

Netherlee and Stamperland Church

Special Kirk Session at Netherlee

7.30pm on Monday 24th January 2022

1 CONSTITUTION

Meeting constituted by Rev Scott Blythe with Prayer.

2 SEDERUNT & APOLOGIES

There were 58 Elders present with apologies from 7 Elders as per the Sederunt Sheet.

3 DISCUSSION TOPIC – *Report of Buildings Futures Group*

Scott invited Helen Illingworth to present the report of the Buildings Futures Group.

Helen reminded us of the 6 elders who formed this group towards the end of 2021 – John Montgomery, John Curror, Tony Ireland, Norrie Bolton, Alastair Graham and herself. This meant there were 3 elders from each community; the group was chaired by Scott Blythe.

From the outset the group were very mindful of the rich heritage of worship in both communities; however they were also mindful of the need to face difficult decisions that will impact on our future.

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Helen took us back to before the pandemic and to the extensive process that invited all our members to get involved with developing our new Mission Statement, which we agreed at an Elder's Conference in February 2020. Before we could really get to work with this Covid-19 struck.

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As a result of this interruption the group were concerned that they were not making any headway on new projects, new ways of working and new pastoral care. There was a concern that two sets of buildings was continuing to divide the united congregation and was preventing any real momentum in moving forward. Moreover, with declining membership there were serious doubts as to the sustainability of working across two buildings as we moved further forward.

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We have experienced a significant drop in income from the congregation during Covid. We have also lost hall users and their income. The deficit for 2021 being circa £12,000. This is not a sustainable future for the congregation. Covid-19 aside, we like all churches are not attracting new members and this is really key to our future as a congregation. We are not convinced that rental income will recover quickly, and the cost of maintaining two buildings given such economic uncertainty is another concern of the group. This drop in income paired with duplicated expense in maintaining two buildings is not sustainable.

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Both our buildings are in need of work and the reality we are facing is that we do not have the financial resources to invest in both buildings into the future.

- In Netherlee we have the necessary repair of the sanctuary roof (approx. £600,000) and further anticipated roof repairs (£400,000).
- In Stamperland the building would need to undergo works to (a) minimise the number of levels (b) allow access throughout (c) alter the main hall to include new toilets, kitchen and servery (d) upgrade the A/V and heating. The Presbytery Buildings Officer and the Presbytery Property Convener have visited the site and estimate that these works could not be done for less than the roof projects at Netherlee.

Any project at Stamperland would have to wait the lifting of the General Trustees suspension of development work as the Presbytery Mission Planning proceeds. Timescales could slip and costs could escalate as a result. Also we need to understand that as Trustees of both buildings until one is sold, we may incur expenses on either building. In considering the wider marketability of the two buildings the group believe the Conservation Area situation will make the Netherlee building harder to dispose of, whereas, Stamperland is in an area where development would be more readily possible.

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- At the first meeting the unanimous decision was taken to recommend to the Kirk Session that we move to a one building structure.
- At the second meeting the committee chose to recommend the Netherlee buildings for retention. This decision was a majority decision.

Therefore the proposal is that the Kirk Session agrees tonight to confirm Netherlee as the congregation's long term home and consequently agrees to close the Stamperland Buildings at such time as Session deems appropriate.

Scott intimated that this motion would need to be seconded in order to proceed.

- John Montgomery and John Curror both seconded the motion.

Scott thanked Helen for her presentation and invited comments or questions from the floor.

