommendation in your summary should be better communication between various strands of activity delivery - I simply cannot co-ordinate activities if I don't know who is planning what and when! For example, there is the requirements of the activity plan for the project, the Friends of St. Peter and All Hallows who plan random activities that I am not always aware of and the social committee and occasionally completely random members of the congregation running events on their own volition!*

As stated earlier and below in the critical success factors, the excellent supportive team work and project paperwork has been exemplary.


External

As the project has moved from the capital phase to the main activities, there have been a growing number of opportunities to promote and publicise the Hub. The publicity budget was not used as expected as so much marketing is now achieved through social media and through working with partners such as the Somerset Coast Festival.

- *Getting our name out there in the community has been great.*
- *It is now beginning to show that the long time spent in getting the project right has all been worthwhile. We have raised the profile of the church in the community, and slowly our numbers and interest is growing.*

MENDIP TIMES

A flat and exhilarating winter walk



STRIDE out on the flat from Huntspill along the river to the Somerset Levels with untravellers views across the mouth of the River Frome to Sturt Point and Sturt Island, to Sheep Holm and along to Blandford in Bridgwater Bay Nature Reserve. Watch and hear the heron which is enjoying the estuary.

One circle begins by the river Huntspill and then follows the England Coast Path close by the estuary. The views across here are beautiful and it can be very invigorating (and windy!). Our route bends round and heads alongside the River Frome before we follow footpaths through fields close to Huntspill. A church near the end

offers walkers a welcome self-service call. Choose, if you can, a clear sunny winter day and wrap up warmly so you can enjoy to the full this exhilarating easy route, largely dry underfoot. There are several stiles down through the fields. It's a walk that is very dog friendly. After the ramble there is a much-needed pub just up the road.

PARK: Just south of Huntspill by Blikk Bridge which crosses the river. The small free car park is just to the north of the bridge. Travelling from Highbridge, turn right off the A38. There's a fairly small turning on the left taking you into the car park (which does have a height barrier). If you cross the bridge going south you have gone too far.

START: Before setting off, it is well worth reading the information board to give you a feel of the area. Turn left from the car park and follow the lane for a few hundred metres. After a cattle grid, reach a crossing route and a bridge across the river.

1. BRIDGE: Turn left over the bridge across the Huntspill river. This is an ancient footpath built in 1980 to supply private water to the Royal Ordnance Factory, Bridgwater, and as a result it has reduced flooding of the lower River Frome Valley. Although not created with

wildlife in mind, the Huntspill does now support a diversity of wildlife which is why it is a National Nature Reserve. You may get sightings of otters and kingfishers. The river discharges, via the Purcell Estuary, into Bridgwater Bay - another important National Nature Reserve - on the edge of the Bristol Channel. During excavations it became evident that this was once an important salt producing area.

On the other side, take the footpath on the right through a wooden gate and continue with the river on your right. Over left in the distance are the Quantock Hills.

2. COAST PATH: Go through a gate and now follow the England Coast Path on in the Highbridge direction - a grassy oval at this stage. Cross over the sluice (passing to the left of the building). Turn left on a track and then go up onto the grass bank, still on the coast path. And now, if you wish, drop down left on a path which goes very close by the water. Or stay up on the bank.

Across the river are great views to Sturt and Sheep Holm. There can be a wonderful medley of colours here from the mud, sand, grass and reeds, the sky, clouds and the water. Around you can see Blandford with its pine and light towers.

The path by the water eventually leads up and joins with the coastal coastal path. Go through a gate and continue on the bank path, crossing alongside the mouth of the River Frome.

3. RIVER BRIDGE: The Frome starts life some 500 years at Blandford in Somerset. It originally took a different route to the sea, but this was changed by Glanvill Abbey in the 12th century.

Pass two very photogenic boat wrecks on the way.

4. SLUICE: As you approach the outskirts of Highbridge reach a large sluice across the river. Go past it and continue on following the footpath signed to Highbridge. A kissing gate leads into a field. Go along the left edge and then round the corner (although there is a shorter, unofficial route across the field obviously used by locals). Halfway along the second side, go left on a well worn path which leads to a metal gate. It takes you onto a fenced path. Cross a residential road and follow the path opposite, going along the edge of housing to the A38 area of Highbridge. Pass a phone box library and maintain direction. Cross another road and carry on, crossing a stile on the way. There's a meadow stile and then a plank footbridge. Now cross the field, slightly right, reaching a stile on the far side leading onto a path.

