

*St Albans and Welwyn Circuit, Beds, Essex and Herts District*

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Church Council Secretary: Chris Kitchin Tel: 01707 332 470

**Minutes of Extra Church Council Meeting held on**

**Wednesday 30 August 2017 at Hatfield Road**

**The reports on which the following decisions were made are attached to the official copy of the minutes.**

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|  | **PRESENT**  Rev’d Andrew Prout (Chair), Eric Bridgstock, Sue Davey, Marion Eaton, Philip Eaton, Rosemary Fletcher, Freda Gray, Chris Kitchin (Secretary), Val Parker, Lesley Saunders, John Scott, George Selvarajan, Caroline Tough, Lianne Weidmann, Gina Woodhead. (Total 15 present). | |
|  | **APOLOGIES**  Chris Hancock, Ros Hancock, Helen Jeffery, Joanna Rose, Peter Wallace, Denise Willingham  Angela Andrews, Rev Alison Facey, Idy Osibodu. | |
|  |  | **Action needed** |
| **1**  **1.1** | **WELCOME and OPENING DEVOTION**  The Rev’d Andrew Prout welcomed everyone and opened the meeting with devotions. |  |
| **2**  **2.1** | **MEMBERSHIP OF THE MEETING**  A list of the membership of the Church Council had been circulated with the agenda. The list was approved in accordance with Standing Order 613.  When the Church Council appoints a church member to be one of its representatives to the circuit meeting, but is not at that point a member of the Church Council, at Hatfield Road it has been the practice to automatically appoint that person to the Church Council under Standing Order 610 (1) (xi). George Selvarajan was duly appointed to membership of the Church Council under that standing order with immediate effect.  In addition, the Church Council appointed Freda Gray with immediate effect for a period ending at the church's annual General Church meeting in 2018. | Secretary |
| **3** | **NOTICE OF ANY OTHER BUSINESS**  **The calling notice for this meeting had stated that the agenda would comprise the following:**    Welcome, Apologies & Opening Devotions  Membership of the Church Council  Receipt of the following papers:  - *Response of HRMC Church Stewards to the initial questions circulated by the CLT****[A]***  *- Letter to Chairs of District & Superintendent Ministers from the President, Vice President and the Secretary of the Conference* ***[B]***  *- A Vision for the future of the Circuit from the CLT* ***[C]***  *Discussion and development of responses to 'A Vision for the future of the Circuit'.*  Date, time and place of the next meeting of the Church Council (Tuesday 17 October 2017 at 8.00pm). |  |
| **4** | **THE BACKGROUND**  The receipt of the above papers was noted.  The Circuit Leadership Team (CLT) held a Vision Day on Saturday 25th March 2017, when it began to look seriously as the future of the circuit in the next 5-10 years. From this meeting each church in the circuit was given a series of questions to consider and reply before the CLT meeting in May 2017.  Two of the questions being asked were: "What opportunities do you see for growth?" and "Where do you see your church in 3 or 5 or 10 years time?". That questionnaire had been completed by the church stewards and copies had been circulated to members of the Church Council.    At the June 2017 Circuit Meeting there were other presentations such as Circuit Finance, including an impassioned plea from the Circuit Treasurer for a Stewardship campaign and for more generous giving.    The CLT met again in July 2017 to consider all opinions and comments received including the submission from our Church Stewards [A], and had produced a paper [C] for all members of the Circuit Meeting, which was to be shared with all members of each church council.    This paper required an extra Church Council to be held before the September Circuit Meeting on Wednesday 13 September so that church representatives could feed comments into that meeting.    The recent letter [B] from the current President, Vice President and Secretary of the Conference of the Methodist Church about challenges and changes facing us all was also relevant.    Members of the Church Council had been asked to prayerfully consider the issues raised in the latest series of questions and come prepared to contribute to an important matter in the life of the Circuit and every local church in the context of our work and mission..    Given the time of year, it was appreciated that not all would be able to attend so any questions on these matters could be directed to Andrew and the Church Stewards.  As a result of conversations in this meeting of the Church Council, the representatives from the Church Council to the Circuit Meeting on Wednesday 13 September 2017 would be expected to feedback its views. |  |