Connell Cranston

- What has happened to the 'Designed to Succeed' report on Stamperland?
 - *Scott replied – whilst they had provided some information (e.g. £300,000 to £400,000 to alter the sanctuary into a multi-purpose space) they had provided no plans or costs for the halls. For a local comparison, 4 years ago Mearnskirk Parish Church (similar age building to Stamperland) spent £600,000 on halls renovation works including a kitchen and servery. Plans to remove a concrete stage (as in Stamperland) were abandoned as this would have added £400,000 to the cost of the project.*
- Has financial planning accounted for the fact that energy costs at Stamperland are one third of that at Netherlee?
 - *Netherlee is a bigger and busier building.*
- Have we considered the issue of accommodation for Stamperland Youth Organisations?
 - *Helen replied that an early next step must be to consolidate as many as possible in the Netherlee building and where not viable to support them in every way we can to get alternative suitable accommodation and storage.*

Niall Illingworth

- With regard to an email sent to the full Session prior to this evening's meeting, he wished to strongly make the point that he felt that some of the language used and the implied behaviours did not reflect his experience of the church folk within Netherlee and Stamperland.
- Financial case for one building is compelling now and will only become more so in the future.
- The worry is not the current Presbytery Plan, but the next one and the one after that.
- The reality we face is a Sunday Club with 3-6 members, we need to look forward, it is just a building, our future is about faith and people.

Grace Scott (read by Norrie Bolton)

I have been a member and part of Stamperland, and more recently of Netherlee and Stamperland Church all of my life. Nevertheless I am not so naïve as to think that nothing ever changes. Since the outset of this exercise to merge both churches I have been horrified by the speed in which things have happened. We have always known as the smaller congregation that voting would seldom be in our favour, but never did I ever imagine we would be in the position we are now so quickly.

It would seem to me that little thought has been given to the people of Stamperland, and by that I mean the wider community, in the future of our worship and I was therefore greatly heartened, but briefly, when the group Designed to Succeed produced a paper that actually gave the community some standing. For whatever reason this paper is now being ignored. Mission and Gospel for the area seem to have disappeared. Is this not what we are about?

Declining numbers in the Church of Scotland should surely be making us look at what we can do to address this rather than take away the opportunity for local worship. Surely something of this magnitude cannot be resolved by one hastily convened meeting of the Kirk Session and more importantly without redress to the people of Stamperland?

Norrie Bolton

I was a leading supporter of Union within Stamperland Church – at the time I did believe that it was the best option for both congregations. We knew there was a roof problem at Netherlee but we were led to believe that it would cost several hundreds of thousands of pounds and that Netherlee congregation had financial assets many times greater. With the support of our Kirk Session s, John Montgomery, Gray Fletcher and myself successfully argued for the retention of our two church buildings based on the number of youth attending our organisations and the limited accommodation in just one building and on the opportunity to use our sanctuaries, particularly Stamperland, for alternative forms of worship at times other than Sunday mornings.

Now that the true nature of the roof problems and associated finance has come to light we face difficult choices. As trustees we are being asked to take a very significant decision which will impact on our congregation and community for the rest of time. As trustees we have responsibilities. We have a responsibility to the congregation to be good stewards of their money. Significantly, in relation to OSCR, we have additional legal responsibilities and we need to be able to show that the decisions we take are made for sound reasons and that we can defend all decisions through an audit trail.

I am disappointed with what we (the Building Review Group) have produced for you. I believe that our Group has come up with an **idea** but hasn't come up with a **plan**. The idea is that if we sell Stamperland Manse and Stamperland Church we should have sufficient funds to repair the Netherlee roofs. But we don't have a plan. We don't know if the idea is reasonable for feasible. We didn't look at the consequences.

We don't yet have reliable costs for the various works which may be required on our buildings.

We don't know the timescales for the work or of the timing of the closure of any buildings.

We have no indication as to the value of the Stamperland site or what type of development the local authority might approve. Greenbank Church hoped to sell part of their site to a developer to fund their new hall extension work, but I understand East Renfrewshire will not approve the planned nursing home and the project is in limbo.

We haven't presented you with well-founded estimates for **future church income**.

We haven't presented you with rational estimates for the **running costs of either building**.

We haven't given any consideration regarding what might **happen to the organisations** using our buildings.

I don't believe it is possible to make an informed decision without this type of information.

I saw that one of the tasks of the Group was to provide information which would allow each of you to assess the benefits of various options, to understand the monetary costs associated with each option and the consequences for mission of each option. This information would allow each of you to come to a well-informed conclusion. I am afraid I couldn't make my voice heard.

