**FOTCH AGM 26th September 2024 President’s Report**

**Facing up to the Challenges of Change**

**Background**

We are undoubtedly facing an unprecedented level of changes which seem to run ahead of any pre-emptive action we try to take. Over the past two years we have been discussing the development of an updated identity and a more relevant proposition for the changed marketplace of Tring. (As proposed at the last AGM) We have made considerable progress on this including an updated identity and offer but circumstances have overtaken us.

For this reason we are not now proposing to relaunch the society itself until such time we can operate in a more stable environment. We need to better understand how we can best meet the needs of our radically changed community

**We have come a long way**

In the 35 years since we launched FOTCH much has been achieved. We have paid out grants of over £300,000 to support various maintenance projects and essential updates in equipment. Our membership has remained stable but attracting new members has proved very challenging. The changes in both the perceived position of the Church of England in society and the massive churn in the Tring constituency. have made it almost impossible to plan targeted communication. Perhaps most extreme of all has been the impact on FOTCH and all such organisations of the Covid years and subsequent lockdown. We have somewhat lost our profile as established organisers of “must see” events

This tidal wave of change has been further exacerbated by a national malaise of frustration which seems to have lost all faith in government and public institutions.

All of this means that we have despite our achievements, largely lost our standing and profile within the community we serve.

Should we be dismayed by this? Not at all; there have always been changes in every era and new circumstances bring new opportunities.

Our strategic task is deal with the immediate needs of our constituency and plan carefully to adjust our offer for the longer term. Rushing into knee-jerk changes is seldom wise (John Lewis is a salutary example!)

**We have a long way to go**

Despite all the above Tring is a town which is in good heart and good health with very high demand for housing and a bustling sense of vitality about the place. No one can say at this stage what will happen with the massive planning challenges to the east of the town. No one can really forecast how the radically different approach of the new Labour government will impact on the wellbeing of our community. Change and uncertainty is all about us.

In the midst of all this we now have some pretty significant and urgent fabric challenges to deal with.

**Surely the wise strategic step is to deal effectively with that short term problem whilst planning calmly for our long term future.**

**Dealing with short term challenges**

If you take a look at the new edition of the FOTCH magazine coming out in a couple of weeks you will see just how much needs urgently to be done to keep the church in good order. We have been here before. About 20 years ago we had a significant challenge with the North Wall and met this with a strong public appeal. (The WallWorks Appeal).

Today we have an equally formidable challenge with the roof which requires significant remedial work as a matter of considerable urgency. This cannot be met through FOTCH resources alone and so once again a community wide appeal will be necessary.

It is for this reason that our short term strategy is to support a community wide appeal that gets the job done. “**Save our roof”** is the challenging slogan for this appeal and you will see much of this featured in the new magazine as well as on displays in the local history museum and eventually in the church itself. After all, ***No Roof – No Future!***

Keeping the roof sound seems the wisest way to give ourselves time and space to plan for whatever the future holds!

**Next steps** We are calmly getting on with the job moving towards a meeting to discuss the action plan for the appeal and start to get the communication in place. What is undoubtedly the case is that we will need new energy and more hands to the pump.

We are very fortunate in having some good new activists in place in particular in the area of social media and communication. We need to engage with the younger generation in our town to get them actively involved in pulling all this together.

The original “gang” who brought FOTCH together thirty-five years ago have either left the stage completely or are running out of steam. We need new leaders and energy to keep going and make our future even more effective than our past.

It will not be an easy job but if we are to keep the Heritage Heart of Tring in good health for future generations, we have to get it done. Over the coming months we will be working towards a launch event for June 2025 to ensure that everybody has a chance to join in this exciting project. As ever, it will be FUN as well as very effective FUNdraising!

**Grateful thanks are due**

To the Trustees, officers, activists, organisers and supporters for the fantastic job that was done for the last Family Fun Day. We are already gearing up for the next one on May 10th 2025. Planning that and executing it effectively will be just as important as planning the launch event for the appeal which will follow very shortly afterwards.

Please get involved, tell your friends, tell people who have never heard of us. The town will always be grateful that when it was most needed people stepped forward to keep our Heritage Heart beating strongly and providing a centre of excellence and involvement for all to enjoy.

**Everyone is included and everyone can help!**

**Yes, That means YOU!**

Thank you all for all you have done – and all you will do in the future.

Grahame Senior

Hon President

The Friends of Tring Church Heritage.

September 2024

To get Involved please contact any of the officers at [info@fotch.co.uk](mailto:info@fotch.co.uk)