

### **Introduction: Our Buildings – loved and a burden, assets and impediments**

It can be difficult to talk realistically about our church buildings because they are so very much loved, and so much part of our landscape. So the Buildings Strategy is an important and integral part of our programme for “God for All” - it is an attempt to help congregations and Mission Communities have those realistic conversations. In those conversations, those who are very deeply rooted in a particular place may feel that they are not understood by those from outside, those less well rooted. But it is our Christian calling to share each other's pain and insights. We are also called to seek the best for each other, for the Church as a whole, and most importantly for the communities we serve in God's name. We all need to remind each other of these aspects of our calling as we try to work through those conversations.

Our buildings are a visible sign of the Church's presence (and we hope and would wish, of God's), they offer great opportunities for the work of the Church (including community use), and they also create a substantial risk:

- a) congregations will often choose to spend time and energy on buildings and fundraising rather than on mission;
- b) and choose to spend money to do urgent repairs rather than on ministry (though we understand that the choices are difficult);
- c) faith in a building – or worse, in the graveyard – may be a substitute for faith in God;
- d) badly maintained buildings reflect badly on the Church;
- e) buildings, however beautiful, may even put people off coming in and encountering God.

*As one indicator of scale, one estimate of their value is well over £1bn (based on insurance valuations of church buildings in Cumbria).*

At least in some places, our congregations and church councils are, and if nothing changes, will continue to be

- a) persevering with unsatisfactory buildings in increasing states of decay;
- b) spending large amounts of money, time, and energy, on buildings which are never going to be useful for mission;
- c) spreading their efforts too thinly over too many buildings.

Given the strength of attachment to local church buildings this is entirely understandable. However, it is a recipe for continued slow and steady decline and will not help us achieve the goals of God for All. We therefore need Mission Communities and Church Councils to take a more strategic approach so that church buildings contribute to our wider mission. The implementation of Mission Communities is of course piecemeal, and so the discussions in Mission Communities envisaged by this strategy will not be uniform: some will already have begun to consider these matters and have covered the initial steps. But the three principles still apply:

- a) that discussions and decisions need to happen at the lowest levels,
- b) that discussions and decisions do not belong just to individual churches and congregations but need to involve neighbouring churches and more widely (eg county structures, the wider community...),
- c) that good relationships will be the foundation underpinning any discussions.

Denominational authorities in the county are committed to supporting the Buildings Strategy. So, first, we will do our best to support congregations making realistic but radical decisions. And second, there has been discussion between the Anglicans, Methodists, and URC, to the effect that decisions about building assets – including both investment and disposal – should not be taken without evidence of thorough local ecumenical discussion and agreement, and evidence of some overall local strategy.

Although the main focus of this document is buildings, other elements like church grounds (churchyards, gardens, and noticeboards) are also important for mission and may also have historic and local significance.

As with all our strategies, this Strategy will need to be changed and developed/refined in the light of experience.

## **Strategy**

There are four legs to the strategy:

### **Leg A : Audit**

A “Questionnaire” has been developed for Mission Communities and their congregations to help them do an Audit of their buildings and to begin thinking strategically and missionally about them. (Mission Communities may also, especially in smaller communities, need to consider other public buildings – as in this situation it may be the same small group of people running/supporting all of them.) The Audit should also include an assessment of buildings using the Churches Trust for Cumbria (CTfC) “Sustainability Rosette”, and an overall/strategic look at the amounts of money spent and needing to be spent on buildings.