We haven't really presented you with any detail regarding our mission and purpose. We certainly didn't consider how we could work with the youth organisations to ensure that we, as a church, support their ongoing activities. In January 2020, Stamperland had 75 Guides, 55 BB and 58 Scouts – a total of 188 young people plus young helpers and adult leaders from our community. That is almost twice the number of people who attended church yesterday.

I believe that as the trustees tasked with making a rather momentous decision each one of us need to be in possession of facts, financial projections and implications for what the church can do before committing, irrevocably, to a course of action. I believe that we as trustees should request that additional information is made available to allow each one of us to properly evaluate the situation and allow us to make a considered and informed decision.

I am not proposing to slow down any building work. We are in the process of having a full scope of works developed which will enable three tender quotes to be sought. We will not have competitive quotes for the sanctuary roof before May. Following receipt we need approval from Kirk Session and Presbytery to proceed. I would be surprised if roofing work were completed before next year.

I am proposing that instead of asking you to decide this evening that you request that a team of trustees be formed with the goal of providing factual information.

This information would include –

- a definitive view of what we, as a church, are seeking to do for our community in terms of mission
- an assessment of how we could manage our accommodation to meet the needs of our community and our stated "mission targets"
- projections of income and expenditure in relation to our two sets of buildings
- a realistic assessment of the value of the church building sites for development
- a plan for how we would manage the closure of one of our buildings

This information is to be available by the time the roof tenders are assessed so that each trustee will be in possession of factual information which will enable each of us to make an informed decision as to the best way forward.

The counter motion is to REQUEST THAT TEAMS OF TRUSTEES ARE TASKED WITH PROVIDING INFORMATION RELATED TO MISSION, BUILDINGS, LIKELY INCOME AND EXPENDITURE WHICH WILL ENABLE TRUSTEES TO MAKE AN INFORMED DECISION ON THE FUTURE OF NETHERLEE AND STAMPERLAND CHURCH

Scott intimated that this counter motion would need to be seconded in order to proceed.

- Marie Owens and Steven Owens both seconded the counter motion.

Scott invited comments or questions on the counter motion from the floor.

Jane Curror

- Concerned she does not know enough about our buildings, and while more information could be confusing, more is better than less. Also queried why only one quote for the Netherlee roof?
 - *Tony replied (1) we are following the standard process for such works, which began with a competition between Architect professionals to investigate the issue. Once selected stage by stage they have acquired information by using Quantity Surveyors and Structural Engineers to compose a detailed specification of the works required. As the building is Listed Grade B a Conservation Architect has also been involved. (2) Once the specification of works is completed then tenders for the work will be sought. So at the beginning and the end the process has a competitive element.*
 - *Tony commented that during discussions with local authority planners, they had said that they did not envisage any difficulty with a residential development on the site of Stamperland Church buildings.*

Niall Illingworth

- Requested clarity on the counter motion, was it to compare our two buildings?
 - Norrie replied it would look at the financial and mission implications of –
 - Netherlee closing
 - Stamperland closing
 - Maintaining both buildings
- Niall responded that he feels the third option, as he has repeatedly expressed, is not sustainable and thus he could not support the counter motion.

Scott Blythe

For clarity Scott reminded Session that if we sell a property we do not get cash in the bank. Instead we effectively get a credit note from the 'Bank of 121 George Street', and very importantly we currently can only ever draw on this resource for property expenditure. For this to change would require the General Assembly to pass a double barrier act which would take several years.

Tony Ireland

The group we appointed to report tonight were unanimous in the core decision of moving to one building. It was a majority decision in selecting Netherlee. Five out of the six members felt that the group had sufficient information to vote and no further detail is required for tonight.

- Both our buildings have difficulties re maintenance and development –
 - Stamperland – the core issues are configuration and composition
 - Access is fine to the main sanctuary, amongst the halls there are many stairs
 - Fire authorities would not permit lift to basement toilets
 - Concrete stage
 - October 2021 an architect estimated £400,000 for new toilets in the sanctuary
 - Netherlee – looking at the sanctuary roof and the large hall roof
 - Expensive projects, but legacy projects, for another 90 years?

