Minutes of the Churches Together in Harborough AGM,
Thursday 22nd May 2025, 7.15 for 7.30 p.m.
at Harborough Community Church

Our objectives:

- **to be a visible sign of the churches' commitment to one another.**
- **to facilitate common witness to Christ**.
- **to respond to the needs of the community in shared service and outreach where this is possible**.

Attendees (13)
Maureen Douglas (OLOV), Jackie Melhuish (MHMC), Angela Zemlak (MHBC), Jan Turner (MHCC), Janet Smith (MHBC), Christopher Brown (MHBC), Theresa Kendrick (OLOV), Peter Arnold (MHMC), David Nixon (MHMC), Sharron Brennan (MHCC), Margaret Atkins (OLOV), Stephen Jack (HCC), Luke Arnold (HCC).

The meeting took place in two parts. First, the Churches Together in Harborough AGM, followed by a regular Forum meeting.

a) Welcome
Maureen opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and thanking people for coming to the AGM. Thanks was expressed to HCC for their warm hospitality.

b) Opening Devotions: Stephen led the devotions by reading verses from Philippians 3, highlighting the letter's central theme of joy and focusing on the ways in which in this chapter, Paul talks of the priceless value of knowing Christ. Paul talks of his noteworthy past, but how he regards all this as worthless and 'garbage' compared with his desire to know Christ and **press on** (Greek dioko (διώκω) - used to describe someone running swiftly to reach a goal, as in a race). Dioko is used in Philippians 3:14 to mean "press on" and ahead, straining for the ultimate prize through which God, through Christ Jesus is calling us. Our past can define us in all sorts of ways, but how can and do we move forward, straining for that prize of the 'upward call of God?' The power /the fuel for all of this comes ultimately from knowing who we are in Christ. Stephen then led us in prayer.

c) **Apologies for absence**
Apologies: Jeannie Brightwell (Anglican), Andy Murphy (MHCC), Fr. Chris O' Connor (OLOV), Anita Beer (MHMC), Liz Mills (MHCC and Foodbank), Alison Iliffe (Anglican), Roo MacRae (MHCC), Rachel Buckby (Anglican).

d) Minutes of the CTH AGM held on Monday 20th May 2024: these had been circulated prior to the meeting. They were received, unanimously accepted as a correct record of the meeting and duly signed.

e) Reports had been circulated in advance of the meeting. These reports represent much hard work with different people working together in various ways from across the churches and beyond. An opportunity for questions was invited.

a**) Receive reports –** key points from the reports were highlighted on behalf of The Bower House (Maureen Douglas). The Cube (Janet Smith) and The Jubilee Foodbank (Sharron Brennan).

b) Any questions? None were asked.

Actions:

- **HYACT (The Cube) are looking to recruit more trustees. A Trustee Recruitment Pack is available. Janet will send one to Maureen for circulation in the next CTH Newsletter.**
- **Jubilee Foodbank: Let Sharron know if any of the emergency food bags held by the churches need replenishing.**

See Appendices A, B and C for the full reports from the charities mentioned above.

f) Treasurer's Report and accounts: the CTH accounts for 2024 - 25 had been circulated beforehand and copies were available at the meeting. The accounts are in good shape, and after discussion about how subscriptions to CTH are calculated for each church, it was decided that although church membership and numbers fluctuate, no immediate adjustment to Churches' subscriptions was felt necessary as it covers the activities for the coming year, but it will be discussed by the Executive.

Action: The Executive will discuss church subscriptions and how they are calculated at the next Executive meeting and report back to the Forum.

a) **Any questions?** Jackie invited questions and one was raised as it had been last year about the nature of the money designated **'good causes'** named in the accounts. This was explained as money that was handed to CTH when the Market Harborough Street Pastors closed. Monies from this source are available for any ecumenical 'mission related' projects.
A discussion around how best to use this 'Kingdom money' established that the Forum felt it should be spent, rather than it lie dormant in the CTH account. Suggestions were welcomed as to how the money might be spent - from contributing to existing ministries like the Renew Wellbeing Café at the Baptist

Church or adding to the number of Bibles in school libraries, along with suitable devotional material ('Purpose Driven Life for Kids was mentioned as a possibility).