|  | The representatives from Hatfield Road Church Council to the circuit meeting were: Joanna Rose, George Selvarajan and Chris Hancock. Because this meeting was being held during the main holiday season both Joanna and Chris were on holiday. It would fall to George and Philip Eaton as Treasurer (who is also a member of the Circuit Meeting) to undertake that task.  In view of the nature of the one subject agenda, it was agreed that the Secretary could make an audio recording of the proceedings for the purpose of compiling a suitable record. | GS, PE  Secretary |
|  | **INTRODUCTION**  Andrew provided a comprehensive explanation of how the circuit had reached this point and explained a number of issues in detail. Two members who were absent had also sent their written comments and these were circulated during the meeting. Consideration was then given to a variety of matters and, amongst a wide range of comments made, the following points were noted:  General   * This is a generally muddled paper which lacks consistency and lacks a vision statement. Little time had been given for churches to consider these important matters; * It feels more like an 'End-of-Life Plan' rather than a 'Growth Plan' and does not address its first two purposes; * Current membership figures are given but no historical data or membership projections are provided; * There is reference to bureaucratic demands, but these are not identified or explained nor explanation given about why these demands should rest on presbyters; * Noted differing rates of decline in different churches and asked what can be learned from those churches which appear to be active. Could the circuit improve communication so to that good practice could be shared more effectively; * There is danger in making decisions about stationing and staffing in   a piecemeal way making this a not very effective way of operating;  The circuit needs to develop a five-year plan with specific and measurable targets, rather than the soft language used;  Churches were asked to identify where they saw themselves in 3 or 5 or 10 years time. Any feedback received has not been reflected in the paper;   * The paper raised the 'query whether continuing as a separate circuit was a good use of presbyters' and church members' time'. No explanation, no alternatives explained and no rationale provided; * The case made for the St Albans Methodist churches is inadequate and need further work.   Membership and Giving   * If connexional and circuit membership figures were projected for the period under consideration, membership and attendance would be halved. If the present level of circuit staffing were maintained, then the consequence would be that personal giving would need to double; * Is seeking growth in all churches a realistic expectation?   Financial   * Neither Marlborough Road nor Hatfield Road cover their contribution to the circuit assessment through personal giving; * Concern expressed about the envelope scheme, the number of people who have envelopes allocated to them but the lower number of envelopes in use, and the need to explain its purpose and how it works; * If circuit staffing were reduced, members would need to understand that the visibility and availability of presbyters would be reduced. Different ways of working would need to be found. These could include the more effective use of lay people and the creation of joint church councils; * Certain parts of the circuit carry a disproportionate financial burden; * All churches need to be challenged about financial giving; * The current level of assessment is unsustainable and noted the funding for the De Havilland Project will cease in two years time. * Could the use of legacy income be an opportunity to increase appropriate staffing in order to achieve growth. |  |
|  | **CONCLUSION**  The Church Council noted the considerable work which had been contributed to date by the Circuit Stewards and asked its representatives to the forthcoming Circuit Meeting to express, on its behalf, the following key points:  The Church Council decided to defer further consideration of the two issues raised by the circuit stewards until a comprehensive vision paper could be prepared. This should contain a greater clarity of vision, more detail about the options available, what is affordable, its definition of growth, membership and attendance projections, and the implications if the current staffing levels were reduced.  A delay in considering a more comprehensive paper may result in missing the forthcoming 2018 round of stationing but this was considered acceptable in order to achieve the best outcome. |  |
|  | **DATE DATE OF NEXT MEETING**  **The n** The nextmeeting will be held at 8.00pm on Tuesday 17 October 2017. | **Secretary** |

