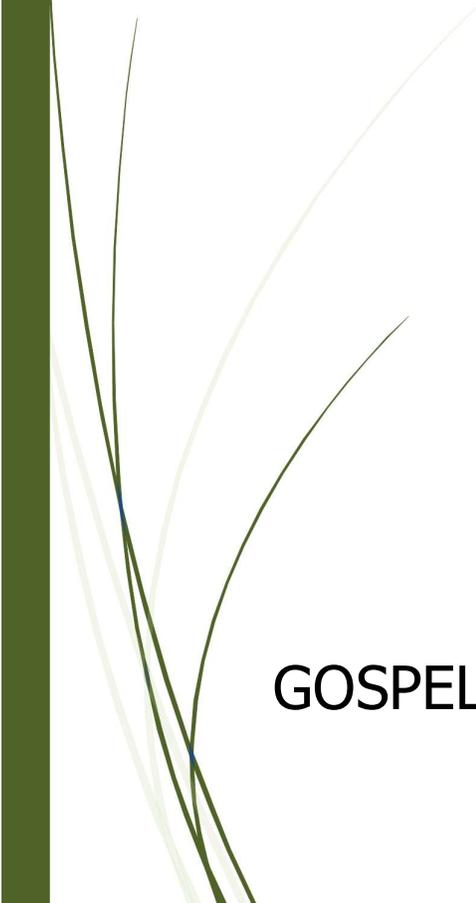




“Show me now Thy way”

An account of the Lord’s dealings with Bethesda
in providing the land at Swavesey



GOSPEL STANDARD BETHESDA FUND

Registered Charity 1199341

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Introduction

This short account has been written to give all honour and glory unto the LORD for His mercies in going before the GSBF Trustees through the provision of a site at Swavesey, in continuing the work of Bethesda in meeting the needs of the Charity’s Beneficiaries in their later years of life. In looking back, we can record many remarkable answers to prayer and, although faith has been tried, we continue to move forward in this labour of love. We believe we can also testify of the Lord’s goodness still going before us regarding the development of the Swavesey site.

This account has also been written to encourage others who may be walking in trying and difficult paths of the truth of the Apostle Paul’s words “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

The way opened

In 2019, the GSBF trustees published a document “The Future Direction of Bethesda” and held a series of Open Meetings, across the country, regarding, if the Lord will, the future of Bethesda. These meetings were in response to requests made by subscribers over several years. The presentations set out a strategy for meeting the needs identified in the Future Direction document. This involved the development of Independent Living Accommodation (ILA) supported by a provision for those with physical and mental needs, such as dementia. These meetings were followed by a survey of attendees and subscribers and in their replies, 71% indicated that they either ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement “The proposals are a reasonable way forward for Bethesda and I endorse them”. Only 11% indicated any degree of disagreement.

About two months after the Open Meeting held at Swavesey, the trustees received an email from a family in the area making us aware that they had been led to offer us a property in Swavesey. This property had been in their possession for two years and, up until that time, they had been uncertain of how to dispose of the house and plot of land. Remarkably, the property was very close to Swavesey Chapel and other amenities in the village: We could not have asked the Lord to have provided a better plot!

The trustees in dealing with the family have ensured that matters have been handled transparently and fairly, so that the responsibilities placed on them by the Word of God and the Charity Commission were fulfilled. The trustees also prayed that if this matter was not of the Lord, then He would overturn it, that His will for Bethesda might be done, and that they, the trustees, might not be left to their own understanding.

Throughout the dealings with the family there has been and continues to be a oneness and amicable spirit felt between us over this matter, with the united desire to walk honourably before the Lord.

The purchase of the plot of land at Swavesey was completed on Wednesday, 30 June 2021 for which thanks were returned. An architect then had to be appointed for the project. Three with suitable expertise were identified and interviews were arranged. Before the interviews, the delegated trustees met for prayer and asked the Lord to grant wisdom and make plain which was to be appointed. One of the three cancelled his attendance. Of the other two, one was found to be a practicing Christian, to whom the trustees felt a bond. The trustees felt there was a clear distinction between the two and in the Lord’s mercies, it was felt that guidance had been given, and this architect was duly appointed: he continues to prove to be very sympathetic and understanding of what we are seeking to achieve.

