

# **AGM REPORT 2024 -25**

## **Heart of Manchester & Stockport Sanghas**

### **Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2025**

#### **I Chairs Report**

It is with pleasure I send this report out, gladdened once again by all those who offer their time, energy and love in maintaining and supporting our sister sanghas. It is good to welcome new faces and particularly rewarding when those new faces become active members, willing to contribute and grow our sanghas. We have seen a wonderful re-emergence of the Saturday sangha, which particularly attracts practitioners who work and are unable to attend Sunday evenings or go online during the week. There is also a new development in Stockport, supported by facilitators and practitioners from both sanghas, where members have the opportunity to develop their practice by reading the 14 mindfulness trainings, and potentially go on to becoming aspirants. As we continue to review we must also take heart that we have had a presence in South Manchester and then Stockport for over 15 years, providing a weekly sanctuary for many over the years. Beyond the locality, exciting developments have been happening nationally. We are just beginning to see the acquisition of a beautiful national Centre for all the sanghas and members across the British Isles. Plum Village UK has been working extremely hard to understand the needs and requirements of its members and secure a central practice centre. The Being Peace Centre, at Abenhall, Gloucestershire. There remain a few key steps before this beautiful building can truly be claimed as the UK National Centre. I believe this can only enhance the nature of each sangha across the UK and will provide regular ongoing opportunity for all sangha members to attend retreats and deepen their practice. To all of this we can give our humble thanks to Thay and of course all the Plum Village UK members and dedicated others who have made this possible.

#### **II Heart of Manchester Sangha: Annual review 2024-25**

**Sunday Sangha Sessions:** We have continued to offer a meditation group to the sangha on Sunday evenings. We usually have a core of around 8 people, and numbers fluctuate between 6 and 14. Some new people, often younger, have become regular meditators, others have been once, found it helpful, but not come again. And people may come a couple of times, we may not see them for a while and then they reappear. (However, we are aware there are four other Buddhist groups in this area, and we hope those who do not return find one to attend regularly). We think it is fair to say that the Sunday Sangha is fluid with comings & goings which creates another type of challenge. We often talk about “how to attract more members” & ideally those who wish to practice more regularly. Then we trust those

wishing, will find us. This is important that we continue to review with facilitators and our practitioners, whether the day and time suits & will attract. **Review**

We had to cancel one sangha session this year on December 15 2024 as the Unitarian Church held their Carol Service that evening, and one on February 2 2025 due to illness. (This was the first time a Sunday evening sangha session has ever been cancelled by us, in over 15 years.)

**The 5 Mindfulness Trainings** are read every second Sunday of the month. We believe these are a welcome part of our practice and again it feels important to review how we present this session & if there are more engaging means. **Review**

**The Saturday Sangha:** has recovered really well, following low attendance a year or so ago and is now a steadier larger group. The moneys here are taken from the black book, no longer a full record as *other donations are made online*. On the whole the regular second Saturday of the month Sangha is now a different set of people from Sunday attenders, with people coming from Salford, Uppermill, Buxton, Stockport, Wales (while visiting Manchester) and other places, as well as from Chorlton. Some people come every time, some dip in and out, and newcomers show up as well. There is a refreshing energy to a morning Sangha. The times changed earlier in 2025 to accommodate a regular group in the Church hall. This moved from a 10.30 start to 11.30am.

<b>SATURDAY SANGHAS 2024/2025</b>		
Saturday, 13 April 2024	<b>10</b>	£35
Saturday, 08 June 2024	<b>6</b>	£13
Saturday, 13 July 2024	<b>11</b>	£21
Saturday, 10 August 2024	<b>4</b>	£13
Saturday, 12 October 2024	<b>11</b>	?
Saturday, 09 November 2024	<b>7</b>	£13
Saturday, 14 December 2024	<b>5</b>	£13
Saturday 8th February 2025	<b>16</b>	£17
Saturday 8th March 2025	<b>14</b>	£43
Saturday 12th April 2025	<b>10</b>	£0 (no access)
<b>DOMS</b>		

<b>DOM</b> Saturday, 11 May 2024	13	£75
<b>DOM</b> Saturday, 14 September 2024	16	£90
<b>DOM</b> Saturday 11th January 2025	30	£93

A huge thankyou to Hil, who is currently the sole facilitator at the Saturday Sanghas.

**Summer & Winter Solstice Events:** following a successful community event where practitioners brought food to share before a usual Sunday Sangha, we decided to run two events a year to coincide with the Summer & Winter solstices. This year for the Summer Solstice a walk was organised and for the Winter Solstice a deep relaxation. Unfortunately, both had low attendance. So, we are now in a position where it would be useful to **Review** this initiative and gain some **feedback**.

