

ST JOHN'S IN THE COMMUNITY

**THE BEACON CENTRE:
NEXT STEPS ON A SHARED
JOURNEY**

AN UPDATE AND A REQUEST TO ALL OF US

JULY 2014

ST JOHN'S IN THE COMMUNITY: THE FUTURE OF THE BEACON CENTRE

The journey so far – faithful witness

The Beacon Centre (BC) was set up to give us a place in the centre of the community where the people of St John's could share God's love and make contacts. For around 15 years a group of volunteers has stayed faithful to that vision. Many stories bear witness to God's faithfulness and our outreach through the BC. **Do take a moment to ask our volunteers about these.** But it is now time to refresh the vision and the increasingly "tired" feel and furnishings.

Where we stand today

We shared a proposed refresh of the vision for the BC at our Assembly Rooms meeting in May. The main elements are –

- the original vision remains a firm foundation – the BC can be a "stepping stone", through which we can make contacts with local people, serve them and, by God's grace, help them start a journey to faith
- but we can sharpen up the way we carry this through
- our "front door" should feel more like a community coffee shop – a place to come and linger
- the BC could be used for, and signpost people to, a range of services to support "well-being". This already happens (eg Amber, Pitstop) but could be expanded
- serving local people is a goal in itself. But the BC itself and the contacts made through well-being services should also help us build relationships and share our faith



Attached to this is a description of how the BC might look and feel in future – there is continuity, and there is freshness. **Please have a read and please speak to one of us if you missed the Assembly Rooms discussion and would like to see the presentation.**

The Assembly Rooms discussion produced some great ideas and feedback. Thank you! There is strong support for reaching out to the community; a sense that the BC is a great asset we need to use to the maximum; a range of ideas and questions about the coffee shop idea, lots of practical suggestions, and a few questions about whether this is really the best way for us to go.

Where next?

We really want to make progress. And we need to – leaving things as they are won't be an option for much longer. But we certainly don't have all the answers yet, and want to carry on the lively discussion that has started as that will help pin down answers to questions. These include –

- future staffing and leadership
- how much we spend on how big a transformation
- where we end up on the spectrum between a community enterprise (volunteers, free offer) and something a bit more commercial

YOU are key to all this. Please pray and think about **four big things** –

1. Will this bring honour to God and am I prepared to back it? (this will only happen and work if this is the passion of the majority, not the few)
2. Wisdom for the PCC as it considers next steps over the coming months
3. How much should we invest in this as a church (in terms of money and effort), compared to other priorities?
4. The right person (and team) to lead the work once the refreshed Beacon Centre opens. Could that be you?

We need **your views and input**. Could you please send your thoughts, especially on 1, 3 and 4 above, to parishadmin@stjohnsww.com by Sunday 10 August.

We will spend more time on this as a church family in September with the aim of reaching firm decisions in the Autumn.

Jon Ward and the PCC of St John's

A WRITE-UP OF A VISIT TO A PLACE IN THE HEART OF CONEY HALL

The Beacon Centre [but there will be a new name] is an inviting, convenient location in the Coney Hall shopping parade. Its exterior and name hints at refreshment and rest, just like a commercial coffee shop, but unbranded and local. Through the window you can see a mix of chairs and tables and, further in, upholstered seating – just like in Starbucks in West Wickham. But this doesn't involve a trek up the hill and the coffee is just as good, competitive in price with a commercial operation, though not offering quite the same range of options.

Inside the décor is warm and comforting. It feels like a place you relax, rest and recover in – a bit of a haven. You can be completely anonymous, lost in your own thoughts, checking your iPad (there is wi-fi) or reading the paper (a couple of dailies are available as well as a couple of Christian titles). You can meet others – there are small groups, for whom this is obviously a regular rendezvous. The staff are welcoming and professional. But there is a bit more of a personalised and local feel than in Costa (the serving ware is good quality, but not branded). This place belongs to the local community, but you can equally opt out and be yourself without feeling you're breaking some rule. If you think about it, you can detect the Christian ethos of the place, but it's subtle and entirely unobtrusive.

As you sit, cradling your mug, your eye is drawn to a number of small, classy display cabinets. One has a small range of birthday and special occasion cards. Another has books – a mixture of local history and Christian, including CDs. You glance at the walls and notice a few pictures by local artists as well as photographs of the area – enough to distract for a moment, but not to dominate. There is a display board with local community information, including a fair bit on the theme of "well-being". You pause for a moment, made to think about problems at home you'd rather not remember – and wonder whether there could be some answers here. Time to face the world again, recharged and with a few thoughts in your head. You will want to return.

In late afternoon the place changes. The seating is moved around to form a circle. Toys are brought out. Soon a parenting class run by a professional body but with local help is in full swing. Later on a local mental health self-help group will hold one of its regular meetings here. It's a convenient, comfortable location, but the welcome from the staff – there for you but not "in your face" – is, when you stop to think, equally attractive.