**Circuit Vision Questions 2017**

**[A]**

**HRMC Stewards Responses**

**1 Estimated number of active congregation. Please include those who contribute to church finances, and/or are regular attenders, or within your pastoral care if housebound, whether or not in formal membership. If you can give an estimate of the age profile that would be helpful.** Total 80 - crèche (6)/Sunday Club (12)/Youth Fellowship (7)/ 18-49 (15)/ 50+ (40)

**2 Your most important outreach activities, and any planned new outreach projects.** Babies & Toddlers, Aldersgate Café, Day Care Group. No new projects planned as yet (but see item 6).

**3 The condition of your buildings and any major expenditure planned in the next 5 years.**

**3.1** The basic fabric is sound. However, our 2015 Quinquennial Inspection identified that some major refurbishment and repair work is urgently required, mainly to the roofs and guttering, as well as the replacement of an old metal-framed window to the main hall. Quotes received to date vary from £20,000 to £32,000. This necessary work is planned for this summer.

**3.2** The floor to the main hall has deteriorated to the point where complete replacement is considered the best option. Doing nothing is not an option, as there are safety issues with splintering floor boards and loosening nails. Quotes for this are in the £16,000 to £25,000 range. This work is planned to take place as soon as possible (summer 2017/spring 2018). **3.3** Other refurbishment work is also being explored, starting with the possible remodelling of our entrance and foyer, the purpose being to create:

o a more attractive/impactful external appearance – a ‘presence’ on Hatfield Road

o better visibility into the building from the street

o lighter, more open feel inside the foyer for those entering

o better visibility, from the foyer, of the worship area and, perhaps, the large hall

o foyer more fit for purpose:

* + - as a meeting/greeting area, especially before/after services
    - as a hub for the distribution of information and resources to church members as a witness to other users of the premises, through displays and literature
    - for current activities that use the foyer, eg Aldersgate Café, Day Care Centre

Costing unknown at present time but range of £50,000-£100,000 anticipated. Should Church Council decide work should be undertaken, which is by no means certain, we would aim for this to take place in summer 2018.

**3.4** Further refurbishment and updating is under consideration for the main Worship Area, the Small Hall and, possibly, the car-park, by the end of 2019. Costings unknown at this time.

**4 Other churches nearby, and your relationship with them.**

**4.1** St Paul’s C of E - little direct relationship now. Historically (within the last 30 years or so), there have been some shared services, pulpit exchanges and joint activities.

**4.2** Living Waters International Christian Fellowship – a gathered Italian-speaking congregation that meets on our premises. Occasional shared services.

**4.3** Others in the Fleetville area are Ashley Hall Church and the New Testament Church of God. No direct relationship at present.

**4.4** There are yet others on the boundary or just outside it, such as The Vineyard, St.Lukes C of E, and even Trinity and Homewood Road URCs, but we do not have a direct relationship with any of these at present. We understand that Trinity URC are looking to see whether they can link more closely with other churches, in response to their own shortage of ministers.

**5 What opportunities do you see for growth?**

HRMC is well placed in the heart of Fleetville, a large residential part of St Albans with a strong identity of its own. Being on the main road, there is a good deal of passing traffic, both vehicular and pedestrian. The church has good physical resources, in terms of rooms, furniture and equipment, and enjoys the benefit of a friendly, supportive and caring fellowship. As well as its own active groups, such as Café, Babies & Toddlers, Network Fellowship, Day-Care and The Brigades, several outside clubs and associations use the building during the week. There are therefore opportunities to give strong, coherent and positive Christian witness to all these sections of the local community.

**6 Where do you see your church in 3 or 5 or 10 years’ time?**

**By 2019/20** In order to help us take up the opportunities identified under item 5 above, consultations with the congregation over the last year or two have yielded many suggestions as to how we might attract people to our church, by showing it to be active, caring and outward looking and of value to the community, and how we might develop more welcoming and non-threatening opportunities for local people to come onto the premises. This means continuing with those things we already do well, but also looking to develop other ways of doing things in a building made fit for purpose. We anticipate seeking to work in close cooperation with other churches in our area, especially on community outreach projects, eg supporting families, older folk or the homeless.

The hope is that, by 2019, coinciding with HRMC having been in Fleetville for 125 years, we will have successfully implemented some of the suggestions made, perhaps capitalising on opportunities afforded by any updating of the premises, and that we will have started to see a return on our efforts.

**2020-2022** Having said all that, we recognise that the number of HRMC members who are both committed and active is diminishing – indeed, we cannot always staff our existing outreach activities from our own congregation, and we are currently struggling to form a full Stewarding team – and so our efforts to attract new people may well fall short for a variety of reasons. We are also aware of the increasing pressure on the Circuit and we understand that Circuit arrangements may be forced to change. This includes the possibility of HRMC and MRMC joining together to form a single presence in St Albans. Although we have not specifically asked the wider HRMC congregation about this possibility, we don’t believe either congregation is quite ready to accept it just yet. If this were to be the way forward, this near- term period is likely to be when active discussion and positive moves towards this would start to happen.

