

Leeds Methodist Mission Council

Minutes of the meeting held at Oxford Place Centre

16th June 2016

The meeting began with a discussion of the three papers (Annexes A, B and C) about the present situation in and the future of the Oxford Place Centre. This discussion set the tone of the meeting and ideas and topics coming out of the reading of these three papers and the initial discussion were revisited and expanded at various points during the meeting. I have, therefore, collected together all such comments under a single, and I hope, coherent item (Item 3) making either no reference to them under the item where they were made or a very brief reference where context demands.

The wording used in reporting comments should not be taken to be the actual words said. Rather I have paraphrased, interpreted, and occasionally elaborated, so that a reader, not at the meeting, can make some sense of it all.

KT

1 Welcome and attendance

Present: The Revd Tim Boocock, Miss Sarah Cave, Deacon Jenny Jones, Mr Bernard Neville (Treasurer), Trevor Parker (Conference and Property Manager), Mr Kenneth Tait (Secretary), the Revd Peter Whittaker (Chair)

Apologies: The Revd Madeleine Andrews, the Revd Stephen Burgess, the Revd Deacon Joseph Cortis, Mr John Goacher, Mrs Rachel McCallam (Consultant to the Council), Mr Tim Newman

2 Opening devotions

At Peter's invitation we kept a short silence to remember, the family, friends and colleagues of Jo Cox, MP for Batley and Spen, murdered in a street in Birstall earlier in the day.

Peter read the account of Paul's defence before Agrippa as recorded in Acts 25 and then led the meeting in prayer

3 Overview of our present situation and possibilities – discussion (including some comments made later in the meeting)

Points made during the discussion of the three papers (Annexes A, B, and C):

- It is remarkable that Leeds Mission still exists.
- Tim (in Annex B) had brought fresh eyes to the situation, setting out some new ways of thinking about developing the use of the building.
- The effect of the changes (that took effect in 2013) had left the Oxford Place Church congregation in limbo leaving the congregation in uncertain isolation for too long.
- There is a need to regenerate the congregation.
- We must act soon.
- Is the building sacrosanct? A comment in the minutes of the recent District Policy Committee meeting seems to hint that the maintenance of the building is expensive and might preclude keeping it.
- New worshipping congregations were looking for worship space. For example an LGBT group which might possibly be joined by a Muslim LGBT group.

- Something similar had for a time existed in Huddersfield and that had broken down barriers and through its central location enabled a beneficial coming together.
- We could end up with a number of worshipping congregations. (We already have two: Methodist and Leeds Christian Fellowship Church, and the Lighthouse Church have prayer space in the Basement)
- Providing space for emerging groups of vulnerable people to meet is a proper use of our building.
- There is no obvious offering of time and talents (to the work in the city centre) by the people of the two Leeds circuits.
- The work of the Mission is understood and appreciated when carried out through the efforts of the deacon, but not so when it is carried out through the agency of another group such as those who hold tenancies in our building.

Later in the meeting:

- A stronger engagement with the District Policy Committee would be good.
- The proposed closing of the Children's Centre (Item 6) prompted the suggestion of using the space for some other kind of childcare provision however, without outside space this would not be permitted.
- The (currently) vacant space in the basement could be refurbished and provide a smaller, more comfortable space for the Oxford Place Methodist Church to worship and might include a café. There would be a loss of income (see 9 (ii) (a)). Ideas for the use of the basement are set out in more detail in Annex B.
- A stronger Christian presence in the building would be good, but we need to keep the building full.
- Action on these matters needs to be taken soon.
- Passivity on the part of the Circuit (who do not want to go with the idea or spend the money) or the Church (who might not want it) could prevent it happening.
- It was suggested that Oxford Place could, in the context of the reorganisation of the local districts, become a regional centre with a community of staff, opportunities for worship, and such things as 'hot-desking'.
- It is important that we keep a city-centre worker.
- The absence of city-centre worship would be a real loss.
- It would be good to have someone who could re-imagine working with other Christian groups and other religious groups.
- Helen Reid (Leeds Church Institute) has already had some discussion with international and independent congregations.
- A number of ecumenical groups or forums have recently been lost (e.g. West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council and Leeds Churches Together in Mission)

