

WOKING UNITED REFORMED CHURCH – APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Executive Summary

The Woking United Reformed Church has applied to Woking Borough Council for funding to assist with the costs of building improvement works. This application is seeking a significant capital grant of £20,000 towards the overall costs of an ongoing extensive refurbishment programme drawn up by the Church. The first element of project is to install push button opening devices on two sets of double doors and the accessible toilet and the installation of two small lift devices, one located in the Sanctuary, the other located in the corridor that provides access to the main hall, lounge, and kitchen. The second element of the application proposes the installation of eco-friendly lighting in the areas of the building where such lighting has not yet been extended to. The overall cost of the project is £77,615 (including VAT).

Members will be aware that the Council assisted with the costs of the Church's improvement work in the current year, awarding a capital grant of £25,000 towards the costs of refurbishing the kitchen. The application now before the Executive represents the final phase of a programme of building improvements undertaken by the Church to support its community work, particularly with those who are elderly and have mobility issues. Whilst the Church has raised a substantial amount of funding itself, the applicant has indicated that the Council's assistance is required in order to meet the overall costs.

The facilities at the Woking United Reformed Church are well used by the local community and support a wide range of activities for those of all ages, including the outreach work undertaken by the Church itself. The facilities are provided free of charge to a number of voluntary bodies whilst other organisations who regularly hire rooms incur a charge, with some organisations including the Freemantles school, Citizens Advice, Mediation Services and Conquest Art charged a much lower rate than that applied to commercial hirers.

However, notwithstanding the community benefit of the proposal, it is felt that in light of the Council's current financial situation, along with the Group having received funding through the Community Grants Scheme for the current financial year, no grant should be awarded.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:	RESOLVE That no grant be awarded.
Reason for Decision	In light of the Council's current financial situation, and taking into account the support awarded for the current financial year, a further contribution of £20,000 towards the project cannot be justified.

The Executive has authority to determine the above recommendation.

Background Papers:

2021/22 Application Form.

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1.0 Summary of Application	
1.1 Status and Aims	<p>Woking United Reformed Church was formed in January 2005 from the amalgamation of the former St Andrew's URC and York Road URC at the premises in White Rose Lane. The Church is a Christian church within the Wessex synod of the United Reformed Church (similar to a Church of England diocese).</p> <p>Besides regular Sunday worship, in normal circumstances, the Church is open seven days a week. During the week, it offers fellowship, pastoral care and an initial level of welfare, building support in a safe and inclusive environment across the complete age spectrum from parents/guardians with babies and toddlers, couples in 25-40 age range (an important group where they have financial pressures of children and a mortgage in a relatively expensive area of the Country to live), to seniors (with emphasis on vulnerable members of the community). A variety of community groups and youth and children's activities meet throughout the week. Visitors can call in for tea, coffee and a chat any day of the week.</p>
1.2 Employees	<p>5, comprising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ The Minister – full time, 6 days a week, reports to elders & Wessex synod moderator.○ Church & community worker – full time, 5 days a week, reports to minister.○ Children's & youth worker – full time, 5 days a week, reports to minister & appointed trustee.○ Church administrator – 16 hours per week, reports to minister and church secretary (a trustee).○ Premises manager – 26 hours per week, reports to appointed trustee.
1.3 Volunteers	<p>229. The volunteers carry out a wide range of activities for the benefit of the local community, when permitted by the relaxation of the government lockdown due to Corvit-19 restricted them, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued work, in conjunction with Woking Borough Council, to help Syrian refugees who have arrived in Woking. This government funded Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme is managed by the Refugee Council, offers a place for English lessons to be taught, understand local customs, and access to healthcare and education. A simultaneous crèche is provided, as well as a place for social gathering before and after classes and includes interaction with church volunteers.• Host, in refugee week (17-23 June 2019) a Christian Aid photography exhibition entitled "Uprooted and Overlooked" which ended with a community evening and meal where the Syrian refugees provided music and a Syrian chef cooked a meal. They plan to provide further meals for the following the recent kitchen refurbishment when the government restrictions permit such meetings.

