



Forward Momentum

BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR THE WAY FORWARD PROJECT

The National Lottery Heritage Fund Stages for Funding



As we step into 2025, it's heartening to reflect on the remarkable progress of The Way Forward Project throughout 2024. This initiative, dedicated to the renovation and revitalisation of St. Mary's Church in Stebbing, has seen significant milestones this past year.

Permission to Start Phase

Having secured funding to the tune of £1.57m in December 2023, we then navigated the crucial "Permission to Start" phase mandated by The National Lottery Heritage Fund. This step was essential to transition from planning to action, ensuring all prerequisites were met for the project's commencement.

June 2024: Securing Final Funding and Entering the Delivery Phase

By mid June, after a period of nervous anticipation, we received the necessary "match" funding, allowing us to officially enter the "Delivery Phase." Our grateful thanks to all those who gave financially towards this, both from the St Mary's congregation, members of the community and the three grants from Friends of Essex Churches, The Beatrice Laing Family Trust and the Garfield Weston Foundation.

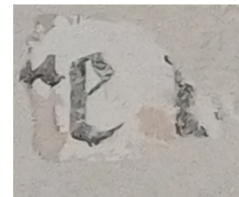


This phase marked the beginning of tangible actions, including the recruitment of key roles vital for the success of our Activity Programme. Positions such as Project Administrator and Evaluation Consultant were filled, with plans to onboard a Heritage Engagement Officer and Volunteer & Training Coordinator, followed by a Historian in Residence and Ecologist in Residence by December. Additionally, preparations were made to temporarily relocate church services to the Friends Meeting House on Stebbing High Street, starting 1st September, to facilitate the upcoming renovation work.



September-October 2024: Key Transitions

In September, having packed up all the contents and with the church building closing temporarily for restoration, the congregation adjusted beautifully to the new arrangements for worship in the village. Meanwhile, inside the church, work began in earnest. Cliveden Conservation inspected the walls and discovered some interesting wall art, evidence of a more decorated church in previous centuries. Following on from that, archaeological explorations uncovered intriguing elements of the building's history. Our Volunteer & Training Coordinator position in the project team was filled as we welcomed Sandi Merifield. A well-known figure in Stebbing village, Sandi brings invaluable experience and enthusiasm to the project.



December 2024: Team Growth and Renovation Progress

By December, three new team members joined the project: Esther Skidmore (Heritage Engagement Officer), Richard Wren (Ecologist), and Caroline Wren (Historian), bringing valuable expertise to our three year Activity Plan. Renovation work progressed significantly and over 20 attendees enjoying our first "Take A Look" tour, Uncovering the Past - Excavations & Archaeology. Visitors explored the excavation process and viewed discovered artefacts like old tobacco pipes, rood screen fragments, and ancient stained glass. Just before Christmas, the builders laid the first layer of limecrete creating a smooth surface for the first time.



January 2025: Future Plans and Progress

With Bakers of Danbury back on site after the festive break, work has begun on creating timber frames. These will make sure the spots stay clear of limecrete so that the ledger stones can eventually be laid back down. They will also guide where the underfloor heating and cables will be placed. Old pipes have been removed from the kitchen ceiling and floor plans are guiding where the new ones will go under the nave and chancel floors. In the porch, the team has dug and added the same protective and insulating layers of glapor and geotextile that were laid in the nave and chancel.



Thank you for your ongoing support, which has been instrumental in making all of this possible. We are filled with gratitude and excitement as we move forward into 2025!

More information about the project can be found at www.wayforwardstebbing.org
Regular updates are also on our Facebook and Instagram pages