Actions:

- **The Executive will discuss a possible framework of criteria that can be used by churches to apply for specific pots of money for missional projects. Any further suggestions are welcome regarding this and should be sent to Maureen for the Executive to consider. Feedback to the Forum in September.**
- **Go back to your churches and think of suitable existing projects and/or come up with some creatively new mission projects.**

Katherine Bentley was thanked for her work in auditing the accounts and thanks were expressed to Jackie for acting as treasurer and for her willingness to stand again for a further year. Jackie informed the Forum that Katherine had requested that next year the AGM be put back by a few weeks i.e. to the middle of June, to enable plenty of time for the accounts to be examined and returned.

Action: Ensure that the AGM 2026 is planned for the middle of June, rather than May.

b) **Approval of audited accounts:** The audited accounts were accepted unanimously by the Forum.
c) **Budget 2025 - 26** (Including subs). The budget had been circulated beforehand. The Forum unanimously accepted the proposed budget for 202 5 -6. See point **f**) above for the discussion around CTH Churches' subscriptions.
g) Chair's Address: Maureen and Jan each presented a short Chair's address. Jan mentioned her particular joy and privilege at being involved in the Lent Lunchtime services, whose theme of 'Journeys of Faith' had enabled a good variety of weekly reflections followed by a great time of ecumenical fellowship over a soup and cake lunch.
Maureen focused on reviewing the past year in terms of CTH activities mentioning the 4 times yearly Forum meetings in September, November, February and May/ June, the Peace Vigil in January (do we move it to another time of year?), the United Service and activities during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, also in January, the Lent lunchtime services and lunches in March / April held at the Baptist Church and the Easter Live Event on Good Friday 2025, preceded by three worship and prayer nights for the event. All these activities over the past year had seen CTH's three objectives being enabled and enacted by Churches Together in Harborough.

h) Election of officers: the officers named below were unanimously voted in for a further year of service to CTH.

a) Executive 2025 - 2026

(i) Jan Turner and Maureen Douglas would Co – chair CTH for a further year.
(ii) Secretary: Maureen Douglas
(iii) Treasurer: Jackie Melhuish
(iv) Other members of the Executive: Jeannie Brightwell and Janet Smith

b) Other Officers

(i) Minutes Secretary: Janet Smith
(ii) Christian Aid Co-ordinator: Peter Arnold
(iii) Accounts Examiner: K.E. Bentley
(iv) Holiday at Home Organiser: Christine Pierce

Thanks, were expressed to above for their willingness to serve.

i)Prayer for newly appointed officers: Christopher Brown led the Forum in prayer for the newly elected officers at the end of the AGM.

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Forum Meeting

Main Business

a) **Introduction of Chairs:** Maureen and Jan will serve as Joint Chairs for a further year. Maureen urged the Forum to keep pressing on towards the ultimate prize as Churches Together in Harborough striving as we do that to meet the 3 - fold objectives that shape CTH, namely, to act, to facilitate and respond in shared witness, service and outreach.

b) **Lent Lunches:** Lent this year saw MHBC hosting the five lunchtime services and lunches. The theme this year was 'Journeys of Faith' with a different church leading each week. We were well fed spiritually with reflections around chosen Bible passages on faith and were privileged to hear several people sharing their personal faith journeys. Then upstairs for a simple soup and cake lunch! The ladies of the Catholic Church (historically famous for their soup – making), had asked Churches Together for help this year, with various people providing soup from across the churches each week - we were not disappointed! Donations received over the 5 weeks amounted to £865.50 which has been shared between Our Lady of Victories, Market Harborough, Aid for Developing Countries Group and Christian Aid. Margaret Atkins, the group's secretary was present at the Forum to distribute information leaflets about the group's work. Special thanks were expressed to Angela & Janet who planned and executed the arrangements for each week with military precision and to Margaret for organising the soup!