Diane Levey

We need to go back to something Helen mentioned earlier – we are now one congregation. We need to look outward. Currently we are presenting a divisive church community. My son goes to a church in St Andrews who meets in a bowling club. Our community is all of Netherlee and Stamperland. We need to go forward with the word of God.

Norrie Bolton

I like what Diane says but my spread sheet shows real financial problem ahead. Get used to the idea of coffee mornings. Giving out plants, Christmas decorations, rounding up Retiral Offerings will not be possible in the future.

As there were no more questions or comments, Scott moved to explaining the voting procedure, informing the Session that only Ordained Elders were permitted to vote.

When marking the voting paper either a cross or a tick is acceptable.

Helen Illingworth and John Curror have volunteered to count the vote.

We vote on the counter motion first –

- **Vote YES if you agree with the counter motion presented by Norrie Bolton.**
- **Vote NO if you do not agree with the counter motion and wish to return to the original motion presented by Helen Illingworth.**
- **Use the third box if you wish to ABSTAIN.**

The result of the vote is **YES = 16 NO = 33 ABSTAIN = 2** so the counter motion falls.

We now vote on the original motion –

- **Vote YES if you agree with the original motion presented by Helen Illingworth.**
- **Vote NO if you do not agree with the original motion presented by Helen Illingworth.**
- **Use the third box if you wish to ABSTAIN.**

The result of the vote is **YES = 36 NO = 14 ABSTAIN = 1** so the motion is carried.

Scott thanked everyone for their contributions and spoke to what would happen next –

- The Presbytery Clerk will be informed of the decision we have taken this evening.
- We have a responsibility to share the decision with the congregation, and Scott planned to do so on Sunday 6th February 2022 at Netherlee. **Subsequent to the meeting it was agreed to share the decision on Sunday 30th January 2022 at Stamperland.** When at Netherlee the service can be live streamed and then placed on our YouTube channel.
- Prepare an Edict for the meeting of the congregation on Sunday 20th February 2022, after morning worship, to agree/disagree with the decision made this evening. All members and adherents present that day can vote.
- The result of this congregational vote will go to the Property Committee of Presbytery, then onto Presbytery itself, and finally to the General Trustees.
- It is the General Trustees who buy and sell our churches. The original motion was worded the way it was because a quick sale is unlikely.

Scott concluded with the following two points –

- Youth Organisations should be able to meet in the Stamperland building until the end of June, but we are unable to commit any further at this time, and whatever happens we need to ensure we support them as best we can.
- Hospitality after worship is to be permitted from February onwards. Scott is talking with our folk to see just when we can recommence this much appreciated service.

4 ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

During the counting of the first vote the Session Clerk reported on four matters –

1. Mildred Currie – this lady, who has been with us for some 10+years thought she was a member but she is not. Dagmar Kerr has been talking to her daughter about solving this conundrum so as not to upset Mildred. So we're asking by Resolution of the Kirk Session are you happy to admit Mildred Currie. Accepted by acclamation.
2. Kirk Session minute of 05.12.2021 was approved.
3. To inform the Kirk Session that we have appointed a new Independent Examiner.
4. Due to the short gap between this meeting and the next planned Kirk Session, we are seeking approval to move the next Kirk Session to Monday 28th February 2022. The meeting will start at 7.30pm and be held in the Netherlee sanctuary. Accepted by acclamation.
5. We would like to acknowledge the passing of the Presbytery Clerk, George Cowie. George was involved with the process of Linkage and Union of Netherlee and Stamperland congregations. Interestingly George was a Student Assistant at Stamperland around 1990 when he was mentored by Alastair Cherry. Sam Esler (a former Session Clerk at Stamperland) records in the "History of Stamperland Church" that George was well liked by the congregation. George spoke to Norrie Bolton at the Induction of Scott to Stamperland and recalled with affection and happiness his time spent at Stamperland. Our thoughts and prayers go to George's family.

