

Consultation notes: Newport, Isle of Wight

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.

[There were a number of interruptions during this section and for the rest of the evening's consultation. 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 and interrupted the speakers. Not every interruption is recorded. 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 during and 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 the Newport 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 town of Newport is currently made up of four separate parishes.
- The four parishes are currently supported by 2.8 FTE of clergy staff.

We want to:

- Create one parish that covers all of the town of Newport;
- Increase the staffing levels from 2.8 to 5 FTE across the parish, with a mixture of clergy, pioneering and operations staff;
- Invest in updating building resources to ensure the buildings can be better used by local communities;
- Create an intern programme to help young people on the island explore their vocation.

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 £1.5 million over the next five years on ministry in Newport.
- 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 all three 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 new ministry in Newport town, what we need to consult you about – first informally and then formally, when more definite plans are in place – is basically this:

Should we create one new town parish which combines the existing parishes or parts of parishes in Newport; and one new rural parish where the remaining parts join with Newchurch and Arretton?

General discussion:

- What is the potential impact on the deanery?
Not looking at closing churches but purely about altering parish boundaries.
- It is difficult to tell the difference between rural and urban parts of Carisbrooke.
Explained where the more populated areas on the map are.
- What will the staffing levels look like for new parts of Newport?
Combination of clergy and pioneer ministers. It is hoped that additional administrators will take away some of the administrative parts of work from clergy.
- Where did the parish lines on map come from?
Mostly existing boundaries. Urban and rural line in Newport is a proposed division. Local information on the demographics in Newport was consulted.
- What is the benefit of changing boundaries?
Not just more money to add on to existing buildings/structures – combining parishes aims to save work and effort to release ministers for mission.
- You talk about increased administration – West Wight was promised an administrator two years ago and this has not happened.
Objections to the pastoral scheme has meant that the scheme is currently sitting with Church Commissioners awaiting their conclusion. Administrator will be decided depending on the outcome.
- (Clive Todd) Also in relation to the administrator in West Wight – when will the appointment take place? We have been told there will be a delay until summer 2019. Is it possible to release funds from the Diocese now?
To be looked into but not this evening. Joanne promised to look into. This proposal is for external not existing funding. The proposed scheme is aiming towards opportunities for better mission, ministry and coordination and to bring the gospel afresh to a younger generation.

- (Kevin Arkell) Clergy jobs will be lost – no groundwork has been done prior to the consultation.
Clergy who might be affected were visited individually and therefore had information beforehand. They were given fair warning out of courtesy.

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?*

[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.

Group Discussion:

The audience were reassured that this is only the beginning of the consultation period.

Like – Applaud attempt to manage positively change that is inevitable in the long term.
Exciting if it works.

Concern – Message coming over wrongly and parishes not reassured.
Feels like flushing the chain – we don't all want to be the same. Is this God's plan?
There are new estates with around 5000 people without a church. People with disabilities will have difficulty getting to church.

Things to consider:

- There will be difficulties in getting congregations of diverse traditions to work together.
- How would a boundary change lead to growth?
- How will primary schools fit in?
- Have we got the money?
- Newport needs a group ministry not a team ministry.
- Have you considered an ecumenical approach rather than team?
- Vicars could be made redundant then have to apply for their jobs again. This has upset a lot of people.
Have tried to aim at fairness – church law means that if parishes are restructured the roles of clergy within it no longer exist – there will, however, be more roles to apply for.
- Broken trust.
Tried to find a way of sharing with as many people as possible.
- You have to carry people with you – is all money going into people or buildings, accommodation, etc.?
Look at other parishes – you have already created a large benefice and travel is difficult.
Open to ideas from other parishes. Majority of money is going to people, not really buildings.
- Large rural parish – how will it be run and administered? Travel issues considered? Pastoral and school visits difficult. Why has there been no pre-consultation? All parishes are ancient with their own identities – why change? Must be tactful and gradual.

- Harbour Church – geared around student population. Could students be catered for in a similar way? *What is right in one context is not always appropriate in another. Harbour has helped other churches grow in the surrounding area. It has allowed a Mission focus and young people have been asked what they want.*
- Have you approached Youth for Christ? – *Not yet.* You don't know what is already here or not here. We want to bring people to Christ. *Trying to take away administration that stops people going out to bring people to Christ. We are not reinventing the wheel. We want to work with what we have. We want to support people who currently feel unsupported and some of whom are at their wits end.*
- We are already doing Live Pray Serve. If we don't change God will move on and do something different.
- God must be at the centre.
- Exploring vocation – questioning whether Portsmouth will nurture vocation. Get the people bit right. *Want to see vocation grow – nothing we are trying to do is against that. Prepared to come back to discuss all issues with clergy and other groups.*

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.