

GOSPEL STANDARD BETHESDA FUND

Registered Charity 1199341

10th March 2025

Dear supporter,

You may recall in November 2024, the trustees wrote to supporters setting out the challenges that have been faced by current and previous Bethesda trustees over the past 50 years.

In summary, these challenges were sustaining, in the Lord's purposes, the provision of the Bethesda Homes against the backcloth of the decline in the number of Chapels on the Gospel Standard (GS) List (in 1975, there were 197 places of worship on the GS List and in 2024 this figure was 78) and the reduced number of beneficiaries coming into the homes. This, in turn, has impacted on occupancy levels and, as a result, the number of care home locations over the past 50 years has decreased from seven to two - Harpenden and Brighton.

In the November 2024 mailing, detailed information and commentary was also provided on the 10 year and 5-year trends in occupancy and operating costs. These costs have been offset by legacies, investment income and sale of properties. In using funds for this purpose they were not then available for future investment to ensure that Bethesda's care provision was appropriate in meeting the needs of future beneficiaries.

During 2017-19, Bethesda undertook a consultation with supporters and other interested parties on the future of Bethesda. As a result, the following challenges were identified:

- Maintaining the distinct identity of Bethesda in an age of compromise and an increasingly secular society
- Responding to and providing high levels of care for an increasing range of residents' needs amongst those entering Bethesda homes
- Recruiting (operational and management) staff who are in sympathy with the ethos and values of Bethesda
- Maintaining the financial viability of Bethesda to ensure levels of care and support are sufficient to meet the needs of residents, together with ensuring Bethesda's physical assets (e.g. buildings, equipment) are fit for purpose

These challenges remain. At the time, there was discussion on widening the entry criteria to increase occupancy. However, trustees were conscious that Bethesda was the home of its residents and the lifestyle provided by Bethesda was that which they had enjoyed in their own homes. Within the Charity's Memorandum and Articles of Association, there is provision for those who do not necessarily meet the stated entry criteria. Consequently, trustees produced a 'pen portrait' describing what it is to live in a Bethesda Home. If this was the lifestyle of the individual, they would nonetheless be welcome to apply for a place in Bethesda. (A copy of this document is attached.)

In the November 2024 communication, the possibilities facing Bethesda were identified as:

- To continue using reserves (e.g. invested funds) to cover the daily deficit. This means that there is less money available for improving or replacing existing facilities. Whilst realising the Lord is He who has provided and will continue to provide, the trustees also feel they are enjoined by scripture to be wise stewards of that which He has put in their charge. They prayerfully look to the Lord to provide the means to continue the work and future development of Bethesda lest a time should come when the reserves are exhausted.
- To relocate the provision to more suitable and manageable premises. This possibility is one that the trustees have explored extensively, and to date have not been able to move forward on any of the properties that have been considered. However, it is not as simple as purchasing and repurposing a domestic property; there are the additional costs of converting it to meet the practical and regulatory needs of operating a care home.
- Home Closure is the option of last resort and one that, no doubt, trustees over the years have trembled at in view of the physical and emotional upheaval on the aged residents, staff,

relations, friends and the local communities and yet in the Lord's purposes a path that had to be walked out.

Since that time, the trustees have continued to prayerfully seek the Lord's will for Bethesda, and in particular the future of the Harpenden Bethesda Home.

At the beginning of 2025, the Lord hedged up the way of the trustees so that at their meeting on 31st January 2025, with heaviness of heart, the decision was made to consult on the closure of the Harpenden Bethesda Home.

This process commenced during the week Monday 3rd March - Friday 7th March 2025. Meetings were held with staff, residents, their relatives, and Powers of Attorney. In addition, meetings were held with the flatlet residents and the Home Support Group. The meetings with staff have been conducted in accordance with employment legislation and rights.

