



## Background

**The beautiful, historic Church of St Peter and St Paul** has stood in the West Mersea Island village centre for many centuries and is one of the oldest church foundations in England. It has been the site of a continuous Christian presence for over 1350 years, since before the King of Essex, Saint Sebbi, built the causeway called 'The Strood' around 680AD to ensure access to the church from the mainland. Our Church is a well loved landmark for the local community and visitors but the cost in both time and money to preserve, maintain and develop this ancient Grade1 Listed Building is high and it is no longer possible for the congregation alone to fund.

In the life of the island the church is much more than a building, it is at the centre of the community. There can be very few islanders who have not made use of it at some point, whether for weddings, baptisms, funerals, for one of the civic services, or even just as a place to retreat to for some peace and quiet. To date the church has received very little outside funding for upkeep of the building and repairs, and has relied on the generosity of community members and the congregation. Over many years the worshipping community has met the cost of a number of necessary repairs, from window mullions to shoring up the churchyard wall. These costs continue to rise, and the regular worshippers are simply not able to meet them all over the long term.

## The aim of the Friends

The aim of the newly formed Friends group is to develop a community group that is formed through mutual appreciation of the ancient church building located at the heart of an Island community. Membership will be open to members of the congregation and the wider public, all of which will have an interest in celebrating Island life and preserving the oldest building on the island. Members will deliver events and activities which will raise awareness of the historic church building, support church repair appeals and support a wide range of needs for those living within the community. Our members will take ownership and responsibility for projects within the church by organising events which will enable the church to carry out essential repairs dictated by a quinquennial report generated by regular inspection.

Members of the community held an initial meeting to identify a committee and to allocate roles within the group. In June 2011, a launch event was organised to bring interested parties together to celebrate within the grounds of the church. In excess of 200 residents attended and 75 people and organisations signed up to become members of the friends group. An Inaugural General Meeting formally setting up the organisation by voting in a management committee and adopting a constitution also took place in June.

The committee agreed that the following church based activities should take place over the next 12 months to meet our objectives:



**Parish Church of St Peter & St Paul, West Mersea**  
**Rector: Revd Sam Norton, MA**

High Street, West Mersea, Essex, CO5 8QD

Tel & Fax: 01206 383222 Email: [admin@merseacofe.org](mailto:admin@merseacofe.org)

Websites: [www.merseacofe.org](http://www.merseacofe.org) and [www.fwmpc.org.uk](http://www.fwmpc.org.uk)

## Project information Sheet for the Friends of St Peter and St Paul Church 2011/12

- (1) Youth and Older Residents- a series of events to bring young and old members of the community together for activities, storytelling and friendship
- (2) Family Events- renewal of wedding vows and children activities.
- (3) Island Life- a series of historical lectures, talks and presentations working in partnership with the local museum.
- (4) Music for all- a series of concerts, a celebration of local musicians
- (5) Share information with other 'friends of' groups

In order to carry out these events it was agreed that we would require an initial injection of funding to purchase the equipment as follows:

Laptop and Projector- for presentations by speakers from the friends group; Catering equipment including Plates/ cups and cutlery- to enable us to provide refreshments at events; Room hire for meetings and events; Volunteer costs (travel and expenses); Marquee for outdoor events; Display stand, printing leaflets and posters of events.

### **How we calculated our costs**

The total amount of funding required is £6,348. We have been in contact with other 'Friends of' groups who have supported us in developing a start up budget, outlining clearly for us the expense incurred during their first year, including start-up. Quotes from various sources have been obtained and we have consulted with other local community organisations to obtain realistic set up costs.

We would like to employ a professional body to ensure that our Safeguarding policies are robust, until this time we will adopt the churches policies that are already in place.

### **The difference we will make**

Mersea Island is a community of approximately 7000 residents, although closely linked to Colchester town, it is a small island cut off to the main land by high tides. The community is fairly rural with a large number of older residents and young families. The church building is central to community life and residents value its presence most highly, many having a history with the church one way or another through marriage, baptisms, attending funerals or even just taking a quiet moment to reflect within the beautiful surroundings. The landmark Norman building itself is of great historic significance and it is essential that it is preserved for the heritage of generations to follow. The Church has stood in the West Mersea Island village centre for many centuries and is one of the oldest church foundations in England. It has been the site of a continuous Christian presence for over 1350 years, since before the King of Essex, Saint Sebbi, built the causeway called 'The Strood' around 680AD to ensure access to the church from the mainland.



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The Friends group will enable island residents to unite to preserve their heritage. All Friends will be Volunteers with an opportunity to make a worthwhile contribution and live more rewarding and fulfilling lives, enriched by being part of a diverse group of people.

### **A plan to reach the most isolated and hard to reach**

The island had a total population of 6925 in the 2001 census, this has increased without a doubt in recent years with a number of new developments housing more families and younger people. Residents are predominantly white British with few minority ethnic groups on the island, over a third of our residents are over 65 years old and only a small percentage in comparison are between the age of 19-25 so we would expect our activities and friends group to reflect this.

Older people are hard to reach but many keep themselves informed by reading the local news letters that go out from 'Mersea Life' 'Mersea Courier' and 'Strood' magazine. We would ensure that information on events and joining the friends would be widely publicised within these newsletters as well as displaying posters within mainstream services such as the local GP Surgery and Post Office.

Our website is now successfully up and running and we would encourage any new younger members to identify chosen methods and set up and lead on any new media ideas such as facebook or twitter.

### **Outcomes**

#### A Stronger Community

1- 250 friends from the community will experience greater historical understanding of the church building by the end of the project.

2- 500 individuals of all ages will take part in regular events throughout the year, bringing together groups that would not normally spend time together.

3- Friends Committee members will have a greater sense of well-being from taking part in Voluntary activities throughout the year.

4- 200 older people (65+) will feel less isolated and enjoy friends activities before the end of the project

5- 120 young people (0-18) will learn about island heritage from older residents and friends activities by the end of the project

6- Regularly engage with new people moving to the island and get people involved that may otherwise not be involved in community projects beyond the life of the project.



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7- Fully inclusive for all faiths as building focussed rather than faith based friends group beyond the life of the project.

### Improving our Rural environment

1- Raise awareness of the historical significance of the building to all residents, and therefore improve the level of respect islanders and visitors have for the unique environment in which we live.

2- Develop pride for our island environment throughout the community, encouraging community spirit and engagement in other worthwhile community activities.

3- Young people have greater respect for Island heritage and therefore altering view of Island Life so they feel special and fortunate.

4- Reducing anti-social behaviour and vandalism in and around the church building through engagement with younger members of the community.

The friends group promotes equal opportunities and has no restriction as to the membership to the friends.

We hope you find our project worthy of support, we have identified a number of trusts and foundations that fit with our priorities and will keep you informed of any progress made.

We would be very grateful if you and your board of Trustees would consider making a contribution of £3,000 towards the start-up and year 1 activities.

On behalf of the Friends and West Mersea Community I would like to thank you in advance for considering supporting our appeal. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information.

Kind regards

### **Jeremy Dumas**

Church Fabric Officer & Member of the Friends of West Mersea Parish Church

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