4 Minutes of the previous meeting (1st February 2015)

These were accepted as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5 Matters arising from the minutes

Updates and comments on the action points listed in the minutes

- (i) *Web site* No suitable alternative to the present method of constructing and maintaining the web site given the present situation had been found. It was proposed that a rationalisation of the present web site be undertaken. (Annex D contains more detail) [4(i)] [KT]
- (ii) Bank details had been communicated to HMRC [4(ii)]
- (iii) *Electrical inspection* The remaining work is difficult as the areas still to be inspected are where a number of our tenants work both evenings and Saturdays. This will be pursued and reported when the work has been booked. (The possibility of using a Bank Holiday was mentioned.) [4(iv)] [TP]
- (iv) *Licences and leases¹* The forms provided by TMCP were being used and the meeting was reassured that tenants and users would be fully apprised of the terms and conditions attaching to their use of the building (including safeguarding) and they would be asked to verify that appropriate insurance policies had been taken out or were in force to cover all liabilities arising from their use of our premises. New licences/leases will be issued at the beginning of September. [4(v) & 12(ii)(c)] [BN,TP]
- (v) *Staffing Review* A report has been prepared and this will be passed to the Staffing Review Group for discussion and recommendations. Provisional membership of this group is: Madeleine Andrews, Rob Cooper (District Lay Employment officer), and David Laycock (who has been providing support to Trevor). [4(vi)]
- (vi) *Repairs monitoring* A list of repairs and upgrades has been prepared from information provided by the caretakers and the tenants. Contractors are being or will be engaged to deal with these items. [4(viii)] [TP]
- (vii) *Documents for the architect* Required documents have been initialled and sent to the architect. [6(i), 6(iv) & 6(viii)]
- (viii) *Plans from 1970s* Located and passed to the architect. [6(vi)]
- (ix) *Branding* No report but understood to be on-going [8(ii)]
- (x) *Grants subgroup* The remit of this group is to apply for grants to fund the work on the property, not (as indicated in the minutes) to apply for funding to support the work of the deacon in the future. Until estimates are received from the architect, the group cannot begin its work (see 7 (ii)).
- (xi) *Funding for deacon* A successful bid has been made to the District Advance Fund for £25000 per annum from September 2018. The initial year has been allocated and funding for the Leeds city centre ministerial post will have first call on subsequent DAF funding from Connexion until August 2022². [9(iv)(b)]
- (xii) *Trustee liability* The Connexional Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice was contacted and a reply received. (A copy of the emails will be found in Annex C.) The exchange raised more questions than it answered including the charitable status of the Mission. This continues to be a matter for the Council and the

1 There is occasionally some confusion in the use of these terms during discussions. In these minutes I have not attempted to distinguish between them and have assumed the much that applies to one also applies to the other.

2 The reason for this is that DAF is not able to award funds more than three years ahead.

District Policy Committee who were made aware of it at their recent meeting (13th June 2016) but there is little indication of what should be or needs to be done.

6 Children's Centre

This was raised as a matter not on the agenda and was dealt with at that point.

- (i) A letter from the Chair of the Children's Centre Management Committee had been received indicated that the committee at its meeting on 15th June 2016 had unanimously agreed following a report from a subgroup of the committee to close the Children's Centre in the Spring of 2017. The Centre has sufficient funds to continue until that time and to fulfil its obligations to staff. The report from the subgroup was tabled and is available as Annex E. The main points justifying the closure were:
 - (a) Reduction in the demand. The use of video links has meant fewer people attending court and the provision of free childcare for children two years old and above has meant fewer people having to bring their children with them.
 - (b) With reduced demand the application for grant funding was difficult to justify.
- (ii) Specific dates for the closure, with a celebration of the work of Children's Centre, over more than thirty years, on the following day³. The staff would be employed up to the end of the following week in order to clear the centre.
- (iii) The Council agreed to the closing of the Children's Centre and that there was no need for a Special General Meeting of the Centre to be called as the proposal had been agreed unanimously at the Centre's most recent Management Committee meeting. Peter agreed to write thanking Gill Jewell who had served as secretary of the Management Committee and to report the decision to Synod in September.

