

# Mepal Matters

The newsletter for Mepal

March/April 2024



[www.mepalparish.org](http://www.mepalparish.org)



# Village Hall News

The Community Hub on Monday mornings has continued - with a short break over Christmas and New Year - supported by volunteers from the Village Hall Committee, St Mary's Church, the Parish Council, the Friendship Club and the wider community. By the time you read this we shall have had the 12th February session with hot snacks as well as the usual hot drinks and biscuits. On that occasion we are also welcoming a NHS representative who would like to hear about people's experience with health and social care services and give advice on where to seek help. All these mornings are an opportunity not just for social chat but for exchange of information and concerns about local services and other matters of general interest.

Quiz nights are always popular and we are planning to hold one in the fairly near future but we haven't yet settled a date. When we do, this will be publicised.

We await a decision in April on our application for a grant to help us remove internal walls in the old toilets and open the area up for storage. Meanwhile during one of the recent downpours a serious leak developed in the kitchen roof. Flat roofs inevitably have a limited life and this one has not been renewed for at least 30 years so the problem is not entirely surprising. Fortunately we found contractors who were able to install a temporary covering, which so far has kept the area dry, and they will shortly carry out a lasting repair.

The side hall was originally fully open to the main hall. The present partition wall that narrows the opening was installed in 2001, mainly with the intention of adapting the side hall so that it could be used as an office for the local youth club organisation that was then in existence. That project never came to fruition and we now propose to remove it so as to restore the opening to its original width and make the space easier to use. We shall find somewhere else for the display of photographs taken by local people.

We have recently received some huge bills from Anglian Water and we are investigating whether this could have been due to a technical fault or an administrative error. Whatever the outcome, it is always important to avoid wasting water, so please if you use the Hall make sure before you leave that no taps are running.

We have reviewed our hire charges and are pleased to announce that for the forthcoming year there will be no increase for local community events and private parties. However, we have felt obliged to increase the rate for commercial bookings to £17 per hour. This is still well below the rate charged by other halls in the locality. Our website has been up and running for some time, among other things enabling anyone to check the calendar of events and bookings, and to make a booking. If you need accommodation for a party, meeting or event of any kind, or you know someone else who does, <https://mepalvillagehall.co.uk/> is the place to visit.

Chairman: Allen Sallis, Treasurer and Bookings Clerk: Lynne Woodward: 01353 776272 [LDSWoodward@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:LDSWoodward@hotmail.co.uk); Secretary: David Stazicker 01353 778129 [david.stazicker@gmail.com](mailto:david.stazicker@gmail.com); Other members – Tim Bosson, Alan Fayers, June Sallis, Lesley Sculthorpe.

## Friendship Club

March is already upon us, and we are planning what activities we can do and where we can go over the next few months.

We've had some lovely meals out and we also now have a new organising team to plan these, so we can look forward to visiting some new places! We are off to the Hartford Marina in March so I can't wait for that.

Easter is not far away, and our members are going to have a go at making easter bonnets and easter cakes to bring to the club meeting. We will judge who has been the most creative. If past performance is anything to go by, it will be hard to choose as the standards have always been high.

The Friendship Club meet every Wednesday morning from 10am to 12pm. We try to offer a variety of activities, with tea and and lots of conversation to get everyone involved in what we do. As well as meals out, it also gives people in the village a chance to meet people and make new friends. Why not come along and enjoy a morning with us and if you like it, why not make it a weekly date and become a member of our club?

Please have a look at our calendar for the next few months to get an idea of what we do.

## BEER HUB

Every blue bin day Thursday, 7pm, The Pickerels

For those men amongst us who are ancient, getting on a bit, or just old-at-heart.

Come and have a free beer and chat nonsense, or just drink a beer, either way we'll be glad of your company.

## Mepal Ladies

If you are free on alternate Friday afternoons, you would be welcome to join us at The Three Pickerels from 2.30- 4pm for a friendly chat, cup of tea and a slice of cake: it's a pleasant way to meet new people or catch up with friends. We meet every blue bin week Friday.

