

Consultation with Pudsey Parish Church – February/March 2021

I'm writing on behalf of the PCC to update the Pudsey Parish Church family on an exciting proposal and ask for your feedback, prayer and financial support.

What's the background?

Many of you will remember just over 18 months ago when, as a church, we considered whether to take on a large building in central Pudsey – Crawshaw Mill – to both be a base for a proposed Pudsey Community Project (youth provision centred alongside clothes project and potential food bank) – along with a soft play centre and café. That building plan was not to be (and we are all very glad with hindsight not to have made plans for a soft play centre given that appears to be the one area of business guaranteed not to survive 2020!) – but given the overall very positive church response to the proposal, after weeks of consultation, we promised to keep working on developing the Pudsey Community Project while continuing to keep an eye out for more suitable buildings – especially smaller buildings with less work needed to make them usable.

In the time that's followed, Pudsey Community Project has been launched and grown into an independent registered charity, centred around our foodbank project, but also encompassing the children's clothes project, the jigsaw library, befriending, shopping, and more. The Pudsey Community Project have worked with dozens of volunteers (half from church, half from the wider community) to make a huge impact on the local area – Pudsey, Swinnow, Tyersal, Woodhall, Farsley, Rodley and Calverley – with very encouraging levels of grant funding and a Lord Mayor's Award recognising the support it's given during 2020. The Project's income has included significant grant funding over the past year which has allowed it to employ Jo Dean as a session worker to coordinate opening times and manage our volunteers, and there is great confidence locally and across the city in its future development. The relationship with the church has developed into a tight positive partnership between our two Christian charities – in a similar way to St George's and its St George's Crypt, or Grace Community Church and its Caring for Life, the Project is the primary local expression of our church's mission to our local community, making a difference where we live and work, transforming our town in Jesus' name.

So now as we approach spring and look towards the medium term future, we have two needs: The Project needs a base, somewhere to flourish and develop, as was the plan with Crawshaw Mill.

The Church building needs to be clearer to fully reopen. We hope to have greater access in the church building for the local community in the future – so we need the space back that the Project is using! Hosting the Project in the church has worked superbly during lockdowns and restrictions but we want to provide full access to the church in the future.

So what's new?

Well, we've found a building, and the PCC are proposing a plan to buy it as a base for the Project to develop and grow, and to allow us to reopen church as church.

The building will be known to many of you as Fartown Christian Fellowship – on the corner of Carlisle Road and Fartown, just a few hundred metres from Pudsey Parish Church. It has been used by FCF as their congregation’s worship space for the past 50 years – but before that it used to belong to Pudsey Parish Church from its building in 1921 as one of our Sunday schools; some of the congregation will remember Sunday school there many years ago – or taking children to youth activities in more recent years.

The small Fartown congregation have taken the decision to stop meeting in person after Covid-19, and will not use their building for worship again, and their trustees have invited us to buy the building back to host the Project – they are very keen on the proposal and are supportively praying for us as we make a decision and plan.

The building includes two large halls, and five smaller meeting rooms, kitchens upstairs and downstairs, and toilets. Unlike Crawshaw Mill, which needed phenomenal work to take place in order to make it usable, Fartown was used regularly for worship until just last March and has been well maintained over the years.

The plan would be to host the foodbank and clothes project downstairs, and to use upstairs for a range of activities including youth provision (when restrictions allow) – including expanding the Friday night clubs we used to run in church before Covid-19, and to develop other areas as the Project grows such as mental health support groups, a lego club, even cooking lessons for teens – all sorts of other possibilities including new and more varied youth provision than is possible in the church building. Generally, “Christian-focused” things would happen in the church building (plus ABC baby and toddler groups, coffee mornings and much, much more!); wider “kingdom” things to enhance the common good would happen in Fartown. Grant funding applications would continue to be submitted and we would hope that before long the Project would be able to employ a full time Project Manager to run the building and its activities.

The PCC have discussed the plans in great depth, and prayed regularly, and PCC members have had the opportunity for extensive tours of the building. Some PCC members have remarked on the miraculous provision of the building and how it just “feels right”. PCC members were very positive about the building and excited about the possibilities it afforded, and how well suited to the Project it would be – and agreed it was a much more achievable plan than Crawshaw Mill, with a significantly reduced budget and very realistic target. We were asked by congregation members to come up with an alternative to the Mill which was smaller and more achievable – and this is that alternative. We have commissioned a very thorough building survey which showed no surprises, and gave us a helpful list of actions we would need to take to maintain and improve the building, but nothing that dissuades us from the building being an excellent home for the Project.

So what’s the plan?

The church owns a house on Somerset Road, and the PCC is proposing to sell this building in order to buy the Fartown Christian Fellowship building. We have also been given an expression of support in the shape of a huge grant of £25,000 from our local ward councillors towards buying the building if we choose to finalise the decision – a massive vote of confidence in the proposal. The Fartown building is significantly cheaper than Crawshaw Mill and we are hopeful

that the combination of the two should cover the purchase price of the building – so **buying** the building itself is a realistic plan.

The Project would pay the church a rent comparable to the rental income from Somerset Road so that our property investment continues to generate an income stream for the church. But a recent Church of England Commission into housing had its report released a few days ago and said churches “should be ensuring that our land and our resources are used for the blessing of all, and not only seen as potential financial assets for our own benefit”. This change of investment does just that – shifting the focus from income alone to income and mission: it would be a win-win for both the church and the Project.

So what next?

The PCC have had lots of discussion on this proposal but, before we make a final decision on the building, we are asking for your opinions and offering to discuss it with anyone from the church who wants to know more.

We are also asking for your prayer support as we weigh up the decision and seek further clarity – and we are inviting you to support the proposal, if you can, by pledging financial support. As mentioned earlier, we are confident about being able to **buy** the building – but as it is 100 years old there are some necessary improvements we would have to plan to undertake including planning to entirely re-roof within the next five years. So we are hoping to build up a fund of money to help pay for the improvements and ongoing maintenance should we take on the building. This fund would give the PCC confidence that should they take on the building, it will continue to be in excellent condition for years to come: so as part of the process we are inviting congregation members to pledge financial support and hoping to reach a total of **£30,000** of promised support towards ongoing maintenance. If we could achieve that, it would be a confident endorsement of a decision to buy, that would help us decide to move ahead. Please contact me or give details in the survey if you are able to help.

You will find in this pack:

- General plan of the building – lower floor and upper floor
- Some photos and a map of its location
- An invitation to online Zoom prayer times over the consultation period (also accessible by phone)
- An invitation to three online Zoom Q&A times (also accessible by phone)
- A link to a short survey to get your feedback on the proposal and a pledge of financial support (printed out with a SAE for those not on email) – names are asked for (for tracking numbers and for replying) but submissions will be kept confidential with names removed

And if you visit www.pudseyparish.org.uk/fartown you will be able to see all these resources and more, and a Frequently Asked Questions section where we will add answers to some of the questions that are asked during the consultation. The consultation will close on Saturday 13 March before the PCC meeting two days later.

Thank you for your prayers, your feedback, and your partnership in mission and ministry in our parish – the PCC commend this exciting proposal to your consideration and look forward to hearing what you think.

Grace and Peace, Richard Dimery – on behalf of Pudsey Parish Church PCC