**Facilitators:** We currently have six facilitators: Helen, Hil, Gouri, Jonathan, Elizabeth and Barbara. Rachel Morris. also facilitated until October but has now moved out of the area. (We miss her. And thank her for her invaluable contribution both as a regular practitioner and facilitator). Nuria and Bill often offer guided meditations and readings. Although six, Elizabeth can only be part time. There have been times when certain facilitators have carried more than their fair share, particularly when both Barbara & Elizabeth were out of action. A large thankyou to Helen & Gouri. **Review.**  
**he Facilitators Rota:** is kindly run and overseen by Gouri.

**WhatsApp Group:** Earlier this year we decided to establish a WhatsApp group. The aim of this is to communicate important upcoming dates, make any quick announcements and post inspirational quotes from Thay and the teachings. This is a one-way communication system only. This has proved invaluable to our Sangha. We thank Gouri for setting this up and being the main administrator for announcements. We decided against a general WhatsApp group for all practitioners, recognising this could become very busy, as we have a large number on our data base.

**Facilitators Meetings:** We have held two Facilitators' Meetings to discuss Sangha initiatives and business and to welcome new facilitators. These were on Nov 24 2024 (joint HofM and Stockport to discuss the forthcoming Days of ~Mindfulness) and March 2 2025. These will continue and will be the appropriate vehicle to address the items identified above for **Review**.

- Sunday Sangha and current numbers
- How the 5 Mindfulness Trainings are being received
- Summer & Winter solstice events – building community
- Facilitator numbers...do we feel we have a sufficient number

**Barbara, Hil & Elizabeth April 2025**

## **Days of Mindfulness: organised & facilitated by facilitators across both sanghas.**

We all welcome this opportunity to work together and come together as one, providing a full day of practice for practitioners from both sanghas and across the North West. Three Days of Mindfulness have been held as always, over the past year.

**May** 12 2024 the theme: 'Looking Deeply', facilitated by Hil and Rachel. 13 attending

**September** 14 2024 the theme: "How do we respond to the Climate Change?" facilitated by Jan and Hil. 16 attending.

**Jan** 11 2025 the theme was 'Being a Friend to Yourself', facilitated by Helen and Gouri. 30 attending. Two further Days of Mindfulness are already planned for 2025, with a Dharma teacher (Dene) invited to take the September day.

The Days of Mindfulness continue to be a good success providing a welcome opportunity for practitioners to take a day out and practice together in person. Thank you to all those who have facilitated over the year and particularly to Helen & Gouri, taking their first full day event.

## **Newsletter and Communications across both Sanghas.**

A Newsletter for Stockport and HoM has been produced monthly since September 2021, ensuring everyone has details of the events happening and includes short pieces from members of courses/retreats attended, moving pieces on practitioners personal spiritual practices and lovely photos.

This year, we have moved to a three monthly newsletter, produced by Martina, formerly a member of Stockport sangha, and now continuing to give her time and skills, although she is herself unable to attend.

In addition, Gouri, a facilitator with the HoM. sangha, kindly offered to step into the role of Communications person. This entails sending out interim emails with reminders and updates of events. This has been a very successful initiative to keep communication alive between newsletters and both sanghas.

Our grateful thanks to both Martina and Gouri for doing this work. Close cooperation between Stockport and HoM. facilitators is needed to enable us to produce the newsletter and ensure effective communication with all sangha members.

**Action:** Continue to look out for someone who could take over the design and circulation of the newsletter to relieve Martina. We also need to finalize recruitment of other sangha members to join Elizabeth and Jan in writing the content of each newsletter.

*Elizabeth & Jan*

### III Stockport Sangha : Annual Review 2024-5

Stockport Sangha continues to thrive as an on-line sangha, offering a weekly practice session on zoom. A monthly live sangha at the Stockport Quaker Meeting House, named the Deep Waters Sangha, started on 26th April 2025

**Weekly Zoom Sangha Sessions:** We continue to meet online each Thursday morning from 11-12.15am. A suggestion of extending to 1.5 hours was rejected last year. Our core group of around 12-15 regular attenders remains stable; these include people who would not be able to attend a live sangha, due to living far away, or having health issues or caring responsibilities. A few people who have high level caring roles in their homes, pop in at the start of the session, then come and go as they are needed. The zoom arrangement makes this possible and unobtrusive. This is clearly valued by these carers, who benefit from the love, understanding and support of other sangha members. Moreover, it seems that all sangha members benefit from the example of these carer members, as we learn about using the practice to support us through troubled times.

**The 5 Mindfulness Trainings.** We read these on the fourth Thursday of each month. This session has now been extended to finish at 12.30. One of our facilitators, Catriona facilitates the central part of the session. This has evolved over the years, and we are grateful to Catriona for the depth of this session, which has become a central and much appreciated part of our sangha practice.

While one of our concerns has been inclusiveness - our sangha membership has been predominantly white, older women - over the past year, we have been pleased to welcome several new members, including younger ones, who are active participants in the sangha. Two more recent members, are now much valued facilitators. We continue to enjoy the balance between welcoming new members to the sangha, and enjoying the safe space created by regular attenders and familiar faces.