The meetings with residents and others focused on the reasons for the consultation regarding the closure of the Harpenden Home. During the meetings, time was spent advising the residents of the position and outlining the options for the future which, in summary, included:

- Moving to the Brighton & Hove Bethesda Home (which reflected the approach of previous home closures that offered a place at a sister Bethesda Home).
- Moving to a smaller facility located in the Luton area. This accommodation, for a maximum of six residents, would provide a dwelling-place and be based on the household model of care. Before proceeding with acquiring this property, the trustees are looking for confirmation that there would be sufficient interest in this option.
- Making alternative arrangements to meet the resident's care needs. Although this is an option, the trustees are aware of the drawbacks associated with this.

A copy of the letter that has been issued to residents and/or POAs is attached.

In view of the sensitivities of these meetings, it was felt appropriate to meet, in the first instance, with those who were directly involved, explain the situation and invite formal (written) feedback by Friday, 21 March 2025.

Now that these meetings have taken place, the trustees are keen to seek feedback from supporters and other interested parties on the proposals made. Also, we would be pleased to receive any thoughts on other viable options that could be considered. Please do email your responses to trustees@qsbf.uk.

Our desire is to look to the Lord who has maintained the provision of Bethesda, to the GS chapels for many years, and beseech Him that He might continue to provide for us and make a way through, as they may seem, the impossibilities before us.

Do please pray for the residents that they may be upheld, strengthened and may prove "And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you". Isaiah 46:4.

Please also remember the Powers of Attorney, relatives, the General Manager, the Home Manager, staff, Home Support Group members and trustees that they might prove "Jehovah Jireh".

On behalf of the trustees,



Michael Ridout (*Chairman*)

Copy of the letter to residents and POA's

5th March 2025

Dear

Thank you for taking the time to meet and discuss with us the future of the Harpenden Home and the implications this may have for you.

We realise that we covered a great deal in our conversation, and it can often be difficult to keep track of the details, so we felt it would be helpful to provide you with a written summary of what was covered during our meeting.

In addition to this summary, we have enclosed the 'Business Case for closure' document that provides detail on why it has been felt necessary to bring this matter forward.

The purpose of the meeting

The purpose of our meeting was to let you know that, after a long period of careful consideration, regrettably, the Trustees feel that it is now necessary to seriously consider the closure of the Harpenden Home, subject to feedback arising from consultation with the residents and their representatives, the staff and other key stakeholders.

In the meeting we outlined:

- The reasons behind the need to consult on closure.
- The consultation process with the options available to you.
- The next steps.

Business context and reasons

The reasons for considering closing the Harpenden Home are set out in detail in the 'Business Case for closure' document. However, in summary, the decision to consult on the closure of the Harpenden Home is based on several critical factors:

1. **Decline in Demand:** There has been a severe decline in demand for the services provided by the Gospel Standard Bethesda Fund due to the reduction in the number of Gospel Standard Chapels and their congregations. This decline has led to decreased occupancy rates in the Homes, especially the Harpenden Home, where occupancy now stands at just 38% of capacity.
2. **Ageing Building and Infrastructure:** The Harpenden Home is now 55 years old and no longer entirely suitable to meet the increasing complexity of care needs. The building's ageing fabric and infrastructure, along with the lack of insulation, make it extremely expensive to operate. Specific issues include the need to replace boilers, repairs to the flat roof, plumbing, and cracking in the walls and floors.
3. **Economic and Policy Factors:** Government policies promoting community-based care and discouraging residential care have significantly reduced the demand for residential care services. This shift has impacted the financial viability of the Charity as a whole, including the Harpenden Home.
4. **Complex Care Needs:** Residents are entering the Homes at an older age with more complex physical and mental health care needs. This has necessitated higher staffing levels, the costs of which cannot be recouped through fee income (due to the low occupancy), further reducing the economic viability of the Home.
5. **Regulatory and Compliance Costs:** The increasing costs associated with meeting regulatory and compliance obligations, particularly in the east of England where the Harpenden Home is located, have added significantly to the operating costs.
6. **Financial Viability:** The practical impact of these challenges has meant that maintaining the service in its current form is financially unsustainable. By the end of 2024, the costs of providing care at the Harpenden Home were exceeding income by over £300,000 a year, with no realistic likelihood of this situation improving in 2025 or beyond.

