

Consultation notes: Gosport

The Archdeacon welcomed people to the meeting and introduced the diocesan team who were to give input during the evening. The Archdeacon explained the structure of the evening, its aim, and the process for consultation. Members of the diocesan team then each presented different parts of the evening, and responded to questions.

The aim of the evening was to consult about plans for pastoral reorganisation, i.e. about how we organize our parishes and ministry roles. The wider aim was to help churches plan and adapt for ministry which cares for our existing congregations, but which also help to reach new people and grow as a church.

In terms of process, this was the beginning of a six-month process of consultation. There would be a number of opportunities for everyone to engage both formally and informally within this process. The process was being driven by a desire to increase impact within the affected areas and to reach more people with the love of God. It was not being driven by costs savings, closing churches or by choosing only to manage decline.

[The note taker for the evening recorded to the best of her ability the key points that were being made, but this was not always possible as people sometimes spoke over each other. Where the same point was made multiple times, it is recorded once. Many people did not speak at all. Some people spoke privately to members of the diocesan team after the presentation and their contributions are not recorded unless they gave permission for that to happen. Everyone was assured that they could telephone, email, or write to the diocesan office and that their views would be collected and taken seriously during the process of consultation.]

The presentation continued:

Why are we changing?

- We are exploring new patterns of ministry in churches across the diocese, not just in this deanery.
- There are some areas of the diocese where, despite the best efforts of clergy and congregations, relatively few people go to church.
- At this time we have the opportunity to apply for additional funds to support new growth projects. In order to be eligible for these funds we also need to release money from our existing budgets and invest in mission.

We have learned that:

- Working with more children and families leads to growth.
- When churches relate to local needs – e.g. debt, food poverty, housing, carers, loneliness – then they can also help people grow in faith.
- It is significantly more likely that we will attract those who have never gone to church before by also providing new, accessible, child-friendly worship services.
- Planting new churches with a fresh approach – e.g. Leesland Neighbourhood Church in Gosport and Harbour Church in Portsmouth city – can rapidly reach many people who wouldn't otherwise go to church.
- Any new initiative works best with a whole team approach, not just a lone individual.
- Any new resourcing initiative needs help and support from surrounding churches, deanery, diocese, and can give support and resources back to others in turn as it grows.

Why are we changing in these particular parishes?

- We want to create an environment here where:
 - all of the churches can flourish and grow;
 - we can be wise stewards of all of the resources that we have;
 - the church buildings can be better used by the local community;
 - the churches can have a bigger impact on some of the issues which are faced in this area;
 - churches here can be a resource and support to other churches in Gosport deanery.

We want to free people from the burdens of finances, administration, and buildings so that rather than only maintaining the existing church they will also be able to support new projects, opportunities, and communities.

What might we be changing?

- The deanery of Gosport is currently made up of a number of parishes, some of which are stand alone and some of which are part of a united benefice.
- There are currently four full-time clergy who cover those parishes, which we are consulting about this evening.

We want to:

- Create two new united benefices:
 - One that covers the western part of Gosport comprising the parishes of Bridgemary and Rowner;
 - One that covers the eastern and central parts of Gosport comprising the parishes of Elson, Forton, Christ Church and Holy Trinity.
- Increase the staffing levels from 4 to 6 with a mixture of clergy, pioneering and operations staff.
- Invest in updating building resources to ensure the buildings can be used by the local communities.

Maps were shown, with affected areas in different colours

What might we do differently?

- Over the coming weeks we are going to be talking to local churches and community groups about what this investment could look like. We will want to hear your views.
- At the moment we don't know exactly what this will look like but possible ideas include:
 - a church plant focussed on younger people
 - more children's and families ministry
 - social outreach – foodbanks, debt support, carers?

- operational support for buildings, finance, and administration
- Including existing resources we aim to spend over £2 million over the next five years on these parishes of Gosport.
- This is approximately double what we currently spend.
- We want everyone to know the fullness of life that comes from faith in Jesus Christ
- We want our churches to grow so that they are sustainable and can reach more people
- We believe that by combining parishes together and having a coordinated plan for ministry, we could help these things to happen

What are we consulting on?

- Although we are keen to hear your views on our proposals for Gosport, what we need to consult you about – first informally and then formally, when more definite plans are in place – is basically this:

Should we unite benefices within Gosport and so create one united benefice of Bridgemaury and Rowner and one united benefice which combines the parishes of Elson, Forton, Gosport, Christ Church and Gosport, Holy Trinity?

Participants were provided with sticky notes to record their ideas, working in small groups

1. *What do you like about the plans that we have outlined so far?*
2. *What concerns you?*
3. *What have we not considered that we might need to look at further?*

[A small number of participants insisted that they did not want to write on sticky notes in small groups but wanted to carry on giving their views to the whole meeting. The diocesan team asked people to write on the sticky notes so that the voices of people who did not want to speak in the public meeting could also be heard. Many people did use the sticky notes, others chose not to, and instead engaged 1:1 with the diocesan team or talked to each other.]

There was a time of feedback and the following points were made/questions were asked during this time, or had been made during the presentation earlier and were then picked up in the feedback. Questions were answered where possible (and recorded below) and points were taken and recorded.

- Alverstoke and Lee have not been mentioned. Shall we go home?