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- Woking Family Contact Centre where it was founded over 20 years ago by the then St Andrew's URC (one of the former Woking URC churches) and has met continuously twice a month on Saturday afternoons in the Church premises ever since. It provides a safe meeting place for parents and children who live apart because of the breakdown of marriages and relationships. Volunteer workers, originally all from the URC, now come from several different churches in the town.
- Support the York Road Project (YRP) which provides a night shelter for single homeless people in Woking. It provides support lodgings for those moving up from being homeless and runs a day centre which provides training, help and support for the homeless and long-term unemployed. Woking URC provides limited work experience for residents during their time there, makes an annual grant to them, a weekly collection of foodstuffs and occasional collections of clothing and sleeping bags as part of ongoing support for its work.
- Hold an 'empty bowls' fund-raising event for YRP in conjunction with Surrey Adult Learning Centres. Pottery and ceramics students hand craft a bowl which is then donated to Woking URC for a soup and bread meal for members who in turn make a donation and keep the bowl as a reminder.
- Work with Woking Borough Council to provide facilities for an annual Silver Sunday afternoon tea event for the elderly and lonely where the Council provides refreshments and a musicians band.
- Offer the use of the entire premises to a Hungarian group (including a children's school) fortnightly on a Saturday afternoon for language, community, educational and cultural activities.
- Support Woking Street Angels in making a positive impact on crime and antisocial behaviour in the town centre (particularly in the vicinity of bars and clubs) by providing a calming presence on the streets on Friday and Saturday nights (10pm to 4am). Members of Woking URC together with representatives from other churches in Woking are both Street Angels and trustees of the charity.
- Offer 'Commuter' coffee once a fortnight, on a Monday morning. Volunteers provide free coffee/tea/soft drink to passers-by on the street outside the premises in White Rose Lane between 6.30am and 9am.
- Support Freemantles, the Surrey County Council school for children and young people aged between 4 – 19 with complex social communication needs, who use WURC premises as a base to help pupils develop their communication and social understanding skills by taking them into the town to experience the hustle and bustle of shopping to gain life skills to help them become independent and helped by WURC volunteers.
- Support other local charities like the Woking & Sam Beare Hospice (with monthly collections of goods for sale in their shops or to be sold for recycling) and Your Sanctuary, the local women's refuge, (mainly through weekly collections of foodstuffs, but also of clothing, bedding and so on).

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- Work with the staff of Engage Woking Schools in leading primary school assemblies together with lunchtime and after school clubs, storytelling and anger management groups, and in secondary schools, provide individual student mentoring, detached and pastoral work and religious education lessons, as well as support for Christian Unions, school staff, and general school activities. This work is now done in 35 primary schools, 3 secondary schools and Woking College.
- Host accommodation for Alcoholics Anonymous closed meetings twice a week throughout the year (open meetings are for family members as well).
- Established a regular monthly lunch club and Sunday afternoon tea (T@3) for the elderly and those who feel lonely or are living on their own.
- Began an annual Holiday at Home club which attracts those adults from within the church and, in equal numbers, from the community, many of whom are elderly and/or perhaps live on their own. The aim is to entertain elderly residents of the town who are unable to go away as a result of age or infirmity at WURC premises with discussions, games, videos, talks and music.
- Operate a Holiday Fun Club for primary school children which has run for a number of years during the Easter and Summer school holidays. Most of those attending do not attend a church, Woking URC or any other, but some do now attend either or both the Friday after school club for primary school children and the Boys' and Girls' Brigades.
- Extended opening times of the church premises by ensuring there are volunteers to welcome and provide refreshments for visitors who may drop in.
- A close relationship with the Children with Special Needs Foundation charity and have organised events like a petting farm with a Ferris wheel and a skating rink to raise funds for them.
- Developed an opportunity for young people, in conjunction with the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) at Wisley, to learn how to grow vegetables and cook them and using seasonal vegetables to make soup for the community.
- Make a substantial contribution to the work of Woking People of Faith which aims to promote religious harmony for the people of Woking. Its main activities are to deliver public meetings, make educational visits, hold sports events and give community service.
- Provide accommodation every Sunday afternoon for the worship of The Father's Day Church, a Portuguese speaking Brazilian church.
- Provide increased intensive pastoral care to disengaged individuals, for example, young people, those with mental health problems, the homeless and unemployed people

Most volunteers are given training for their role, often supplemented by on-the-job support for the work they have volunteered to do. Refresher training is also provided from time to time.

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<p>1.4 Clients/Users</p>	<p>1,800, comprising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">698 male1,102 female80 disabled304 ethnic minority1,674 resident in Woking285 aged 0-5170 aged 6-10191 aged 11-18762 aged 19-65392 aged 65+ <p>The Church provides its facilities free to all members of the congregation when they use its premises. Some make a voluntary contribution from time to time to help with costs. Some organisations like Freemantles School as well as charities who hire the premises regularly like the Citizens Advice, Mind groups, Mediation Services, and Conquest Art do get charged but at a lower rate than that charged to commercial hirers.</p> <p>Regular commercial hirers are offered a slightly reduced rate and one-off commercial hirers pay the full rate, though these are in the minority because of the demand from internal organisations, voluntary bodies and charities.</p>
<p>1.5 Members</p>	<p>395, comprising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">153 male242 female21 disabled16 ethnic minority255 resident in Woking29 aged 0-558 aged 6-1033 aged 11-18135 aged 19-65140 aged 65+ <p>The figures given are made up of church members, those who regularly worship and take part in the life of the church and children and young people who attend worship and/or are closely associated with the church through the groups which it runs. No charges or subscriptions made to members.</p> <p>It was one of the Church's aims to make the premises a community hub in this part of Woking. There is more that the Church could and would like to do in that regard, though the range of groups supported, from Baby and Toddler Groups to senior citizen groups to railway enthusiasts to Tai Chi classes, is indicative of the needs being met.</p>