As will be seen from the detailed information provided in the Business Case document, the Harpenden Home has sustained operational losses of over £1.7m since 2014. These have been met by selling other Bethesda properties and drawing on reserves which, in turn, has limited future investment. Although these funds have been used to care for our residents during this period, there comes a point when, if the charity is to continue, this can no longer be sustained.

The consultation

This consultation will continue over the next few weeks. The reason for this is that although the Trustees have come to a view on the Harpenden Bethesda Home, outlined in our meeting, they are open to suggestions and would welcome further thoughts and ideas for their consideration.

In addition, core to the consultation, is feedback being sought from the residents and their representatives about what they might want to do if a decision to close the Home was confirmed, as this will help guide the decision making for the way forward.

Although it is emphasised that decisions on future care and accommodation are entirely the choice of the residents and their representatives, Bethesda would like to be able to offer options.

These would be:

- a. To take a place in our sister home in Brighton,
- b. If it were provided, a new Bethesda facility reasonably nearby or,
- c. To make other arrangements.

In respect of a new Bethesda facility, the Trustees do now have a property in view that could be a home for some of the current residents. However, as this would require substantial investment to purchase and adapt, they are seeking an indication of the likely demand for such a facility. Until this is known, subject to the Lord's will, the trustees are unable to proceed with making an offer to buy the property.

There are therefore two aims to this consultation:

1. To understand, should it be decided to close the Harpenden Bethesda Home, those who wish to:
 - a. Move to Brighton.
 - b. Move to a new Bethesda facility nearby.
 - c. Make their own arrangements.
2. To identify, having presented the case for closure, whether there may be other approaches to the problem that we have not yet considered.

The new facility, should it prove viable through sufficient demand, would be run on different lines to the current Home. This would be focused on current best practice around a 'household' model of care. The facility would be smaller in size with a maximum of six places, of which two would be 'ordinary' rate and four 'intermediate' to 'higher' rate.

Next Steps

We would like you now to please consider your response to this consultation and let us know your views on the proposals made.

Please can you provide your feedback to the General Manager (Adrian Topping), preferably in writing, by either email or letter addressed to:

Adrian Topping
Harpenden Bethesda
201 Luton Road
AL5 3DD
management@gsbf.uk

However, Adrian is very willing, if needed, to meet you to discuss this matter further. Please contact him to make a suitable appointment.

Please could you let us have your feedback by the end of the day on **Friday 21st March 2025**.

Support and resources

Although the desire has been to be open and transparent with those most affected by this matter, we are acutely conscious of how difficult this will be for all those that we support in this Home, both residents and their loved ones. We will do all we can to help and support through this process.

We are working with our staff to ensure that they also are supported in their own consultation process to ensure that there is no drop in the quality of care provided and that continuity of care is maintained.

The local authority, (Hertfordshire County Council) have been informed of the consultation process, and are being very helpful. A letter from them is enclosed with information and contact details should you wish to speak to them.

I realise this is not an easy matter for any of us and we trust and pray that the Lord will continue to watch over the residents and provide a suitable dwelling place for each of them to the end of their days.

On behalf of the trustees,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Ridout". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

Michael Ridout
Chairman

Applying for Admission to the Bethesda Homes

The Trustees, along with the General Manager, prepared the statement below which may be of interest to anyone who may have loved ones, or themselves, who may be thinking of applying to come into one of the Homes – or the Flatlets. The trustees have also clarified the position of entry into Bethesda, for those who are sympathetic to the truths held Gospel Standard churches and the way of life in the Homes yet maybe unable to comply with the attendance criteria.

The statement is as follows:

“The Charity’s Memorandum and Articles of Association (Trust Deed), provide that primarily the Gospel Standard Bethesda Homes and/or Flatlets are for the benefit of those who are either:

1. A member of a Gospel Standard Church or
2. A regular attender of a Gospel Standard listed chapel.

However, the Trust Deed also makes provision to allow others to be considered for Bethesda. This additional provision is not so well known, and as such, whilst we are not seeking to change the provision, we would like to make potential applicants more aware of it.

