

Churches Together in Harborough
Minutes of the Forum Meeting on Thursday 12 November 2020
at 7.00 pm via Zoom

Attendees:

Janet Smith	Rose Williams	Andy Murphy	Derek Williams
Mandy Gays	Christopher O'Connell	David Nixon	Margaret Nash
Maureen Douglas	John Pearse	Theresa Kendrick	Stephen Haward
Jeff Bonser	Dee Quinn	James Pickersgill	Christopher Brown
Angela Zemlak	Jo Giles	Andy Giles	Dave Tomlin
Quentin Appleton			

Welcome and Opening Devotions:

Janet welcomed everyone to the forum and thanked James for organising and hosting the Zoom meeting. Janet also welcomed Christopher O'Connell, the new priest at Our Lady of Victories, on behalf of CTH

Jo Giles led the devotions saying:

This has been a difficult year for so many of us, but it has been particularly difficult for our young people. A survey by London School of Economics (LSE) suggested that 1/4 of all school age children had no schooling or tutoring during the first lockdown. Now schools are back up and running they are reporting significantly higher incidence of self-harm, anxiety, depression, eating disorders and suicidal thoughts among young people.

For us at the CUBE we found that we lost contact with the vast majority of the young people who had been involved in our groups. We are now able to operate again, but due to our youth work manager Charlotte leaving us to follow a different career path we have been unable to get groups up and running again. Although, we are currently recruiting for a new youth work manager, so hopefully in the New Year we will be able to start again.

Our young people are facing an uncertain future. The year of COVID has taken a lot from them and it has been a year of great loss for many things they had hoped for, exams, graduations, proms, festivals to name a few.

In Luke 24 as Jesus' friends are talking to stranger on the road to Emmaus, they say of Jesus 'we had hoped he was the one who had come to rescue Israel'. They were mourning not only the loss of their friend, but also the loss of hope. They didn't realise that the one they were mourning was right there with them. The stranger was Jesus.

The truth is, life is always uncertain, and at some point we all face loss of hope. But even in that dark place, whether we recognise him or not, Jesus is with us. The road for our young people may not be the direct route they were hoping for, but direct routes are rarely fulfilling or transformative.

Jo then led a time of prayer

1. Apologies for Absence:

Liz Mills, Alison Iliffe, Keith Rugg, Abby Baird-Smith, Philippa Oliver-Dee

2. Minutes of Forum 7 September 2020

The minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting and Janet signed them

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising

4. Main Business

a. Lenten resources 2021

Ecumenical Lent Groups - Lent starts on 17 February in 2021 and this year being the one where the groups would normally take place, the Executive had looked at various options:

- Arrange something completely different / creative
- Zoom Ecumenical Lent Groups would need Zoom hosts and someone to organise the materials. Brian Davis had produced a booklet Caring for Creation based on the booklet of his used in 2017
- Do nothing ecumenical but just within own churches

Various comments were made:

- Brian's booklet would be too soon after using similar one in 2017
- Too soon to think about Lent when Churches hadn't finalised plans for Advent and Christmas
- People had made lasting friendships as a result of previous Ecumenical Lent Groups and it was felt there was a need to meet, if at all possible, every two years
- If difficult to arrange formal groups, then maybe informal gatherings in-person or online dependent upon the guidelines in force at the time

Friday Lunchtime services, normally led by lay people from different churches but at the same venue each year with soup, bread and cake, could be more informal and like the Lent groups in-person if permitted

It was agreed that any decisions would be made in the New Year. Christopher B was asked, as Chair of the Ministers' Fellowship, to arrange a discussion at the next meeting on 26 November on both Lent Groups and Friday lunchtimes.

b. Good Friday Event 2021 – how do we move forward?

Good Friday is 2 April in 2021. Currently the only event allowed on the Square is the Farmers' Market. We would need permission from HDC and may have numbers attending in excess of any limit set. The media equipment (screen and digi-van) had been booked and paid for in advance for 2020. One church had paid its pledge already, but others were told they could wait. The original event as planned was no longer possible as, although Abby Baird-Smith had bought the licence and rights to use the drama, it was not possible to rehearse.

Options were:

- Pre-record a service – with loop of testimonies and music by the band
- Hold a smaller event

Rose had been attempting to contact the media company but would continue to get a response whether we could have a refund or move to 2022.

A discussion took place when consideration was given to:

- The amount of time and energy it would take to prepare for 2021 only to have to cancel / delay because of Government restrictions
- It not being the best use of resources with so many pastoral needs

It was agreed unanimously that although people had been looking forward to the event that the Executive would continue in its attempts to either get a refund or a postponement from the Media company.

c. **Homeless / Asking for Help project** – an update

Jane White had sent in a report (see Appendix A).