Alison posts a reminder on Mepal People Facebook group. We look forward to seeing you.

Hilary Bowcock and Alison Eden

# St Mary's Parish Church

**Interim Priest-in-Charge:** the Reverend Canon Mark Haworth 01354 6699491 or 07932160009  
mhaworth50@hotmail.com

For all enquiries in the first instance please contact the Churchwardens: Elizabeth Stazicker 01353 778129 email eliz.stazicker@gmail.com; Lesley Sculthorpe 01353 777267 email lesleysculthorpe@gmail.com

**Times of services:** Weekly Sunday services are held at 11.30am. However we have been asked to consider whether we should change to an earlier time. During March we hope to consult parishioners as to whether they would welcome this; if you are a regular church goer, or attend occasionally, or would consider attending if the time was more convenient- we would like to hear your views. Subscribers to the Grapevine parish magazine can reply via a short questionnaire; or email Elizabeth Stazicker, Churchwarden- contact details as above.

**Annual Church Meetings:** the Meeting of Parishioners (Vestry Meeting) will be held at 12.30pm on Sunday 21st April at St Mary's Church, followed by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting. All residents are entitled to attend the Vestry Meeting and vote for the election of Churchwardens; only members of the Church Electoral Roll may vote at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting. If you wish your name to be added to the roll please see the notice at the church and contact Jo Hamilton, Electoral Roll Officer, jo.hamilton@outlook.com by March 21st.

**A candle-lit storytelling evening at the Church** with wine and cheese at 6pm on Friday 15th March- 'The Tale of a Fenland Princess.' There is no entrance charge, but donations to the church are very welcome.

**Tea at the Church** on Saturday April 6th at 3pm. Do come for tea and cake at St Mary's - perhaps even outside if the spring weather has arrived.

**Candle-lit Storytelling**  
with wine and cheese  
on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> March  
at 6pm at St Mary's Church



Come and hear the tale of a Fenland Princess.  
There is no entrance charge, but donations  
to St Mary's are very welcome.

## PASTORAL LETTER

### BE A PART OF IT

Dear Friends,

As I write, Lent has just begun; the schools are in their last week of the first half-term, Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday observances have taken place variously in school and church, and we look now to the keeping of Lent, Holy Week, and Easter; the more restrained season of Lent lightened as always by Mothering (or Refreshment) Sunday until the joy of Easter Morning. This month also sees the beginning of the round of Annual Meeting of Parishioners and Annual Parochial Church Meetings in each parish; we have until the end of May to do this, so please look out for porch notices at church, or the date and time to be published here next month.

My hope, request, and challenge even, is that for both study, worship, prayer, and governance we increase your being with us in each parish.... at church we talk much about how to encourage more people to attend/turn up/show interest, and would always be glad to hear from you as to what would help you to feel a greater sense of belonging, and ways of growing your faith..... what are we not doing that you would like to see happening? I encourage you to be upfront about it, better still come and do so at the annual meeting of parishioners, open to everyone on the civil register of electors.

One of the sacraments of the Church is Confirmation, and as last year, we are presenting candidates to the Bishop at the Cathedral on Easter Eve, Saturday 30th March at 8pm; if you are interested, whatever your age from 11 upwards, please do be in touch with me as soon as possible (mhaworth50@hotmail.com or tel. 07932 160 009)

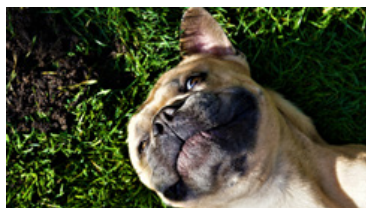
Finally, it is right to report here that after much prayer and not a little effort by many folk over the last 4 years and more, the Ely Deanery Synod has voted through the creation of a new Isle of Ely Villages Team Ministry, with two clergy intended to reside in Little Downham and Sutton, leading and working with all the local ministers, lay and ordained, as now. The other nine parishes (fyi clockwise from Downham) are Witchford, Little Thetford, Stretham, Wilburton, Haddenham, Wentworth, Mepal, Witcham and Coveney). Much of the foregoing will be helped by this new arrangement, yet to formally promulgated, but on which scaffolding there is much to build; better together.

