

Notes of the Tower Hamlets Deanery Synod - 12 February 2014

7.30pm at Christ Church Spitalfields

Attended by 16 clergy and 26 laity attended from the Tower Hamlets Deanery

Rev Andy Rider opened the meeting with prayer and welcomed the Hackney and Islington Deaneries.

Rev Michael Learmouth, Dean of Islington, set the scene by speaking about the work underway to determine the strategic direction of the church over the coming years in order to boost church attendance and engagement. It was important that all members of the church helped to shape the strategic direction and it was hoped that some good ideas could be taken to the October clergy conference.

Two minutes of 'buzzing' followed whereby attendees introduced themselves to those around them.

Rev Julia Porter, Dean of Hackney, spoke about work that had taken place in recent times in the Hackney Deanery to effect change and welcomed Bishop Adrian's desire to pick up and drive this work forward. The Bishop had recently commissioned a contextual analysis of the Stepney Episcopal Area from the co-author of 'Another Capital Idea', Alan Piggot, and was pleased to introduce Alan to bring his findings to the meeting.

Presentation by Alan Piggot

Alan began by explaining that he had drawn on 2011 census data to produce his study and was keen to point out that much of the statistical data in his presentation would be familiar to those who live in the area and are witnesses to the constantly changing landscape.

Changes in People

20% increase in population of Stepney area in last ten years – 120,000 more people

Significant change in urban geography: large-scale planned developments (eg Canary Wharf) together with lots of property conversions and small developments

Islington and Hackney have more 'metropolitan town centres', ie more focussed communities with recognisable hubs of public buildings, churches, shops, etc. Tower Hamlets has tended to spread away from 'town centres' and community hubs are less distinct.

In 1981, 85% of Tower Hamlets residents lived in council accommodation. The private rental sector has since expanded and houses a more fluid population, such as young, childless professionals and students. Both of these groups will include visitors from abroad.

The population churn is high – only some 30% of residents will still live where they do now in ten years' time.

Church attendance has grown in London and shows how well ministry is being applied to these rapidly changing communities.

Attendees split into small groups for ten minutes to discuss how these statistics are reflected in the local area.

Changes in Work

More people work than live in the Stepney area. There are some ½ million jobs in the area, the major concentrations being Canary Wharf (120,000 jobs) and the City fringe (200,000 jobs).

There are lots of business professionals (lawyers, marketing and IT professionals, creative industries), although the area is underrepresented by health professionals and unskilled workers compared to national figures.

75% of the jobs in the Stepney area are taken by people who live outside the boroughs. Similarly, 60% of residents of the Stepney area work outside the boroughs. There is a great 'crossing over'.

The official unemployment figure for the area is 9%. However, there are lots of part-time workers, carers and retired people not accounted for by this figure.

Many people will have been affected by the government's benefit changes, although the impact will be greater or lesser depending on the benefits claimed.

There are some 103,000 long term sick, with comparatively few carers (54,000). Many of these sufferers are likely to be the over 65's who have remained in the area.

The large majority of 25-30 year olds in the area will be childless (young professionals or students).

57,000 under 16 year olds are living in poverty. 60% of U-16's have no holiday and 40% have limited bedroom space.

Conclusion

There is, and always has been, a multitude of networking initiatives that take place across the Stepney area organised by different groups, whether they be cultural, sporting, special interest, etc. Attendees were asked to consider how these trends play out in their own neighbourhoods and what it is that brings people together. It is here that opportunities may be found for re-shaping the church and its place in people's lives.

Attendees split into small groups for a further ten minutes to discuss how changes may be affected in their local areas.

Rev Andy Rider closed the meeting at 9pm with prayer and song.

**The next Synod – Tuesday 25 March, 7.30pm at St Mary's Bow –
Deanery Strategic Conversation III**