Andy Giles informed the meeting that:

- Two businesses, Subway and Greggs, had both agreed to support the initiative but proposed CTH by gift cards to hand out. Neither of them was open in the evenings.
 - All the takeaways had been approached and were thinking about it. They were not keen on the CTH voucher which they felt was open to abuse. Fish shops don't take Just Eat vouchers
- Mandy Gays informed the meeting that Living Rock Church taking hot food / sleeping bags / toiletries into Leicester 7 nights a week and were considering doing something similar in Market Harborough. Janet agreed to contact Stephen Morse or Phil Chapman to discuss further. Offers of any sleeping bags or toiletries would be gratefully received (take to Stephen Morse' house).

5. **Report of Recent events:**

Prisons Week Service on 11 October

James and Emma, the Gartree Chaplain, were thanked for arranging the service which was held by Zoom at 5 pm. There were around 30 people attending with several new people asking for information about the Prison Fellowship and the prayer line.

6. **Communications**

Derek asked people to support the Harborough Mail by purchasing a printed copy. Many local papers were not continuing. Each week there is a half page spread written by someone from the CTH and was well received.

7. **Supporting one another during the pandemic** – a time of sharing

Prayer Squares were being knitted by members of The Mothers Union some of which had already been sent to church leaders / pastoral leaders for distribution. The square has a cross in the middle and is sent out with a printed message. They have a stock ready so if anyone would like a supply to distribute please contact Janice Lunn by email: janice.lunn@gmail.com

Harborough Anglican Volunteers were continuing to support the community by shopping, collecting medication and phoning those in need of support. Referrals came from HDC.

The Light Trail, held on 31 October, and organised by St Dionysius resulted in 40 families taking part. Sam Peverett was thanked for organising the event. There was a report and pictures in the Harborough Mail <https://www.harboroughmail.co.uk/news/people/families-enjoy-harborough-churchs-light-n-superhero-trail-3022288>

A Christmas Trail was being organised by several of the town's churches?

A Refugee family was being supported by Andy Murphy, along with others. They had been in the area for around three years. They are supported by the government through benefits. Brought here originally under the government's Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme but now on reduced benefits and with four children they need ongoing support. The father's English is not very good but he is a carpenter and skilled labourer and looking for work. If anyone has contacts to help him find work then please let Andy know. It was agreed that Andy would write a message which Rose would send to the churches asking for financial or material support. This was a separate scheme from the South Leicestershire Community Sponsorship Group supporting another refugee family.

Naseby Square – David T had sent in a written report (Appendix B). David was thanked for being the voice for the tenants and his continuing hard work.

8. Brief Headlines from our organisations

Bower House – Philippa and Trish had sent in a written report (Appendix C). A poster had been distributed to churches giving details of their continuing work

Cube – Jo had spoken about the Cube in her devotions

Street Pastors – Mandy explained that they had re-started their patrols, but these had ceased with the new lockdown. Two Street Pastors had visited Welland Park Academy to talk about the work of SP which is part of the GCSE curriculum

Justice and Peace Group – not meeting but still campaigning

Jubilee Foodbank – Margaret Nash had retired from the committee. She was thanked for all her work. Prayers were needed for the change to new systems of working. Volunteers from VASL were helping with distribution of parcels

CTH donations to the three main charities. Rose reported that following the letter to the churches she had received (to date) £295 to be shared between BH, SP, Cube

9. Coming Events:

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 18-25 January 2021

In the past an Ecumenical service was held on the 1st or last Sunday with prayer meetings, usually at 12 noon, focussing on local charities during the week each at a different church.

CT in Britain and Ireland had produced resources with the theme Abide in Christ (John 15)

The options for the Service on either Sunday would be discussed at the Ministers' Fellowship (2020 as at Congregational and 2019 at Baptist) with Zoom being the safest option

Re the Ecumenical prayer sessions it was suggested that Zoom meetings could be hosted each day and repeated lunch time and evening to enable all to take part. Derek offered to put together a booklet with a local focus, sending out to those who will be leading.

10. Any other Business

Peace Vigil

It is hoped that the Peace Vigil will be held on Friday 8 January on the Square. This is organised by the Justice and Peace group led by Alison Tomlin. Permission from the council would need to be sought to enable this event to happen.