5. FARM: Continue on, going through Maudslayi's Farm between barns. Just before leaving it, pass a board with updated details of the farming activities here - a good reminder that the countryside is a working landscape.

6. FIELDS: Now just maintain direction (don't go right) following the footpath through several fields, over a residential road,

through gates, over stiles and along paths until you reach a T-junction at a crossing. Turn right and have to change direction. The path goes between a hedge of hawthorn and nettles and through a metal barrier. Keep straight on and at Plymston Road turn left, going through an older part of Huntspill.

7. CHURCH: Turn right to the lovely old church of St Peter and All Hallows which is well worth going into.

There is a welcoming self-service honesty café in the back of the church with

5.75 miles, about 3 hours walking + ON Explorer 153 Weston-super-Mare & Blandford Hills, grid ref. ST97 485. What a great day! Refreshed and happy to be going!

sheep's cheek - ribs and a selection of drinks and biscuits. A £2 donation is suggested. The church's origins date back to 1200, but it was rebuilt around 1600 and extended in the early to mid 19th century. Sadly, a fire gutted the building in 1878 and extensive Victorian restoration took place over the following two years. Interestingly the rather strange round window of the dramatic pillars is the result of the fire. Since the 18th century the patronage of the church has been held by Blandford College, Dorset.

Return to the gate where you came in, turn right inside the edge of the churchyard field, if you don't go up to the church itself. Go over a footbridge over a dyke and cross the field diagonally right. After another footbridge, take the lane right. Follow it round until you reach the crossing lane at Shewey Bridge (1 BRIDGE) where you were earlier. Turn left and retrace your steps back to the parking area.

If you still want refreshment turn left up the road for a short way to the Cossways on the right, with a big car park.

WALKING



5.75 miles, about 3 hours walking + ON Explorer 153 Weston-super-Mare & Blandford Hills, grid ref. ST97 485. What a great day! Refreshed and happy to be going!

An article in the Mendip Times in December 2024 about the circular walk linking to the honesty café.

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CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

Talking with the project team, volunteers, contractors, consultants and people in the village for this report, three key ingredients for success were repeatedly mentioned:

- The small, tightly-knit project team, with the perfect combination of individual personalities coming together to form a cohesive team;
- Tenacity, and constantly referring to the plans in order to deliver the project;
- The real need for the project in the community.

The project team and having the right people involved

- *They're a small voluntary organisation and they're not worried if it's in their job description or not – there's a will and a willingness. They showed honesty and integrity.*
- *There weren't the politics of a big project: In an isolated community they pulled together, divided the actions up between them and there was a real sense of caring for each other, perhaps coming from a deep Christian belief.*
- *They really respected and honoured the grant they'd been given, and it seemed they felt lucky that they'd got it, there was no sense of entitlement.*
- *Chris is a community asset – she's good person.*
- *We were lucky to have Chris who is really supportive and loves figures. It was very reassuring.*
- *Ginny has been a really big asset to the team. Her time availability is limited but what she's done in the time is incredible. She generates a lot of enthusiasm.*
- *Mel, Chris and David are a very tight project team + Ginny, and Sara if needed: it's about the right number as it's difficult to get everyone together.*
- *We're a pretty good team – we haven't let the grass grow, we've kept chipping away.*
- *Marcus has a really good understanding of the church's limitations – the capacity of the church itself, what's reasonable to expect of us.*
- *Tom was hands-off and always there if needed. There was no-one hovering over us making us nervous.*

Tenacity

- *There was real resilience and determination – they didn't give up if they didn't get a response, they really kept trying.*
- *The hoops they have to jump through with faculty etc adds a layer of stress. The resilience of the community is impressive. There were very few people with agendas, and if there were any, they were dealt with very well.*

Meeting a need and being able to adapt

- *There was a real need in that community that came through in the consultation – projects don't work if there's no need – and in return they've been supported back by the community.*
- *They've created something that's got a life of its own. They opened the doors and said come in and use the church. People know they can suggest ideas and that they will respond.*
- *As things became more expensive we curtailed things at the base of the tower – it was a good call because we could revisit it when money was left, using a tower scaffold rather than £60K of scaffolding.*
- *The café met a need in the village – it has really good benefits – people talk to friends, make new friends, catch up on gossip. The local people needed it.*
- *We've gone a long way in delivering the Activity Plan: not all has worked out. If the situation has changed, we've adapted.*

