



**MAKE
SMOKING
HISTORY**

A GREATER MANCHESTER SMOKEFREE SPACE: FARNWORTH BAPTIST CHURCH - BOLTON

1. About the organisation

Farnworth Baptist Church in Bolton is a busy community hub that delivers a wide range of social action programmes alongside its role as a place of worship.

The building is open seven days a week and hosts a variety of services and partner organisations, including welfare benefits advice, wellbeing support, a food bank, a community café and employability support. External partners such as Citizens Advice and local support organisations also use the space, alongside regular activities for families and older adults.

The church supports a community experiencing high levels of deprivation, with many visitors facing complex health and social challenges. Creating an environment that feels welcoming, accessible and supportive for all users is central to its work.

As Senior Minister, John Bradbury explains:

"We're getting people with often multiple and complex issues... predominantly helping people with long-term health issues and disabilities."

2. Why they chose to create a smokefree space

The decision to introduce a smoke and vape free outdoor space was prompted by ongoing challenges with smoking near the main entrance.

Although the building itself was already smokefree, people would gather just outside, particularly in poor weather, creating an unavoidable barrier for those entering the building:

"People would stand just outside the door under the canopy... so you create a cloud of smoke outside the door."

Attempts to move people away informally often led to new issues further along the access route:

"They move to the end of the lane and then you've got a crowd of people that others have to walk through."

The Church saw an opportunity to take a more positive and structured approach, focusing on creating a healthier and more welcoming environment while supporting both staff and service users to make different choices around smoking.



3. Their starting point

Before the policy was implemented, smoking was highly visible around the building entrance, particularly along the lane that forms the main access route.

"It's not a good look to have a crowd of people who smoke at the entrance point to where people come onto our property."

This created both a practical and perceptual barrier for visitors, especially those already feeling vulnerable.

There was also ongoing litter linked to smoking activity:

"You'd come in and there'd be cigarette butts all over the floor... and you'd be sweeping up."

While there was an indoor smokefree policy, expectations outdoors were informal and inconsistently applied:

"We put a couple of signs up... but not really a lot of engagement."



4. How they used the Smokefree Spaces Toolkit

The Smokefree Spaces Toolkit provided a practical framework that helped the organisation move quickly from identifying the issue to implementing a clear solution. One of the most useful elements was the ready-to-use signage, which allowed the team to act immediately while refining their approach:

"Having signage we could print off, laminate and put outside was really helpful... we wanted to get the locations right first before investing in more permanent signage."

The toolkit also supported staff and volunteers in having supportive, positive conversations with people using the space:

"It's about saying it's okay for you to smoke, but do you mind moving there... that positive reinforcement is much more helpful than just saying you can't smoke."

Importantly, it simplified decision-making and built confidence:

"It just made it simple... I didn't have to second guess anything or think 'what do I do about that?'; it was already there."

The wider programme also helped normalise the challenge:

"When we saw that other organisations had exactly the same issue, it helped us realise we weren't alone."

5. What they did

Implementation began with internal engagement, including discussions with staff to review the toolkit and agree a practical approach.

A designated smoking area was introduced away from the main entrance, on the opposite side of the building. This allowed smoking to continue in a more appropriate location while reducing its impact on people entering the site.

The approach was designed to be simple and low-cost:

"We used a sand bucket as a receptacle... something easy to manage that didn't cost much but did the job."

The smokefree approach was then embedded into day-to-day operations, including volunteer induction and staff guidance:

"It's become part of our volunteer induction... where the smoking space is and where it isn't."

Communication with service users was largely informal, supported by signage and gentle reminders where needed.

The organisation also linked this work to wider smoking cessation support, working with Bolton Council to promote stop smoking services and enabling staff to refer individuals where appropriate.

6. Community and staff reactions

Response to the smoke and vape free space was overwhelmingly positive, with little resistance.

"We've not had any negative... no one shouting or anything like that."

Staff and volunteers quickly adapted to the changes, recognising the benefits and supporting the approach. While occasional reminders were needed, particularly for those using vapes, these interactions were minimal and non-confrontational.

Where conversations were needed, they were handled in a supportive and practical way:

"Only very gently... just reminding people to use that space so we can keep this area clear."

In some cases, framing the conversation around accessibility and ensuring clear pathways proved effective, reinforcing that the change was about creating a better environment for everyone.

"ALL THOSE FEARS YOU HAVE, THE TOOLKIT ADDRESSES THOSE. IT GUIDES YOU THROUGH THE PROCESS AND HELPS YOU TO THINK ABOUT PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING THE SMOKEFREE SPACE."

— JOHN BRADBURY, SENIOR MINISTER

7. Impact and benefits

The introduction of the smoke and vape free space has led to clear improvements in behaviour, environment and overall experience.

One of the most noticeable changes has been the shift in behaviour among staff and volunteers:

"People are automatically going to that space without thinking about it now."

There has also been a visible reduction in cigarette-related litter:

"There's not as much cigarette-related litter... and over time that's come down significantly."

The entrance area is now clearer and more accessible, improving the experience for visitors:

"It's about keeping that area free... people aren't blocking the path or creating a crowd anymore."

Importantly, these changes have not negatively impacted use of the space:

"We're still as busy as we've always been... it's not deterring people from coming into the building."

The work has also supported wider health outcomes through links to stop smoking services:

"We've had five or six people quit through the stop smoking service we've been promoting."