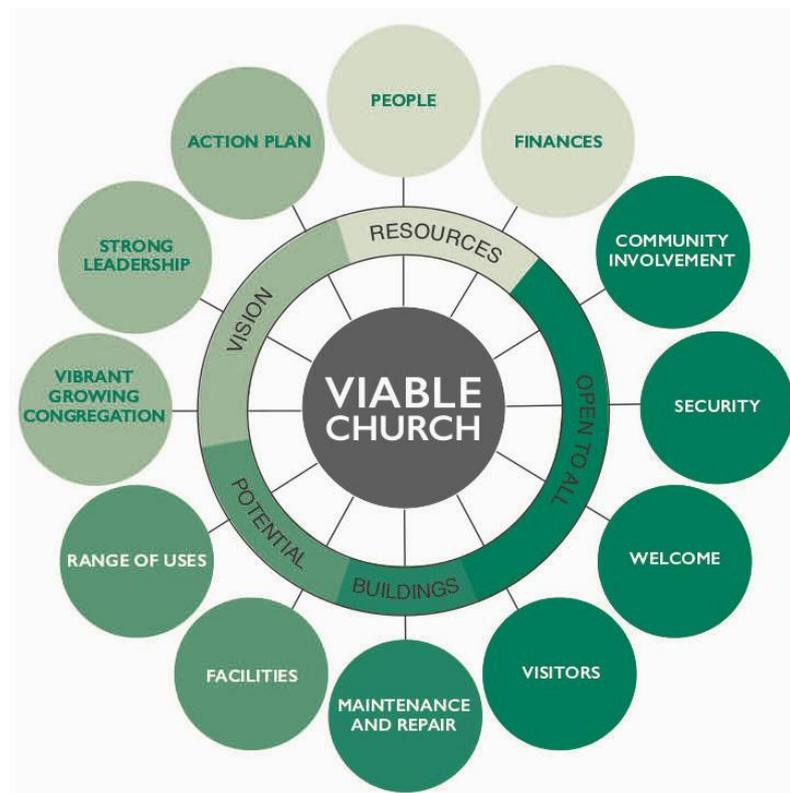
In the Questionnaire, as well as this factual part, there is a vision and mission part and an analysis and decision part.

Constructive Coaches and Friends (CCFs) and the Strategic Development Officers (the Archdeacons) need to be fully briefed/aware, and part of the conversations about buildings. Inspecting Architects will also be a very good resource, both to assist in understanding existing buildings and their problems and significance, and also to assist in imagining possibilities.

At County level, too, we have done Audits to understand the issues facing us. Some of the global themes picked up from the 2012 ecumenical Church Buildings Strategic Review include:

- a) transient/struggling communities where second homes or lack of work or transport significantly reduces the size, strength and sustainability of a community, borne out in congregation figures and ages in some places, coupled with potential for affordable housing from church owned buildings or land where churches could take a strategic approach with all planning authorities, affordable housing organisations and organisations like Cumbria Community Land Trust to plan how to turn this into an opportunity for communities
- b) potential for churches to be used as concert and art exhibition venues or tourist trails

- c) central resources for maintenance eg purchase/hire of equipment or shared qualified advisers
- d) heating issues, including fuel purchasing
- e) serving the needs of the poor in the community eg hosting foodbanks and advice surgeries
- f) other hosting to improve access to services eg post offices and hubs for shared transport
- g) advertising meeting space and facilities available from churches/church halls cooperatively
- h) shared vacancy supervision as occasionally non-priority building works are slipped through during this time, or surveys avoided



CTfC suggests using the following two scales (ie you associate two words with each “petal”)

**how you see things at this point:**

strong  
satisfactory  
fragile  
broken

**how you see the trend:**

growing  
static  
weakening

Having looked at each of the “petals”, churches should be able to come to an overall assessment of the sustainability of their buildings.

The research by the Churches Trust for Cumbria, crystallised in the Rosette, suggests that any church/congregation which has issues in several “petals” has questionable sustainability.

Churches Trust for Cumbria (CTfC) did not suggest any weightings for these “petals” but crudely, there are three simple indicators in order of increasing weight and concern:

- a) the fabric of the church,
- b) the finances of the church,
- c) the congregation and wider support.

As a rough categorisation:

- a) some of our buildings are in the right place and are as good as they can be (for worship, community use);
- b) some could do with investment (or even replacement) but are probably in the right place;
- c) some are OK for some things but not for others; the way we use these has changed or will need to – eg use in the summer not the winter; for pilgrimage rather than regular worship.... we called these hibernating churches; (we may need a better word;)
- d) some are not in the right place nor are they the right sort of building; we need to be honest and brave about disposing of these.

NB in some places, none of the buildings in the area may be fit for purpose but there may be a geographic need for a presence and a place of worship – so Mission Communities may need to consider how this can be achieved, rather than just abandoning the area.

We tried to put numbers against these four categories. We think disposal may be the right solution for 10%-15% of our buildings; hibernation the right solution for 20%; investment the right solution for 35%, although these are simply guesses based on an overview. It might be useful to apply these ratios of possible future action to Mission Communities, though with some caution.

As well as an assessment of each building’s sustainability and missional value, there is the question of its “heritage value” (eg the physical evidence that the church contains; the historical associations; its aesthetic importance; and its value to the community and indeed the county and nation). Mission Communities will not necessarily have expertise in this area but it is available in the County, through, for example, your appointed Inspecting Architect, the Churches Trust for Cumbria (CTfC), some members of the (Anglican) Diocesan Advisory Committee, and members of the Methodist District Consent Giving Body. These values are not divorced from mission and though there may sometimes be a tension between conservation and mission, it is the business of both “lobbies” (and some people are in both!) to find mutually agreeable solutions.

