The Annual Report of Churches Together in Bexhill, AD 2024

Registered Charity no. 1149860

For its AGM

on Wednesday 26th June, AD 2023 at 7.30pm

at St Mark’s Church Hall, Green Lane, Little Common, Bexhill-on-Sea TN39 4TY

Agenda

1. Welcome, Scripture and Prayer

2. Apologies

3. Minutes from 2023 AGM and Matters Arising

4. Report for the year 2023/2024

5. Financial Statement – sent separately

NB Assets and responsibilities were transferred to CTiB as a CIO no. 1205042 on 31/3/24 And interest accruing from future income to be transferred to General Account for solvency.

6. Foodbank Report

7. Thank you to Officers and Trustees

8. Forthcoming events

9. News from the churches and other Christian ministries

10. Any other business

11. Questions

12. Prayer

These papers have been prepared to conform to the requirements of the Charity Commissioners in The Charities Act 2011 with regards to an annual return.

*Please bring this with you to our meeting – laptops and iPads allowed!*

Administrative information

Churches Together in Bexhill (CTiB) is a charity registered with the Charity Commission within the meaning of the Charities Act 2011.

Since the last AGM, the following served as Officers

Chairman: Jonathan Frais

Secretary: Sally Parry

Treasurer: Ruth Lawrie

and the following as Trustees

Chris Cole, Corinne Gadsden, Wendy Gubby, Charmaine Hill,

and Lisa Young (from 28 June)

As stated in our Constitution of 2012, CTiB exists for

1. The advancement of the Christian Faith for the public benefit

2. To further such charitable purposes as are exclusively charitable and connected to the charitable work of the charity (in particular, but not exclusively, the relief of need in the community of Bexhill).

Remaining contents:

* Chairman’s report (on behalf of Trustees)
* Minutes of last meeting
* Financial papers (CC16a, IFE report, Narrative) sent separately
* Foodbank report
* Ministry in Registered Care Homes– if arrive in time

AFFILIATED GROUPS – if arrive in time

* Christian Aid report
* Street Pastors’ report
* Homeless Unity Group (HUG) report
* Bexhill Hub for Ukraine
* Coffee Fellowship
* Hastings and Rother Interfaith Forum

OTHER GROUPS – if arrive in time

* Transom Trust
* Christians Against Poverty (CAP)

Chairman’s Report (review of 2023)

The apostle John sees “a throne in heaven” (Revelation 4:2). So there is a control centre at the heart of the universe and on it sit Father and Son Unlimited. It is a glorious sight, and it is surrounded by worshipping beings from heaven and earth. So let us be encouraged by this vision of dazzling splendour and ultimate victory. We cry out ‘Jesus is Lord’ and work with believers from other churches knowing that our labour in his name is not in vain.

The Prayer Service on Sunday afternoon, 22nd January at St Mark’s Church Hall (in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity) was well-attended. Then, at the end of Lent, we prayed together at various points in the town centre on Good Friday (7th April), as co-ordinated by John Black. We concluding with a service at St John’s Centre, supported by the Lifted Up Gospel Choir led by Day Lavall and the hospitality of St John’s Baptist Church (organised by Michael Ensor).

In the summer, we gathered at The Bandstand on the seafront on Sunday 23rd July for an afternoon of hymn-singing at the start of Carnival week. Come the autumn, we met on Tuesday 5th September in the afternoon for an EGM to approve the re-creation of CTiB as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).

In advent, we sent 1,942 Nativity booklets (produced by Bible Society) to five Primary Schools in Bexhill, and then sang carols on Saturday morning, 16th December last year, in Devonshire Square (with tech support from John Black).

Meanwhile, ‘Prayer for Ukraine’ gatherings continued on most Wednesdays (at 4pm or 8pm) at St Mark’s and the Prayer Boxes were regularly emptied (and needs lifted up in prayer to the throne of grace) from two locations, while the ‘Just A Minute’ column continued in the Bexhill and Battle Observer, alongside the Church Notices (organised by Helen Jalfon). Thank you to Peter Ewan for overseeing these.

