

Cambridge Judge Business School

REACH Ely Case Study Series

Reimagining Churches as Community Assets  
for the Common Good

# ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST WATERBEACH



*Text, design and photography*

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**REACH Ely (Reimagining Churches as  
Community Assets for the Common Good)**  
is a multi-partner research project that  
aims to help communities make fuller use  
of their churches.

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*The project is implemented by*

**Centre for Social Innovation at  
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**[www.reachely.org](http://www.reachely.org)**

The challenges facing church communities and their buildings have been extensively studied in the light of declining church attendance in the United Kingdom over several decades. REACH Ely aims to address the less-well-understood opportunities for churches to engage and reconnect with the 97.7 per cent of the local communities in the Diocese of Ely who do not attend their parish churches.

With the absence of universal determinants of success and failure of churches in the community engagement context, the REACH Ely project will provide an understanding of the relationship between communities and wider use of church buildings as well as the contribution that churches make to the common good. The project will determine community values, needs and opportunities that can be used in the most effective way to ensure a win-win outcome for communities and a sustainable future of church buildings.

The **case study series** is based on in-depth interviews and observations about church building use with informants from a subset of deaneries and parishes in the Diocese of Ely, supplemented with secondary information about the communities they represent. The purpose of the case study is to unearth various church experiences in renovating and envisioning their buildings as missional and social spaces, engaging with local and wider communities, addressing current challenges, and learning from their practice.

The **Glossary** is a separate document that accompanies the case study series. It is available as a download from the project's website [www.reachely.org](http://www.reachely.org)

*On the cover: St John's church pulpit (1883) with elaborate mosaic panels.*

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# ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST WATERBEACH

**Church Category:** Rural

**Deanery:** North Stowe

**Address:** Station Road, Waterbeach CB25 9HT

**Website:** [www.stjohns-waterbeach.org.uk](http://www.stjohns-waterbeach.org.uk)



## Summary

**Buildings and Artefacts:** Grade II\* listed building; Rebuilt spire; Elaborately decorated chancel; Pulpit with mosaic panels; Fragment of ancient sculpture of cherubs; Electric pipe organ; Stained glass windows; Marble Communion Table; New heating; Church Room (church hall) with an office, kitchen, storage area and facilities; Spacious car park

**Congregation to Population Ratio:** 71 / 5,143

**Fundraising:** Friends of St John's; Contactless system; Waterbeach Feast

**Income Generation:** Charitable Foundation created by the sale of glebe land; Funding obtained for Children and Families Minister; Rental income; Parish giving

**Communications:** Two parishes website and Facebook; Beach Churches Together YouTube channel; Weekly handout The Fold; Village magazine; Visitors' Book; Church noticeboard

**Community Engagement:** Collaboration with Church band; Links with other churches; Making Sense event; Beach Churches Together Holiday Club; Third Space Conversations; Café church; Exhibitions; Eco Church; Food Hub; Breakfast church in Landbeach.

# ROOTS

## Profile

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Waterbeach is a large English village on the edge of the Fens, 6 miles (9.7 km) north of Cambridge in the district of South Cambridgeshire. Waterbeach covers 2,327 hectares (c. 5,750 acres) and the parish stretches for almost 8 km along the west bank of the River Cam. Waterbeach and its sister village Landbeach (population 841 in 2018) are on either side of a major road connecting Cambridge and Ely (See *REACH Ely case study Landbeach*).

Waterbeach has expanded considerably in recent years due to economic growth in the region and has increasingly become a dormitory settlement for Cambridge. Further housing is planned on the former army barracks site, providing up to 10,000 new homes. The population of some 5,166 inhabitants recorded in the 2011 Census will undoubtedly have grown and is set to expand significantly in the coming years.

There is a village hall and a variety of shops and businesses. Cambridge Innovation Park was opened here in 2012, providing serviced offices for high tech businesses. It has expansion plans on this site, as well as in other parts of Cambridgeshire. There is a small industrial estate at the edge of the village and a number of small companies have premises in the village itself. Waterbeach Community Primary School has approximately 300 pupils. There are three public houses and The Beach Social Club – formerly the British Legion. To the south-east is a Woodland Trust nature area called Cow Hollow Wood, created in 2000 to mark the Millennium. Other places of worship include the Baptist chapel and the Salvation Army Church.