[PW]

7 Architect's Report

A progress report had been received (from our architect Stephen Calvert of Pearce Bottomley date 9th June 2016 (Annex F)).

- (i) The full inspection of the building had taken longer than expected, and some unplanned visual inspection had been carried out. The condition of the building is better than had been anticipated with the most serious and urgent matter being the refurbishment of the 'joinery' in the main window frames.
- (ii) Estimates for the cost of the work are expected in July.

8 The Café

- (i) A report was provided (Annex G) and discussed. The following points were made:
 - (a) At present the café was carrying a surplus but this might not be true after the summer period.

3 A date for the last day of operation has been suggested, but will not be publicised until the staff have been informed.

- (b) Initially it had been thought to propose continuing until 31st August 2017, but on further consideration this was deemed too risky with 28th February 2017 a more realistic proposal.
 - (c) More publicity is needed.
 - (d) What is on offer has improved.
 - (e) Some (small) meetings have found it cheaper to buy directly from the café rather than order a buffet.
 - (f) Some conferences have changed their schedule so that they do not feel it necessary to order a buffet lunch.
 - (g) Having a café adds to the ambience of the premises.
 - (h) If either or both of the staff decided to leave then we would be in difficulty.
- (ii) The council agreed that the café should continue as at present until the end of February 2017. Thanks were expressed for the work done.

9 Finance (including Batcliffe Drive manse)

- (i) A report was provided (Annex H) which included the following proposals:
 - (a) To increase the inclusive rent/service charge of tenants by 2% with effect from 1st September 2016
 - (b) To appoint Tapp Chartered Surveyors to market the vacant areas of the building.
 - (c) To agree to let, if appropriate, Batcliffe Drive on a short term letting until 31st May 2017.
 - (ii) In the discussion the following points were made:
 - (a) Currently there is a substantial amount of space not let. This has been valued as capable of earning £30,000 per annum, with £18,600 of that in the basement. (The figures exclude service charges)
 - (b) Tapps wished to mount a 'to let' sign at a cost of £250 and it was noted that there commission would be 10% of rent charged with a £500 fee to be paid for early termination.
 - (c) Tapps wished to make recommendations to TMCP about licences.
 - (d) In the light of discussion about the use of the basement the second proposal was modified that only that space in the basement that was suited to tenancies should be advertised and then only on a short-term basis. Space in the rest of the building would be advertised as proposed.
 - (e) One organisation⁴ may wish to continue renting space in the basement over the coming months.
 - (f) Nigel Tapp of the Vineyard which worships in the Headingley Methodist Church will be invited to look around the premises.
- [BN,TP]
- (iii) *Batcliffe Drive manse*

4 The Council has decided at an earlier meeting that because sensitive nature of their work the name of the organisation cannot be mentioned.

- (a) The present tenancy agreement expired on 14th June 2016, but the tenants wished to continue in occupation on some kind of rolling contract until they had purchased a house.
 - (b) Any further tenancy should be short-term, but probably not less than six months.
 - (c) Money from income on the manse had been reserved for refurbishments.
 - (d) The District Manses Committee Secretary needed to be informed of when the manse would become available for a deacon.
 - (e) District Property Secretary had been asked to facilitate the negotiation between TMCP and the letting agents.
 - (f) The manse would need to be available for a visit by any prospective deacon in January 2017.
- (iv) The first and third proposals ((i)(a) and (c) above) were agreed as stated, the second proposal was agreed subject to the modification set out in (ii)(d).