Meanwhile, the labours of God’s people to share the love of Christ continued all year. Reports from Foodbank (for which CTiB is the supervising charity) and affiliated groups are enclosed. Thank you to them, their teams of helpers (staff and volunteers), their supporters, and all who remember them in prayer.

The Clergy Group of local pastors continue to meet every other month. We thank God for our hosts, Andrew and Carol Dreeling, at HOPES (House Of Prayer East Sussex) at The Coach House, Bexhill Old Town.

I appreciate the fellowship of my fellow trustees. We meet quarterly, beginning with input and updates from Foodbank.

We thank God for his mercies past and trust him for all that is to come. May there be many blessing ahead for the cause of the gospel in our town.

In Jesus’ name, *Jonathan Frais* (Chair of Trustees)

**Minutes of the CTiB Annual General Meeting**

**on Wednesday 28th June 2023 at 7pm at St Mark’s Church Hall.**

**1. Welcome and Prayer** Jonathan welcomed members of the churches ‘in the name of Christ, to inform and update you on our work’. He then read from the Bible, said a prayer and then all said the Lord’s Prayer.

**2. Apologies** Bridget Kitts, Ruth Lawrie, Corinne Gadsden, Michelle Pannell, David Lockwood, Paul Deeming, Peter Ewen.

**3. Minutes of the 2022 AGM and any matters arising** The Minutes were agreedand there were no matters arising. Proposed by Peter Popplestone, seconded by Wendy Gubby, all in favour.

**4. Report for the year 2022/23** As per the report in the booklet circulated by email before the AGM. Peter Ewen was not present but is still in charge of the Prayer Boxes around Bexhill. There was also mention of House of Prayer East Sussex (HOPES) at the Church House, Clergy Meetings, and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January.

**5. Financial Statement** As per the report in the AGM Booklet. Pat Reigh had examined the accounts, for which many thanks to him were expressed; the Charity Commission sheet was included in the report. Thanks also to Ruth Lawrie (not present) for completing the accounts; also to Lisa Young for her work on Battle and Bexhill Foodbanks’ accounts. Appreciation was also expressed for the steady support of donations to Foodbank. Approval of the accounts was proposed by Simon Earl, seconded by Béla Ogonovsky, with all in favour.

**6. Foodbank Report** Jonathan told the meeting about a day he had spent in London recently with the Trussell Trust, and how impressive he had found it. Jenni Barnes read Michelle Pannell’s report detailing the impact that the Cost of Living Crisis had had on the Foodbank, how donations had dropped a little, and how useful the input of our CAB adviser had been to clients of the Foodbank. Bexhill now also opens on a Friday. There are now 100 volunteers between the 2 centres. Bexhill is still looking for a larger space from which to operate. Thanks to all who support the Foodbank with a particular mention for the team at the Rotary Club.

**7 Election of Officers (Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary) and Trustees.**

**Chairman Jonathan Frais**

nominated by Sally Parry, seconded by Corinne Gadsden.

**Treasurer Ruth Lawrie**

nominated by Chris Cole, seconded by Jonathan Frais.

**Secretary Sally Parry**

nominated by Corinne Gadsden, seconded by Ruth Lawrie.

**Trustee Chris Cole**

nominated by Jonathan Frais, seconded by Sally Parry.

**Corinne Gadsden**

nominated by Wendy Gubby, seconded by Ruth Lawrie.

**Trustee Wendy Gubby**

nominated by Ruth Lawrie, seconded by Chris Cole.

**Trustee Charmaine Hill**

nominated by Wendy Gubby, seconded by Sally Parry.

**Trustee Lisa Young**

Nominated by Wendy Gubby, seconded by Ruth Lawrie.

Meetings of the Trustees are held quarterly on a Monday afternoon. Affiliated groups (Foodbank, Street Pastors, Ukraine Hub etc) come to report on their activities, and prayers are said.

