



The Vicar & Church Wardens
St Stephen's Church, Norbury & Thornton Heath
Warwick Road
CR7 7NH
5th March 2026

Dear friends,

As we begin our Lenten journey, we continue to rejoice in our life together here at St Stephen's, and for continued spiritual growth in Christ.

We want to write to you, the congregation and friends of St Stephen's, to 'keep you in the loop' as it were about the multiple projects which we are currently working on or starting to think about. All these projects relate either to our church building or site. Here is a list of each project as follows:

- **Oak tree behind the church hall.** In the summer of last year, the Parochial Church Council (PCC) was approached by the insurers of one of our neighbours on Strathyre Avenue whose house has been suffering from subsidence due to the clay soil in this area and the roots of the extremely large oak tree behind our hall (we have since established that the growing cracks in the hall are also most likely down to the encroaching tree roots). This is a long-term issue which dates back to the 1990s - you may be aware that the oak tree has been crowned on multiple occasions to prevent further root growth and subsidence, and various correspondences have been exchanged between St Stephen's and the residents of Strathyre Avenue. However, the situation has escalated, with the PCC of St Stephen's being warned of legal action and significant financial liabilities if the tree is left in place. After seeking advice, we have been advised that the only course of action is to remove the tree completely – the alternative would be to leave St Stephen's open to serious legal and financial vulnerabilities. Of course, we are loathe to cut down an aged tree, but we do not have much wriggle room. Ownership of the tree is split between ourselves and the owners of 18 Strathyre Avenue, who have kindly agreed to pay 50% of all costs relating to the

removal of the tree, and are also convinced of the need for the tree to come down. The removal of the tree is scheduled for mid-March, and will cost us **£4690** plus further costs relating to repair of the fence, etc. We will fund this through a withdrawal from our reserves. There is chance we may get some money towards this from our insurance company as well.

- **Rewiring of the church.** The PCC has been aware for some time that the electrical wiring of the church is outdated and needs to be redone to ensure the church is safe, functional, and fit for purpose in the 21st century. Last year the circuit which powers the lights around the high altar failed due to degradation and is now defunct – this is a sign of things to come if we don't start moving with rewiring the church. This is going to be a large project, with an estimated price tag of **£60,000+**. We would very much like to get the ball rolling with rewiring the church in 2026, even though getting this project sorted this year may be a bit optimistic. Simon Lewis has kindly put together an audit designed to gather opinions from the congregation and community about what we'd like from a completely new electrical circuit, which will go out over the coming weeks. Once the church is rewired, we will most likely have to look at redecorating the church.
- **South-west porch.** You will be aware that the sandstone flooring in the main entrance of the church is deteriorating and will need attention soon. We would also like to make the entrance to the church more accessible for those with disabilities by removing the step. We do not know how expensive this work will be, but it is sure to be another sizeable sum. Again, we would like to get moving with this over the next 18 months or so, depending on how other projects such as the rewiring of the church plan out.
- **Asbestos in sheds behind the hall.** It has come to our attention that two of the sheds – one which we rent out, the other we use as a gardening shed – are highly likely cladded with a dangerous form of asbestos which is not in good condition. We have closed these sheds to prevent exposure. To remove the asbestos, we will need to hire a professional asbestos removal company who will seal off the area for safe removal. We will need to get moving with making the sheds safe (and potentially thinking of how the space could be used going

forward) very soon. We suspect the removal of the asbestos alone will be **£5000+**.

- **The hall.** Cracks have begun to appear in the church hall again, and our architect has noted that the concrete supports for the hall are deteriorating. These problems are occurring due to movement, partly due to the clay soil, the oak tree, and shallow foundations (the hall was only built to last 40 years, and it has done more than that!). A longer-term project will be looking at how/if we can prolong the life of the hall. We will first have to wait to see if the removal of the oak tree has any impact on the structure of the hall.
- **The organ.** Our organist, Andrew Chadney, has been advised by the company which maintains our organ that it will need some significant work done in the foreseeable future (probably 2027). Many of the internal mechanisms within the organ are now very old and won't last forever. It is estimated repairing the organ will cost **£10,000+**. We would love to be able to fundraise for this work later this year/earlier next year, in order to successfully maintain a beautiful instrument which is integral to our regular worship.

We have decided to write to you regarding the above purely to keep you informed and updated as to the work which needs to be done to the fabric and property of St Stephen's. We hope this information is helpful.

It goes without saying that the above work is going to require substantial sums of money, some of which we will spend from reserves, some we will need to fundraise for. Now more than ever, your generosity is appreciated and needed. We are incredibly grateful for those who give to St Stephen's on a regular basis, and to those who will give in the future.

There is much more going on at St Stephen's than just the above in terms of administration of the sacraments, pastoral care, preaching & teaching, community engagement, youth work, evangelism, etc. We hope you will recognise the impact the above will have on what we're realistically able to achieve in our ministry and mission – these projects are extremely time-consuming, and often complex and multifaceted.

Despite this, life at St Stephen's remains overwhelmingly positive. Our Sunday congregation has grown over the last year, and we have already achieved much in terms of fundraising to install a new notice board and a new sound system.

By tackling these issues when they arise, we are enabling ministry and mission to continue in this place, making sure that we pass onto future generations the blessing of our church, just as it has been handed onto us.

Yours sincerely,

Fr Daniel Burton, Vicar

Andrea Anderson, Church Warden

Lana Ruddock, Church Warden



The Diocese of
Southwark