Our faith tried

Our faith has been tried regarding the planning process (1 Peter 1:7; John 16:33). In December 2022 we wondered 'where the scene would end' and whether we would ever obtain planning permission. The following extract from a report presented to the trustees, in January 2023 on this matter, expresses the place where we were in at this time:

"63 Middle Watch, Swavesey – "Show me now Thy way".

On Monday 19th December our planning consultant was advised by the South Cambs Planning Officer that our latest plans were considered unacceptable and that our application would be refused. This was particularly disappointing as we had been through two PreApp (Pre-Application) consultations (the first of which commenced over 12 months ago). At all stages we have endeavoured to accommodate the comments made. A decision was taken that the application should be withdrawn to avoid a refusal.

Our planning consultant contacted the planning officer and asked that we have a meeting with him and a senior officer in order that we can clearly understand what adjustments to the plans are needed to meet with approval. He was advised that we needed to follow the PreApp process again and that this would re-open for applications on Monday 9th January. Given that we have been through two PreApp's already this seemed unnecessary bureaucracy.

In discussing this before Christmas it was suggested that we should seek to write directly ourselves to the Chief Planning Officer explaining the background to our proposals, confirming our willingness to accommodate reasonable amendments, setting out our frustrations and requesting a face-to-face meeting with him and the officer we have been dealing with.

The break for Christmas and the New Year has given time for reflection. Whilst the human reaction is to blame the system and the officer involved; these are only secondary causes regarding the situation we are in. The Lord has heard our prayers but has not answered them in the way which we hoped. What is His purpose in this? What is He telling us and what is His will?

I firmly believe that we have clearly seen His hand in this project and that He will bring it to fruition in His time and way. I am encouraged by the words of Manoah's wife. (Judges 13:22-23)

May we be enabled to lay the matter at His feet and wait upon Him as we seek to venture forward. Your comments and prayers would be very welcome.

"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Acts 9:6"

A door opened

Yet we were to prove the 'hearts of all men (and women)' are in the Lord's sovereign Hand. Mercifully, in January 2023, the Lord led a subgroup of trustees to meet for prayer and from that meeting it was felt that we should venture to contact with the local district councillor. A member of the parish council who attends Swavesey Chapel was approached, and it was found that he knew the lady concerned and was able to make an introduction. The Lord was going before us. The councillor willingly attended a meeting in the Swavesey Chapel schoolroom and, it transpired, was very understanding of what we were trying to achieve in providing ILA. Her working life had been in the health sector, she had been employed as a Chief Nurse, for an adjoining county, and for about ten years had inspected Nursing Homes. She thoroughly endorsed the idea of ILA and said that this was the way forward. In the Lord's purposes, this councillor then willingly took up the matter with the South Cambridgeshire Planning Department.

As a result of the meeting with the district councillor, and her subsequent discussion with the Planning Authority, a meeting was held with the Area Planning Officer, our architects, and the trustee liaising on the project. Our planning consultant had previously told us that a meeting at this level was unheard of for a development of this size. The Area Planning Officer came to that meeting in a positive and constructive manner and made useful suggestions to help us progress the application, effectively rolling back all the earlier requirements made throughout the previous year, that had all been working against the feasibility of the project. He then continued to take an active interest in our new application through to its approval.

We trust we can also testify that the Lord has gone before us over 120 years ago. Among the reasons cited, in the planning officers report, to allow a three-story building (which was against the local development plan) was that the ridge height was similar to a nearby property. This house was built by a relative of the family who sold the site at Swavesey to us. The family had always wondered why a house built in circa 1900 needed to be so tall. We believe the Lord knew why: He had directed the minds of those involved in 1900, so that the door for Bethesda could now be opened in 2023.

More recently, concerns were expressed as to whether the "Newt survey" could take place before the newts hibernated: A 'Newt survey' is an ecological requirement prior to any site work commencing and is to ensure that there are no newts remaining on the site when work commences. Again, mercifully we were able, at very short notice, to find a fencing contractor to build the amphibian fencing and thus allow our Ecologist to undertake the required trapping. What also seems remarkable is that the mild weather, during this autumn, has meant that it has been possible for the survey to take place prior to the newts hibernating for the winter. We prayerfully await, at the time of writing, the outcome of the survey.

Only last weekend (15-16 October 2023) when the temperature dropped, we were faced with the fact that if the temperatures fell, as forecasted, then the project could be put on hold until next Spring. Much prayer was made, and the warmer weather subsequently forecasted was seen to come forward by a day!

