

## **Christ Church Walmersley**

**November 2017**

**Report:** C Barson and H Ford

**Title:** Community Consultation on development of Church, Church Hall and Land

### **Executive Summary:**

The church of Christ Church Walmersley is in need of development and the consultation process undertaken with diverse groups offers an insight into the needs of the community and church. There are no simple recommendations with a set of complex needs, emotions and desires on all sides. Simplicity would suggest the Parish should sell the land for the most economic benefit and refit/re-build the church. This would ignore the needs, wants, and desires of a community that does see itself as serious stakeholders in the future of the church. Whilst not necessarily being involved in the church and its life, people are concerned across a multitude of concerns, such as prices of housing, the environment, loss of the building itself and many more. These have all been well publicised but remain of concern to the community. There does appear a genuine concern and the Trustees/PCC will need to take all these concerns into account when making a decision for the future of Christ Church and the community it serves.

The report will detail the methodology, the conversations held and the concerns raised. There are a number of considerations for the church to consider, especially concerning how the community can be proactively engaged in the process into the future.

### **Introduction:**

Christ Church Walmersley is a church serving the village of Walmersley on the outskirts of Bury Metropolitan Council area. The church serves a defined village community, identifying itself as a village, with a village culture. The parish served by Christ Church, is not a poor community within the general IMD index although it does have some issues of deprivation. It is a nice place to live with good housing stock and nears the 50% least deprived areas of Britain. With that stated there are concerns for c 12% of children who live in poverty and 21% of families are single parent households. There is a dearth of qualifications for some residents (22%) and there is also an older generation who are claiming secondary benefits – 15%. This adds up to a good place to live with little poverty and this should inform the nature of the churches missional activity.

The church has served this village since 1838 as the parish of Walmersley.

This report will focus on the results from a series of qualitative research groups held during 2017. The current buildings at Christ Church comprise a church a church hall and the PCC have ownership under a trust deed of land to the west of the church comprising c 4 acres.

The Archdeacon of Bolton, due to inconsistencies in community engagement and some problems with the previous attempted sale of the land has developed a task group to engage in the process. It is intended to advise on the process and report back autumn 2017. The church field and site must be used to replace the church and hall buildings that are in poor condition. Previously the church considered selling the site and entered into negotiations with a housing association. The sale of the

land for building will impact upon the community and the idea to hold a series of events stemmed from the task group. The aim was to ensure the next phase looked at the impact upon the community, options regarding the land sale with engagement being at the heart of this to build bridges and reduce conflict that has shrouded the church in recent years.

The initial facilitation day was held in 2015 with further work completed during 2017.

### **Methodology:**

This report is based upon the development of three focus groups representing the following:

1. Current users of the church hall
2. The church congregation.
3. VCSE partners more especially the Friends of Walmersley Village.
4. A large general event held to complete the data collection including all the above and others.

The invites went to all stakeholders of the groups operating within the parish and to some external to the parish where deemed necessary. The groups were each asked a series of questions based upon schedules similar to that attached at appendix 1.

The focus groups were facilitated by the same two officers from Church House, experienced in this type of data collection and analysis. The schedules were developed to aid a conversation to take place between those attending and to show how the church at Christ Church could be invested in to play an even more active role in meeting the needs of the community.

The data collected from the groups was taken and analysed by the officers to create this report. From the data key concepts were developed based upon conversations held. A framework of concepts was developed from the data incorporated into this report as findings and later recommendations.

### **Findings:**

The following are the findings of the facilitation grouped into sections of relevance to the church. The church exists to proclaim God, to seek to nurture new disciples into the Christian Faith, to offer loving service to those in need, to seek to bring justice for all and to safeguard God's kingdom. These marks of mission are Anglican and belong to all people.

1. **The Building:** In relation to the building and sustainability there is a need to resolve the issue with a single build option. The meetings reported the church building as iconic in the community and agreed it held a special place for the village. The community suggested that it would be devastating to lose the church although recognised the need to develop the site. The views for the current church buildings were that it was a cold, unwelcoming space that

should be developed into an ecologically proofed space, that was warm and welcoming. An attractive building should be built to replace the old church although many suggested a renovation and joining of the hall and church. The majority view as of glass, new structure with toilets, community space and a widening of the users, becoming a central tenet of the community into the future. The consultation raised awareness to potential partnerships, not least with FOWV, school and statutory sector to build a business plan for the future use of the space created. Finally the reuse of current fabric was supported as a way of merging the old and the new, not least the bells of the church that are admired by many.

