

Record of meeting of Tresham community meeting about the wider use of the church

January 16th 2019 7.30pm, held in Tresham Church.

There were 19 residents present. Three others had written to give their support to the widening of the use of the church for social activities as well as worship, but could not attend.

1. Aim of meeting:

To open discussion within the village about the church, its value to the village and its residents, and whether it could be used more widely. If so, how might that be achieved?

2. Sue Whitfield (church warden) introduced the subject:

Since the church-going community was normally very small and its members getting older, there is a medium or long-term threat to the viability of the church. This is occurring across the country, and churches are widening their use into their local communities. The Gloucester Diocese is very supportive of this, and Sue had attended their workshop on it, as she thought it might be helpful for Tresham at some point. With such a small community here, there is the real possibility that, looking ahead, unless we start to take some action soon our church may later be deemed redundant and close. Elsewhere, such churches are sometimes sold for housing. Many churches have made adaptations to make them suitable for activities other than worship, so that there is a larger number of people supporting them in every way, and they are providing a more widely useful resource to the locality. In Tresham, with no other public building, it may be that residents would support the wider use of this building, so that more people would benefit from it and be involved with it. It would then become more likely to be able to continue to be here for Tresham residents to use, including as a church, well into the future.

3. Issues raised (no particular order):

- i) It was recollected that the local village pub had closed as a result of the arrival of television in the 50s and 60s, without people realising at the time what the impact would be.
- ii) Respect is needed for the graves, where people known to residents and loved by them, are buried.
- iii) Need to protect the font and chancel, and artefacts precious to the church and its community
- iv) Need to still be able to visit the church when it is empty and feel its peace and tranquillity, for private contemplation.
- v) Should establish a need before making any changes and embarking on expense
- vi) Significant problems such as vehicle access, heating, and lack of facilities (toilet, kitchen servery for refreshments, storage).
- vii) Pews – general concerns; emotional attachment to the pews we know so well despite their discomfort and lack of any aesthetic value. Suggestions that they could be placed around the walls to give space, or be made movable. Pews are always a very big concern whenever a church makes change. Suggestion that if we did this, we could start with just removing the pews at the back of the church.
- viii) Group of people would be needed to make it work.
- ix) It would be for Tresham use – or with own friends if accompanied, perhaps also extend to Alderley (we are a joint parish with St Kenelm's there, and Alderley residents share our respect for both churches. Some attend our church as well as theirs). We would not be intending to make a 'business' out of it, but its activities could help maintain the building, alongside the church, but still keeping finances separate.
- x) Best to start small, and hold suitable events now, to establish possible justification for extensive work and get more people involved immediately. Quiz night?
- xi) Consider putting in wifi to open up wider uses, once Fastershire broadband is available.
- xii) Set up a small willing group to help maintain the building and its surroundings.
- xiii) Disabled and less-abled access crucial, to ensure everyone can get to the building.

- xiv) Richard Goodenough, Treasurer, said that the church usually breaks even financially each year, but we do need events from time to time which raise money to achieve this. The Village Hall Fund might contribute some money to any changes but we need to be confident that it is answering a need.
4. Possible uses referred to during the meeting:
Coffee mornings, exercise aerobics or pilates groups, table tennis tournaments, village meetings, harvest suppers, watch World Cup, children's parties, quiz nights, local cider-tasting event, art/language or other educational course, barn dances or ceilidhs, ideas from local pubs for special interests (but some centre around their bars there....)
5. Defibrillator: in response to a question, Richard Graham reminded us that within a few months there will be a defibrillator installed in the (re-ordered) phone box for public use, with the possible addition there of a book exchange system. We would also have whole-village training in defibrillator use, perhaps using the church. Suggestion that we might also try to have wider first-aid education too. The defibrillator is being funded from local taxation, by Hillesley and Tresham Parish Council. Richard was thanked for all he has done as councillor for the village and our representative on the council. Minutes and agendas of meetings are on the Parish Council notice board by the postbox. There is also a link on the village website under 'What's Around'.
6. Passing reference was made to The Silver Line, a helpline for older people that's open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The number to ring is 0800 4 70 80 90; the website is www.thesilverline.org.uk.
7. Conclusions:
- i) There was general agreement at this meeting that we greatly value our church, and wish the building to remain in use in the long term for current and future residents. Our community has people of all ages who might make good use of the 'village hall' aspect of the church, if adapted, but we do not know the extent of this.
 - ii) If we are to make it more suitable for wider use, it would be expensive and disruptive, so we should move in stages to establish that the changes would be justified by the later use, and meanwhile have opportunities for local social enjoyment without having to drive anywhere. Improvement of facilities would probably need an extension to the north for a kitchenette servery, accessible toilet, and storage for chairs, tables and eg table-tennis tables. So we should start by seeing what we can do to widen use without much expense or change, and also involve more people who are willing to join in, in the current care of the building and churchyard.
8. Next steps:
- i) Simon Lee will move with others towards organising a Quiz evening in the church. Other activities also to be considered.
 - ii) Everyone to discuss the contents of the meeting with others, whether they had attended or were not able to be there, to reach a consensus on how to move forward.