Waterbeach has very good transport links, with its own railway station on the main line from King's Lynn to London, and is close to the busy A10 road linking Ely and Cambridge. The A14, providing access to the east coast and the Midlands, lies a few miles to the south.

The parish contains a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments including Denny Abbey, home of the Knights Templar in the 12th century. It also sits adjacent to Car Dyke, a Roman waterway, which was constructed to transport goods. There are other Roman works to the east, notably Bottisham Lode which served a drainage function.





Top: View of the church building and Church Room from south-east. Middle: North entrance porch and War Memorial in the churchyard; Noticeboard by the road. Bottom: View of church buildings from the car park.

## Buildings

There has been a church at Waterbeach since c.1160, when priests were recorded there. The present building is built of field stones dressed with ashlar, and consists, after extensive 19th-century alterations, of a chancel with transeptal organ chamber, aisled and clerestoried nave with a shallow north porch, and west tower. The earliest surviving part of the church is probably the two eastern bays of the nave, which were possibly cut through the thick walls of an earlier church. The north aisle had a doorway with dogtooth mouldings and a lancet to the west. It received new windows in the 15th century, when a chapel with two similar three-light windows was built north of the chancel. The clerestory was probably also put up in the late 15th century.

The upper part of the tower, damaged when the spire was blown down in 1719, was rebuilt c.1720. In the 18th century, the nave received new seating, including several high pews, and a gallery filled its west bay, blocking the tower arch. A clock installed in the tower in 1746 was replaced in 1865. The bell frame, which appears to be elderly and worn, is in reasonable condition, and the five bells are no longer rung.

Restorations of the nave and the south aisle walling, rebuilding of the north aisle and the then dilapidated chancel, and adding a new transeptal chapel in Perpendicular style to house the organ were undertaken in the 19th century. The tower was repaired in 1965, and further substantial work began with the aisles in 1979.

Under a Chancery order of 1729 the church was entitled to the surplus income of the parish charities to pay for repairs. It was made a separate ecclesiastical charity in 1904-05 and remains active to this day. The

sale of further glebe land in the 1970s has resulted in a large portfolio of investments (see *Income Generation*).

The churchyard was too small for so populous a parish and was closed in 1855. In 1879, the vicar sold one acre of glebe land to the northwest of the village to a burial board, and this ground was still in use in the 1980s, when there was a mission chapel situated in Joist Fen. This chapel was dedicated to St Andrew. It suffered structural damage in the 1960s, was considered beyond repair and subsequently demolished. The south aisle at St John's was dedicated as a 'memorial chapel' for St Andrew's.

The Grade II\* listed church building is broadly good, but there are a number of challenges facing the fabric, e.g. dampness and the status of the Kempe window. A new heating system was installed in 2016. Remedial work has been carried out on the driveway. More recently, the Kempe window was removed for restoration, funded by the Friends of St John's and the Kempe Society. Future plans include the installation of a bicycle parking, a solar PV heating for the Church Room, a sound system, and an audio-visual system.

The church can accommodate 200 people comfortably, although up to 300 have attended larger services, such as on Remembrance Sunday, with the use of additional chairs. There is a child-friendly area with toys, books and craft materials. The church has a spacious car park. The building is open to the public seven days a week.

**Church Room.** The adjacent Church Room, built in the 1970s, can comfortably seat 60 people. It functions as a church hall and houses an office, kitchen, storage area and WC facilities.



*Top: View towards the chancel from the nave. Middle: Seating arrangement in the nave. Bottom: Mixed seating with the eagle lectern and the pulpit. On page 6: Church Room interiors.*



## Artefacts

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The pillars in the north arcade have the stiff, upright leaves of c.1200. The south aisle and clerestory feature 15th-century additions.

In about 1620, Margery, wife of Thomas Banks, donated a silver gilt cup to the church, made in 1557 and described in 1745 as 'finely carved and embossed', resembling in shape a tazza of Venetian glass. It was sold in 1929 for £1,800, which formed a Cup Fund for church purposes, initially used to subsidize the vicars. The parish retained a paten of 1683, and a cup, paten, and flagon of 1882, given by Mrs Horne.

