

Katrin Hackett

From: Nigel Bonson <treasurer.bnwc@outlook.com>
Sent: 04 July 2024 08:11
To: Katrin Hackett
Cc: lyn.gregg@methodist.org
Subject: Silkstone Common Methodist Church Cease To Meet/Future Plans

Good morning Katrin

On the recommendation of Neil Harland, I am writing to you on behalf of the Barnsley Circuit Resources Team in connection with the above.

Silkstone Common Methodist Chapel is part of the NW church in the Barnsley Circuit. It has been exploring its future actively since 2007 if not long before that. In the neighbourhood plan for 2022-2033 it is described as a "fine example of a primitive Methodist Church. Built in 1931 to replace a former building, it is the only place of worship in the village & has supported Anglican worship. Although as far back as 2007, 50 people in the community survey were prepared to support Methodist & Anglican worship but only 23 ecumenical worships.

There have been several serious efforts to move things forward. An architect was appointed in 2019 to produce sketches following a project brief to improve the building for users. As this was just pre-pandemic nothing seemed to happen further. Post pandemic it was proposed to set up a management group for the chapel. This would consist of a minister, 2 other managing trustees from NW church & around 8 members of the local community agreed by the church council of NW church each September. The paperwork was undated but more recent.

None of this work was successful and in January 2023 the members of the church council agreed with the members request to have a year to transfer, with a closing service in April 2023. The membership has all moved to Dodworth Methodist Chapel. At the NW Church Council held on 30th January 2024 the meeting accepted the proposal that 'following the exploration of the feasibility of running Silkstone Common, the NWCC request that the Circuit take the necessary steps to dispose of the building. The Proposal was accepted with 23 votes For, none Against, and 1 Abstention. This was passed to the Circuit Meeting & the decision made in March 2024 to close & sell the building.

This provoked media & local interest. It is clear that Silkstone Common Methodist Chapel has provided an effective community hub for many years. The chapel has sought to build links alter the building & create community management, but all attempts have failed. The community survey shows clear interest in a community hub rather than a church. The building has been listed as a community asset which affects the value.

The Parish Council are applying for grant funding to keep the building under community ownership & to develop the building. This is outlined in this letter from the Parish Clerk.

"Our bid to the COF is very detailed and explains to the evaluators how the Parish Council has the resource, energy, commitment, and experience to run the Chapel as a Community Hub; allowing current user groups to flourish and promote usage for other community groups in the parish and beyond. The Council also has ambitious plans to refurbish the Chapel, deal with all the required maintenance works and accommodate other types of leisure activities, groups and if there is appetite to potentially allow space for worship."

Decisions on this are time critical. The funding opens on May 30th & closes on June 26th. If they are successful, then it is likely funds will be released over the summer. Sadly, it is unlikely they will be able to move forward if the agreement is not in place. This community hub is part of the paperwork & sense of how the church sees itself. We hope that we can have agreement to the cease to meet & to the sale of the building. We will then be able to see how we can work back into the building in a new way.

The circuit has supported Silkstone Common and the North West Methodist Church in considering possibilities since 2007: by community survey and new building plans, but ultimately, the congregation was too tired. There was resistance to church leadership, particularly if Methodist, due to its regulations. In terms of our mission plan, we aim to work firstly where we have a congregation. Silkstone Common has not been meeting as a congregation for over a year. Even the most passionate advocate feels the community hub is the best way to go. There are no other significant community spaces in the area. The Parish Council are applying for funds to buy the building and fear that it could be sold for housing or similar.

Attempts by the chapel to develop an appropriate management body with church and community acting together to run, develop and maintain the building have failed as they could not get community members to work with the church [and struggled to get the members to take up the work]. Therefore, much as we see the possibilities [economic and evangelistic], the problem will continue if we hold on. We could use space in the community hub for new forms of worship if freed from the pressures of maintenance.

Elsewhere in both Circuit and Church, new things are beginning and monies arising from the sale would be directed into some of the excellent projects currently under consideration such as circuit youth work, lay worker(s) involved in inter-generational and ecumenical work, vintage Messy Church or something arising.

Subject to consent being given for ceasing to meet, we will proceed with the process of applying for consent to sell, and further our plans for a Replacement Project.

Please contact me if you require any further information, and advise the outcome of the meeting that Neil mentioned to be held on 9 July 2024.

With kind regards

Nigel Bonson
Treasurer and Trustee
The Methodist Church Barnsley North West
Registered Charity Number 1135136
Buckley/Dodworth/Emmanuel/Higham/Kexborough/Pogmoor/Silkstone Common