**Action:** Our intention is to continue with these weekly meetings in their present form, as a permanent feature of our sangha practice.

**In-Person Social Gatherings:** These are provided to enable sangha members to meet in person and get to know one another better. They have evolved over time and now happen roughly every three months. This year we have settled into a routine, where a dozen or so of us meet up for lunch at a local pub/restaurant. There is a real ethos of caring, support and inclusiveness. Our thanks to Anne, Lillian and Wendy, who arrange these meet-ups.

**Action:** We have yet to explore the idea of offering online social gatherings, to cater in particular for those who cannot attend in person gatherings.

**WhatsApp Group:** This was set up to promote communication between those who attend the Thursday morning sangha and it continues to be an important communication link between sangha sessions. It has 23 members currently. The platform is used for sharing the dharma (readings, podcasts, guided meditations etc), reminding people of sangha events, sharing happy moments through photos and sending apologies for absence.

**Action:** Continue to enjoy the meditations, readings, podcasts etc offered, and consider inviting on-line gatherings to explore some of them more deeply.

**New Development : Deep Waters Sangha, Stockport Quaker Meeting House (QMH).** A new model for a sangha open to all in the Stockport, Manchester and surrounding areas started in April 2025, called the Deep Waters Sangha. This monthly gathering on the last Saturday afternoon of each month, offers the opportunity for a longer, in-person practice session, and is open to all, particularly to Order Members, Aspirants and those looking to deepen their practice. The QMH is open from 1pm on the Saturday of the session, for participants to arrive early, to eat together and chat, and the two hour practice session runs from 2-4pm. The 14 Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Interbeing provides the basic framework. At the end of each session, an opportunity for feedback is offered, so that sangha members can shape the development of this session.

We hope that it will offer the opportunity to address such matters as taking the 5 mindfulness trainings, sharing facilitator roles, and for some, becoming aspirants with a view to joining the Order of Interbeing. However, there will be no requirement for any attenders to follow this path.

This initiative is supported by Jan (Stockport sangha facilitator and member of the Order of Interbeing), Hils (Heart of Manchester facilitator) and Maria (from Buxton, who has practiced for some years with both Stockport and Heart of Manchester (Saturday) sanghas).

**Action:** We will watch the progress of this initiative over the coming months, with a view to reviewing at the end of the year, and deciding whether to continue this into future years. A small room has been booked at the QMH, and depending on attendance, this could possibly be transferred to the large practice room if needed.

## **The Future**

Issues to address over the coming year include

- Building on the start we have made, to continue to develop social connections, particularly on-line.
- Expand 'Deepening Our Practice' opportunities, including with the Deep Waters Sangha at the QMH.
- Look at what interest there is among sangha members to receive the 5 mindfulness trainings. with a view to arranging a non-residential retreat at some point in the coming months.
- Re-establish regular facilitator meetings.

*Jan Williams, April 2025*

## IV 2024 Treasurer's Report

Balance at start of 2024	£1,789.09
<b>Income</b>	
Dana	£2,274.00
Total	£2,274.00
<b>Outgoings</b>	
Website	£60.00
Being Peace Centre donations	£200.00
Plum Village sangha memberships	£60.00
Enjoy our practice books	£150.00
Unitarian Church rent	£1,675.00
Zoom fee	£78.00
Total	£2,223.00
Balance at end of 2024	£1,840.09

*Jonathan Boyle April 2025*

**V Finance Management Committee:** We have met 3 times during the year with the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting being this AGM. Elizabeth (Chair), Jonathan (Treasurer) and Barbara (Secretary) Anne as Stockport representative. ~This committee is to oversee the finances and was established as a requirement of the Bank. The committee makes no decisions. However we have made suggestions over the year on donations to the Being Peace Centre.

We are all prepared to carry on these roles on behalf of the 2 Sanghas.

**VI Thanks:** We have thanked people who contribute to the running of the sanghas and the roles they undertake, throughout the report. However we wish to reiterate our thanks to all the facilitators in both sanghas who give of their time voluntarily and keep the sanghas running smoothly. Their commitment and unwavering willingness to step-in and help one another is admirable. With deep gratitude to Hil, Barbara,

Elizabeth, Jonathan, Gouri, Helen and Rachel. Heart of Manchester. And Anne, Jan, Elizabeth, Judith, Judy & Catriona . Stockport Sangha.

To Hil for currently single handedly facilitating the Saturday morning sangha.

To Gouri for organising the HofM rota, establishing the HofM Sangha WhatsApp, overseeing the database and writing and sending out emails to both sanghas.

To Judith for stepping up and overseeing the rota at the Stockport Sangha in Jan's absence.

To Martina and her willingness to continue to give her skills & time in designing, contributing & circulating the newsletter.

To the Finance Committee: Jonathan (Treasurer) Elizabeth (Chair) Barbara (Secretary) Anne (Stockport rep) -

And a thankyou to all our members who practice with us and forever help us all.

VII A.O.B.