

Meeting with Lorraine Taylor, Head Hartshill Academy, 18th March 2026 - Jeff Robinson and Frances Hall

Our aim in meeting with the Head was to explore how we might work with the school on community engagement. We explained that our community project is still at an early stage, and that we see the church and its grounds as a genuine asset for the whole community. We emphasised that we want young people to be involved from the very beginning - not as a paperwork or tick-box exercise for funders, but as active contributors shaping how the project develops for the benefit of the community.

We hoped to explore how the school might help us achieve this by developing a programme that aligns with the school's priorities, pressures, and aspirations for its pupils. We shared that we have some emerging ideas, but that the real intention is to shape these with young people so they become meaningful, co-created projects rather than pre-designed activities.

The Head initially believed that the interior of the church was going to be significantly altered. We clarified the building's historical significance and confirmed that major internal changes are not part of the plan. The only physical developments are the creation of two new spaces beneath the balcony, the transition from gas-fired space heating to an all-electric, people-centred heating system and re-decoration.

It became clear that the Head may have expected us to present fully developed project proposals, and our lack of fixed ideas may have caused some frustration. Frances then introduced the biodiversity strand, drawing on examples from other churches and her own previous work. This helped shift the tone of the meeting, although the Head continued to ask, "What sort of ideas do you want the school to be involved in?"

Several of the ideas we mentioned were things the school had already done. The Head explained that, if pupils are to work off-site, there needs to be a clear added value - something unique that they cannot achieve within the school grounds. She asked what we are trying to create, what makes it distinctive, and why the school should invest time beyond its already demanding workload.

The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme emerged as a potential area for collaboration. The school has around 45 pupils involved each year, all of whom need to complete volunteering hours, and this could provide a natural link.

We suggested piloting a small project together, such as supporting our Eco Church application. The Head noted that this sounded similar to Eco Schools and suggested that a pupil-voice activity could be arranged quite easily.

The school currently has a small team developing a sensory garden on the field near the woods at the back of the school, in partnership with Oxford University, and the same group is planting at the front of the school. They also have a rain garden planned for after

the builders complete their work. We offered the idea of creating a sensory garden in the church grounds, giving pupils the opportunity to design something visible in the public domain. The Head said they could potentially plan for this in the 2026/27 academic year. She also suggested exploring a more reflective area as part of this.

We then discussed the heritage aspect of the project. The Head was particularly interested in the work relating to those who died in the wars and felt this could be a strong area to explore later.

The Head commented very positively on the Christmas Concert, saying it had been “really, really good.” She had already spoken to Nick about the possibility of holding two concerts next year and was keen to open them up more widely to the community, as parents loved it and she felt the wider community would too.

She also mentioned a very enthusiastic pupil who wants to start a journalism club. The school could potentially support her to work with us, within the boundaries of the school website and newsletter. This pupil is the school’s Young High Sheriff, and the Head noted that featuring our project on the school’s social media could reach around 2,000 parents.

However, the Head stressed that any involvement must have a clear educational purpose. The school can promote the project, but they need to understand the educational rationale for doing so.

Finally, we were invited to take part in the school’s Eco Club event—a two-day programme in June for families who cannot afford the residential trip. The Head will pass the Head of Science’s contact details to Frances so we can follow this up.