c) **Easter Live Event**: Christopher Brown was invited to feedback about the Easter Live Event held on Good Friday, sharing that there was a team of around 60 volunteers involved in the planning and execution of the event

this year from across the churches. There was much to celebrate about the event – firstly and namely that the vision of bringing the whole story of Easter to the local community in a way they could engage with had been fulfilled. There was an obvious breaking down of any barriers between 'church' and 'community,' on the Square, a powerful and moving drama, great music, strong testimonies shared, popular children's activities, local Christian charities showcased, and the vendors were very happy to be there. It was acknowledged that future lessons could be learned to enable the event to be even better in terms of the quality of sound to all those on the Square by using a more powerful PA and more speakers, possible staging for any actors, the giving away of appropriate material by stewards to engage with people and publicly announcing that prayer was available. The available space on the Square, due to the increased numbers of fixtures and fittings, coupled with the fact of the Council's strictness in where things may go, meant that space was tight and is not as big as it might seem and so needs careful thought. Feedback from the community was all positive on the day. A larger open space like Welland Park may be appropriate to put on a celebration of the Christian faith at a different time of year. Thoughts welcome on that! Thanks were expressed to Christopher and the team for all their hard work to make the event a success.

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Action: Continue to think of innovative and creative ways to share the gospel with our community and feedback to the Executive or Christopher.

d) **Holiday at Home 4th – 8th August 2025:** this popular event will be held again at the Methodist Church from 4th- 8th August.

e) **It's Your Move Books:** These books have been given out to Year 6 pupils in the town's primary schools for quite a few years. The books are produced by Scripture Union. Previous feedback on the books confirmed that the books are well received. This year's 336 books have arrived for distribution in the coming weeks after Andy M has placed a sticker inside each book stating it is a gift from CTH. This is a great opportunity for clergy and church leaders to strengthen vital connections with our town's primary schools. Thanks was expressed to Janet for contacting the schools & organising the purchasing of the books.

Action: Janet has the numbers of books required for each school, and with Andy will distribute the books to the appropriate clergy and church leaders for taking to the schools.

f) Christian Aid: Peter Arnold informed the Forum there was little to report, as Christian Aid Week 2025 had only just finished. The Big Brekkie on 31st May organised by the Congregational Church had been well publicised and

Sharron brought news that any money raised will be added to by the Congregational Federation. A local online donation station had been set up and was raising money that way. Peter gave notice that he will stay in the role as Chrisian Aid rep for a further year and would then be stepping down. There is a service on June 12th in Westminster Abbey to celebrate the charity's 80th Anniversary. Several people from our local churches will be attending.

g) Harborough Carnival – CTH will be represented at the forthcoming carnival on **14th June** in various ways by individuals, churches and associated organisations to CTH. Look out for 24 fun runners from HCC! The Bower House, Eco Churches Harborough and Harborough Fairtrade Town will all have stalls and activities on the showground and The Cube will be open for refreshments and activities in the Cube Garden.

h) **Moving Forward – the shape of the year ahead:** watch this space while we press on as Stephen described in his opening devotions and as Maureen and Jan reiterated in their Chairs' remarks.

i) **Refugee Week 16 – 22nd June 2025:** this is a week where we can focus our attention on the plight of refugees and celebrate what their presence brings to our local community by way of enrichment and diversity.

j) Any Other Business: Further notice – Jeff Bonser will be leading a service at the Boats' Festival at Foxton Locks on Sunday 8th June at 10.a.m. All are welcome!

k) Future dates and venues of CTH meetings in 2025 - 26 are planned, but to be confirmed:

- **i. Thursday 11th September, at the Baptist Church**
- **ii. Monday 24th November at an Anglican Church**
- **iii. Thursday 5th February, at the Methodist Church. Confirmed.**
- **iv. AGM and Forum – venue will be the Catholic Church but date to be confirmed, considering the request for the AGM next year to be in June.**

All meetings 7.15pm (for refreshments) for 7.30pm start.

l) **Closing prayer:** The Forum closed with the saying of the Lord's Prayer together.