Blessings for Lent, your parish priest

Mark  
Rev'd Canon Mark Haworth

## Control of Dogs in Mepal – please have some respect and read the signs!

Please abide by our golden rules:



1. Always keep your dogs on leads on the Recreation Field.
2. Use only the perimeter of the field to exercise your dog.
3. Clean up after your dogs every time (we now have teams playing regularly and we don't want our children (or the older players) sliding in your dog's mess!
4. Respect other walkers if your dog is off lead – retain close control at all times.
5. Clean up after your dog's wherever you are taking them – **dog mess is unacceptable and not picking it up is irresponsible.**

A message to all dog owners in Mepal: please control your animals and have leads with you at all times and only walk dogs off lead in public areas if your dog can be recalled or controlled immediately so that other users of the space are not bothered by your dog running up to them.

If you are enjoying a peaceful walk around the village or footpaths, the last thing you want is to run the gauntlet of dog owners assuming it's acceptable to allow their dogs to run wild and without any consideration to fellow residents. If you are walking your dog off-lead (NOT off-lead on the recreation field) this is a simple request to be aware of other walkers, cyclists, or riders at all times.

We want everyone to enjoy the recreation field, and we are fortunate enough to live in a part of the Country where there are many other areas where dogs can be let off lead. Yes, they may be muddy, yes, you may need to ensure that there are no other animals or humans in the fields or footpaths, yes, it may not be as convenient, but please take responsibility for your dogs, read the signs at the entrances, pick up your dog's poo, and keep them on lead on the recreation field and to the outside perimeter of the field, and when using the footpaths keep close control of your dogs at all times.



## Can you help us create a Species Rich Hedge with 'Grow Through' trees at the Recreation ground?

We have spent weeks sourcing grant funding, ecological site visits, and planning species lists and now's our chance to make a difference. Think of the life, joy and beauty given by the Field Maple, Silver Birch, Oak or Rowan you planted in the soil on the 3rd of March 2024!

Following a decision at the Parish Council Meeting on 12th February the Parish Council voted to make an application for a grant to work on the corner of the recreation field (where the unsightly spoils heap resided) as part of Mepal Parish Council's nature recovery plan. Read the meeting minutes for full details.

With huge thanks to Fiona Wynn who has worked tirelessly to get the late application in and help us secure some grant funding, we are pleased to announce that we have been allocated a grant from ECDC's Pride of Place funds, in order to plant a 60 metre Species Rich Hedgerow, together with some bulb planting, at the Recreation Ground in Mepal.

This is in addition to the two Oak trees we are getting from ECDC as one of its top 20 actions from its 2023/24 Environment Plan. From a sapling and even long after its death, the oak tree is home, shelter and nourishment for around 2,300 species, helping to increase biodiversity.

This is only the first stage of our 5-year plans to improve the area and we hope to add further hedging, accessible paths, improve the basketball area and add further benches in future.

Now, with your help, we are looking forward to the fun part, the planting. Before we place the order for the small plants, we need a minimum of 10 people to commit to helping for a couple of hours. We anticipate plants will arrive in time for Sunday 3rd March, 10am (but possibly 10th March). Please WhatsApp (or text) Fiona Wynn on 07748 963 126 to join the Planting Team WhatsApp group.







## Let's SCRAP fly-tipping

Dispose of your items properly to avoid prosecution or an unlimited fine. Fly-tipping is the illegal dumping of items. If your waste is fly-tipped, by you or by someone else on your behalf, you could face a fixed penalty notice of up to £400 or an unlimited fine.

