

10 February 2023

Dear Friends,

It is such a privilege for me to be leading this part of God's family here at All Saints at such a time as this. Jesus promised that he would build his church and the gates of Hades cannot prevail against it, so as we pursue our mission of simply sharing Jesus, his life and message with everyone in our community, we can look forward with confidence to seeing all that God does in and through us. But of course, there will be challenges along the way! During recent services at All Saints you may have heard that the ROCK Project has reached a critical crossroads in its development. I am writing today to call everyone in the church to prayer over the coming weeks as we seek God's guidance and particularly lift up the Parochial Church Council (PCC) as they come to vote on the way forward next Sunday evening 19th February.

As some of this letter is related to the finances of the project, let me begin with some good news regarding our general finances. In October last year, our Treasurer Rob Gray reported to the PCC and the church that we were projecting a likely deficit on our general expenses of around £20,000 by the end of 2022. I am delighted to report that we have actually ended with a surplus of around £6000 which means we are able to pay some more towards our parish share and put a little back into reserves. This only happened thanks to God's faithfulness and your amazing generosity, so thank you so much for all your commitment and support for the ministry of this church.

The ROCK Project

Unless you have very recently joined the church, you will know of the long journey of the ROCK Project, which has faced many obstacles along the way. I am grateful, as I am sure you are, to those who have worked so long and hard to keep faith with the vision which emerged after much prayer and consultation during the time Patrick Whitworth was Rector. One of the things that drew me to All Saints was the vision and enterprise that underpinned the ROCK Project and I sense my previous experience as an engineer is probably one of the reasons why the Lord has called me here for such a time as this!

At the start of 2023, we had the good news that the Diocese had given its overall approval to our plans by granting us a faculty. Although there are still some local authority planning conditions to be resolved, the major hurdles of gaining planning approval have been achieved. At the beginning of the year we were also blessed that Richard Lewis felt called by the Lord to bring his experience and come on board as Project manager. The plans have nearly reached the point when we could go out to tender to a number of building contractors. But before we could go ahead, there needed to be a review of the estimated costs in the light of the high inflation rate and other challenges facing the economy.

The challenge that faces us is that a project which was expected to cost in its totality £3,250,000 is now expected to cost over £4,000,000. (Some of this has already been spent on fees and planning etc.) This is an increase of 23%. Reaching the original target of £3,250,000 would have been a very big stretch but on the basis of known funding, the figure of £4,000,000 now feels well beyond our reach from a human perspective.

The PCC is therefore now grappling with several options for how we might move forward with the project, including breaking the work down into phases (or even stopping altogether!). None of the options are straightforward and whilst phasing may look attractive, there are all sorts of complications. These include: planning conditions; priorities; different costs of the phases; redrawing parts of the scheme and other implications.

I should say that additional funding is required for all of the options (apart from the 'go back to the drawing board option'). So the PCC is also considering the wisdom of whether or not to apply for a large loan from a charitable agency, in the same way it took out a large loan when the Church Centre was reordered in 1999-2000. At the same time efforts are continuing to seek funding from external grants; as it currently stands, £223,000 has been given or pledged by external trusts.



Many people within the congregation have given generously to the project, starting in 2016 when we had the first appeal. To date over £1,000,000 has been given to the project by church members (including two legacies) and roughly another £275,000 is expected to be given in 2023 and 2024 to the project by church members. That means, as it stands now, more than £1,300,000 has been or will be given by church members. Thank you so much, this is amazing.

But we will need even more funding either in the form of gifts or loans or grants if we are to make a start this year. Postponing the start in order to raise more money risks wearying and dispiriting people altogether and inflation just eating up whatever new money may come in.

So you can see we are at a critical juncture. It is a test calling for a combination of faith, wisdom, discernment, unity and generosity. On Monday 6 February the PCC (which has a membership of 20) considered at length the various options and the financial challenges facing the project. On Sunday 19 February, after the evening service, the PCC will meet again to decide which of the options (if any) it wishes to proceed with and to decide on whether to apply for a significant external loan.

The options which the PCC will consider are:

- Only proceeding with the re-ordering and refurbishment of the church interior together with a modification to the choir vestry to improve wheelchair access. Nothing of the Welcome Centre (extension) would be built so there would be no new WC's, foyer, kitchen or additional meeting rooms.
- Only proceeding with the Welcome Centre (extension) together with the necessary external works which are linked to local authority planning permission. No work would be done on the interior of the church.
- Proceeding with a hybrid version whereby some improvements would be made to the church interior and roughly half of the Welcome Centre (extension) would be built which would provide a new foyer, fully accessible entrance, a reduced number of WC's and a kitchen but no additional meeting room.
- Not proceeding with any of the above i.e. a complete rethink and the offering to return or reallocate funding received.

CALL TO PRAYER

Much prayer has gone on for the ROCK Project in its ten-year life but I am calling the church now to pray over this next ten days particularly. Depending on how the PCC decides to proceed there may be further calls to prayer after that! Along with the churchwardens and the whole PCC I am asking you to pray for the PCC and for God's guidance and his wisdom. I would ask you to pray privately and in whatever groups you meet with – prayer triplets, home groups and other groups. **We are also setting aside Saturday 18 February as a special time of prayer with 3 one-hour long times of 'morning, noon and night' prayer in the church starting at 8am, then at 12noon and again at 6pm.** It would be so good if you could come and join me to pray. And if you are unable to come to the church, please could you try to set aside time at home or wherever you are on that day.

I trust that by praying we will receive the wonderful reassurance of Philippians 4 that *'we will not be anxious about this situation we face but that, alongside our thanksgiving, we will present our requests to God through our prayer and petitions'* and that therefore *'the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus'*.

I will of course let you know the outcome as soon as possible following the PCC meeting on 19th February.

With my love and prayers,

Revd Tom Yacomeni – Rector of All Saints

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