

M:HUB – Where are we now? February 2022

Background

M:HUB (Milnthorpe Hub) opened in November 2016 in the former Milnthorpe Methodist Church. The building is the responsibility of Kendal Methodist Circuit Meeting and day-to-day management and oversight is provided by the Milnthorpe Project Group.

When Milnthorpe Methodist Church ceased to meet the Circuit decided to retain the building and see if it could be developed as a community centre and also as a 'base for mission' in Milnthorpe. It was refurbished at a cost of approximately £15,000 mostly by volunteers, with the idea that if it proved successful after two years then a scheme for a substantial redevelopment would be put together and the funds raised to implement it.

There was a lot of community use – which provided sufficient funds from room hire to cover the operating costs and make a small surplus. Grant aid was secured to pay the costs of putting together a redevelopment plan and securing planning permission.

A number of different mission initiatives have been tried over the past five years: a mums & toddlers drop-in café; a mindfulness course, regular mindfulness sessions; a walkabout nativity; a visiting comedian and story-teller; a monthly poetry evening. In addition, a small group of former members of Milnthorpe Methodist Church met initially fortnightly and then monthly for a café-style service – calling themselves M:OASIS (Milnthorpe Oasis). Money was secured for a pioneer to work six hours per week – someone was appointed to the role for 18 months. Most of these initiatives had only a small degree of success (apart from the walkabout nativity which attracted 160 people!!)

Current Situation

Following the Coronavirus Pandemic, the building has now re-opened and is used by a number of community groups. We receive an average of 12 hours rental money per week (approximately £150). There is a Community Café and Bookshop open every Friday morning – to coincide with market day – which is staffed by volunteers and raises an average of £50 per week.

Planning permission for the building to be redeveloped was secured, but with the change in the Connexional grant-making policy no fundraising has yet taken place. The scheme would cost between £250K-£500K depending on its scope.

M:OASIS is much diminished and but continues to pray in our building and for this important work every quarter.

Pilgrim Poets continues to meet monthly and has about six people in regular attendance.

Over the time it has been open, the building has stood up remarkably well to the amount of use that it has had – given that it was intended only to last a further two years. Internally, it has been redecorated, the electrical installation has been tested and passed upgraded to see it through for a further five years. The roof is coming to the end of its life and there are a couple of leaks which are proving problematical to resolve. Historical cracking to one of

the walls has increased in recent months and is currently under investigation by the insurance company.

The Milnthorpe Mission Fund holds about £6,000 in unrestricted funds, and £1,500 for establishing a café church. There is also money to pay a pioneer six hours a week for 18 months (some held at Circuit level and some at District) – if one can be found.

The Milnthorpe Project Group has five members, plus the Circuit Administrator, and meets about every two months.

Looking to the Future

The current minister, and chair of the Project Group, Rev. David, is leaving at the end of April 2022. The Circuit has applied for a Probationer Minister to replace him – and M:HUB will be part of their brief.

The Project Group is working towards M:HUB being on a stable footing – with regard to building and finance – so that the Probationer will have a chance to develop whatever work they see the need for or feel called to. This might be to push forward a café church initiative, or to develop a chaplaincy role to the community groups that use the building, or to be out in the marketplace – all these things are possible.

Eventually the building will need to be redeveloped. The extent of this will depend on the funds available and also exactly what is needed.

M:HUB has become a community building where church (in all its forms) can happen, rather than a church which grudgingly lets the community in so that it can make money. This has created a good space where new ideas (fresh expressions) of church can be ‘played’ or experimented with. Milnthorpe is well served with a range of traditional churches – Anglican, Roman Catholic, Independent Evangelical – but these simply don’t appeal to the vast majority of people who live, work and play in Milnthorpe. Our vision is that M:HUB can provide a space where initiatives can be developed that do appeal much more widely.

Alongside this, much more could be done to develop a range of community services out of the building – a wellbeing café, debt advice, a range of support groups etc.

A Call To You

Can you see yourself as part of this circuit-wide initiative? Will you offer your time as a volunteer – for a particular piece of work, or as part of the Project Group?

The field is large, the potential harvest is vast, we need you.....

If you are interested in getting involved in any way then please contact Rev David (01524 761397) or Chris Palmer (015395 67751) – we’d be happy to talk with you.