Drive in Carol Service – 20 December in Sainsbury's car park

Andy G reported that he is still waiting for a response from HDC

World Day of Prayer

Rose reported that the service in March may be via Zoom. The team would be meeting again in January

11. Dates for future Forum Meetings:

Previously booked dates:

Thursday 7 January 2021 via ZOOM

Monday 1st March at OLOV or ZOOM

Thursday 20 May 2021 – AGM

New dates:

Monday 6 September 2021

Thursday 18 November 2021

Janet thanked the Churches and Organisations Representatives for attending and thanked Angela for taking the minutes

Janet closed the meeting in prayer with everyone saying the Grace together

APPENDIX A

Update from Homeless and Asking for Help For Churches Together in Harborough Forum 12.11.20

The last meeting of the Homeless project group was held on 16th October to discuss the problems we have been facing this year and make some plans for resolving them.

Very little has been happening this year as we have had the problem of our hot food outlets withdrawing from the voucher scheme, and the Covid lockdown has meant that most of the churches holding bags of food have been closed. The other side of this coin has been that the majority of homeless people have been housed in hotels by the council for most of the lockdown period.

Record keeping is a problem for us, although the records for the voucher scheme had begun to improve before everything came to a halt in March.

From May 2019 to the end of February 2020 we have records of 16 vouchers being used but only 10 of those were accompanied with the paperwork. We have no way of knowing how many food bags were given out.

The outcome of this meeting was that Andy Giles agreed to call on food outlets to see if any are willing to participate in the voucher scheme, and he will also explore the possibility of using any pre paid vouchers that the outlets may have of their own.

Jane is going to liaise with the Foodbank Committee to see where we can work together and improve our record keeping. The Foodbank already provides the pre made bags of food and has been acting as the main distributor of the hot food vouchers for us.

The Foodbank have also been providing for the homeless people in the area during lockdown via The Council Hub.

Jane will be contacting all the Church Reps to see where each of the Churches stands on holding ready - made bags of food and to ensure that they know the system for getting new bags once they have been used. The system is having to change a little as the Foodbank is having to change the way it works a little due to the problems of social distancing and delivery.

Of course, since our meeting, we have gone back into the tighter lockdown, and the Homeless folk are supposed to be back in hotels until December.

Jane White

In addition

The email below was received on Tuesday 10th November from Rose Forman, Housing Services Manager at HDC hhs@harborough.gov.uk

Unfortunately, it went into my junk folder, so I did not find it until 9 o' clock that evening. It details a count by HDC of rough sleepers in the Harborough District and a survey to complete if any rough sleepers were discovered

Janet

From Rose Forman

Good afternoon all,

Thank you for your continued support to help estimate the number of rough sleepers in the Harborough District tonight.

Please remember to only count those who are about to or actually sleeping rough, on the street, in a shed, garage or other place which is not designed to be habited. If you can get any personal details that would be great but do not put yourself or the person at risk. Or you can give them our contact details to ensure that everyone gets the help they need.

APPENDIX B

Naseby Square Update for Justice & Peace Group, CTH Forum Members and Petition Supporters For Churches Together in Harborough Forum 12.11.20

Dear Friends,

It is with a heavy heart that I have to inform you that Harborough District Council has sold its own former garages site and its purchases of land and property adjacent to it.

Unable to find a developer for their own site they have sold it all to the Platform Housing Group.

Having created the initial shock to the tenants of Naseby Square by getting Platform's agreement to demolish 'social and supported living homes' and the Community Hall they may now well have given Platform an assurance of getting Planning Consent to develop a new application that is hoped to go to the Planning Committee in February.

With the Governments changes to Planning governance there is little chance of public opinion being effective due to the over-whelming control held by the current local 'Cabinet'.

The revised application will need a swift response to it once posted on HDC's web-site.

We ask for your prayers and active support to ensure that any amendments made to the existing revision do not lead to even greater problems connected with strains on the NHS, Education, and Social Care. Traffic and on-street parking already make life impossible for many, and to think of another 100 people permanently to-ing and fro-ing and fighting for non-existent parking spaces will be a night-mare.

We expect to see and hear of the land sales this coming week via the media.

The original intention was to cover for a possible future development on the remainder of the Naseby Square site – so if you can lobby on behalf of the tenants that remain at Naseby Square we would ask you to do that. Thus to any of you who are able to contact the Planning Dept. or The Harborough Mail or HfM this may be the only chance we now have of trying to save the rest of the Naseby Square complex.

Platform have not treated their tenants in an appropriate manner. They've already sacrificed 13 elderly tenants up to 97 years of age. Others remaining in the Square are dealing with serious illnesses, and it is not humane to put them through over 18 months of additional stress knowing that some of them may well not see an end to the proposed development.

David Tomlin

07.11.20