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1.6 Sum Requested	£20,000 (Capital)
1.7 Project	<p>The Church is seeking funding towards the overall costs of two building improvement projects which form part of the Church's phased approach to improvements.</p> <p><u>Disability Access.</u></p> <p>The Church is hoping to install push button opening devices on two sets of double doors and the accessible toilet. This would make it possible for anyone in a wheelchair or a disability or with an injury which limits their strength to open doors to have easy access from the main front door (already with a push button facility), right through the Forum area to the back corridor and remainder of the premises, including the accessible toilet. The proposal would also help parents/carers with babies in buggies having automatic doors to access and exit these same areas within the premises, particularly the accessible toilet which contains baby changing facilities and nappy disposal bin all as recommended by the British Toilet Association.</p> <p>It is further proposed to install two small lift devices. The first one would be located in the Sanctuary, from floor level to the dais, to enable anyone in a wheelchair (or unable to manage the steps) to take part in the Service or any other event held in that area, such as choral concerts or drama performances. The second would be located in the corridor that provides access to the main hall, lounge, and kitchen, all rooms which are extensively used by community groups.</p> <p><u>Lighting</u></p> <p>To provide eco-friendly lighting using light emitting diodes (LEDs) consistent with the Church's environmental policy. Green Journey, an organisation designed to help Churches manage the complexities of energy and the environment, carried out a survey of the Church premises and has stated that a change to LED light fittings throughout would give savings in energy consumption and on maintenance costs. The Church has already changed the light fittings in the main hall, kitchen, over the dais area in the Sanctuary and some of the corridors to LEDS; this project is designed to complete the rest of the building.</p>
1.8 Cost breakdown:	<p>The Church has received quotes for the works proposed, copies of which have been provided with the application. A summary of the costs is set out below:</p> <p>Cost of disability access (doors & stair lifts): £44,049 + VAT</p> <p>Cost of lighting: £17,550 + VAT</p> <p>Contingency of 5%: £3,080 + VAT</p> <p>Total cost of project: £77,615 inc. VAT</p> <p>Funding is currently being sought from United Reformed Church Wessex Synod Trust, Woking Borough Council and other grant giving bodies published by the Directory for Social Change.</p>
1.9 Community Benefit	In normal circumstances, it is reckoned that each week during school term-time, and quite apart from on a Sunday, around 1800 people use the premises.

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1.10 Covid-19 Impact	<p>Covid-19 has meant that the premises have been closed to the public and visitors since 23 March 2020. However, during this period, the opportunity has been taken to proceed with a number of necessary improvements. The premises were re-opened in mid-July, for two sessions a week and with all necessary precautions, for meetings of the Alcoholics Anonymous.</p> <p>For the people supported, this has continued where it has been possible within the government guidance for social distancing, e.g., support for YRP, the Woman’s Refuge and Woking Street Angels.</p> <p>Plans are well advanced to accommodate, from mid-September, the English classes provided to the Syrian refugees and to Baby Sensory perception. If successful then it is expected that, subject to meeting all the health and safety requirements, further groups will be accommodated. The additional running costs associated with this re-opening for the 12 months to 31 July 2021 are estimated at £9,000.</p>
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2.0 Financial Background	
2.1 Budget	<p>At the time of the application, the Group held £61,377 in the bank. The following sums are reserved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ £42,840 for final payment on Audio-Visual and lighting improvements (net of £5,000 grant awarded). Expect further grant of £6,000.○ £10,500 in capital projects fund for expected replacement of Minister’s car <p>Wessex synod, the wider body that WURC belongs to, does not encourage local churches to maintain extensive reserves, other than to maintain its existing services but rather allocate their finances to the wider use of the community in which they serve.</p> <p>The Group has submitted a budget for 2021/22 which shows an anticipated income of £297,000 against an anticipated expenditure of £328,000, resulting in an anticipated deficit of £31,000.</p> <p>Anticipated income includes offerings (£160,000), use of premises (£22,000), special appeal for projects (£10,000), grants for projects (£60,000), and grants for workers (£40,000). Items of expenditure include the Ministry (£74,000), premises costs (£35,000), repairs (£20,000), projects (£77,500), salaries (£95,000), outreach (£8,500), and other expenses (£18,000).</p> <p>WURC is a member church of Wessex synod of the United Reformed Church, one of 13 synods that cover the whole of Great Britain (similar to Church of England diocese). It is hoped that Wessex synod trust will provide a grant of 25% of the above figures for the disability access and lighting. They have also indicated that they will consider offering a loan at advantageous terms if this becomes necessary.</p> <p>A successful giving appeal to members of the WURC congregation in 2017 has already provided additional funds to enable WURC to engage more with the local community. A subsequent appeal was launched to members of the congregation in July 2020 to help fund the audio-visual and dais lighting improvements. By mid-August this</p>