LESSONS LEARNED

Good things learned

- *We've made good connections – I didn't know Somerset Wildlife, God's Acre or Wilder Churches before.*
- *It's been interesting, I've learnt a lot about projects, systems, cash flow, meetings – I've never handled this amount of money before.*

Combine with other activities already happening:

- *Wherever possible we've piggy-backed onto other things to bring in more people, e.g. the Heritage Open Days and the car show.*
- *There's a domino effect when you do something – we can now do a zip lining event with teddies when we get a new handrail in the tower.*

Perseverance and flexibility

Some activities never took off as expected, or took a long time to become established:

- *People are enthusiastic about things and they want to come along but they don't want to volunteer.*
- *We've attempted everything with varying amounts of success – bats and scouts didn't take off as expected.*

Operating costs

Overall operating costs increased during the project as expected with more activity, for example insurance premiums went up. These have been met through developing diverse income streams. Utility bills are slightly higher in winter and are offset with a donation from the café. Income from the café totalled £3488 in 2024, including donations from the wall safe and nearly £500 from contactless donations. Once payments had been made for heating (£23 per session in winter) and cleaning (£15 per week), £2140 remained as profit. Café expenditure includes the cost of tea, coffee, sealed packets of biscuits and UHT milk cartons for the honesty café with occasional donations of tea or coffee. Cakes are donated by volunteers.

Some expected costs were lower than expected as most publicity is now done through social media for free rather than incurring printing costs or paying for advertisements.

Heating

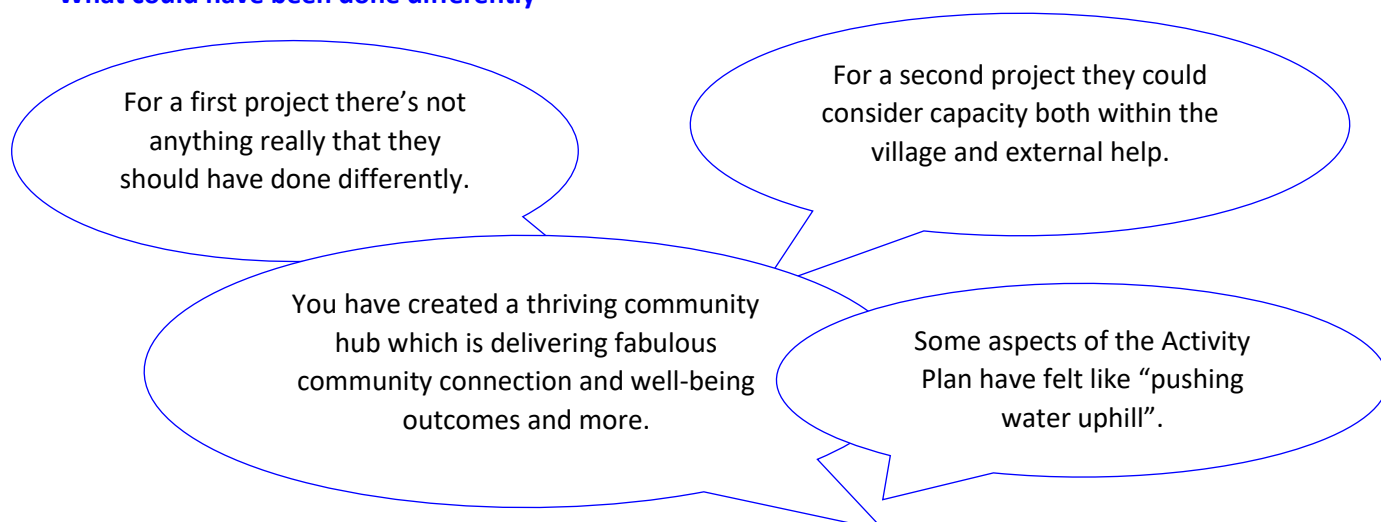
The team commented that it has been difficult to get bookings because of the cost of heating, or to organise activities in the winter because people don't want to sit in a cold church.