If you leave items:

- beside street bins and recycling banks
- on the floor of communal bin areas
- outside closed recycling centres and charity shops

### This is fly-tipping!

East Cambridgeshire's have reported a continued drop in incidents in the Ely standard in February 2023, however in January 2024 the Environmental Officer who collected an earlier dump on Engine bank reported that incidences of fly-tipping are on the increase again. In and around Mepal we have seen some truly shocking incidents in the last six months.

One conscientious Mepal resident reported a fly tip on Witcham Road in January and following advice from local district Councillor Mark Inskip, reported it to ECDC for them to investigate and remove the dumped waste. Last year eight fixed penalties were issued for fly tipping in East Cambs.

### If it is your waste, it is your responsibility.

Find a registered waste carrier in your area on the Environment Agency's website:

<https://environment.data.gov.uk/public-register/view/search-waste-carriers-brokers>

### Always follow the S.C.R.A.P. code:

**S**uspect all waste carriers. Do not let them take your rubbish until they provide proof of registration. Note their vehicle's registration plate.

**C**heck that a waste carrier is registered on the Environment Agency's website.

**R**efuse any unexpected offers to have your rubbish taken away.

**A**sk how your rubbish will be disposed of and seek evidence of this.

**P**aperwork must be obtained: a proper invoice, waste transfer note or receipt, including a description of the waste being removed and the waste carrier's contact details.

Fly-tipping on public land can be reported to Customer Services on **01353 665555** or via the ECDC Self Service Portal using the online form below:

[https://eastcambs-self.achieveservice.com/service/ECSS\\_Fly\\_Tip\\_Report](https://eastcambs-self.achieveservice.com/service/ECSS_Fly_Tip_Report)



# Parish Council News

## Who are your current Parish Councillors?

The up-to-date list of your Parish Councillors is always available on the Parish Council Website, so please take a few minutes to look us up!  
[www.mepalparish.org/parish-council/councillors/](http://www.mepalparish.org/parish-council/councillors/)

### Mepal Parish Councillors



Lorna Williams



Jack Hickman



Sam Knightley



Diana Billimore



Tom Bradney



Lesley Sculthorpe

## Councillor vacancies reduce to only one following recent co-option of new councillors

At the Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 12th February, we were delighted to co-opt two further Councillors to increase the number to 6. We have one further application to consider for co-option at the next Parish Council Meeting, but having nearly a full Council will hopefully help us to look at some more grant funding to accelerate some of the projects we have had to put on hold over the last year, and reduce the pressure on the existing Councillors and Clerk. What will be vital is that, at the next election in 2027, we maintain these numbers, to allow us to get General Power of Competency, which will allow us to better support the community each year. More on this in the Annual Report to be published in May.

## Annual Tree works

We have completed the interim tree survey and after identifying a few trees requiring work, East Cambs Trading have carried this out. The next survey will be in 2 years.

## Football

We are all pleased with the increased usage of the field and Pavilion for football this season. The sports lease and grass cutting is working reasonably well despite some early equipment failures. The pitches are holding up well, and it is great to see the Youth, Ladies and Men's teams playing almost every week, weather permitting.



## Please drive with Care in Mepal

Hey there, Village Drivers! Let's have a quick chat about something super important: road safety within our lovely community. We all love our village, don't we? Lately, there's been a bit of a buzz on the Mepal Matters FB group about some speeding issues, and it's time we address it.

First off, let's remember that our village is a cul-de-sac, meaning there's no real through traffic. That makes it even more crucial for us to watch our speeds and pay attention to our driving, especially considering most of the culprits may be our fellow residents. Yes, we're talking to you!

Safety should be our top priority and speeding through our streets puts people and animals at risk, so, let's all take a moment to slow down, be mindful of our surroundings, and drive with care. Let's keep our village safe and remember, it's not just about arriving at your destination quickly; it's about making sure everyone gets there safely. Thanks for listening, and let's keep our village roads safe for all!