The elaborate decoration of the chancel included alabaster panelling in the sanctuary, inlaid behind the altar with figures of saints in mosaic, influenced by the Oxford movement. Similar mosaic panels by Powell of Whitefriars adorned the square alabaster pulpit, inaugurated in 1883 with a new font on marble shafts. The church has a number of stained glass windows and an electric pipe organ. The Communion Table of Purbeck marble thought to be 11th-century and found beneath a Tudor floor.

There is a fragment of ancient sculpture in the church, on which is one cherub blowing a trumpet and another keeping him company, from the monastery which stood 800 years ago on the farm of Denny Priory, two miles away. The original 14th-century font can be seen in the Old Burial Ground about hundred yards to the east of the church.



# RUNNING

## Team

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The ministry team of St John's church includes an associate vicar, two churchwardens, a part-time administrator, a children's and families minister in vacancy (funded). The church has an active PCC.

Waterbeach church shares its vicar with All Saints' Landbeach since 1975.

## Religious Services

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There are two Sunday services, with a Holy Communion service on the first and third Sunday. Between 80 and 90 worshippers attend the main Sunday service. The fifth Sunday (four times a year) is an all-age Communion service, two of which are held at Landbeach. Some of the families from Waterbeach attend Breakfast Church at Landbeach. Kids Church is an opportunity for children to explore their faith through stories, songs, games and craft. It is open to all children and runs on second and fourth Sundays during the 10.15 a.m. service; there is a group for pre-school and Key Stage 1 children, and a group for Key Stage 2 and 3 children. A special service is held on the first Sunday of November for the recently bereaved.

**Covid-19 impact.** During the pandemic lockdowns in 2020 when all church services and community events were suspended, Waterbeach and Landbeach churches shared on their joint **Facebook** page the prayer of the day, tips and advice on self-care, family food challenge, and motivational thoughts. On its **website**, the church regularly posted daily reflection, Sunday services videos and shared service sheets and useful links on online activities of other churches and Church of England's phone line for support. In addition, Beach Churches Together Holiday Club (see *Engagement*) produced **daily videos** on its Facebook page and YouTube channel filled with songs, games, crafts and stories. To support communities, the church runs Food Hub (see *Community*).

### Ministry Share

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In 2019, ministry share expenditure was £39,813.

### Fundraising

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**Friends of St John's** is a registered charity to raise funds for the fabric and furnishings of the parish church. It currently has about 60 members and has raised more than £10,000 over the ten years since its founding. It holds an annual dinner with a guest speaker.

**Contactless system.** St John Waterbeach holds no specific fundraising events but does plan to introduce a contactless system for donations. They have found that visitors, such as those attending christenings, often wish to make a donation but may not be carrying cash.

**Waterbeach Feast** is an annual carnival in the village which is held on the green. The church groups run several stalls at this event.

### Income Generation

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**Charitable Foundation** supports the fabric of the building, which generates around £28,000 per annum. This fund was created by the sale of glebe land in the 1970s and the portfolio amounts to some £3 million, income from which is shared between the education department of the Diocese of Ely, church repairs, and two smaller charities in the village.

**Children and families minister.** Three-year funding for the children and families minister has been provided by the strategic developers for the new housing development in Waterbeach, which has been matched by the Diocese.

**Rental income.** The Church Room produces rental income and is well used by the community.

**Parish giving.** The church also receives regular income from the Parish Giving Scheme ([www.parishgiving.org.uk](http://www.parishgiving.org.uk)), which is centrally managed through direct debits. Giving through this channel allows the option of index linking gifts.