- *I regret that we didn't give the heating in the church more consideration – the system is very good but it's very limited, and it's a big space to heat, taking 2-3 hours to heat up to 16°-17° at £10ph, so it's costing £30 before we even use the space, so it's difficult to hire it out.*
- *It's not as efficient as I'd like it to be, and the heat at the back drifts to the front.*
- *What's good is that it's on remote control so I don't have to come in to the church early in the morning.*
- *Putting in underfloor heating when the floor was up would have meant heat where we needed it, although it would have cost more.*

Fundraising

- *It's the ideal not to have emergencies, such as the leak above the organ or needing a handrail for the tower. The Friends are very helpful in raising money.*

What could have been done differently



The Activities Co-ordinator Role

- *In reality it should have been a day a week not half a day, but it's evened out – there are peaks and troughs.*
- *The Friends and the Social Committee – they're each doing their own thing and didn't want to be co-ordinated. At times it was difficult to join them up to deliver the activities.*
- *The role didn't sit in any of the groups, so felt lonely at times.*
- *I was appointed late and always felt I was playing catch up.*
- *Was 'Co-ordinator' the right title? Is it human nature that people don't want to be co-ordinated?! Maybe a Community Networker?*
- *I'm an ideas person and didn't have ownership of the Activity Plan which was frustrating.*
- *It was a COVID Activity Plan – things moved on, priorities change, personnel change.*
- *The Activity Plan laid the foundations – could we have had a review half way through?*
- *Maybe the Activity Plan could have very SMART targets for the first year with initial activities simple and achievable then be more flexible.*
- *It's easy to beat yourself up about things but that frustration isn't necessary if you look back at what we've done in the last three years.*
- *We're going to miss that role but we're not yet at the stage we can fundraise for it.*

NLHF Processes

- *We're now on the third way of making a claim – you just get used to one and it changes. The first gave a good summary, it was very clear, and the current one is so basic in comparison, I have to rely on my figures. I've not done this before so to have a clearer system would be easier for people.*
- *I tried to keep a running total but it would be really useful to go in and look at the totals to be reassured.*
- *With the different cost headings I had to split invoices and VAT, e.g. with the interpretation it went into professional fees, capital work and digital outputs.*
- *We always got help quickly when we asked for it but could there be a training course at the beginning when you get the grant? It's a real responsibility for the team to have a lot of money.*

Other frustrations

- *It got very difficult and frustrating at times with the convoluted way of the Diocese doing things. The decision about the bat licence came at the 11th hour, it came with a day to spare and Ellis were about to stop working.*

ADVICE FOR THE FUTURE – AND OTHER PROJECTS

Project management

- *Find a good company who know what they're doing, who give gentle, calm leadership and confidence and handholding through the NLHF process.*
- *It will take about a decade from initial idea to completion, and you'll have two masters – the Diocese and the NLHF.*
- *You need online banking.*
- *Getting the right number of people on the team – we were a close knit team – with enough people to support and reassure but not too many all contributing different ideas. For the finance you need one person with a good overview.*
- *The finance role takes a lot of time during the building work with managing the cash flow, Lottery claim, DCMS VAT claims, paying invoices, splitting money between accounts...*
- *I go to site meetings, activity meetings, finance – it's a big commitment.*
- *It can be daunting and worrying at times with all the jargon from professionals, learning new things - don't be afraid to ask for help.*

Just go for it!

Partnership and community working

- *Start small and build up – build on early foundations – keep it simple.*
- *When working with schools, find a project where the children are really involved – such as the map – an actual project that the children contribute to and want to show and share. It's very special.*
- *Regular contact between the church and the school is important in keeping the relationship going.*
- *The barriers will be broken down – if people don't worship, they won't feel comfortable coming in. Now people come in, have a coffee, it's all much more relaxed – Christine really encourages that.*

Perseverance

- *It's been long and involved and sometimes fraught but the end product is worth it.*
- *Sometimes you'll get project fatigue but the building now is in a better place and the community is in a better place than ten years ago.*
- *Link to existing activities, and if at first you don't succeed, keep chipping away.*
- *I don't mind the challenge, I was constantly learning along the way and I knew I could ask John McVerry and Ian Walker but you need to know the right questions to ask. There's a lot of jargon.*



At the end of May Don Bishop, a landscape photographer and resident in the village, staged an exhibition of his photographs, which were admired by many, especially at the Monday Morning Community Cafe.

The project team have been good at linking to existing activities or organisations to develop additional activities and networks.

SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Work planned in our NLHF application	What happened
CAPITAL REPAIRS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tower will be repaired with mortar repairs and stone replacement; The tower roof will be replaced and the parapets re-profiled to cope with modern rainfall patterns; The tower will be strengthened with steel pins. 	<p>Completed with additional stonework in Spring 2025</p>
CAPITAL REORDERING: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drainage works and introduction of WCs, a kitchenette and cupboards etc; Removal of back pews to create area for café and exhibitions; Relocation of font to enable circulation and better access; Relocation/conservation of 2 pictures to enable interpretation; Re-lighting of activities area and installation of broadband and contactless sales/donations point. 	<p>Completed.</p> <p>Community café opened on 18th July 2022, with the Honesty café opening a few weeks later.</p> <p>Contactless donations point successful bringing nearly £500 of additional income in 2024.</p> <p>Free Wi-Fi available for church visitors.</p>
OTHER CAPITAL: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation-led interpretation scheme; Address all identified access barriers; Honesty café for heritage and activities audiences and as a permanent isolation-reduction facility; Stack seating to replace lost pews and offer multi-purpose seating. 	<p>Completed.</p> <p>Honesty café open 365 days a year, including a cake and company day on Christmas Day.</p> <p>Prototypes of the interpretation were on display in the church, and informal consultation took place at the coffee morning.</p>
ENVIRONMENTAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities will celebrate the flora and fauna in the churchyard; The tendering process has assessed comparative environmental approaches; Procure plant and equipment to minimise energy consumption and waste; Promote the church and café as walking destinations, including from the Coastal Path. 	<p>Somerset Botany Group and Wilder Churches group continue to monitor biodiversity. It is hoped activities will continue to develop as a strong legacy.</p> <p>Initial concerns and difficulties with heating the back of the church were partly addressed through reconfiguring heating zones, but the situation could still be improved.</p> <p>All light bulbs were changed to LED.</p> <p>Circular walk published and the church has taken part in the regional Coast Festival. This is likely to grow as the English Coastal Path becomes more established.</p>
INTERPRETATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signage and exterior interpretation; Permanent exhibition explaining the heritage of the building and community; Temporary exhibitions highlighting specific topics researched and created by community groups. 	<p>Touch screen, wall hangings and external noticeboards in place.</p> <p>Souvenir Heritage Booklet and Family Activity Booklet printed.</p> <p>Final elements of interpretation completed June 2025.</p> <p>Potential for more temporary exhibitions in the future.</p>

<p>ACTIVITIES – all in partnership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities Coordinator to be appointed to ensure smooth delivery; • Establish a talking café with IT support to address isolation and skills gaps; • Activities specifically targeted to identified beneficiaries: supported by BCT, WEA, CCS etc; • Curriculum-linked resources for teachers; • A selection of scouts' achievements and badges; • Art and photography exhibitions; • Training and engagement for volunteers; • Special access days for lottery players; • Ecology events and activities will be organised to engage with wider audiences 	<p>Activities Co-ordinator appointed in summer 2022.</p> <p>Talking Café with support from CCS, police, IT volunteer etc opened in July 2022.</p> <p>Although different partners were involved than planned, a wide range of people were involved in heritage based and wellbeing activities including school children, farmers, cubs and local residents. Lottery players actively encouraged to attend events.</p> <p>Curriculum linked themed boxes were created for the school including one box (Saving the Heritage) containing building materials such as Blue Lias which is kept in the church.</p> <p>Recent photography exhibition proved very successful.</p> <p>All café volunteers were trained in food hygiene (food allergies, fridge temperatures, food handling etc).</p> <p>New opportunities for volunteering attract people from outside the congregation.</p> <p>Biodiversity activities continue.</p>
<p>FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish our Honesty Café for walkers, cyclists, heritage and local visitors; • Build up our programme of concerts, fetes and other income-producing events; • Instigate our management and maintenance plan. 	<p>Honesty Café opened in August 2022 and used by visiting groups of cyclists and walkers, as well as individuals visiting the church. The café makes a profit of over £2000pa. The Friends group continues to give valuable financial support.</p> <p>The church website gallery displays a range of church and secular activities including summer fetes, concerts, cream teas, lunches etc.</p> <div data-bbox="991 1574 1453 2029"> <p>It's a better space for fundraising: it's easy to use the kitchen and people are more likely to stay and talk than if they're squashed in pews.</p> </div>

DISTANCE TRAVELLED FOR THE ORGANISATION AND LEGACY

Lessons to carry forward and embed

Despite the difficulties of managing the project during a double vacancy and the background of emerging from COVID, everyone acknowledges the huge success of the project and how the building work and new facilities have enabled the West Huntspill community to thrive. Unlike some projects where the engagement activities quietly slip away when they are no longer required by the NLHF, the Huntspill team and local residents are coming up with new ideas and activities to keep the Hub relevant and very much part of village life.