10 Stationing

The Invitations Group met on 13th June 2016 and a draft profile for submission to the Diaconate is in preparation with an intention to finalise before September. It was noted that the proforma provided for the profile does not fit our situation. [20160201 Item 9(ii)]

11 Safeguarding

It was agreed that Laura Gallery (District Safeguarding Group) be contacted and asked carry out a 'safeguarding audit' of the whole building.

[PW]

12 Membership of the Council

Currently the Council has 13 members. Members are appointed annually by the Autumn Synod. The meeting was informed of the following:

- (i) The Revd Peter Whittaker will resign as chair of the Council effective on 31st August 2016, but will continue as a member of the Council and as chair of the Invitations group.
 - (ii) Mr Bernard Neville gave notice that he will resign as Treasurer to the Mission at the end of the next connexional year and from the Council. The responsibilities of the Treasurer have become much more onerous and the responsibilities have become more like those expected of an accountant. A request was made that a successor should be found early in the connexional year who could then shadow or work with Bernard to ensure a smooth hand over. Suggestions were made as to possible sources of suitable expertise.
- [BN,TB, SC]
- (iii) Mr Kenneth Tait gave notice that he will relinquish his responsibilities as Secretary to the Council at the end of the next connexional year and resign from the Council.
 - (iv) The Chair of the Council is appointed by the Chair of the District. Treasurer and Secretary are appointed by the Council from the membership.

- (v) A letter had been received from Mr Tim Newman indicating that although he was moving away from Leeds he would continue his interest. It was agreed to continue his membership of the Council.
- (vi) The Revd Dean Joseph Cortis has not been able to attend for several meetings. It was agreed that he be approached to ascertain whether or not he wishes to continue as a member. It is understood that he has new responsibilities, not linked to the city centre.
- (vii) It was agreed that we should not (at the moment) seek to increase the membership of the council
- (viii) The list of members for the coming year needs to be sent to the District Administrator soon.

[KT]

[KT]

13 Reporting

- (i) *To Synod* Peter would report to the Autumn Synod, but any information concerning proposals or actions to change the way the Oxford Place Centre is used would be reserved until the Spring Synod.
- (ii) *To the new Chair of District* These minutes and all related papers will be sent to the Revd Anne Brown.

[PW]

[KT]

14 Future Meetings

- Autumn meeting: 10th October 2016 at 7.30pm
- Winter meeting: 7th February 2017 at 7.30pm
- A date for the summer meeting will be agreed through an on-line poll. Currently suggested dates fall in the fortnight beginning 12th June 2017.

[KT]

15 Close

Peter a period of silence, Peter led the Council in prayer, remarking that the Oxford Place Centre is a place where there is always hope and love, and where the Spirit lives.

Actions

Who	Action	Minute	Target date
KT	Update of web site(s)	5(i)	September 2016
TP	Arrange for final stage of electrical inspection	5(iii)	As soon as possible
BN,TP	All licences and leases to be signed	5(iv)	September 2016

Who	Action	Minute	Target date
Staffing Review Group	Finalise membership and meet to discuss report	5(v)	
TP	Outstanding repairs to be documented and contractors engaged	5(vi)	As soon as possible
PW	Children's Centre closure: write thanking Gill Jewell, and report to Autumn Synod	6(iii)	
BN,TP	Invite Nigel Tapp to look round	9(ii)(f)	
PW	Contact Laura Gallery re safeguarding audit	11	As soon as possible
BN,TB,SC	Identify a successor to BN as treasurer	12(ii)	
KT	Write to JC re continuing as member of the Council	12(vi)	As soon as possible
KT	Membership to district administrator	12(viii)	As soon as possible
PW	Report to Autumn Synod (see minute for details)	13(i)	Autumn Synod
KT	Minutes and papers to Anne Brown	13(ii)	As soon as possible
KT	Arrange date of Summer 2017 meeting	14	As soon as possible