

1. The story so far...

Over the past few years we have been walking a journey as we seek to play our part in the building of God's kingdom in Hurdsfield, Macclesfield and beyond. Back in 2017 I encouraged us to follow some ideas and possibilities that God seemed to be laying before us. We called that, 'following the breadcrumbs' and it is exciting to see that several of these continue to bear fruit. In 2018 I talked about vision and values. I hope that you all recognise them:

Our Vision (What we are about):

We seek to passionately follow Jesus, sharing the good news of his amazing love and seeing people, relationships and our community transformed by Him.

Our Values (Who we aspire to be):

We are HTH | family | authentic | adventurers

At that time, I also talked about some priorities that the PCC felt we should focus on. They are a work in progress, but I am pleased that we have made good headway in most of them.

2. Looking to the future

As a PCC we have been looking towards the future. This was prompted by, perhaps surprisingly, Cheshire East Council! In late 2018 we applied for an extension to our temporary planning permission for the church office and classroom porta-cabins. Whilst we were offered a short extension, we have been told that we will need to remove them in the future as temporary permission cannot be extended beyond the end of 2020.

This felt like a prompt from God saying, 'now is the time to put in place a foundation for the future ministry of HTH'. So the PCC set about thinking about what HTH might look like in 2038 (the 200th birthday of the Church) and what do we need to put in place NOW to ensure that we build on what we already do well and that our ministry continues to flourish?

3. Principles for the future

We cannot be sure what HTH will look like in 2038, but as PCC we have discussed and prayed about what God is saying to us through all of this and we have agreed some key principles that will guide us:

Principle 1 We want to grow

We aim to grow as a Christian community. We accept that this will bring change and the need to adapt. We will need to manage this change carefully. Growth will not just happen. We need to be intentional about ensuring that we create conditions that encourage growth.

Principle 2 To grow we need to invest now

- investing in people

We agreed that it felt right to invest in additional staff now to bring growth rather than wait for growth and then invest to keep up with the demands of that growth. Everyone wants and needs to be involved in a growing church. Therefore we must also ensure that, even with a growing staff team, our individual discipleship leads to everyone contributing time and effort towards growth.

- investing in our facilities

The church site provides us with a worship space, meeting rooms, parking as well as a long Christian heritage and place in the community. Over the years the church has been continually changing (just think of chairs, toilets, kitchen, classroom, office ...). We are not able to keep the current office and classroom so we now need to consider the next step in developing our facilities. We have agreed that we need to develop alternative space to replace the office and classroom and we need to submit plans showing what we will do in 2020.

While we considered several options, there does not seem to be a compelling argument to look beyond our site for new / additional facilities nor to redevelop the church itself which would be an expensive option. Therefore, we have looked to our own site and considered several potential options for siting a new building. Following discussions with planners and PCC, the preferred option focusses on a new lightweight structure on the existing site of the office and classroom. This new building should be permanent, maximise the area we have available to us, and be of flexible internal design so that it will meet our changing needs as we grow.

- investing in congregations

As we look to growth we are guided to continue to develop our model of church which has multiple congregations (as opposed to a single large congregation that meets in a huge auditorium). We currently have 2 congregations which meet at 9am and 10:30am. Our worship space seats a maximum of 220 - 240 people. Evidence from other churches indicates that congregations tend to stop growing once more than about 80% of the seats are full (i.e. 175 – 190 people). Wonderfully, our 10:30am congregation is approaching this size and so we need to think about ‘what next’ in terms of congregations now.

- investing in the church site and our welcome

In November 2018, the PCC agreed to take forward a project (called Everybody Welcome) to improve our ability to welcome people and access the site safely through resurfacing, increased parking, bike storage, improved signage and traffic flow, and an improved welcoming process to ensure people who arrive are not just welcomed but come to belong as well. We will include this as part of what we do as it will make sure our site is fit for the future.

Principle 3 Communication is critical to success

We agreed that involvement and communication is key - both within the PCC and the whole church. This is why we are taking this opportunity to let you know about this now. Alongside this information, PCC members are ready to help answer questions that you might have.

4. So what are we proposing?

Given the above discussions and conclusions, we are proposing that we develop a project with 3 elements:

- ***Investing in people*** - one full-time role (or a combination of part-time roles) for 2 years
- ***Investing in the church site and welcome*** – making the site and our welcome fit for purpose into the future
- ***Investing in facilities*** - a new building on the site of the existing porta cabins, to house the office, flexible meeting rooms and storage.

A high level estimated cost for the investment over 2 years is £310K (definitely an estimate). The general sense of the PCC was that this figure, while challenging, especially given the timescales, felt achievable.

5. So what happens next?

- *we want your thoughts and feedback*

First of all we want to hear your feedback on what we are proposing. We know that growth will bring change to the way that HTH looks and feels. Please talk to the PCC members, ask them questions and let them know what you think.

- *we want your help*

We agreed that we need a project team to take this forward. John Burt has offered to lead the team. PCC members were asked to put themselves forward if they wanted to be part of this project team. We also want others from the church to be part of this team. If this might be you then please talk to John or me.

The priorities for the team at this moment are to:

- seek the opinion of the DAC (Diocese) on these plans
- develop the detail of what we are going to do for the PCC to agree
- work out how much this will all cost.

6. A final thought...

The future looks exciting – I hope you agree. As we set our minds to the future and establishing solid principles and foundations for growth, I am reminded of all the faithful ministry over the years in and through HTH and am excited for all that will happen in the future. It is not first step, nor is it the last, but ***it is our moment, our opportunity here and now to respond*** and step into what God is calling HTH to do as we play our part in His growing kingdom.

As I have been thinking and praying about all we plan to do, I have been reminded of 2 verses. The first has been with me consistently since I arrived at HTH: *Isaiah 43v18-9 'See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland'*. The second is more specifically for us as we consider the future. *Proverbs 3v5-6: 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight'*.

I believe that this is a moment for us to stand together, trust in Him and faithfully pursue his presence in our lives. As we do so, I believe that he will make the way clear and provide all we need so that we can remain faithful to him and be effective for Him and the growth of His kingdom to 2038 and beyond.

James GIBSON - 31/03/19