- *The Lottery Activity Plan gave us a real push: we can't now sit on our Laurels, we need a push from ourselves, there's no shortage of ideas, and there's been a real ripple effect.*
- *We're more sustainable as an organisation – we had a cream tea fundraiser, we couldn't have done that before without the facilities.*
- *It's taken people on the PCC a while to get their heads round the changes and that we're not just about church business, we're other things too.*
- *We're still changing – things change slowly. People are more positive than they were. They were sceptical about bright ideas, now they're more on board and make suggestions.*
- *We're in a better financial position than before the project.*
- *More people are coming to church now than before the project - they came to the hub and now they come to services. Some people sit at the back because it's more comfortable than the pews.*
- *There were under 20 people at services now it can be 30 on a good day. Christine's enthusiasm and encouragement help, and it's also a nice place to come. We're showing signs of growth.*
- *More people come in generally through the building with the interpretation and honesty café - the toilets are a big thing.*

There are normally over fifty people at the coffee morning, I'm not worried it's going to stop, the numbers didn't diminish when the novelty wore off.

Maybe they surprised themselves and did better than they expected.

We learnt as we went along and are constantly reviewing what we're doing.

It feels as though it's on the cusp – it's got real potential.



Cream Tea fundraising event, and a Breakfast Gathering in the Hub

What opportunities are there now: what next?

The Building

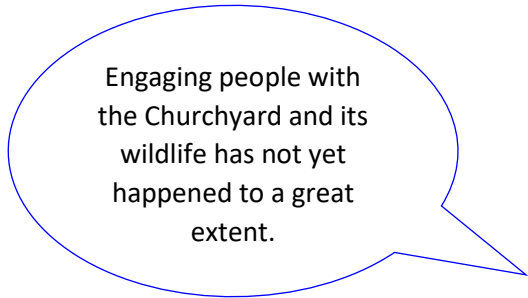
This project was always known to be the first phase, with other phases potentially including the repair of the 140 year-old lead roofs and completing the re-ordering of the internal layout to create a space that would allow the PCC to build on their community engagement activities.

- *The emergency repairs on the roof have bought us ten years, but it needs doing. The stonework on the tower is now sorted but the rest of the church needs doing. The stone work needs repointing, and the cement pointing removed. It's ongoing but we're caught up a bit.*
- *We still have a fairly dodgy roof and we're hit by the weather off the estuary.*
- *The attitude in the church has changed – we now know it's possible with grants and that money is available, we've really benefited from that.*

Heritage, including natural heritage

With the NLHF change in strategy, there is less emphasis on wellbeing and more on saving heritage - whether that is buildings, memories, culture or oral history recordings.

- *With the new strategy their heritage links are more tenuous – if their project was assessed now we'd be looking for more heritage.*
- *Many of their activities were to do with wellbeing – that's no longer directly in the investment principles.*



Engaging people with the Churchyard and its wildlife has not yet happened to a great extent.

The churchyard at West Huntspill is large, and rich in both flora and fauna, but played only a small part of community activities in this project – maybe because being a rural community, the richness is underplayed. With the growing disconnect between people and nature, and the increasing understanding of the importance of nature connectedness to people's health, future projects could develop the natural

heritage and environment as an important theme and hook for new audiences.

Often nature is an easier and less intimidating way to engage people in heritage and environmental issues than what may be seen as drier, contentious or intellectual topics.

The Somerset Botany Group is continuing to be involved, and returned to monitor the church yard in March 2025 identifying 12 native trees or shrubs, 16 introduced trees or shrubs, 42 other native species and 19 garden plants, with the expectation that a survey later in the year would probably identify more species. Working with other churches across the county and diocese, the richness of churchyard biodiversity is slowly being revealed through NLHF projects and related surveys. Whether it is the West Huntspill team, or an external wildlife group, there would be an important and interesting project linking the findings of NLHF projects, particularly around rare bats, and prompting other churches to carry out surveys to bring greater understanding and awareness.