**8. Election of Members of the Executive Committee**

**Bridget Kitts** has stood down.

**John Black** is the last member of the Executive Committee. He coordinates the events organised by the CTiB, and agrees to continue. Nominated by Béla Ogonovsky, seconded by Alison Marchant; all in favour.

**9. Constitutional Changes** **: Charity upgrade to become a CIO.** The Foodbank has grown and now employs people. It is therefore necessary to become a CIO; for this a solicitor’s help is required. 80% of new charities have opted for this model which was introduced in 2014. Simon Earl pointed out the importance of getting it right; a seamless change was necessary. Alison Marchant suggested that from her experience as a trustee of several charities, the change-over should not be too difficult. Wendy Gubby had sought the advice of Ashdown Hurrey who had said that the transition should not be difficult but that a solicitor would be required.

**10. Forthcoming Events** Sunday 23rd July : the start of Bexhill Carnival Week, Hymn Singing at 4pm in the Community Bandstand for 40 minutes with social time afterwards. As it is a Sunday only a certain amount of amplification is allowed

**11. News from the Churches** Hub for Ukraine has been operating for 15 months: 40/60 people gather on a Wednesday. Participants are more relaxed and their English has improved. Children are cheeky! 3 or 4 new people in today. Peter Popplestone mentioned Beulah’s Got Talent when Ukrainian ladies appeared in national costume singing.

**Guy Partridge** told the meeting that CAP is a CIO. Mental health troubles are the main driver towards debt. Christian Explorers group meet on a Tuesday at the Coach House (home of HOPES) where an episode of a film is shown and a discussion follows. Guy thanked all concerned for their kind donations; he can preach and spread the word about CAP.

**Freedom Church:** Darren has been ordained and gone to Lymington, so Freedom Church is in inter-regnum.

**Terry Jin:**  Korean Culture Day on 17th June had welcomed around 100 people. There was food, activities involving customs etc. Bexhill College provided some attendees over Zoom, some looking for help with their careers. Terry is trying to organise meetings with influential people.

**Barry Turnwell**: Christ Church Methodist Choir raised £1000 in June.

**St Barnabas Update** Russell and Judith Meredith said that the church is on the Heritage at Risk register of Historic England. Nevertheless, currently there is a renovation programme in progress transforming the church by adding a kitchen, café and lavatories, a mezzanine floor and 3 extra rooms. A bequest of £800k has been used as ‘seed money’. The community is being consulted. There is a school uniform swap shop, ‘The linen cupboard’ for those coming out of hospital, HUG is working with the homeless (providing meals 3 times a week; families are assisted with filling forms and sign-posted to other organisations which can help them). The north side of the church is the first to be transformed.

**Carol Cockroft** told the meeting how impressed she was by the depth of the discipleship of prayer.

**12. Any Other Business** John Fowler informed the meeting that Geoffrey Bennett is Chair of the Men’s Coffee Fellowship which meets on the 3rd Monday of the month in Buckhurst Hall, Beulah Baptist Church.

**13. Questions** There were none.

**14.** **Prayer** - for spiritual revival. This was an open session. Thanks to St Mark’s for being open for prayers for Ukraine and an end to the war. John Fowler said that it was good news to have ecumenical hymn-singing (‘bless that time’). It was prayed that the St Michael’s spirit of joy would flow through Bexhill, living for Christ and His glory. Alison Marchant prayed for blessings on the schools in Bexhill, and that God would ‘open the doors’.

Jonathan concluded the meeting with a final prayer.

**Report on the work of the Foodbank year ending 31st March 2024 – Michelle Pannell**

Thanks to God for a very full and uplifting year at the foodbank. We are privileged to be able to serve many of our most vulnerable residents and it is the strong and dedicated team of 95 local volunteers that keep us going (67 at Bexhill and 28 at Battle). Our sincere thanks go to them all, as well as the dedicated volunteers from Bexhill Rotary, Jim & Lynn Langlands, Nigel Lockwood and the local churches for transporting donations to us.

