

## **Report from Jane Gurden, Chair of Friends of St Matthew's, for Annual Parish Meeting 26 May 2026**

The Friends of St Matthew's is a charity whose sole purpose is to raise money to preserve and improve the fabric of St Matthew's church building and its grounds. FoSM have been putting a lot of effort into fund-raising events since St Matthew's church council (the PCC) decided to apply for a Faculty (i.e. official permission from the Bishop) to install a fully accessible toilet and a servery into the church. The plan is to make it a more welcoming space for use by not only the church congregation but also by the wider community.

A Faculty was granted in June 2025 and we were given a year in which to deliver the project i.e. to raise all the necessary funds and to complete the works. We knew from the outset that this was going to be a very tall order, but had been made aware that an extension of time could be sought. Jane Gurden and Andy Phipps (church treasurer) have been working together to obtain grants from various bodies.

We have received two anonymous donations of £10,000 and £2,000 towards this project. In October 2025, we secured a donation of £4,000 from the Belstead Ganzoni Charitable Settlement.

In late 2025, we started a complicated two stage application to the National Churches Trust for a Large Grant which they offered for installation of toilets and kitchens. We passed stage 1 and, updated quotes were required to comply with stage 2 of the process. Unsurprisingly, these new quotes indicated increased costs which, with a prudent 10% contingency fund to cover unexpected works, showed that the total required to deliver this project was, as at December 2025, £63,414. We were advised in March that our application was unsuccessful, as were 2 out of every 3 applications to them on this occasion. This was a great disappointment but we are continuing in our efforts to secure grants.

As well as running a 100 Club (3 numbers still available if you are interested!), FoSM ran a bottle stall at the village fete, and held a snail race and a quiz last year. We also have a Snail Race on Saturday October 17<sup>th</sup> and a quiz at the Hare and Hounds on Thursday 19 November to look forward to. In addition, we are offering those who would like to make a donation to this project the opportunity to make a dedication to a loved one in a special book that will be on display in the church.

Between FoSM and the PCC, we currently have around £42,000 for this project, which is 66% of the funds required to deliver the project. We are a very small though enthusiastic committee but, despite the fund-raising initiatives of both the FoSM and the PCC in 2026, the prospect of our being able to bridge this financial shortfall from 'business as usual' within a reasonable timeframe is well beyond what can be achieved. We are hoping that grant applications will secure the missing tranche of money required.

Our major concern is that rising costs could leave us in a position of constantly having less funds than the updated costs demand.

We will shortly be submitting an application to BDC for CIL money and would like to thank Lee Parker for his support to date.

We very much hope that – where appropriate – Philip Faircloth-Mutton will be supportive of our efforts for this project.

The Parish Council has previously indicated their support for this and we hope that when we are closer to our target they will be inclined to support this project financially.