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory

We believe that we have clearly witnessed the experience of the hymn writer in penning the words: "But when the Lord's people have need, His goodness will find out a way."

In Conclusion

We are encouraged by the local interest and support that has been shown to Bethesda in the proposed development of ILA at Swavesey. We trust the current residents in our Bethesda Homes can testify of the Lord's provision in providing a resting place for them; we also trust there will be those who, in due time, will be able to testify of the Lord hearing their prayers and making provision at Swavesey near their place of worship, family and friends - a place where the Lord would have them to be.

We are thankful that planning permission has been obtained for 6 apartments (4 x 2 bedroom and 2 x 1 bedroom) and further consultations are proceeding with quantity surveyors, architects and other professionals. If the Lord will, we would look to go out to tender for the building at the end of October 2023. (Photographs of the site and the elevations and layout of the proposed building are attached.) We trust that the Lord has gone before us in the developing of ILA Swavesey: our faith has been tried yet the Lord is faithful who has promised.

The trustees continue to prayerfully commit their way unto the Lord, desiring that our thoughts might be established as to the future residential care provision for Bethesda both for this generation and the next, according to His will. In the unfolding of the Lord's purposes, we look to the Lord to guide us in the pathway ahead and the prayerful steps that will need to be taken "that in all things he might have the pre-eminence" (Colossians 1:18).

Do pray that the Lord might not leave our little group of churches and that there might be a continuing of Bethesda (as a House of Mercy) for those who come down to old age and hoar hairs (Isaiah 46:3-4)

In the service of Him

The GSBF Trustees

Psalm 115:1

October 18, 2023

Photographs of the site, the elevations and layout of the proposed building

1) The Swavesey plot: 63 Middle Watch as purchased



2) The proximity of Swavesey Chapel



2) The proximity of the local store



3) The view at the rear of the site (Bethesda has purchased the field adjoining the plot)