The team are working on the 135 pages of churchyard records to put on the screen in a useable format to help people find the grave they're looking for:

- *It's a big churchyard so having the records on the touch screen will be a great asset in the future.*
- *We've got an ongoing history project, gathering material that in time will be put into booklets, for example about the soldiers in the two World Wars and the Commonwealth War Graves.*
- *Foundations have been laid for mini projects in the future.*

Suggestions for future activities include:

Talking with the project team and members of the community, it was very encouraging to see the ownership, commitment and wealth of ideas coming forward to take the Huntspill Hub into the future and continuing to meet the social need that was so critical in the project's success. There is no concern that the Huntspill Hub will finish with the end of Lottery funding – many of the activities are financially self-sustaining and indeed contribute to the church's running costs. New activities are being proposed that are independent of the NLHF seed-funding, and as long as the activities are shared between rotas of volunteers, there is no reason that the existing programme of events, such as the coffee morning, and community Christmas trees, should falter. Ideas for future community activities include:

- Monthly soup and roll, with a choice of two soups, needing 4 volunteers on a rota, maybe working with the WI, and charging enough to cover the ingredients and heating. This idea was piloted with the Farmers' Soup Lunch, which went very well indeed
- Men's breakfast
- A sing along group
- Fruit and veg stall
- Developing an offer for older people in care homes or living with dementia, such as Singing for the Brain, or Memory boxes with photographs and resources about the village, based on the boxes Ginny started to do with the school
- The potential for music and singing by starting a choir
- A pet service

People are also talking about the possibility of taking out more pews for more tables to build on the current success, although others liked the linear separation of secular and sacred spaces.

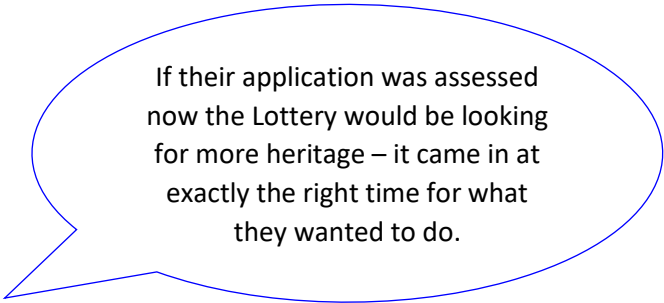
With the village growing in population because of new housing developments, the idea of a noticeboard in the new housing estate was put forward, so that people who are new to the area would know what was happening in the local community, which included the Huntspill Hub and the Local Churches. This has now been put in place, due to the generosity of the house-building companies at Brue Place and the tenacity of the team.

Many people mentioned the opportunities that come with the new screen, and recently licences have been acquired to allow screenings:

- Film evenings/afternoons
- Family films, e.g. a Disney film with dressing up
- *My one disappointment is that it was difficult to engage with older children and teenagers – the cinema might be a way forward*
- *We (the school) would like to see regular contact continue as well as visits at Christmas and key times. We'd like to make use of the church's resources when it fits with our curriculum on biodiversity, remembrance, history and geography as well as RE*

The team has also collated neuro-diverse resources to make the church more inclusive and welcoming for everyone – this is set up to happen post-project.

This project was the first phase of a longer term maintenance and repair masterplan. Although these activities should all be encouraged as building connections between people and the



If their application was assessed now the Lottery would be looking for more heritage – it came in at exactly the right time for what they wanted to do.

church, as well as contributing to its financial sustainability, if future applications to the NLHF are considered, then activities with stronger links to heritage would need to be thought through.

All these developments and activities, past, present and future lead to exciting and challenging discussions on the role of the church in today's communities. The Hub has demonstrated a way forward and is an important role model for others to follow.

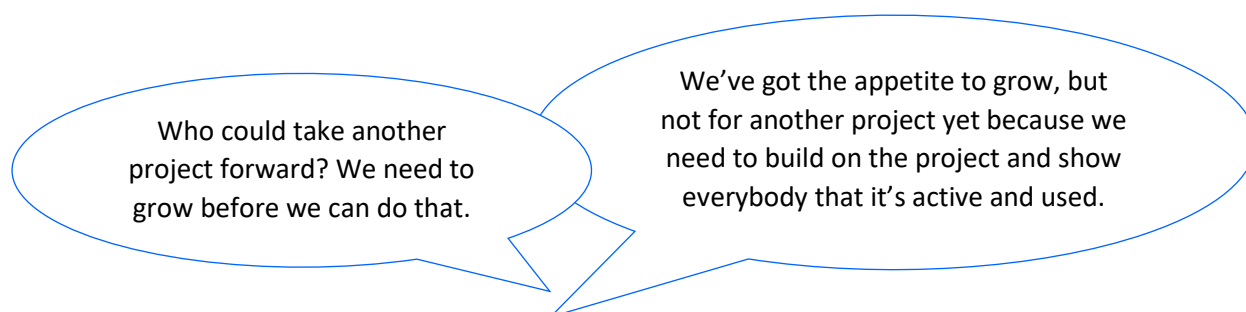
- *Those things are all on the edge of the church, the fuzzy edges.*