Appendices A - C

Reports for the CTH AGM 2024 – 2025

A. Bower House Report – AGM Report

As always, it's a joy to report on the work of the Bower House.

The Team

This year's 'Away Day' took place in April at the Methodist church and pivoted around the theme of creativity. Some of our counsellors (and members of the Governing Body) ran parts of the day and it was wonderful to experience the richness of what was offered, as well as spend time fellowshipping together. The 'bring and share' lunch was delicious too!

We continue to be sought by trainees for placements and have facilitated many student visits and interviews in the last few months. Our interview process includes a set of questions pertaining to self, counselling practice, supervision, confidentiality and Safeguarding, as well as a skills session to help us gain a clear sense of the counsellor's 'in the room' practice. We have taken on two new trainees to be inducted in June but taking on new students remains a balancing act; there are still a limited number of 'student suitable' clients coming into the service for counselling. (These are clients without significant risk and/or trauma.) Please pray for this issue. We would really like to offer more students a placement opportunity in the coming months but need appropriate clients to be able to do this.

We have had the pleasure of inducting another two support workers to join our wonderful existing team. Unexpected illness and a hospital visit have slowed the induction process for one, but our other new starter recently took the plunge to 'go solo' in the house for the first time. We continue to welcome people that are interested in applying for this pivotal role, without which, the house simply could not function. Support workers are often the first point of contact for clients – the warm welcome they offer can make all the difference to someone who has made those first, tentative steps to access support.

Fundraising and Community As we receive no funding from the government or NHS, although local GPs and medical professionals' signpost to us, we rely on the amazing generosity of local churches and the contributions of our clients to cover our running costs. It remains extremely important to us that there is no financial barrier to accessing counselling support at the Bower House. In order to mitigate the shortfall that occurs when clients cannot afford to donate, we are committed to

fundraising and the Bower House family and friends in the local community have afforded us wonderful support over the last year.

We've had coffee mornings, a theatre Gala Night and stalls at the Harborough Carnival and the Scarecrow Festival in Lubenham. One of our team organised a 'Time and Talents' fundraiser based on the parable of the talents. A £5 stake was provided, and people were asked to creatively 'grow' this amount. There were cake sales, coffee mornings, jewellery making, e - bay sales and a silent auction, resulting in a grand total of £1911 and a tremendous amount of fun! In March this year, we also held a concert (in memory of one of our founding members, Sarah Ray Smyth). It was a resounding success with over £1800 raised. More importantly, all these events allow us to connect with the local community, ensuring people know that we are here if ever they have need of us.

CPD Events

CPD is an important part of developing as a therapist and we are committed to offering quality CPD opportunities to our counsellors. Lynne Findlay (specialist Safeguarding trainer, social worker and therapist) delivered online Safeguarding awareness training via zoom in April, but our most recent CPD training focus has been on Neurodivergence. We wanted to respond to the noticeable rise in clients with ASD, ADHD or both conditions. On Feb 22nd Sara Kedge, a trainer and coach who specialises in neurodivergence, delivered a morning's training, followed by a second event at the beginning of May that built on the understanding gained in the previous training. Helen Heather, a former teacher and specialist neurodivergence therapist, focused on practical considerations for working with neurodivergence in the counselling room. We had excellent take up from Bower House counsellors and those from other organisations for both events. We are planning a CPD event on Trauma in the autumn.

Initial assessments are a very important part of the counselling journey, for both the client and The Bower House; when clients refer themselves for therapy, the assessment is the first opportunity they have to unpack their unique history and story. We speak about their therapeutic goals and expectations, as well as checking out any risk, so it's important we work safely and to the client's best interests.

We recently wrote some initial assessment training and delivered it to qualified counsellors on our team looking to develop their skills. We introduced an updated initial assessment form, talked through the process and discussed important considerations. Since this session, we have written Initial Assessments scenarios and offered 'practice' sessions to new starters. Willing support worker volunteers played the part of clients, enabling counsellors to receive feedback, gain

confidence and become more familiar with the paperwork before conducting assessments with real clients.