"THE SCRIPTS IN THE TOOLKIT WERE REALLY HELPFUL AT PROVIDING DIFFERENT SCENARIOS WE MIGHT INCUR IF WE NEED TO CHALLENGE SOMEBODY. SOME OF OUR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS WERE A BIT NERVOUS ABOUT DOING THAT BUT THE TOOLKIT GAVE THEM THE CONFIDENCE TO KNOW HOW TO APPROACH IT."

— JOHN BRADBURY, SENIOR MINISTER



8. Challenges and what they learned

One of the key reflections from the process was how straightforward implementation proved to be.

"I was expecting it to be more difficult than it's been."

Initial concerns about resistance or conflict did not materialise, in part due to the gradual approach taken:

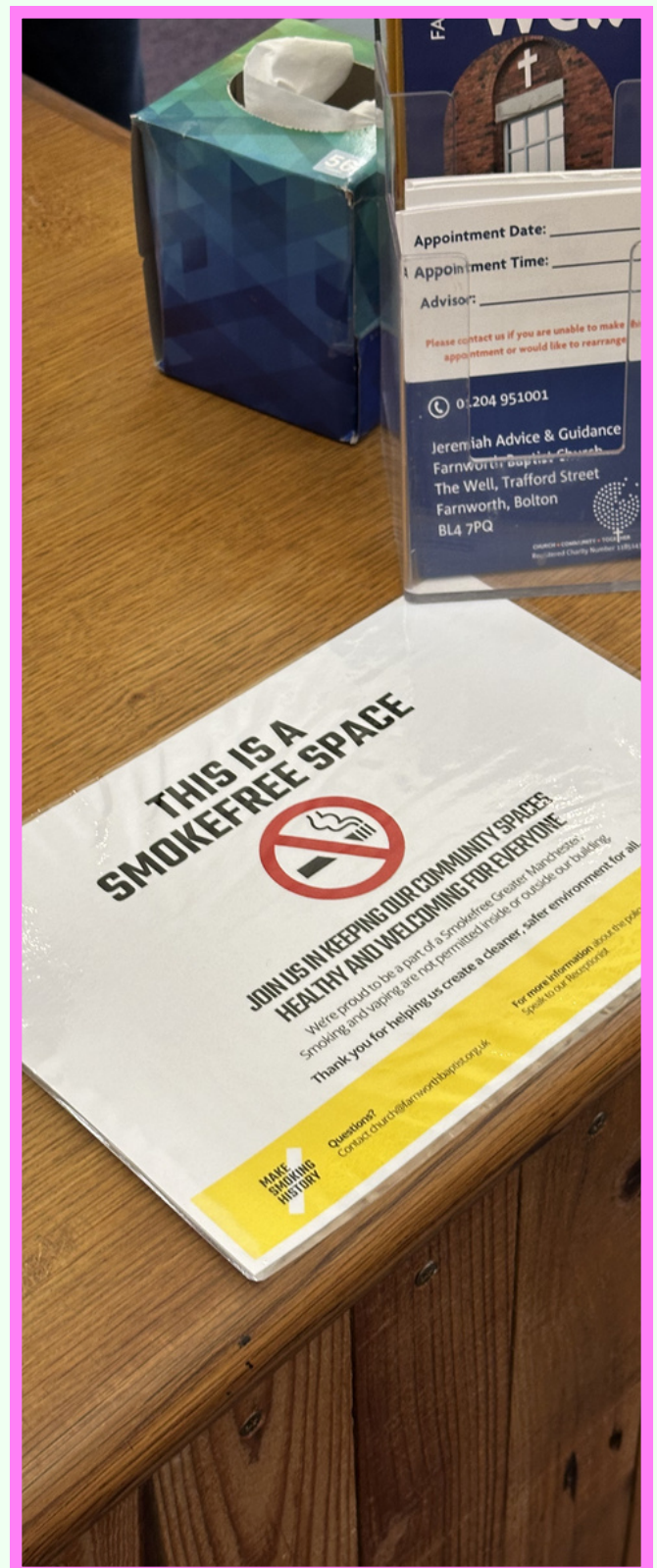
"Because we talked about it along the way, it happened gradually and avoided problems."

Most challenges were minor and practical, such as maintaining signage, rather than behavioural.

Reflecting on what could have been done differently, John noted that investing in more permanent signage earlier and making greater use of communication channels such as social media could have strengthened the approach further.

"I WOULD HAVE INVESTED IN SOME FIXED SIGNAGE A BIT EARLIER, RATHER THAN THE HOMEMADE LAMINATED SIGNS WE PUT UP AT THE START."

— JOHN BRADBURY, SENIOR MINISTER



9. What's next

Looking ahead, the Church plans to build on its current approach by introducing more permanent signage to reinforce the smokefree message. The policy will also continue to be reviewed regularly as part of the organisation's wider governance processes.

"We'll invest in more permanent signage... now we know what works."

They also plan to strengthen communication:

"We probably should share more about why we're doing it... tell that positive story."

More broadly, the smoke and vape free space will continue to sit alongside wider efforts to support health and wellbeing within the community.

10. Advice for other organisations

John's key advice is to focus on clarity of purpose and adopt a supportive, balanced approach.

"Be clear why you want to do it... once people understand the why, then the what will follow, because it just starts to make sense to them."

Understanding the needs and vulnerabilities of those using the space is essential:

"It's about the benefit for the people visiting... and understanding their circumstances."

He also emphasises the importance of tone:

"You don't want to sound too preachy... you want to be supportive and get that balance right."

Offering practical alternatives is key to making the approach work:

"It's about saying it's okay, but suggesting a better place... rather than just telling people they can't do something."

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