

25th September 2024



Chair of Islip Parish Council
% Ms Jill Dickinson (Parish Clerk)
4 Mordaunt Close
Lowick
Kettering
NN14 3BY

Dear Mrs Duval

Thank you for your e-mail requesting that the clock chimes of St Nicholas Islip be unmuffled. We have discussed the matter at our most recent Parochial Church Council (PCC) meeting and would like to explain our position.

In January 2024, shortly after the restored clock started chiming for the first time in over 10 years, we received a collective complaint from several residents who live adjacent to the church. The complaint was about residents being woken and kept awake by the chimes during the night. At that time we responded with sympathy, but also explained about the history of chimes in the village, the restoration of the clock and that many other residents were delighted to hear the return of the chimes.

Then on 30th May we were written to by North Northants Council advising us of a complaint they had received about noise from the chiming of the church clock. The letter warned us that they were commencing investigations under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime & Policing Act 2014 and The Environmental Protection Act 1990. They also advised that we take all reasonable steps to avoid the possibility of the chimes disturbing our neighbours. At this point I and the churchwardens started considering more carefully what options we had.

The letter was followed up a fortnight later with a phone call from a North Northants Council Officer, who was soon to go out and monitor the noise level of the bells within an adjacent dwelling. In conversation, he recommended that we try to ensure the bells do not disturb neighbours at night. He also advised that whilst there were legal precedents of nighttime church chimes being retained in the face of complaints, the case results were mixed and the fact that our chimes had not rung for over 10 years would significantly count against us. On the basis of this advice, I informed the Council Officer that I would seek to mitigate the noise level of the chimes later that day, whilst we worked towards a longer term solution of nighttime silencing.

The Revd Nolan D. R. Robson - Rector of Thrapston, Denford & Islip
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We considered our options to be as follows:

1. **Leave the chimes running, await investigation and see if legal proceedings were enacted.**
This would please those who appreciate the recently returned chimes, but it fails to respond to the legitimate complaints from neighbours. There was no doubt the chimes contravened permitted nighttime noise levels and on the advice of the Council Officer, we were unlikely to end up with legal success, should proceeding progress. Jesus tells us to be good neighbours and to settle disputes quickly, before we get near to court, therefore we did not consider this to be a good option for us.
2. **Disconnect the chimes but leave the clock running.**
This would solve the noise problem for those who are being disturbed. But since the clock face is only visible from a few locations and it is the return of the chimes which are the real delight to many other villagers, this also did not seem a suitable solution.
3. **Have a night silencer fitted to the clock.**
A night silencer would disconnect the chimes during nighttime hours (e.g. last chime at 10pm, first chime at 8am). This would come at a cost of approximately £2500 +VAT. An auto-regulator could also be fitted, which would keep the clock running accurately to time. This would be an additional cost of approximately £2500 +VAT. Faculty permission and fundraising would be required for these, which would take several months.
4. **Reduce the volume of the chimes.**
This would reduce the volume of the chimes to a level where they do not disturb neighbours during the night, whilst also keeping the noise of the chimes in part. The simplest way to achieve this was to wrap rubber around the striking hammer and this was the action taken following conversation with the Council Officer. It has successfully mitigated the chimes to a level where complaints and proceedings have stopped. However, getting the volume down to an acceptable nighttime level has meant it is barely audible in the daytime from anywhere outside the churchyard.

The PCC thank Islip Village Council for your interest in the clock chimes and have considered your e-mail carefully. We are especially encouraged to hear about villagers who were delighted to have the chimes ring out on the hour again. However, we continue to think that option 4 is the most sensible short term solution, whilst we progress towards option 3 as the longer term solution. Out of love for some of the neighbours who live closest to the church and because we have no desire for noise complaint investigations to recommence, we are therefore not willing to unmuffle the chimes at this stage. Instead we will continue to work towards achieving day time chiming, which we hope will be a reasonable compromise for all.

If you want to discuss this matter further, then please do not hesitate to get in touch and if the council would like to contribute towards a nighttime silencer, that would be also appreciated.

Yours sincerely



Revd Nolan D. R. Robson
Rector of Thrapston and Islip; Chair of Thrapston and Islip PCC.