Clients/Waiting List

Our first Decider Skills course for clients ran from February to March. This is a CBT skills based course delivered over two sessions to help clients whilst they wait for their 1:1 counselling sessions. Two of our Decider Skills trained support workers, delivered the program and had excellent feedback from the those that attended. We propose to run the program again in the Autumn. Clients waiting for allocation currently stands at around 30, with almost half of these clients looking for late afternoon or evening appointments. When we informed counsellors of this emerging pattern, some of our volunteer counsellors moved their times in the house to meet this need. As ever, we are incredibly thankful for the flexibility and heart of our team. We want to thank the Churches Together for all the prayers and wonderful support that the Bower House receives. It remains a tremendous privilege to work alongside so many committed and faithful people in the Christian community in Market Harborough.

Every blessing, Cara and Loraine.

The Cube: Report 2024 - 2025

As reported earlier in the year, The Cube is facing change as the trustees continue to review how the charity is governed in terms of updating its charitable aims and recognising the need to recruit a bigger and more diverse trustee board to better reflect the essence of the charity we now are, 20 years on from HYACT's beginnings in June 2005.

The Trustees are currently working with a consultant, appointed by the Cranfield Trust (an organisation providing charities like HYACT with pro-bono support), on a feasibility study, working through the options available to us, while at the same time developing closer links with local charities who share similar aims to that of HYACT, to provide mutual support and the sharing of ideas and good practice in charity governance and day to day working.

We have a great building, and it is important to HYACT that The Cube building remains a resource for youth work in Market Harborough. It is also important to us that the work we do continues to make a difference in young people's lives, and most importantly, that young people stay at the centre of all decisions regarding

the direction of the charity. We continue to build on partnerships with our local secondary schools. We are present every week, running groups, meeting young people through the popular drop-in lunch time sessions and tailored mentoring for some individuals, alongside after school sessions run at the Cube. We continue to provide subsidised access to counselling and last year delivered 487 sessions where specialist counsellors met with young people. The Youth Counselling Service continues to grow as it meets the wellbeing needs of local young people. We have recently appointed a new administrator and a support worker to work alongside the Youth Work Lead. Both bring a wealth of experience and are welcome additions to the staff team. We are always looking to recruit new volunteers to a variety of roles.

We are thankful to Churches Together in Harborough, individuals, churches and Friends of the Cube for their continued financial support. As with any charity, there is a constant need for the raising of unrestricted funds to enable the running of the charity.

The Cube continues to provide a base for various groups who hire the building during the week. Churches are reminded that the Cube is available for youth related activities and meetings. As we continue through 2025 with the direction of the Cranfield Trust, be assured of our openness, and the sharing of progress. Above all, we thank God for His provision and outpouring of grace over the work of HYACT for the past 20 years and look forward to His continued blessing into the future.

To find out more about the work of the Cube or to respond to any of the things outlined in this report, you can contact us at: **The CUBE on Symington's, St Mary's Road, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 7DS 01858 437650**

Janet Smith, Trustee

Annual Report, Jubilee Foodbank, Churches Together Harborough

Figures for April 2025

Our main Referrals Agencies continue to be: **Renew Wellbeing café / The Children and Family Hub / CAB / Turning Point / Harborough Churches / Cube and Homestart / Schools and other agencies also feature but not quite so regularly.**

Reminder that when referred we offer families food for **7 days including 3 meals a day.**

April has seen over 118 referrals which is an approximate increase of 10% on this time 2024.

This year we have helped 167 Households as well as individual adults and pensioner referrals have risen slightly, which amounts to over **1,000 people** being fed. If all meals are accounted, this amounts to over **20,000 meals** donated this year so far.

We are also seeing an increase in the referrals of people who are homeless or in temporary accommodation which have doubled in April from previous months. This is becoming a normal pattern for this time of year, as more itinerant people seem to use Harborough as a base in the warmer months.

We continue to report back to Referral Agencies if families are needing support for longer than we normally offer it.

Shortages

Due to the increased demand for food the store has become extremely depleted. We are struggling for particular food items; these are consistently updated on our website and other social media platforms.