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	<p>had raised £14,000.</p> <p>A small group within the Church has been set up to co-ordinate fundraising activities. In the past year successful approaches have been made to John Laing Family Trust, Woking Borough Council, the United Reformed Church (Wessex) Trust Ltd, John Beane's Charity, and the Community Foundation for Surrey. Further grant applications are being progressed.</p>
2.2 Accounts	<p>The Group has submitted accounts for 2019 which show an income of £318,422 (£294,964 in 2018) against expenditure of £314,818 (£291,912 in 2018), resulting in a surplus of £3,603 (a surplus of £3,052 in 2018).</p> <p>The sum of £1,703,468 was carried forward at the end of the 2019 year, comprising unrestricted funds of £182,600, restricted funds of £25,258 and expendable endowment of £1,495,610.</p>
2.3 Support over the past five years	2020/21 – £25,000 the costs of the kitchen refurbishment.

3.0 Assessment of Application		
3.1 Key Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Constitution ○ Registered Charity ○ VAT Registered ○ Equal Opportunities Policy ○ Safeguarding Policy ○ Reserves Policy ○ Quality Mark ○ Other funding sources pursued ○ Other support by the Council ○ Fundraising ○ Two quotes ○ Regular monitoring provided previously 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes Yes No Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes No Yes Yes Yes
3.2 Consultee Comments	None.	
3.3 Assessment	<p>The Woking United Reformed Church has applied to Woking Borough Council for funding of £20,000 to assist with the costs of building improvement works. This application is seeking a significant capital grant towards the overall costs of an ongoing extensive refurbishment programme drawn up by the Church. The Council's criteria for grant funding states that, whilst grants will not normally be awarded for projects designed purely for places of worship, consideration will be given to applications for assistance towards Church Halls and other Community Halls where use and/or hiring is open to all.</p> <p>The application is seeking funding towards the overall costs of two</p>	

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building improvement projects which form part of the Church's phased approach to improvements. The first element of project is to install push button opening devices on two sets of double doors and the accessible toilet. This would enable anyone in a wheelchair or with a disability or injury to have easy access from the main front door right through the Forum area to the back corridor and remainder of the premises, including the accessible toilet which contains baby changing facilities. The Church also proposes to install two small lift devices, one located in the Sanctuary, the other located in the corridor that provides access to the main hall, lounge, and kitchen.

The second element of the application proposes the installation of eco-friendly lighting in the areas of the building where such lighting has not yet been extended to.

The overall cost of the project is £77,615 (including VAT).

The Council assisted with the costs of the Church's improvement work in the current year, awarding a capital grant of £25,000 towards the costs of refurbishing the kitchen. The application now before the Executive represents the final phase of a programme of building improvements undertaken by the Church to support its community work, particularly with those who are elderly and have mobility issues. The applicant has confirmed that the Church would not seek any further contributions from the Council in coming years.

The first priority of the improvement programme was to replace the kitchen with one that met current catering requirements and was capable of meeting requests from users. This work was completed in July 2020 at a cost of £53,000. The Church has expressed its gratitude for the support given by the Council for this project. The second priority was to install modern audio-visual equipment and LED lighting covering the dais in the Sanctuary. This work was completed during August 2020 at a cost of £88,000. The pews have been removed to allow the space to support groups from the performing arts sector.

As noted in this report and the report considered at the beginning of the year, the facilities at the Woking United Reformed Church are well used by the local community and support a wide range of activities for those of all ages, including the outreach work undertaken by the Church itself. The facilities are provided free of charge to a number of voluntary bodies whilst other organisations who regularly hire rooms incur a charge, with some organisations including the Freemantles school, Citizens Advice, Mediation Services and Conquest Art charged a much lower rate than that applied to commercial hirers

Although the Church has raised a substantial amount of funding itself through donations and fund raising activities, the Applicant has advised that the Council's assistance is required in order to meet the overall costs

However, notwithstanding the community benefit of the proposal, it is felt that in light of the Council's current financial situation, along with the Group having received funding through the Community Grants Scheme for the current financial year, no grant should be awarded.