No. The core part and the health of the church at Alverstoke and Lee are numerically strong. This is not a cause for complacency. If you are from Alverstoke and Lee you need to be asking "What can our churches do to support others". Strong churches can still be a part of this. Historically many of the churches in Gosport were planted from Alverstoke.

- Lee and Alverstoke are better off – the others are poor relations. You are picking on us to be closed.

Sorry if that's the way you see it.

- Why split St Matthews and St Thomas up and put Bridgemaury back with Rowner? Why 4 and 2. Why not put Rowner with Bridgemaury and Elson, keep us together?

That might be where we go. This is a discussion, we are only making suggestions.

- Alverstoke and Lee have benefitted from alienation of people from other churches. People who didn't feel they could continue where they were.
- You talk of releasing funds. What else could be considered. The Diocese of Portsmouth could be part of Winchester, Chichester or Guildford. A lot of money runs the Diocese which should be running parishes.

This has been considered. Having served in larger dioceses there would be little advantage. We currently share a finance team, share IT, share Safeguarding and share Education with these other dioceses in different splits, so the costs are already shared.

- What about the Cathedral? Dispose of it to save money?
- We like the focus of church and families. Concerns that it is early in the process. Geographical grouping rather than "like groups" and people would have to travel if they want to go to a specific church they have a connection with. Not considered: talking to communities or ourselves before. Council Safety Shops. Where do we go for school etc. Like the inclusion of young people. Concerned in that we like the connection with "our priest". Like the idea of activities in church not just going on Sunday. But do we just host activities or connect with them?
- The Diocese missed a trick. The foundation is already here. What happens to priests? They are already doing a lot of pastoral work. Seem just to be creating a social service and imposing redundancy.
- Why weren't we consulted earlier?
We had to put the proposals to Bishop's Council and seek their approval to go ahead with consultations.
- Why was there such short notice of this meeting. Why take away clergy we know and "inputting strangers".

This is just the beginning of a consultation. We are only starting the process. The "social services" area is separate, Good Neighbours are already doing a lot that would have been done. We are looking to make changes in order to better share our faith with people, not replace social services.

- You talk of increasing from 4 to 6 people. Where will they live? Elson Vicarage has been sold off. What happens to parish finances/Parish Share? Need to reach out to the youth where they are.

The Resources are already there. Need to reassign resources to new places centred around most need.

- You say the consultation is the start of the process. How does it continue? How do people in the parish who are not here put their thoughts in?

Our next set of slides explain the process from here on.

- What will happen to our clergy? Are there plans for any church buildings to be closed?

Some of the posts may continue and others may not. The benefice is attached to a geographic area. If we change the boundaries of a benefice and a new structure comes into place, the office attached to the former benefice is abolished because that benefice no longer exists. The proposed new benefices reflect the proposed new areas and existing clergy can apply for the new posts in the new structure.

There is a legal process we have to follow in order to make changes to boundaries and benefices.

- Who is involved? If we involve all churches could we re-align boundaries to mix in with other churches? Should redefine all not just some. How does resourcing affect congregations?
- Holy Trinity and Christ Church are expanding. You should talk to the priest about what additional support you should be putting in.
- You talk of increasing the number of children and grandchildren we should be attracting to church. Elson used to host Sunday School, Guides and Brownies in the Church Hall. We now have no vicarage. Nothing to share, nowhere to host things. There is a Church Hall but it is not useable, empty and rotting.
- As Vicar of Alverstoke I know that we are in a position to say that Alverstoke won't be here in 10 years, if left out of the restructuring. It needs to be a strategic restructuring across the whole of the deanery. We have all got to pull together and plan for our future together.

The sticky notes were collected so that their feedback could be recorded.

The timetable for the consultation was outlined:

We are currently entering the *informal* consultation part of the process.

w/c **Monday 15th October:** Public Consultation Meetings

Friday 19th October: Informal letters sent to Legally Interested Parties plus anyone else who asks for them

Friday 30th November: closing date for written responses

Wednesday 5th December: statements of view and any scheme changes presented to the Bishop's Council

Following this we will have a *formal* consultation process lasting eight weeks [extended beyond the usual 4-6 weeks as it falls over the Christmas holidays]

Friday 7th December 2018: formal consultation letter and draft proposals sent to legally interested parties

Friday 1st February 2019: closing date for written responses

Monday 11th March 2019: statements of view and final draft proposals presented to the Bishop's Council

Friday 15th March 2019: Bishop Christopher to send draft scheme to Church Commissioners Pastoral Division

When the scheme has been received by the Church Commissioners Pastoral Division they will review and evaluate it. It will then be published. If there are representations the Church Commissioners will look at comments from this and other parts of the consultation process. They will make a decision in either May or July 2019.

The scheme could be made as early as 1 June 2019 and could come into effect on 1 December 2019.

Between these two dates we would look to recruit to new and vacant positions with the aim of people starting in new roles by 1 January 2020.

How we will communicate and how people can communicate with us?

We will continue to put information on the diocesan website and on our own social media. We will send emails to parish clergy and officers.

As well as the formal letters which are sent to interested parties, we are keen to hear from anyone who has a view.

You can email the deputy diocesan secretary: jenny.hollingsworth@portsmouth.anglican.org

You can write to us at The Diocese of Portsmouth, Peninsular House, Wharf Road, Portsmouth, PO2 8HB.

The meeting closed with a prayer.