This is causing us some concern, and we also worry that recent Government policies regarding social support may cause even more people to fall into food poverty.

We are trying to tackle this by reaching out to new donators, but if any Churches have any ideas for a more reliable source of food donations, we would be grateful.

Special Donations

Lions did a shop as well as a collection from Sibbertoft.
Hallaton Church launched their 'one ton of food' initiative and we have gratefully received over 900 tins of food from them.

We were donated Chocolate Eggs from Leicester Grammar school before Easter. A shipment of loo rolls was received from Rural Trading this week.

ALDI Vouchers

In a measure to try to ensure that families have access to some fresh items we have begun to buy Aldi vouchers that can be exchanged for fresh items such as

milk, cheese eggs and meat products. These are in addition to the meat and veg vouchers supplied for the town Market stalls.

Trustees

We have recently had a turnaround of Board of Trustees with **3 new Trustees** appointed and a change of roles for others. This has given a new lease of life to some areas of our work. Although we are still looking for **2 new Trustees** as we are losing a member temporarily and have room for another, if anyone from CTH is interested in such a role.

Referral Agency

New Referral Agency is VASL, who will also be prepared to act as a food drop off centre when they are in their new premises.

Volunteers

We are currently in need of new volunteers to help with both front-line donations and to join the store teams. If Churches together have any ideas or would like to offer some help here, please do contact Jubilee. Obviously, these are responsible jobs and would need training and a degree of fitness as there can be lifting involved.

Social Media

Social media has been stepped up / a newsletter for Referral Agencies has now been well established.

We continue to use social media as an approach to asking for more focused food donations, and during lean times.

New Connections

New connections have been created with businesses in town, **Mercado Lounge** has a food donation basket; and has agreed to donate regularly from their charity Quiz nights, with more support to follow.

Park Run organised a donation day for Jubilee which we were very grateful for, and we hope that this could be more of a regular donation stream.

Events

Volunteer Social at the Village / AGM / Quiz Night at the Mercado.

Market Harborough Building Society have given us the use of their new facilities to hold our AGM.

We would very much like to have a more public face at future Harborough town events, but we are struggling for volunteers to help set up and staff a stall. We were present at Good Friday on the Square. We had previously been offered the Green Street at the Carnival but have no one to run the stall. We are aware that the Vintage Car and other summer town events are coming up that we would like to be part of.

Recipe Booklet

Jubilee have put together a booklet with recipes that use products found in the food parcels that we supply. This has yet to be printed and trialled, but we hope that it will provide a good service to the people that may need this help.

External Agencies

Independent Food Network, there is no cost to join, and they can support our campaign and are nationwide.

Gift Aid

We are still investigating claiming gift aid, and the benefit from monthly giving.

Pet Support

Liz has spoken to Lisa Parrott who runs 'Dogs Dinners' and she is happy to give us animal food for the Foodbank on an ad hoc emergency basis.

CTH

Emergency food parcels - Each Church has been given an emergency food parcel some time ago. Please do let Jubilee know when you need this replenished or replaced. We will ensure that new emergency bags are brought to your Church.

CTH Chair's Report 2025

Jan Turner & myself are grateful to the CTH Executive committee for their wonderful support over the past year whilst we have been in Office. This has comprised of Jeannie Brightwell and Jackie Melhuish & Janet Smith.

Their support has enable the smooth running of CTH - helping with preparing the agenda before each Forum meeting and executing the programme of events through out the year.

These have included the Peace Vigil in January, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Lent Lunches and the Easter Live Event.

Looking forward our desire is by the help of God to continue to fulfil the objectives of CTH. These are:

- to be a visible sign of the churches' commitment to one another.
- to facilitate common witness to Christ.
- to respond to the needs of the community in shared service and outreach where this is possible.

These objectives are being made possible by the continued support of the Ministers Fellowship.

We are excited to see what the Lord has planned for CTH in the coming year as we continue to honour Him by our love for one another and in the service of His name.

Maureen Douglas 26th May 2025.