## Mepal Neighbourhood Development Plan - Update

Over the past two years, Mepal Parish Council has been preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for its area. On 13 October 2023, Mepal Parish Council formally submitted its Neighbourhood Plan to East Cambridgeshire District Council for independent examination, which includes a final round of public consultation.

East Cambridgeshire District Council invited comments on the submitted Mepal Neighbourhood Plan from Thursday 2 November 2023 to Friday 15 December 2023.

An independent Examiner has been appointed to examine the Plan and recommend whether the Plan should proceed to a referendum. The Examiner is Andrew Ashcroft MRTPI. Further updates as the examination proceeds, including any questions raised by the Examiner, and the recent response from Mepal Parish Council are available on the ECDC website: [www.eastcambs.gov.uk/local-development-framework/mepal-neighbourhood-plan](http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/local-development-framework/mepal-neighbourhood-plan)



# Your Hedgehogs Need You!

I am simply devastated to report that despite all the hard work of Mepal's 'Help our Hedgehogs' Group, the heartbreaking reality is these gentle little creatures are now silently slipping away from our village.

Working with the Peoples Trust for Endangered Species, we have been mapping routes, monitoring numbers, & linking gardens across Mepal, since 2015.

We have been doing this work because - to find enough food, shelter, nesting spots, & a mate - each Hedgehog needs access to a remarkable 30 - 40 gardens!

Previously, each night, I would typically see 3 - 6 Hedgehogs, doing their amazing work, in the garden. Remarkably in 2020 we even identified 10 small Autumn born Hoglets!

There has been a gradual decline, & then in September 2022 something catastrophic happened to Hedgehogs in Mepal. Across the village people such as Pat Tasker & Evelyn Woodward report "No Hedgehogs" at their Feeding Stations all last summer. Others that keep an eye out for them report similar - "No Hedgegies". Throughout 2023 I saw only ONE Hedgehog- **all year!**

It breaks my heart that these gentle creatures, who have no voice, are literally dying on our watch. Since 2000 National research shows we have lost half of all our Hedgehogs, with the East of England being one of the worst effected areas. Hedgehogs are now on the 'Red List' for endangered mammals, & shockingly classed as 'vulnerable to extinction'.

## What can we do to help?

- Leave more areas of long grass.
- Lots of Leaf & log piles. 'Leave the Leaves'
- Create 13x13cm (CD case sized holes, too small for most pets) in EVERY gate & fence (gaps under fences also helps Frogs, Newts, & Toads). Talk to neighbours & create these vital Highways across our village
- Clean dishes of water all year- especially in hot summer, & cold winter, (helps our Birds too).
- Go chemical free in the garden. Lawn 'treatments', pellets, & weed killers all effect nature's balance of vital insects, beetles, worms, birds, & healthy soils. Chemical free = more food for Birds & Hedgehogs
- Plant Hedges
- No rat/mouse poison. Banned in Europe, due to the dieing mouse crawling away & poisoning Tawny Owls, Cats, Dogs & Hedgehogs. Local vets report cat & dog poisonings. We live in the countryside, the occasional rat really doesn't harm us.
- Switch to some Organic or Regeneratively farmed foods- even if it's just swapping some frequently eaten foods this supports farmers working with nature, & avoids overuse of herbicides, pesticides & artifical fertilisers. A



weekly Veg box (eg Riverford), or Ely Farmers Market makes this easy.

- Less 'Green Bin', more 'Compost Heaps'. Leaves, branches, sticks etc are valuable garden resources. Adding life, shelter, homes & food to our gardens

