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Blandford Church Plant - Preliminary Information from Steven Driver

Although the BCP conurbation has many FIEC churches, the rest of Dorset does not. There are around 160,000 – 300,000 people in that area who potentially have limited access to the Gospel.

- 6 years ago, at a regional leaders meeting, the question was asked: Is there a need to plant churches in rural North Dorset?

I came away feeling convicted by God about the need for a church plant in Dorset.

In 2022, Sarah and I came to join Broadstone Baptist Church. In the interview process and preliminary conversations, no mention was made of a church plant. However, shortly after I started, a casual conversation with Pastor Tim revealed that the Lord had laid the idea of a church plant in rural North Dorset on his heart too.

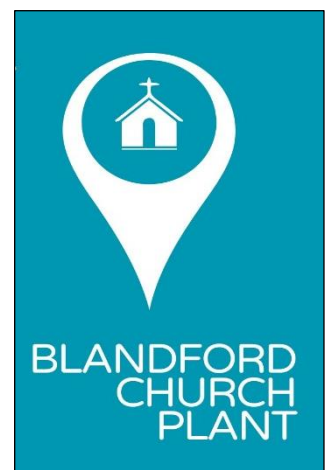
From then on, I began to consider this more seriously. Unexpectedly, as part of my Crosslands studies, I found myself doing a module on church planting. Following that, and with much prayer, I came to the realisation that a church plant in rural North Dorset was definitely needed.

Where should this be?

Blandford is the obvious place. It is where I grew up and I know it well. This God-created community has many needs. Blandford is a built-up area of around 12,000 people, with a surrounding network of villages that increase the number in the region to between 20,000 and 24,000. It has a vast mix of demographics - due largely to the army base which has brought people in from, not just around the country, but around the globe.

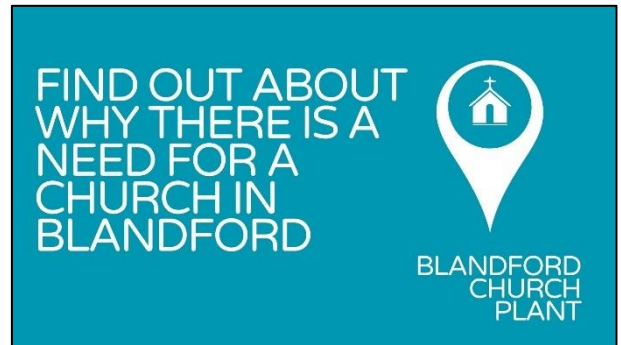


**Assistant Pastor
Steven Driver**



However, Blandford is not short of problems:

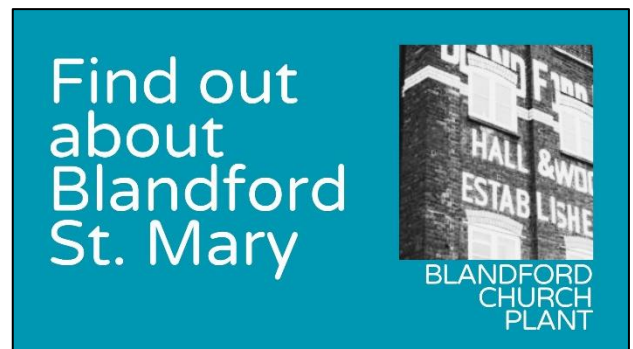
- It can be quite isolated from the rest of the county. Like many rural towns, bus services are few and within the town there is not much in the way of entertainment.
- Drug use is a problem. With limited means of escape from the town, many choose drugs as their escape. In the past it has been dubbed the heroin capital of England and Wales.
- There has been a big rise in the number of domestic abuse cases since the pandemic, probably linked to the isolationism that many people experience.
- There is pagan worship and a growing number of Jehovah's Witnesses, as people try to find ways to fill their emptiness.



Yet, this is not their biggest problem.

Their biggest problem is that they are sinners who need to see the light of the Gospel.

- To the problem of isolationism, Jesus says 'I am the vine', offering them identity, communion and community in him.
- To the problem of escape, Jesus says 'I am the resurrection and the life'. It is through him we can have life to the full!
- To all the higher powers, Jesus declares that he is the light of the world. The answer to the town's problems is not found in things like the summer solstice but in the source of all light.



With two broadly evangelical churches in the town, the parish church and Blandford evangelical church, it might seem that this need is already being met. However, it is clear that not just the town but also the surrounding area needs more workers.

The best way of doing that is by bringing in another church.

We have already encountered many instances where God seems to be opening doors before, we even get to them. Here are a few examples.



1. I had stated early on that, if this was to happen, I would love to see the Wessex Gospel Partnership involved. In October, they had a meeting where church planting was not on the agenda at all but that is exactly where the meeting went! They finished by asking for churches to come back in March with some ideas for church plants in rural Dorset, and I took the vision I had.



2. At the FIEC Conference in November, Pastor Tim found himself talking to Don Olden, a Pastor in Andover. Don shared with Tim that he and his wife Paula would be retiring soon to a home just above Blandford and obviously would be looking for a church. Don had planted the church in Andover and he comes with a wealth of experience to draw upon.

3. In March this year, I decided it was time to speak to the local Vicar of Blandford Forum Parish Church. I was really nervous about the meeting, and prayed that God would give me the right words. I rehearsed all I wanted to say.

I didn't need any of it! The Vicar (Chris Beaumont) said all of the things I was going to say to him. He quoted the same Tim Keller article, and has invited me to preach at the parish church once it looks as if things are moving.