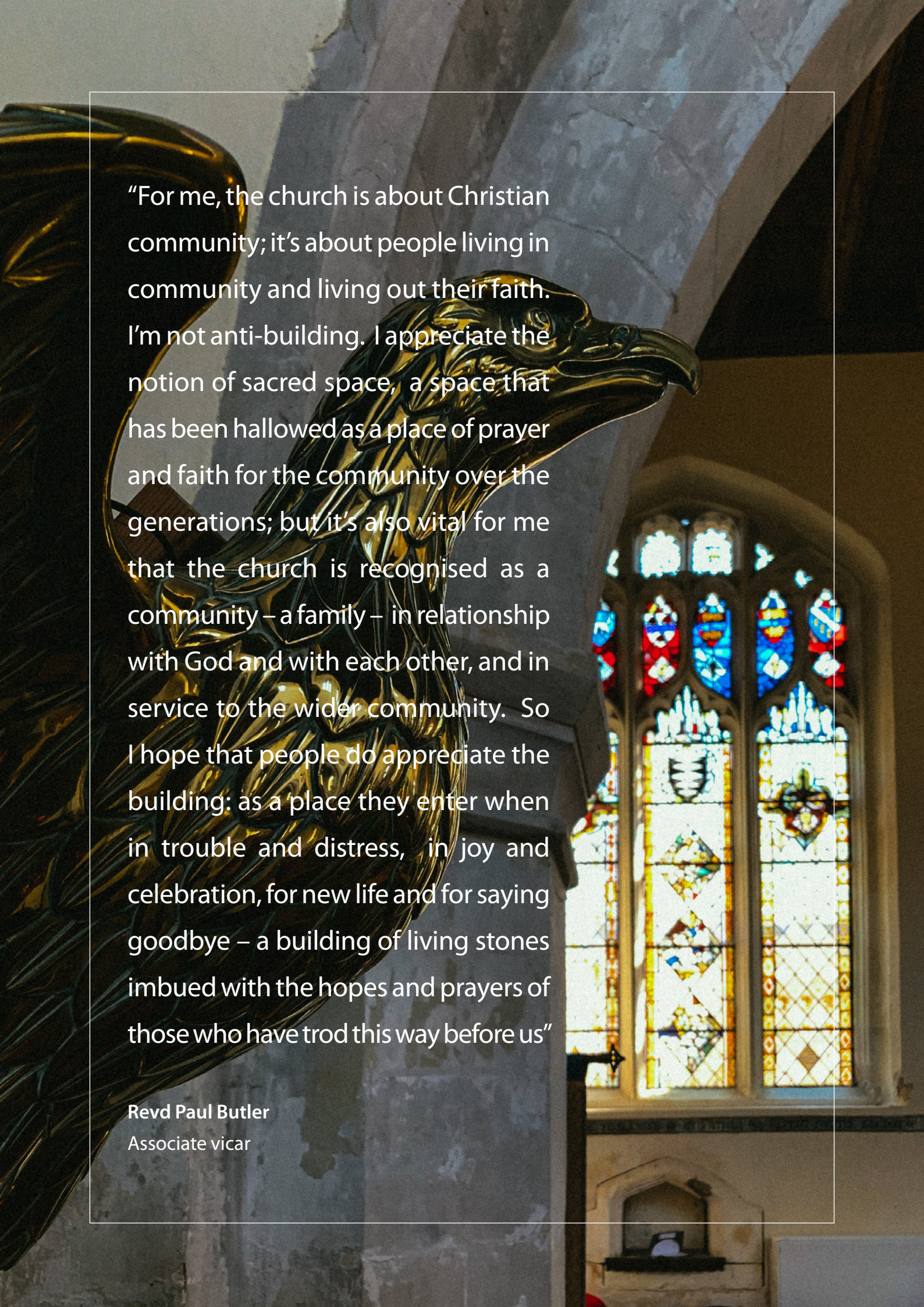
### Communications

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The church has a well-developed **website** and a **Facebook page**. Beach Churches Together Holiday Club runs its own **YouTube channel** (*see Engagement*). A weekly **handout** *The Fold*, placed in the pews and shared on the website, includes both church and community information. The church also contributes to the village **magazine**. There is a **Visitors' Book** and information **leaflet** about the history of the church inside the building. A church **noticeboard** is set in front of the church. Food Hub of Waterbeach and The C3 Church runs a Facebook page (*see Community*).



Top: Members of the congregation in the church. Middle: Food Hub during the pandemic; Christmas at Waterbeach church; Harvest festival.  
Bottom: Members of congregation on Remembrance Sunday (Photos by St John's church, Waterbeach).