Capacity Building and Volunteers

Key to both future NLHF applications and the future success of the Hub, if new activities are to be successful, is that more volunteers will need to be recruited to share the work, especially if a new capital project is to go ahead. There is a concern that it's a small number of people doing it all:

- *There's so much we could do but it's frustrating when we can't get people to do things.*

There is realism that new events and building sufficient volunteers takes time to organise and become established, and it is important not to rush into too many things at once.



All the current project team come from within the church congregation: increasingly, with fewer people attending church nationally, other projects are looking to the wider community to bring their experience and skills to help. Building community and social cohesion through activities and the weekly café may help to create a growing source of volunteers in the future. It will also be important not to lose the knowledge that has been built up over the last seven or eight years.

- *If they're going to do a second project they need to think about capacity because at times the health and wellbeing of the team has been compromised. They could put in for some money for a project manager, freeing up the team for oversight and strategy, and put in a larger budget for the Activities Co-ordinator.*
- *It would be beneficial if they could have more external paid positions and paid better – maybe someone to act as a critical friend and to hold their hands as a mentor. They relied a lot on Tom and Laura to comment on detail.*
- *They were missing a critical friend.*
- *Consider having a contingency budget to increase salaries and support.*
- *I hope they're now able to draw from new people from outside the congregation to drive the next project.*
- *At the development phase think about having more paid capacity, for example for a Fund Raiser to help with team stress.*
- *West Huntspill is very rural and isolated – it's difficult to recruit from a wide field for a position – could the recruitment be wider or more creative?*

RECOMMENDATIONS

The church as a building and as an organisation has been transformed over the duration of this project, and just as importantly the relationship with local residents has developed beyond what was imagined or thought possible. The project has been instrumental in meeting the needs of local residents, and is an exemplary project in showing the social benefits of using heritage spaces and using a secular approach to help people feel comfortable in a church.

It has been a huge achievement: a proper record of the project should be kept in some form, both to help future projects and also as an historical record. If the 1879-80 rebuilding programme had been chronicled in detail, it would have been a fascinating and informative record, and future generations will be interested to know what happened and why.

For general interest it may be helpful to have a photo book, and it will also be important to gather together all the contractor's reports, NLHF application documents, as well as Ginny's Project reports for a fuller, more detailed record.

Unusually and encouragingly, recommendations made in the interim appear to have been heeded, with issues around communications, diary planning and co-ordination, the Activities Co-ordinator role, mitigation and monitoring of anti-social behaviour, good stewardship of energy and costs, and more opportunities to build on the community activities all being addressed. Capacity remains an issue, although it is good to see new people coming forward including Bronwen Wright leading Tea and Talk sessions. It is encouraging to see that the Hub team are taking the idea of legacy very seriously and that the concept of a Hub Forum is taking shape to keep the momentum and overall vision going, and adapting to changing needs in the parish. The Hub Forum will involve drawing some key people together to support and drive forward the ongoing development of the Hub - possibly involving one or two people from each of the different interested parties e.g. Café Team, Church Social Group, Friends of St Peter's, Village Film Club, amongst others. As with the naming of the Huntspill Hub, we are hoping to collate thoughts on this at our Celebration event on 19th July.

As well as ensuring the Hub continues to thrive on a day to day basis, nurturing people from outside the congregation to become involved in future projects and at a strategic level will become increasingly important.

There will always be pressure on church budgets, particularly as the church is one of the diocesan Magnificat Parishes i.e. one of the most disadvantaged in the diocese. With an improvement in fundraising capability now that the most essential repairs to the church have been carried out and new facilities are in place, it will be important to ring-fence some of this income to build reserves for future projects.

- *The determination to succeed in spite of the pandemic and secure significant funding is remarkable and the Diocese is extremely grateful and delighted at what has been achieved. The new community facilities will ensure this church's future for generations to come.*
- *I don't think they realise themselves how well they've done and how much they've achieved – they've taken their responsibilities really seriously, much more so than some large heritage organisations with paid staff.*
- *Together we are 'Saving the Heritage and Sustaining the Community' and I am deeply grateful for all that has been done thus far and very excited by all that lies ahead.*