5 DATE OF NEXT MEETING(S)

- Kirk Session at 7:30pm on Monday 28th February 2022 at Netherlee
- Group and Committee meetings as per schedules issued.

6 CLOSE

The meeting was closed with all present saying the Grace.

Appendix A – Report of Buildings Futures Group

Scott Blythe
Minister

Stuart Buchanan
Session Clerk

Group Reporting on Future of Buildings

Some Background

- Before we reached the Pandemic, there was an extensive process that invited all to meetings of the whole congregation. This work gave rise to our new Mission Statement that we agreed in February 2020.
- New Mission Statement Agreed in Feb. 2020
- “We are a church that seeks always to find new ways to love God and our neighbours.”
 - Within this mission we aim to:
 1. Be a place providing regular worship to God
 2. Provide a welcoming space for all who are isolated or alone in our parish
 3. To identify new projects that serve our community with love, e.g. Monday Lunch Club, Heart for Art, etc.
 4. Provide a space for groups in the Community to meet
 5. Develop new ways of working with families throughout the parish
 6. Develop new methods of aiding Pastoral Care within our Community

Some Background and Concerns

- We have been trying to work to our February 2020 mission statement since that time, despite the upset to our lives that Covid has brought.
- However, our group were concerned that we were not making any headway on the aims 3, 5 & 6 of the Mission Statement, new projects, new ways of working, new pastoral care
- On investigating some of these concerns there was agreement that we were really only marking time and not moving forward. We were struggling to initiate New Ideas and Ways of Working Together
- There was a concern that the two sets of buildings was continuing to divide the united congregation and was preventing any real momentum in moving forward.
- Moreover, with declining membership there was serious doubts to the sustainability of working across two buildings as we moved further forward.

What We are Facing

- We have experienced significant drop in income for the congregation during Covid. We have run five figure deficits and we have lost hall users and their income in both buildings. **This is not a sustainable future for the congregation.**
- Covid aside, we like all churches are not attracting new members to our united parish and **this is really key to our future as a congregation.**
- We are not convinced that rental income will recover quickly to pre-Covid levels when we finally emerge from the Pandemic. Equally, the cost of maintaining two buildings given economic uncertainty is another concern of the group. **This drop in income paired with duplicated expense in maintaining two buildings is not sustainable.**
- All these factors are affecting our need to move forward and get on with our agreed mission together.

Reality facing our Buildings

- Both buildings are in need of work as both buildings are between 70-90 years old. **We do not have the financial resources to invest in both buildings in the future**
- **In Netherlee** we are faced with the need for the Sanctuary Roof to be replaced asap. This project has been explored and developed and costed to approx. £ 600,000. The replacement costs for the remaining roofs at Netherlee have been costed in 2021 at £ 400,000
- **In Stamperland** the building would need to undergo adjustment to minimise the number of levels within the building, allow access throughout the building, alteration of main hall to include new toilets, kitchen and servery, AV Upgrading and New Heating throughout the building. Presbytery Buildings Officer and Convener estimated that all this could not be done for cheaper than the projects at Netherlee.
- Any project at Stamperland would have to await lifting of General Trustees suspension of development work as Presbytery Mission Planning proceeds. Costs would escalate as a result.
- We need to also understand that as Trustees of both buildings until one is sold, we may incur expenses on either building for as long as we are owners of both.
- In considering the wider 'marketability' of the two buildings. We believe that Netherlee's Conservation Area situation will make this building a harder building to dispose of, whereas, Stamperland is in an area where development would be more readily possible.

Proposal from Review Committee

- The committee of six volunteers appointed by Session on 5th December met on three occasions. At the first meeting the unanimous decision was taken to recommend to Session that we move to a one building structure. Following that, at its second meeting the committee chose to recommend the Netherlee buildings for retention. This decision was a majority decision.
- ***The proposal to Session is that Session agrees tonight to confirm Netherlee as the congregation`s long term home and consequently agrees to close the Stamperland Buildings at such time as Session deems appropriate.***