It is clear that there need to be more churches in the Blandford area to reach the community with the Gospel and to join in the work that is already going on.

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Blandford is actually split in two. Blandford Forum, where the Parish Church and Blandford Evangelical Church (BEC) are, is on one side of the river, and Blandford St Mary is on the other.

Blandford St Mary is very connected to the surrounding villages. It has a significant number of young families living there and there are a large number of new housing developments – the biggest one so far being St. Mary’s Hill. The village of Charlton Marshall almost merges into Blandford St. Mary at this point.

The population of Blandford as a whole is set to rise by a few thousand in the next few years. People are moving to Blandford and even if just 1% of those people went to church, 3 evangelical churches would not be enough.



- **The vision goes beyond Blandford St. Mary.**

Starting in Blandford, we will connect with villages and other towns in rural North Dorset. Gospel workers in many of the towns in this region face similar issues. The hope for a plant in Blandford would be that this would lead to further plants.

Then we would be reaching the thousands of people in rural North Dorset for Christ.

The vision to start with is a church plant in Blandford – to be a community where the Gospel is central, where we exhibit true delight in the Gospel, reflecting that gospel light to the community of Blandford and beyond, so that they do the same.

- The heart is for God’s church to grow in this region. We want his name to be made known.

Which other churches and organisations could be involved?

- Wessex Gospel Partnership, as already mentioned
- St. Johns in Wimborne - a number of their congregation live in Blandford.

There has been interest in planting a church, but no one to spearhead it. Over Christmas, some people turned up there asking about whether there was a church in Blandford and they are praying for the church plant – just another indication of God working well ahead of us. I will be preaching there in May and sharing the vision with them.

- Poole Christian Fellowship – Andy Upton, the pastor at PCF, has experience planting with his previous church in Leicester and I will have the opportunity to share with them in June. A few people from that church have already expressed interest in joining the plant.

Matt Lee (St John's) and Andy Upton (PCF) are forming a **Board of Reference** with Tim, John and myself. Steve Bell from the Isle of Wight, who has lots of experience with church plants, will also be on the board.

I am also talking with Pete Bentley Taylor, who is the pastor of the recently planted Trinity Church in Salisbury. I will be joining them at their prayer meeting in June to speak about it more.

What is the timescale of this?

Between now and September (2024) a core team will be formed to make up the initial plant. The team will be made of individuals, couples and families from a number of churches.

- If, by September, for whatever reason we feel that the plant is not viable, we will not go ahead or at least we will pause until things become clearer.

However, if by this time it is viable – that is we have the team and the finances - then we will start to meet regularly to plan, pray and form as a team. This is a vital stage, particularly as we will be from different churches.

During this time the crucial administrative elements of a church plant will begin to take place.

- We will fill in forms to connect us with the FIEC as a registered church plant. That will give us support, not just financially, but from their whole church planting team.
- Those of us who don't live in Blandford will put our houses on the market, so we can start living in the community.
- The hope would be that in the spring of next year, we will start looking to make ourselves known. We could partner in initiatives with other churches or do something ourselves – we don't know yet.

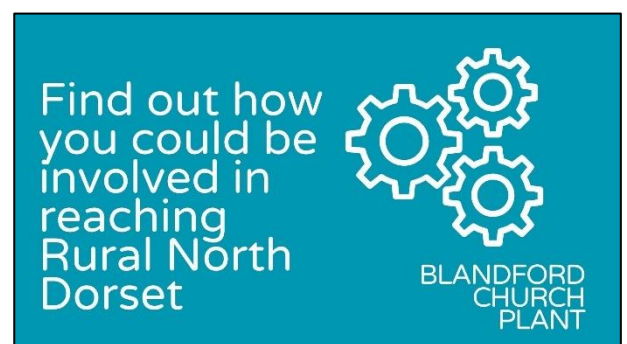
- In August 2025, we will look to soft launch the plant – starting to meet on a Sunday, though not opening it up to the people of Blandford. That is so we can get used to doing church.
- In September 2025 the hard launch will take place and we will be publicly commissioned.
- That is when the hard work begins! Planting in rural areas is a long-term commitment – on average, it takes 7 years for a plant in this size of town to become truly independent and self-sustaining.

What about finance?

- Obviously, there is a financial cost to the plant:
- My salary would be a significant part of that so that I am released to lead the new church well.
- We will need to rent a space to meet
- Some level of PA would be necessary
- General costs of being a charity.
- The commitment we are looking for is a long-term financial commitment. One off gifts, though appreciated, would not make the plant viable for the long term. It is impossible to say how much will be needed at this stage. As we form over the next year, we will get a better idea of the costs.

How can you get involved in this?

It won't surprise you that we would love to have members of Broadstone Baptist Church directly involved in this plant, so please:



- Pray that God's Spirit would grow and establish this local church so that many will praise his name.
- Consider joining us. We need to people to move, serve and to be a part of this church and commit to the work of the Gospel in the town. We would love to see

people of all ages and stages involved in this work. It is easy to count yourself out, but before you do, please really think and pray about it.

- Pray that it will be clear whether or not we should go ahead when the time comes to make a decision.

Assistant Pastor Steven Driver – May 2024

VIDEO

Can we now encourage you to watch the video presentation that Steven has put together which explains the rationale and thinking behind the project. Use this link to watch <https://youtu.be/xwEQvLfX4hl>

Speak to Steven or Sarah to
find out more

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“Delighting in the light of
Christ, reflecting his light
to the people of
Blandford and beyond so
that they may do the
same”

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