



Notes from the first “Friends of St Thomas Church Steering Group Meeting” – Fri 11th Oct 2013 3.30pm at the Westacres Pub

Liz Millman, Chair of Finchfield Community Association, welcomed everyone and introductions were made.

Over the past few weeks since FCA started to explore whether there was community interest in trying to reclaim the use of the St Thomas Church Building we have held 4 Open Viewing events with positive feedback and lots of ideas. We created the Friends of St Thomas Church as the project name to take this interest forward and we have now got 180 Friends Of St Thomas Church, with 45 specific offers of volunteer support, plus a number of people who have already made financial contributions to cover initial costs incurred, and more than 20 have volunteered to be active on the Steering Group. We set the first Steering Group meeting at 3.30pm on Fri 11th October and 13 people attended, but a number of other interested people were unable to come at this time and sent apologies.

Those present agreed to be the Steering Group, which with others who have expressed interest will take this project forward and to be a member of the FSTC Steering Group individuals, or representatives of other organisations, must agree with the overall ideas that are the consensus of the way forward and have a willingness to listen to and consider alternative views, in order to take an active role in taking this vision this forward, and be willing to undertake the necessary activities and action needed or give advice on the steps proposed.

Summary of decisions made after discussion:

- ✓ we agreed that there is clearly a great deal of community interest and support to give confidence that we can work to reclaim the St Thomas Church building as a community resource. This was based on the very positive and supportive community response to the proposal, and the clear potential of the building to be an asset for the future – this was endorsed by a specialist Church Architect who arranged to visit
- ✓ we accepted the offer of WREN (Wightwick and Regis Enterprise Network) to explore ways that WREN can support funding applications and welcomed Cyril Randles, Chair of WREN, to join the FSTC Steering Group.
- ✓ we agreed to get a survey done, by specialist Church and Historical Buildings Surveyor, recommended by the architect, asap, this will cost £600 and we plan to use the monies raised at the Finchfield Autumn Festival and donations to cover this cost.
- ✓ we agreed to launch an Appeal to raise further funds to support further initial and ongoing costs of activities needed to reclaim St Thomas Church building for community use, eg based on the outcome of the survey, we will get an independent valuation – this, as well as the volunteer hours contribution, will act as “matched funding” in funding applications. If for whatever reason this

FCA agreed to take on the management of any income related to this project and as an FCA member, Andrew Atkinson agreed to take responsibility for this at this stage.

Steve Vanstone agreed to take a role in Project Management and Fund Finding.

Background and update

Since August 2013, through creating opportunities for local people to visit the derelict St Thomas Church building and engaging in community consultation, Finchfield Community Association (FCA) has identified a real enthusiasm and single vision of the creation of a multi purpose Community facility using the refurbished Church building with an extension of a Garden Room, with toilets, kitchen and space for an informal meeting place, with a Community Garden. Space for offices could also be explored.

The consensus seems to be that this use would meet a variety of needs:

- For families: Breakfast Club and After School care, and a garden for exploring
- For teenagers: evening and possibly weekend activities
- For older people: a meeting place with activities organised
- Intergenerational activities: local history workshops
- For people with learning difficulties: opportunities to develop sheltered employment in the kitchen and garden
- For people with physical difficulties: easy access and a garden with raised beds for enjoyment, organic planting etc
- For us all: events, cinema shows, dance classes, yoga, etc
- Educational opportunities: eg social media workshops, confidence with computers / tablets and phones
- For the Independent Friends of St Thomas: a regular reserved Sunday morning worship slot
- For local people who want to book a space for their own activities, clubs etc

And there are many other ideas, but all along the lines of restoring the building and using it as a central place in the community for events and activities. However there appears to still be interest in private purchase, so we must take action asap to secure the use of the building and at some stage soon we will need to explore whether we need to put a Community Asset lock on the sale of the property to anyone else, while we try to raise the funding to pay for it.

The St Thomas Church Congregation, who call themselves “The Independent Church of St Thomas” continue to meet each week at St Columbas Day Centre and will welcome anyone interested to attend their short service at 9.15am. The Congregation have been kept well informed, with individuals visiting the building and interested to share their stories.

Wolverhampton City Council have given support through the “Our Place Our Plan “ consultation and support by the LNP Team at events and with information, also with advice from Sue Whitehouse, the Historic Environment Officer at the Council recommended who arranged for a specialist architect to visit and advise us on the suitability of the building in line with our thoughts and plans. This was done at no cost and supported our ideas very positively.

Kerry Purnell from WCC has agreed to support us in finding funding sources and has already emailed a range of possibilities. She has agreed to meet at Latuskes on Mon 21st Oct at 9am to discuss the HLF Start Up Grants application with us.

Julia Harris at the Wolverhampton Voluntary Council has agreed advise us on appropriate structures to take this project forward in terms of the organisational structure that will take this forward in a timely and appropriate way, then being able to move to the day to day management of the Community Centre.

We still need offers of support and interest – just let us know and we meet for coffee at 9am on Mondays and Fridays at Latuskes – come along and meet up at any time you can make it – we are also planning an open evening meeting on Wed 20th Nov – ***to be confirmed*** at Uplands Juniors and we are planning a Site Meeting (at the Church) on **Friday 1st Nov at 2pm** – please bring a chair and wear your thermal undies!

On behalf of FCA – thank you to everyone who has been involved to date. This project is being explored alongside the other activities FCA is engaged in ie supporting the set up of Business Watch, supporting a new improved approach to Neighbourhood Watch, working on parking issues , potholes, speeding concerns, clearing up weedy areas, and trying to find solutions to the rubbish storage and collection around the main shopping area, and if this is more your area of interest then please consider joining the FCA Local Neighbourhood Committee (Businesses and locals) ie those of us who don't mind trying to sort out everyday challenges!