Plans showing proposed elevations and layout of the building





PROPOSED SIDE ELEVATION 1

Scale: 1:100



PROPOSED REAR ELEVATION

Scale: 1:100

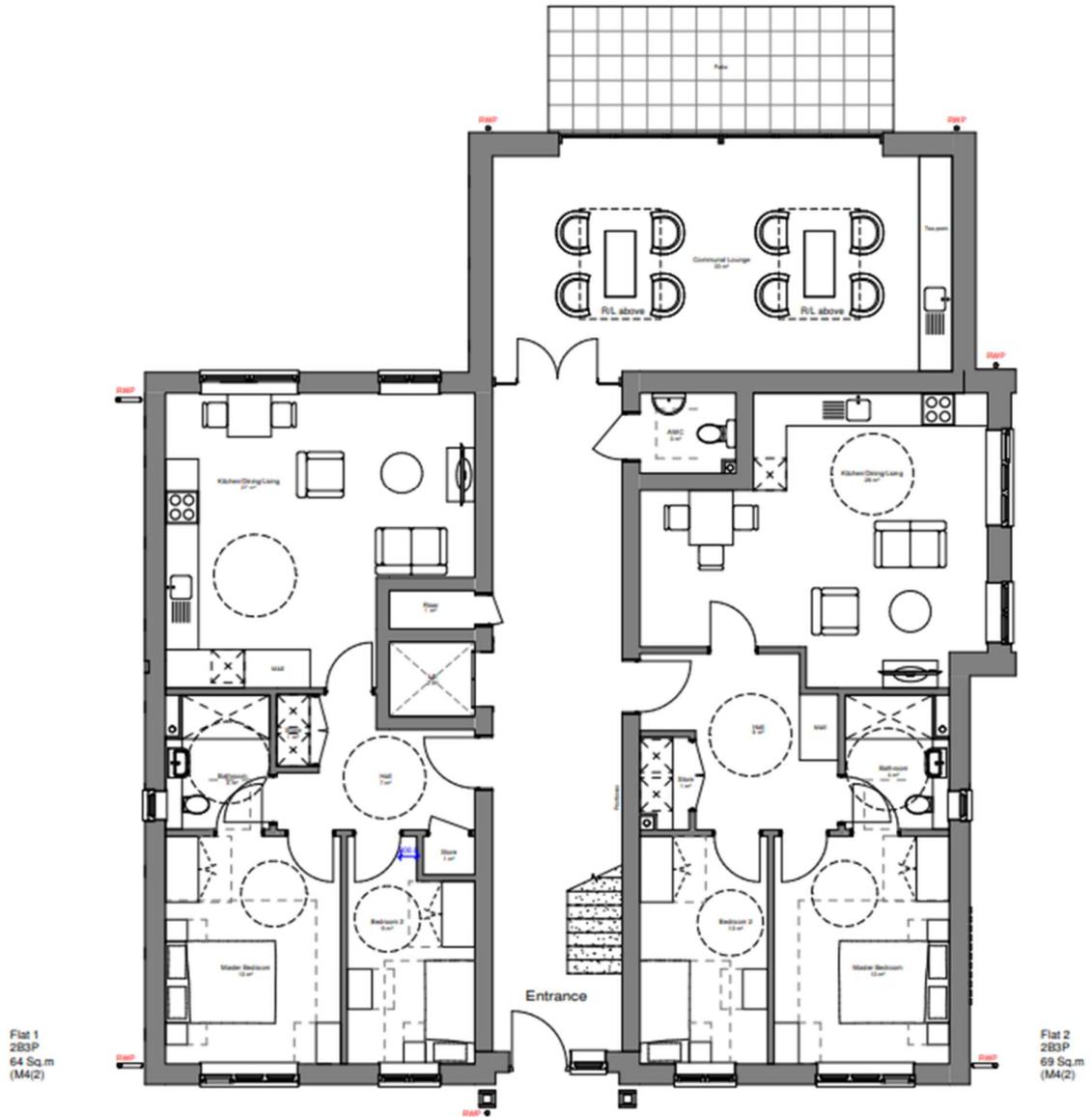


PROPOSED SIDE ELEVATION 2

Scale: 1:100

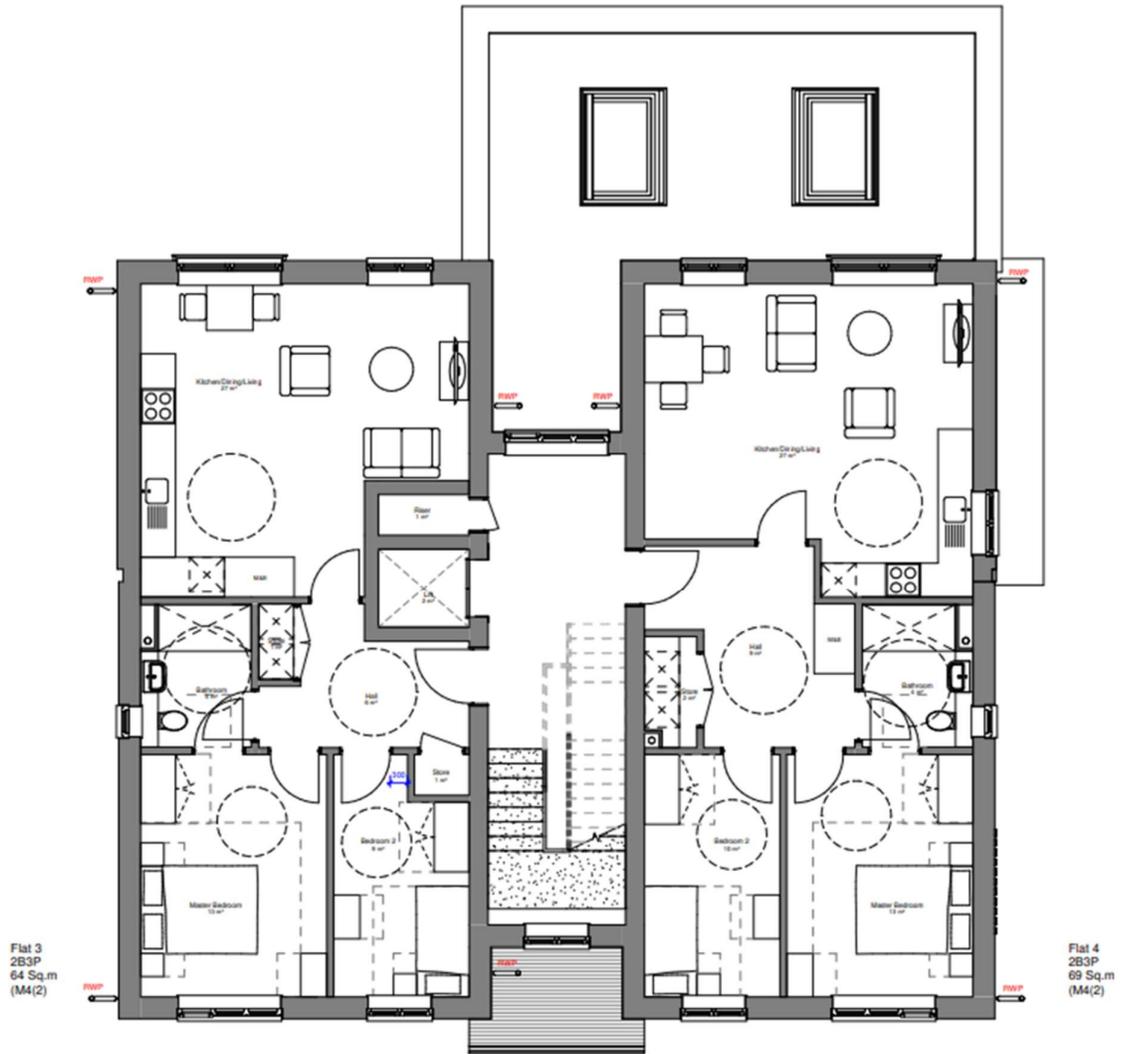
The proposed layout of the flats within the Swavesey ILA