2. The Legal Issues: The facilitation raised legal concerns from the community. Whilst it is accepted the PCC are the legal guardians of the church and holders of the trust deed for the land, the community do wish to move on from the conflictual relationships of the past. The meetings heard that there will be options developed and the community wish to maintain their involvement, supporting what should be a new build that meets the needs and aspirations of all those in the village. The community raised concerns over car parking, over traffic flow and access to homes. The community wish the PCC to control the building on the field and not to abrogate responsibility, maintaining a governance role to ensure the community involvement is enabled. The community worry that the PCC will simply abrogate their responsibility to the community and sell the land without recourse to covenant.  
*(The PCC have been advised that they should not insert any covenants in the sale of the land nor should the PCC raise any expectations in consultation with stakeholders that this may be the case. The PCC is not holding land on trust for secular purposes but on its own ecclesiastical trusts under the Parochial Church Powers Measure 1956 which do of course include "promoting in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelical, social and ecumenical") Note from the Diocesan Registrar 21.11.2017.*
3. Community Engagement: The community wish to be involved, not just with the legal aspects and use of the field but also wish to support the church. Many ideas were generated to develop a natural hub for the community across a wide range of services and opportunities. There is significant support needed for many people not least those families with single parents and older people in poverty. There are causes of concern with the lack of qualifications for older people and many ideas were suggested from lunch clubs through to uniformed service provision. There are uniformed services using the hall but this could be widened to support young people who have little to do in the community. The new centre could incorporate a hub for young people, wi fi etc. The Hub could support smaller groups developed for specific needs i.e. advice and information, slimming world, crafts etc. The community are also aware of the need for occasional offices and how this might dovetail with increased community use.
4. Overarching there was reported a lack of trust between the community and the church. This has been due to the previous problems in selling the field and the community not being properly consulted. Resulting in a feeling of them and us. The consultation exercise seems to have brought the community into the fold, reporting better communications. The community wish this to continue. Recognition was evident that the PCC could build upon the new relationships. The PCC need to realise their assets and safeguard the future of the Church in Walmersley. Whilst this remains the domain of the PCC the community wish to be included and believe they can add value to the project. The role of the priest has been positive in developing the relationships to date and this should continue.

5. Green Space: on most people's agenda of those who were consulted, there is one factor that seems to be thematic. The community, whilst acknowledging that the field will go and be built upon, would like to see a small section of green space being left for young people, older people etc. to have access to a green site. The belief that the church should not chase money but actually work to develop a shared space and shared green space for all along its own missional doctrine. This would serve the community and the church in re-building relationships for the future sustainability of the church in Walmersley.

### **Discussion:**

This exercise has been completed with good will on all sides. Some difficult conversations were had and a lot of grievances were stated due in part to the previous conflict arising from the original sale of the land. The community are concerned for the developments to come, on their own properties, on the natural state of the environment, on increased car use and on what might be built on the site. They acknowledge the PCC have a duty for the church and realise the mission is paramount. They also wish to state that the church has a duty of care for the community and would welcome further access to developing a partnership approach. Many, whilst not stating a Christian faith would like to be a part of the site development, to see engagement with local people and to contribute to a sustainable and developing Anglican presence in the community. This might not materialise of course but there were indications that people were prepared to be involved. There exists a village culture in Walmersley and as such the community are open to opportunities to be involved, hence the evidence generated for this report. Many people have turned up to make their feelings known and undertaken a dialogue with the Church House officers to move forward this potential project. There appears to be an opportunity for the church to further open the dialogue with the community and to develop a structure where people can be involved in decision making whilst not limiting the liability of the trustees – the PCC to make the right decisions for the church and its future.

### **Considerations:**

The community wish to be involved. This can be meaningless or positive, and both the PCC, the church congregation and the village itself need to be involved and to reflect on the future relationships. The community do not want the field to be developed; the church has no choice but to sell the field to develop a fit for mission church for the membership and community. These are not necessarily unattainable goals. Good will should be allowed to flourish on both sides to develop the site for the mutuality of all. The PCC will make decisions based upon their legal entitlement but the major recommendation is to allow the community access to the process. The following are some areas for consideration of the PCC and the task group established to move this forward.

1. Whilst the PCC retain the right subject to Charity law, Planning and Ecclesiastical Law to make decisions for the benefit of the parish of Christ Church, there are benefits from involving the community in a continuing discussion/consultation and collaborative process.
2. Potential exists to take the involvement to a higher level with non-voting representation from the local groups and more especially FOWV.
3. The community would like to see the development of the site with a build that both reflects the community and its specific needs and additionally be an eco-friendly build fit for the

future and sustainable to ease burdens on those coming after us. There is evidence to support the development of the current church building as a site for housing and if it is demolished that some of the materials to be used in a new build. Additionally some members of the community would like to see the church building extended and renovated on the current site. Consideration is also suggested as to the rules and local planning regarding the demolition of this building in light of the area being a conservation area.

4. The community ask the PCC to recognise that although the relationships have been difficult to date, the future could be different and involvement could be developed through consultation and involving the community in a welcoming and flexible space for all.
5. The community wish to develop trust between itself and the church, building on what has taken place recently, the high regard for the priest in charge and to start a positive and engaging relationship. This would need to be a shared objective.
6. That the PCC when making a decision bear in mind the communities concerns and consider reducing capital receipt with reference to charity law and take an active role in managing any new build on the land, putting in covenants to ensure the whole community is served.  
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7. Finally, in relation to additional funding, opportunities and success are greatly increased when demonstration is made of partnership approaches and community collaboration.

<http://ccwalmersleybury.org.uk/vision-for-the-future/community-consultation/>