**2023-2027** It is quite likely that only one Methodist presence in St Albans will be sustainable by this time, whether it is on one of the two existing sites or on a different ‘neutral’ one. It may even be that we will have reached a situation where we will be looking to combine with other non-Conformist churches in the area. We feel that any new or combined church community which may come about, even if based on an existing site, should involve a completely new build. ****

**[B]**

**[C]**

We suggest we seek presbyteral appointments at both 2018 and 2019 stationing, relinquishing one of these posts from 1.9.23, or sooner dependent on the outcome of the current and forthcoming stationing and invitation rounds and any extensions to appointments that are agreed beyond 2018 and 2019.

NB Revd Rosemary Fletcher has requested an extension to her appointment of four years which if agreed at the September Circuit Meeting will keep her in the Circuit until August 2022. If not agreed a new presbyter could be sought for the period 2018 - 2023.

**Radlett** is enthusiastic, but experiences difficulty in sustaining outreach, finance and necessary administration due to its relatively low numbers.

**Welwyn / Hatfield** In the last year Revd N Johnson left the circuit and Revd N Young indicated he will retire in 2018. Our 50% youth worker appointment at Birchwood runs to 31.8.18. A deacon has been appointed for five years with effect from 1.9.17. A presbyter succeeding Revd N Young would be appointed for five years with effect from 1.9.18.

In a circuit context:

The figures come from the 2017/18 circuit budget papers and population from Wikipedia.

From an overall perspective, Welwyn / Hatfield would justify substantial Methodist presence, but we are comparatively weak and fragmented. We would like the new presbyter to:

Support the congregations at Oxlease and Ludwick Way

Birchwood - build on the 50% youth worker appointment to grow its membership from the younger, local families who benefit from that work

Digswell - maintain growth, liaising with CofE leadership.

The church at Oxlease is not easy to maintain or well suited to current needs, but has extensive grounds. We would support replacing the church with a more appropriate facility, as part of, or funded by development of the site. Ideally we would like this to be Christian facility, possibly an MHA home, which we could work with to develop mission in the area.

It would be more practical, as the presbyter from 1.9.18 will cover Hatfield as well as WGC, to have a manse for the presbyter closer to the centre of the section.

**St John’s Potters Bar** SJPB have a strong congregation and are planning new outreach projects, including the possibility of a shared youth worker.

**Shenley** has a small but enthusiastic membership. Their 50% youth worker appointment runs to 31.8.18, and we feel some continuation of this work should be supported.

**Circuit** Membership has declined and the bureaucratic demands on churches and the circuit have increased enormously, with result that presbyters, stewards and church members are spending more time on administration to the detriment of worship, pastoral care and outreach. We query whether continuing as a separate circuit is a good use of presbyters’ and church members’ time.

## Finance

To put the recommendations made into context an initial projection is included at Appendix 4. If the circuit wishes to go further with the various suggestions more detailed and properly costed proposals will be needed in each case.

At this stage we do not have a budget for the Chipmunk Close capital work and it is assumed revenue costs will fall within the 2016/17 circuit budget. If the circuit and churches wish to maintain staffing at 5 ministers in the 2018 and 2019 stationing rounds the churches will need to fund assessments as indicated below.



## Conclusion

The Circuit Meeting is asked to consider

1 Does the Circuit Meeting as a whole support the vision and principles set out?

NB – individual projects are only raised as suggestions at this stage. Any project would need detailed consideration before commencing.

2 Does the Circuit Meeting support the employment of 5 ministers (4 presbyters and 1 deacon) in the next 5 to 6 years as necessary to progress the approach set out and will we fully meet the resulting circuit budgets, both as a circuit and as individual churches?

*NB If the churches are not willing to make this significant commitment then serious consideration will have to be given as to whether or not we will be able to fund and support any requests for extensions of their appointment beyond August 2019, with due regard to length requested or otherwise, if made in the Summer of 2018 by the Revds Ali Facey and Andrew Prout, or indeed the appointment of a new minister if either decide to leave in August 2019, leading to a reduction in the numbers of staff to 3 presbyters and a deacon with implications for the Circuit and its viability in its current configuration.*