

## **Proposed Closure of Wheatley Methodist Church**

Wheatley Methodist Church joined with the Anglican Church of St Peter and St Paul on 19 January 1992 to become 'The Church in Wheatley' - a Single Congregation Local Ecumenical Partnership.

Both the Methodist and the Anglican buildings were retained and used for worship and other key celebrations and events.

During the lockdown period the congregation were very active in the local community, for example, preparing a monthly lunch that could be collected from the address of one of the members and eaten with friends in people's own gardens; or providing prayer stations within the local churchyard for key festivals when villagers were unable to enter the church buildings.

This experience, coupled with concerns about the running costs of maintaining two buildings and some long-term structural issues with the Methodist premises, prompted the trustees to explore the best use of their resources for mission in the village.

The relationship with the local Church School is a key component of the Church's vision. The Anglican premises, especially if they could be adapted to create a more flexible space, are well sized to accommodate the whole school on regular occasions.

The way forward was discussed at two Congregational Meetings on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2022 and 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2022. At the first meeting it was minuted that: 'This meeting, having considered the running costs of the building and the potential cost of maintaining the structure of the Chapel, with regret, feel the way forward, may be to close the Chapel.'

On 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2022, after a discussion based on the Methodist notes from the 'Strategic Guidance for the use of property in mission', the members voted on the proposal 'that we start the procedure for formal closure of the Methodist Church building.'

Present 17 people

In favour 12

Abstentions 5

On 31<sup>st</sup> May 2022 the trustees met with Tom Rattigan on Zoom to explore the next steps they need to take. Tom was able to share ideas about mission initiatives from other areas, including the Peak Circuit, and to introduce the trustees to the questions that need to be considered when deciding whether there are other missional uses for a building like Wheatley Methodist Church.

The members of the Circuit Meeting will assemble on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> July 2022 to receive and discuss the above report and to vote upon two proposals:

- (1) To seek permission from the Synod to cease to worship at Wheatley Methodist Church.
- (2) To authorise the members of the Circuit Leadership Team (in liaison with the local trustees) to explore and action the best option for the premises, which could involve finding an alternative missional use, leasing or selling the property.

Care is being taken to ensure that the Methodist identity is not lost at this time. For example, the new noticeboard at the Parish Church will include both denominations and ordained ministry will continue to be shared between the two denominations. The Covenant Service and Methodist styles of worship will continue to be embedded in the practice of the congregation.

The Circuit Leadership Team, in liaison with the local trustees, will explore the missional questions produced by the District/TMCP, take professional advice through a Qualified Surveyor's Report (QSR), consult with the Methodist Conservation Officer as the property is in a conservation area, consult with the Connexional Ecumenical Officer about the implications of past and future Sharing Agreement and keep the local membership, and the wider community, informed of all decisions.

*Julie Coates July 2022*