“For me, the church is about Christian community; it’s about people living in community and living out their faith. I’m not anti-building. I appreciate the notion of sacred space, a space that has been hallowed as a place of prayer and faith for the community over the generations; but it’s also vital for me that the church is recognised as a community – a family – in relationship with God and with each other, and in service to the wider community. So I hope that people do appreciate the building: as a place they enter when in trouble and distress, in joy and celebration, for new life and for saying goodbye – a building of living stones imbued with the hopes and prayers of those who have trod this way before us”

Revd Paul Butler  
Associate vicar

# REACH

## Community

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**Eco Church** is web-based award scheme designed to motivate and resource churches in establishing caring for God's earth as an integral part of their everyday work and witness. St John's joined the Eco Church initiative in March 2020 and is working towards a 'bronze' award. Eco Church is run by A Rocha UK in partnership with Christian Aid, the Church of England, the Methodist Church, and Tearfund. A Rocha's vision (which St John's shares) is for the new scheme to create a national network of churches as local centres of creation care in the community. Signifying the church's effort in this regard, St John's has (as of March 2021) installed a new, low-power lighting system in the church building, and is planning both a bicycle parking scheme (in design) and a 'zero carbon', solar PV – heat pump heating system for the Church Room (currently under discussion with suppliers).

**Food Hub** is a community support initiative organised during the pandemic at St John's church in partnership with the C3 Church in Cambridge to provide fresh food, store cupboard goods and fresh frozen meals – all for free. The initiative is set up to help those impacted by Covid-19 situation, e.g. furloughed and those in general need. The church welcomes donations towards the costs and reminds to wear face coverings to come inside the church. Food Hub also organises a pop-up food truck as a Cambridge brunch: 50 portions of Pie and Chips are provided for free or for a small donation. Food Hub updates are shared on its Facebook page.

**Church band.** The church has a band that plays at services on the third Sunday of the month.

**Links with overseas churches.** St John the Evangelist church is linked to a parish in Avrille, France. It also supports a mission in Melanesia with prayer and regular grants as well as welcoming visiting clergy. In addition to supporting the Melanesian Mission, it makes an annual grant to the Province and sometimes launches special appeals in response to natural disasters.

## Events

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**Making Sense.** This regular event is held in the Church Room and outside speakers are brought in to lead discussions on theological topics, e.g. Making Sense of Sabbath Rest.

**Third Space<sup>1</sup> Conversations** events are held once a term in a public house and centre around faith and science, with speakers brought in to lead discussions.

**Third Space** is a series of light-hearted events are led by the vicar and focus on storytelling, music or a quiz and are also held in a local pub.

**Café Church.** This is run in conjunction with All Saints' church, Landbeach.

**Exhibitions.** St John Waterbeach has been used to hold exhibitions, for example a two-day textiles exhibition.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'third space' or 'third place' was coined by Roy Oldenburg (born 1932), a contemporary American urban sociologist known for his research on the importance of informal public places for a functioning civil society, democracy, and civic engagement. Whereas one's 'first' and 'second' places relate to home and work respectively, 'third places' are public community areas and anchors of community life that facilitate interaction.

### Engagement

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**Beach Churches Together (BCT) Holiday Club** ([www.bctholidayclub.com](http://www.bctholidayclub.com)) began with the churches of Waterbeach and Landbeach wanting to provide the primary school aged children of the surrounding area with a week of fun and learning. Every year in the summer holiday the club runs six mornings of activities, songs, and stories with an overarching theme consisting of songs, games, craft and Bible teaching. BCT Holiday Club is run by a team of volunteers from various churches.

**Children and families minister.** This role (in vacancy) has been created and will be funded for three years in acknowledgement of the large number of young families that are likely to be moving into the area with the new housing development. The minister will provide pastoral care to the wider community.

**Focus on families.** The church runs a number of groups for parents and their children and has around 30–45 families in the congregation (approximately half of the church). A weekly Kids Church is held alternately at Waterbeach and Landbeach churches. Around 20 primary school-aged children attend.

**Collaborative events.** Volunteers from St John's support both Waterbeach and Landbeach churches, and a Holiday Club is organised jointly with the Baptist Church and Salvation Army Church in Waterbeach.

