**THE REBUILDING OF ALL SAINTS CHURCH – UPDATE OCTOBER 2020**

**Q) Why has rebuilding not started yet?**

**A)** I had hoped not so long ago that rebuilding would start this Autumn. Currently two things stand in our way.

**PERMISSION** – We have planning permission for Hart District council. The Chancellor of the Diocese is still to grant our final faculty application. We have submitted everything he needs to do so. The Victorian Society have registered as objectors to the project, mostly on the ground of our many times amended plans for a porch/west entrance. The chancellor has tried very hard to bring about a swift resolution that does not involve any sort of formal ‘hearing’ – which would be costly and cause more delay. Correspondence between our Architect and the Victorian society has moved us significantly closer to an agreement which will allow the Chancellor to grant the faculty without further obstacle, though it might put a condition on the way the porch is built. I am sure that we could live with that – what we need to avoid is any amendment of the design that would necessitate resubmitting the plans to Hart Planning or the DAC! That being said, I feel we are very, very close now to resolving this and receiving the final go ahead.

**MONEY –** Despite having put the project out to tender, we still do not know how much money we will need to complete the project. That is because (at the time of writing) we are still waiting for our insurers to confirm how much they will be giving us. It is clear however that we are currently some way short of what we need to complete the full project – perhaps somewhere between £300,000 - £500,000. As you will see from the ‘Barometer’, this is almost exactly what we had hoped to raise by fundraising this year, but sadly little fundraising has been possible due to COVID.

Again I am confident that we will have a clearer picture of the true ‘gap’ in funds very soon – but then I have said that before and been wrong, it is not down to us and obviously we have no means of putting pressure on our insurers short of filing a complaint, which would not be in our interests.

**Q) So, what are our options?**

**A)** Obviously, we cannot commission work that we cannot afford to pay for, so our options are these.

* **Build as much of the project as we can afford, prepare the ground for the rest, and continue to fund raise when we can until we are able to complete the project.**
* **Modify the project in some way – i.e. decide not to build the annexe, or the new entrance, or do smaller/simpler versions of these.**
* **Rebuild All Saints exactly as it was.**
* **Abandon the Project Altogether.**

Personally, I would prefer the **first** of these options, which I believe would be achievable, and would remain faithful to the vison we have been given and to all the sacrificial giving and support we have received so far.

**Q) Why can’t we just rebuild All Saints as it was?**

**A)** What exactly do we mean by that? The amenity groups (Victorian Society, Heritage for England etc, our local conservation officer) have different ideas about how the church should be ‘put back as it was’ ( As it was in 2015? Or 1950? Or 1930? Or 1863?). So even this option would mean going back a few steps in the planning process – causing more cost and delay.

The bigger issue is with the future viability of All Saints. Believe me, the Rebuilding Group have only worked on this project as they have because many people told that AS needs to be ‘improved’ in order to meet the needs of our town and church in the 21st Century. We have been inspired by the concept of ‘All Saints, a place for everyone’, which we believe is a key part of our work of Christian mission going forward. The huge amount of support financial and otherwise that the project has received convinces us that this path is the right one. To go backwards would be to let down our community, our supporters, our congregation, our young people, and ultimately , our Lord.

**Q) So, couldn’t we come up with a less ambitious plan?**

**A)** Yes, we could, but any significant change to the plans would mean resubmitting them not only to the church authorities (DAC) but also to the local planning authority (HDC). From experience, this could delay the project further by as much as a year, and our changes would be scrutinised once again by the Victorian society, Historic England etc, with uncertain outcome. It would also take time and money to redraw the plans and take them through all the stages that lead up to planning application and tender again**.**

**Q) Would you really consider NOT rebuilding All Saints?**

**A)** This remains an option, but **no one** wants to see this happen. We would be letting down all those good folk I mentioned above, wasting years of work and strain, and depriving Fleet of not just a building it badly needs, but of a powerful symbol of the presence of Christ in this town – a symbol that all the other Christian churches believe is needed too. We have however managed to worship and serve Jesus without AS for 5 years, so it remains, as I say, an option.

**Q) So, what happens next?**

**A)** As I have said, I believe we are very close to a big step forward. When we have the final ‘go ahead’ from the chancellor, and when we know a final figure from our insurers (which we may have to challenge) we will be in a position to decide the next step. Ultimately, it is for our PCC to decide (guided and consulted by all of you, of course) what we do. One thing they cannot do is break the law, or commission work that we cannot pay for. I believe we should go ahead with the project, starting with the rebuilding of All Saints church itself as proposed in the plan we have submitted. Probably with the new porch as agreed and prepare the ground and utilities as much as we can for the eventual building of the annexe. I think we should as soon as possible resume our fundraising, which we will be able to do in a more targeted and informed way when we know exactly how much we need to raise. I believe the project is what God and Fleet want us to do, and that God in his own time will bless our faithfulness with success.

These are my thoughts about what should happen next and it will be for the PCC ultimately to decide.

**Q) Why has it taken so long?**

**A)** Because that’s how long a project on this scale takes! When we began, and even after a year or so, none of us working on the project realised just how complicated and difficult a project such as this is to get done. That being said, I believe that the system we have to work with is fundamentally broken – putting too many obstacles in the way, and giving too much say to interest groups who have their own (quite understandable ) agendas and are given multiple opportunities and unlimited time to object to projects such as this.

I feel guilt every day about the pain caused by the time we have taken to get to this point, but I can assure you that there has been no unnecessary delay or dragging of heels by the rebuilding group, who have all without exception, been amazing servants of the parish through all this!

I hope this helps to explain where the project currently is and to answer some of your questions. If there are questions I haven’t answered please email them to me or write/ring me if you prefer. If you have your own thoughts about how we proceed I would be interested to hear them, but please be aware that everyone has their own unique idea of how this should be resolved, and that’s why your PCC must ultimately make the final decision.

**Mark**