Ground floor



00 Proposed Ground Floor Plan
1 : 50

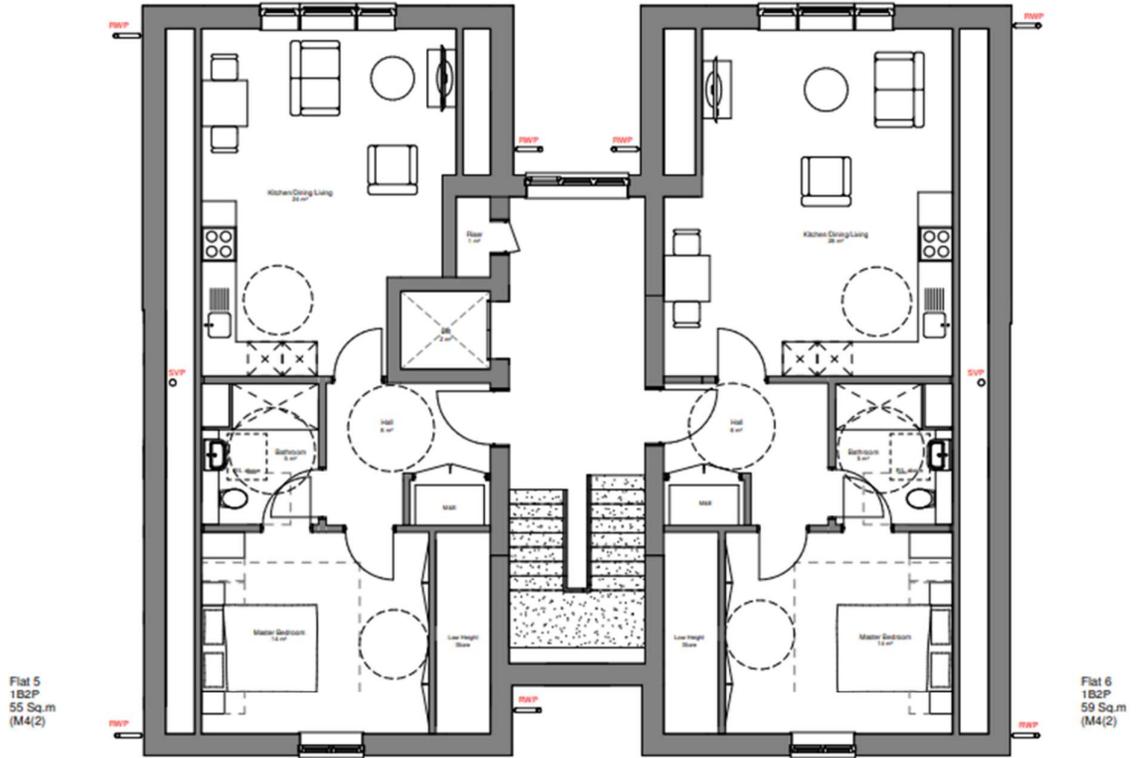
First floor



01 Proposed First Floor Plan

1 : 50

Second Floor



02 Proposed Second Floor Plan
1 : 50