The cost of living crisis has had a marked impact on the physical donation levels given to both Bexhill and Battle, with around a 40% drop, especially in the shops and supermarkets. Thankfully financial giving has remained good and this means we have had the funds to be able to buy food and ensure that we can give a full and varied food parcel to every local person in crisis who wishes to access our service. We have extended the range of foods that we offer from the foodbank now with items such as fresh bread, eggs, fruit, vegetables, oil, sandwich spreads, sauces and sometimes cheese/ butter.

The cost of associated items has also risen out of line with people’s income and thus we now provide toiletries, cleaning items, nappies, wipes, baby food and pet food too. Thank you so much to every donor who has helped to make this possible.

The service styles at the two branches remain the same, with Battle operating a pick-your-own style due to the lower number of clients and the greater space available, and Bexhill picks to a preference list completed with the client, to ensure they get just want they require. There is always at least one volunteer on hand to chat with the clients, give them a coffee and biscuit and to be able to signpost them to other services. Some clients really appreciate this time to talk and others prefer to quietly wait.

We still deliver to clients who cannot get to the foodbank, or have ill health. We are finding that RDC are putting more people into temporary or long-term accommodation in rural areas, such as Ninfield, Westfield and Burwash and there is no adequate transport links for these clients to get about, and this creates an extra need for deliveries.

We were so pleased to note that the overall number of people using the foodbank has dropped slightly. In the financial year ending 31st March 2024 we had fed 6784 people between the two branches (83% Bexhill, 17% Battle). We believe this drop is because of the financial inclusion work that we started in partnership with the local CAB in October 2022. We’ve had an advisor, Amy Baynes working specifically with our clients to help them ascertain the underlying causes of their crisis and to work with them to help alleviate those causes.

This is done by a benefits review, seeking grants, working on alleviating debt, budgeting and referring to other associated services. We have seen some massive wins for our clients since this work started, with a great many not needing to use the foodbank again. It has also considerably reduced the repeat need for foodbank use. In the financial year 21/22 the average client collected 6 food parcels from us and this has now dropped to an average of 3, despite most clients being in deeper hardship than they were previously.

After the financial year end but since writing this report I am thrilled to report that the foodbank has now branched out and has its own welfare rights advice service. Amy Baynes moved from the CAB to work for CTiB directly as of May as our Advice Service Manager. We are currently refurbishing premises on Sackville Road, which will act as our advice service/ foodbank office, where we will be able to help even more local people in need. We plan to have an official opening of this service and the office after the summer.

We have been very busy establishing new outreach opportunities and partnerships. This year we have trialled foodbank outreach at many venues in Sidley, as this is a particular area we know we need to serve better. We continue to be at the Marketplace at Freedom Church on the second and fourth Tuesday of the month.

We now have a team of three working for the foodbank - myself, Amy, heading up the advice service and Jenni, the Volunteers Manager who looks after the team and works closely with me to develop the service. We have plenty of plans in the pipeline, as we are always looking at the ways we can better serve local people in need and we are in talks with the Trussell Trust about a grant for someone to work on behalf of the foodbank to campaign and organise locally to help our residents have a voice and make a difference to local and national policies that impact our clients.

Last autumn we did a big piece of collaborative work to look at the vision, mission and values of the foodbank and I attach the outcome of this.

On a personal note, I continue to find my work very fulfilling, so much so that I can find it hard to turn off, as there is always so much more we can be doing to help those in crisis. God has been talking to me recently about the importance of rest and play, so I’m trying to embrace those principles. I want to thank all the trustees for the support that they give to me and the foodbank team; it is so reassuring to know we can turn to them.

Please continue to pray for all those who need to use the foodbank; that they’ll have the courage to seek our help and that we continue to be well-resourced so we may serve them well. God bless you for your support, it means the world to us.