Those who may not immediately feel that they satisfy (1) or (2) above, are still welcome to apply for entry. All applications require the completion of an Application Form, which is then considered by the Trustees, with all applications being treated sympathetically and in strictest confidence.

In the case of applications outside (1) & (2) above the applicant will also be asked to explain why or how they consider Bethesda would be suitable for them. The Trustees will be looking to ensure that the way of life in a Bethesda Home, reflects the applicant’s current lifestyle and way of living in their own home, to ensure that they would be comfortable within the Bethesda environment. The application may involve a meeting with two of the Bethesda Trustees, so that they can explain more about Bethesda’s ethos and give both the Committee and the Applicant an opportunity to clarify any points arising. We hope by this process to help ensure that right decisions are made for the applicant’s wellbeing.

The Trustees, have over the years, welcomed a number of applicants who do not qualify under (1) & (2) above, and the individuals concerned have found Bethesda to be a “a House of Mercy”.

If you feel that Bethesda would be a suitable place for you, a relative or a friend to be a resident in a Bethesda Care Home or Flatlet, please contact the General Manager who will be pleased to discuss Bethesda’s entry requirements and provide additional information. ”

In addition to the Statement above, the Trustees have prepared a supplementary document that explains ‘Living in Bethesda’. This gives details of what a perspective resident would expect to find in the daily life of Bethesda and the conduct of the Homes. The document has not been written in a prescriptive way, its purposes is to highlight what it is to live in a Christian care home where the residents desire to walk in the fear of the Lord and according to the precepts of the Bible. The wording of the document is as follows:

Living in a Bethesda Home

The Bethesda Homes were established 75 years ago (1948) by the Gospel Standard Bethesda Fund (GSBF), a Christian charity providing residential care for those older people who have been associated with the Gospel Standard (GS) group of Churches. The Charity’s trustees, therefore, seek to provide an environment in the Bethesda Homes which reflects the lifestyle that the residents had prior to entering Bethesda.

This lifestyle is one that seeks to walk in love to the Lord Jesus Christ in keeping the precepts and commandments of the Word of God together with a desire to keep themselves unspotted from the

world. (Yet feeling their sinnership and that their hope of salvation is through the electing love and mercy of a triune God by free grace alone and not of anything of their own ability.) This also embraces following the Bible teaching regarding marriage between one man and one woman, hair length, head coverings and the distinction between the clothing of men and women.

The following provides examples of how Bethesda seeks to meet this way of living in its Homes:

- Using the AV/KJV version of the Bible for personal and daily communal devotions.
- Using the “Gadsby’s” hymnbook, a collection of hymns that reflect the Christian’s pathway doctrinally, experimentally and their personal walk and conduct. This collection of hymns includes writers such as: John Newton, Augustus Toplady, William Cowper, Joseph Hart, John Berridge, Charles Wesley, Anne Steele, William Gadsby, and Isaac Watts. This does not exclude the enjoyment of hymns and metrical Psalms found in other hymn books and Psalters.
- Using “Thee” and “Thou” in prayer and when speaking of the Lord.
- Keeping Sunday (the Lord’s Day or Sabbath Day) as a day of rest and time for worshipping the Lord. Residents if able will, on the Lord’s Day, either attend a GS chapel or listen to a service transmitted from a local GS cause of truth.
- Limiting access to the Homes on Sundays by acknowledging the residents desire not to participate in the distractions and attractions of those activities undertaken on weekdays. This is not done in a legal sense but in love to the Lord by keeping His commandments.

In addition, daily morning and afternoon devotional readings take place and prayer meetings are arranged. These are regularly conducted, in the Homes, by male members and ministers from Gospel Standard Churches. Members of Home Support Groups, who are volunteers, from local GS chapels, also come into the Homes to assist the residents and additionally organise events and activities such as craft workshops, hymn singing, presentations and outings for the residents.

This document was originally published in the [GSBF Newsletter of April 2023](#).