## Solutions for common concerns -

- 'I'm worried about my dog'. Dogs & Hedgehogs are fine, if we provide multiple access points in & out for quick escape, rather than just one gap, which can make it a bit of a trap for Hedgehogs
- 'I don't want neighbours cats in my garden'. Placing a brick horizontally across the gap creates a hog friendly zig zag, which cats find awkward to negotiate
- 'I'm concerned a gap will encourage rats & disease'. Rats climb fences easily. Avoiding build up of bird food & food scraps in gardens will prevent rats. For reassurance - Catching Leptospirosis (Weil's disease), in the UK is vanishingly rare. A very slight occupational hazard if a ditch or sewer worker, but absolutely no threat to gardeners. An occasional rat just isn't a concern. More info here - [www.ufaw.org.uk/rodent-control/humane-rodent-control-detailed-advice](http://www.ufaw.org.uk/rodent-control/humane-rodent-control-detailed-advice)
- 'My fence has concrete barge boards'. Cut the hole in fence above, & provide a brick step either side. Hedgehogs are good climbers

## Helpful resources -

- Excellent Facebook group - 'Gardening for Wildlife (UK). Putting wildlife first'
- 'Wildlife Gardening' by Kate Bradbury (available preloved from World of Books).
- British Hedgehog Preservation Society & Peoples Trust for Endangered Species

**Did you know?** The latest science shows the more 'life' in a garden (particularly birdsong) the happier people are!

Hedgehog highway signs, & advice freely available from Mepal's 'Help our Hedgehogs' group. Could you help others make gaps in their fences/gates, or log Highways linking across the village ?

If you would like to get involved with Mepal's 'Help our Hedgehogs' group please call/text Fiona - 07748 963 126

[www.nffn.org.uk/support-nature-friendly](http://www.nffn.org.uk/support-nature-friendly)

# DIARY DATES

## March

Wed 6th	Friendship Club Bingo	10:00
Sun 3rd	St Mary's Parish Eucharist	11.30
Mon 11th	Full Parish Council Meeting at Mepal Pavilion	18:30
Wed 13th	Friendship Club Bring & buy something you have made that you would like to sell, cakes, jewellery, knitting, cards.	10:00
Fri 8th	Mepal Ladies at the Three Pickerals	14:30 - 16:00
Sun 10th	St Mary's March Mothering Sunday activity	10:30
Sun 10th	St Mary's Holy Communion	11:20
Fri 15th	St Mary's Storytelling with wine & cheese	18:00
Sun 17th	St Mary's Parish Eucharist	11:30
Wed 20th	Friendship Club Lunch outing T.B.A	10:00
Fri 22nd	Mepal Ladies at the Three Pickerals	14:30 - 16:00
Sun 24th	St Mary's Holy Communion	09.30
Sun 24th	St Mary's Morning Praise	11.30
Tue 26th	St Mary's Compline	19:00
Wed 27th	Friendship Club craft demo, judge easter bonnets/cakes	10:00
Fri 29th	St Mary's Good Friday Last Hour	14:00
Sun 31st	St Mary's Easter Day Eucharist	11.30

## April

Sat 6th	St Mary's Tea at the church	15:00
Sun 7th	St Mary's Parish Eucharist	11:30
Wed 3rd	Friendship Club Bingo	10:00
Wed 10th	Friendship Club raffle coffee and chat	10:00
Sun 14th	St Mary's Holy Communion	11.30
Wed 17th	Friendship Club Fish and chips	12:00 - 14:00
Sun 21st	St Mary's Parish Eucharist	11.30
Sun 21st	St Mary's Vestry meeting & APCM	12.30
Mon 22nd	Annual Parish Meeting at Mepal Pavilion	18:30
Mon 22nd	Full Parish Council Meeting at Mepal Pavilion	19:00
Wed 24th	Friendship Club games morning	10:00
Sun 28th	St Mary's Holy Communion	09.30
Sun 28th	St Mary's Morning Praise	11.30

***Dates/times were correct at time of print - please check with clubs directly for any changes.***

If you want to provide any diary dates for the May/June 2024 issue then please ensure these are provided before the copy deadline.

Send articles & dates to:  
mepalmatters@mepalparish.org

**Next copy deadline:**  
**8<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

**PLEASE NOTE THIS DATE IN YOUR DIARY NOW!**

**Thank you to the volunteers who help distribute the Mepal Matters issues!**

