

Deopham and Hackford Parish Council

Deopham STAR Update for AGM, 1 May 2024

Caring for our Roots

STAR stands for St Andrew's Restoration and is a group of local people who were asked by the then rector in around 2020 to look into funding of the restoration of the church. The group consists of 2 Parish Councillors, 3 Parochial Church Councillors and 4 others. The skills in the group are fairly wide-ranging, with people with expertise in civil and electrical engineering, data analysis, teaching and project management, to name the main ones. The group are acting under the direction of and on behalf of High Oak Parochial Church Council (PCC) and are chaired by one of their members.

The group did an "Expression of Interest" in 2021 and submitted it to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). The Fund liked it and asked the group to submit a full bid for funding, which was submitted in 2022 after much hard work under the general title "Caring for our Roots", which works on so many levels.

In March 2023, the NLHF awarded the PCC around £49,000 for the "Development phase" to establish in detail what needed doing to the fabric of the church to take it off the English Heritage Buildings at Risk Register (which it had been on for some time) and what modifications needed doing to the heating, lighting and other facilities to make the space as inviting to members of the wider community as possible.

The group selected an architect, an activity consultant and, as with all these things, an evaluation consultant to ensure we were spending public money wisely. These are all very experienced people in their own fields. In the 14 months since we were awarded the grant, we have used several specialists, such as an engineer, archaeologist, conservator and ecologist, to carry out investigations to see the extent of work that will need to be done to the roof, walls and windows of the church building. We are yet to receive the full report.

We have also investigated upgrading the electricity supply, lighting, heating and the possibility of providing additional facilities such as an accessible toilet and a refreshment area.

One major element of "Caring for our Roots" is to involve the wider community in the sense of place, church, churchyard, village and beyond. This involves not only local schools but also the whole community. Part of the plan is to have the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, working with local school children, plan a nature trail in the churchyard, and there will be a permanent heritage exhibition in the church linking the community to the place they live, working with the Norfolk Records Office (details to be worked out with the activity consultant). Obviously, being in the development phase means that very little of this has begun!

There will be a meeting with the National Lottery Heritage Fund (who funded this project) at the end of May to go over our plans and report on progress. We will have to submit our bid for the major part of the funding (c£300,000) for the delivery phase by roughly November.

