

## STEDHAM WITH IPING - ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 23 April 2025

### STEDHAM WITH IPING CHURCHES

There are two Churches in the parish - St James Stedham and St Mary's Iping and our parishioners are exactly the same as those of SIPC. Both churches are regularly used within the benefice of Stedham, Milland, Iping and Linch. Our popular vicar - Trish Bancroft - is very hard working and often thinly stretched across the benefice so we are also very grateful to Andrew and Victoria Ashdown for helping out. Congregations of regular church goers are growing again and we do encourage and welcome others to come along.

We would like to thank all of those - we reckon well over 100 people - who regularly support us voluntarily and without whom the churches would not be able to function. I would also like to thank Jeff, my fellow churchwarden and Vanessa who looks after St Mary's at Iping for all they do.

**Finances** for running the churches remain a concern. For example:

**General upkeep:** both churches have recently had quinquennial inspections by an architect. The churches are in reasonable condition but, as should be expected with old historic buildings, there are some high priority repairs which have been identified. We are currently considering what repairs are essential and how to fund them.

**Contribution to the diocese** - this year £40,000 - which pays for clergy stipends including NI, clergy training, pensions and housing; for diocese staff who advise on the buildings, safeguarding and legal matters and supports the Church's ministry including church schools.

Currently the Church of England policy is for churches to reach net zero by 2030. This is probably an unrealistic aspiration, but there will be significant costs associated with it (replacement of St James's gas boiler for example) at some time in the future.

Both churches are centres for our communities and although the majority of residents do not regularly attend services, they would no doubt be concerned if the churches fell into disrepair or ruin.

We are not in favour of rewilding the churchyard around St James, so there is a stark difference between the graveyards on either side of Mill Lane. We are very grateful and thank SIPC for looking after the new churchyard, but wonder if it might like to review its rewilding project and consider the benefits or if it is supported by the residents of Stedham. Our feedback is that actually most residents are not in favour of it. The new gate also needs attention as the latch is not robust enough and it might help if a metal swing-over gate loop could be installed.

We continue to strive for closer liaison between civic and religious events: for example the upcoming VE80 celebrations on Sunday 11 May: 11am at the Church and 1pm at the Memorial Hall with refreshments provided by the WI. Everyone is welcome to attend either or both commemorations.

Dawn Cansfield has done a huge amount of research into the history of the parish and the church through study of the gravestones and her display within St James has been very popular. If residents have not seen it they are encouraged to visit - the church is open every day. Dawn is also giving the inaugural Memorial Hall talk about it on Tues 29 April 7 for 7.30.

Our main message is that both churches remain very much part of our parish and everyone is welcome to play a part.

Jane Crawford

23<sup>rd</sup> April 2025