

## “People wanted to invest in the Kingdom”

Supported by other Christians, a small Baptist church in Oxford raised £500,000 in a week. Robin Peake shares the story.



**B**arton Community Church (BCC) is a small church on a council estate in Oxford. Planted out of Headington Baptist Church (HBC) in 2010, its purpose is to be ‘an authentic community bringing hope to the heart of Barton through making Jesus known’.

It has grown from a Sunday bicycle workshop to a small worshipping community: Sunday@4, BCC’s Sunday expression of church, is an informal, interactive gathering which attracts around 35 people per week to a 4pm service followed by dinner. Some have lived in Barton all their lives and others have moved onto the estate to be a part of this community. The church seeks to maintain an outward focus, running a foodbank, a listening service and more recently piloting a self esteem course for teenage girls. “We’ve made many mistakes,” says Robin Peake, a member of the leadership team, “but we are seeking to try to reflect Jesus in the community. We are here to do stuff with the community, and be a faithful, long-term presence.”

“The church has always had a dream to own its own house; a ‘ridiculous’ dream”, notes Robin, “for a church with 20 members donating around £20,000.” (Barton is supported both by HBC and Southern Counties Baptist Association.)

Last year it was struggling to find a successor to its first ever minister Paul Clarke, who had left at the end of 2020. It wanted the new incumbent to live in Barton, in keeping with its vision of being a faithful presence on the estate, but the lack of a manse was proving a drawback.

So when in September a suitable property came onto the market, the church thought, ‘Let’s give this a go’. On Friday they recorded a fundraising video. By Tuesday they had £30,000; by Thursday close to half a million. Ultimately they would raise £850,000 through a combination of loans and donations, enough not only to buy a manse, but another property for homeless men.

“We were blown away” says Robin. “It’s a crazy story.”

Much of the funding came from other Christians, with most lenders loaning between £5,000 and £30,000.

“People wanted to invest in the Kingdom. It’s a wonderful expression of gospel partnership,” says Robin.

“We realised that just because people won’t join you in moving into the estate, it doesn’t mean they’re not for you.

“Living in community over time gives a credibility. Just by being there.”

With the manse now secured, Barton Community Church was in a position to call a minister in February.

### Hear4You

One of the ways in which Barton Community Church serves its community is providing a listening service. Hear4You operates each Tuesday when residents are given a safe, welcoming space to chat with a volunteer listener over a cup of tea or coffee. It’s staffed by members of the church and volunteers from HBC. The church works with the social prescriber at the GP surgery, and there’s no limit on the number of sessions people can attend.

“We asked what Barton needs, and the message came back ‘Barton just needs people to listen.’ People are overwhelmed with circumstances, and loneliness.”