**Mothers' Union.** The group has recently been revived. It welcomes both men and women, not just mothers.

**Craft and Alpha.** In the past, the church run this group each Thursday during term time in the Church Room. Members were able to try new crafts or share their skills whilst exploring the Christian faith. Drinks and cakes were provided.

**Footsteps Baby and Toddler Group.** Parents and other carers are welcome at this twice-weekly baby and toddler group. It meets on Mondays and Fridays in the Church Room, and around 15–20 families attend. There are toys and activities for the children to play with and in the summer the outdoor space is used for water and sand play. The group holds an annual summer BBQ, along with Saturdads and the local Mother's Union.

**Saturdads** is a group that meets every other month on a Saturday morning to give dads, grandads and male carers a space to meet with other men with their primary school or younger aged kids. They meet in the Church Room and provide bacon sandwiches for the men, toast for the children and plenty of toys.

**Lunch Club.** The vicar is looking to extend the reach of the church into the community, particularly since the church does not have the capacity to hold more than 200 people and the Church Room can seat no more than 60. Lunch Club is one example of the church's Outreach programme. The number of people attending fluctuates between 18–27, although 32 can be accommodated. Most of those attending are not regular members of the congregation.

“What defines the influence of the church is the strength of its connections. We might have say 80 people in attendance for Sunday worship; they have connections with family, friends, neighbours and various groups in the community, living out their faith in all of these contexts. It's a ripple effect, with some strong connections developed, and then other connections made with people further away from the centre of the church community, but nevertheless making some faith contact.”

Revd Paul Butler  
Associate vicar



Top: Details of the mosaic panel on the pulpit. Bottom: Stained glass window and children's corner.



# REFLECTIONS

## Challenges

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### **Capacity of church buildings for a rapidly growing population**

There will be a large influx of residents in the coming years as the new housing in Waterbeach is completed. The single-storey Church Room is already inadequate for the number of children now attending services and clubs and it has a busy programme of events and private hires. The space within the room can be divided off but the PCC is considering whether another storey might be added. The church itself has Victorian pews and removing these would provide a more flexible space for events and different forms of worship. A small number of pews were previously removed. There have been discussions around allowing the nave to be used by the community and this is being encouraged by the Bishop. However, there are many stakeholders to consult when making such changes, including English Heritage and the Victorian Society, as well as the Diocese.

### **Providing a more welcoming space for new worshippers**

Entering the church can be seen as daunting for some and many of the newer families have only come by invitation. The church might be made physically less intimidating by replacing the front door with glass so that people can see in and by making the church a lighter (by repainting the yellow wash on walls) and more open space. The installation of new lighting was completed in March 2021.

### **Reaching out into the community**

Waterbeach church is keen to become a more inclusive body and plans to appoint a Children and Families minister who will connect with the wider community. There are plans to represent the broad demographics of the congregation on the church website with photographs of some of the younger members of the church.



## Lessons Learned

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### **To work in partnership**

The two congregations at St John the Evangelist Waterbeach and All Saints Landbeach have close ties and share a number of services and events, such as Café Church, Breakfast Church, and Beach Churches Together Holiday Club. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Waterbeach church in partnership with the C3 Church organised Food Hub.

### **To be open and responsive to change**

The church runs a wide range of events to cater for its changing demographic and is aware that its mission lies outside as well as inside the church buildings, particularly as the community grows.

### **To adapt the church building for more flexible and a wider use**

The church team are keen to encourage greater use of the church building by community groups and improvements are being made, such as new lighting, heating and sound systems, to make it more appealing to users.

### **To maintain and strengthen the connection with the worshipping community**

Before the current incumbent arrived, there had been a more formal, structured relationship between the church and its congregation. It has taken time, but there is now more of a relaxed, community feel. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the church reached the community by phone and online.

### **To provide stability during a time of transition**

The church provides a sense of rootedness and security for a community in transition.

### **To be open to people who might feel overwhelmed or intimidated by the church**

The church aims to be inclusive and continues to consider changes that will create a more welcoming space that can be used by the wider community.



“I believe we are moving towards a more dynamic, supportive and empathetic community; we are on a journey, which is really about following Jesus Christ – and this is a lifelong journey.”

**Revd Paul Butler**  
Associate vicar

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