### **Leg B : Toolkit, Levers and Pathways**

- 1) The power to change to church buildings lies largely with local congregations and communities;
  - a) “no change” is no longer an option:

- i) the two buildings audits conducted in 2008 (Anglican) and 2012 (CTfC – ecumenical) showed that many buildings are fragile; a confirmation of this is that we already face increasing numbers of possible church closures;
    - ii) churches would anyway need to adapt in a fast changing world with rising costs, but more importantly, the huge assets which are our churches need to be used to the full to engage missionally with our people
  - b) we have an unwritten covenant with our wider communities, which recognises them as stakeholders, and also values their understanding; but with this goes a responsibility which they need to take, or to accept that their wishes may not be fulfilled.
- 2) One aim of the Buildings Strategy is to create some easily followed pathways, a toolkit, and levers, for congregations and church councils to tackle their buildings appropriately:
- a) the **pathways** are: eg
    - i) ease of getting permission to do the right things,
    - ii) a good appointment system for architects;
    - iii) active and sustained support from eg Archdeacons / Strategic Development Officers where radical and difficult decisions are made
  - b) the **toolkit** contains eg
    - i) diagnostic tools
      - (1) the Sustainability Rosette;
      - (2) the two Buildings Audits (2008 and 2012);
      - (3) useful Quinquennial surveys (not only diagnostic but also forward looking);
      - (4) looking at Mission Communities which have large numbers of Grade I or Grade II\* churches – especially where many of these might be churches used less often;
    - ii) modest supportive finance to develop ideas for buildings: eg pump priming money for congregations to pay an Architect to have drawings done or to do feasibility studies (drawings, business plans, etc) which would support future grant applications for development of church buildings;
    - iii) for less frequently used buildings:
      - (1) ideas about alternative uses eg pilgrimage, Champing (contact CTfC), etc;
      - (2) guidance on maintenance regimes; this is perhaps the most crucial element, and the most difficult - because by definition the resources available to churches in this category will be reduced, yet these are churches (again by definition) of high cultural/heritage value;
    - iv) suggestions for good contractors;
    - v) the Churches Trust for Cumbria; including :
      - (1) training sessions
      - (2) the maintenance cooperatives (started by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB))
    - vi) Mission Community Action Plans – probably the crucial element, through which churches might take stock of, and a careful look at, the sustainability and potential of their building... including better interpretation and the use of buildings to tell the Christian story
    - vii) some modest free advice from members of the Diocesan Advisory Committee eg the Energy Management Adviser, who aims:

- (1) to provide Cumbria-wide advice to churches about their use of energy
  - (2) to coordinate energy conservation which will link with the Anglican “Shrinking the Footprint”<sup>1</sup>, the Methodist “carbon reduction programme”<sup>2</sup> and similar initiatives from other denominations, and
  - (3) to help churches be better informed customers
  - viii) a short Questionnaire which Mission Communities can use to begin discussing their buildings
  - ix) active and sustained support from the Strategy Development Officers and county Church Leaders for clergy, congregations, and communities which have to face the closure of a church building; for example, there are liturgical resources from all our denominations to help congregations mourn as buildings close<sup>3</sup>
- c) the **levers** are eg
- i) conversations with Strategy Development Officers / Archdeacons,
  - ii) (Anglican) Tri-ennial Visitations to churches,
  - iii) declining congregations and finances can and should mean that congregations are prompted to think realistically about sustainability and opportunity
  - iv) pressure from the Mission Community Leader and the rest of the Mission Community, supported by the Constructive Coach and Friend.

### Leg C : Decisions

- 1) The conversations (assisted by the Questionnaire) and consequent decisions about buildings need to happen in Mission Communities : the assessment of each and all buildings, (including church halls) what is to be done about them, etc...
  - a) the Archway document, which charts the progress of Mission Communities towards launch, commissioning, and beyond, prompts nascent Mission Communities to consider their buildings and the way these help or hinder mission and working together; we want to see real change, and these discussions are an opportunity to challenge and be creative; and it may be that honesty about buildings – or the prospect of that happening – may release some fresh energy in some;
  - b) there is properly a mutual accountability which means that one congregation should not on its own make decisions about the future of its building because we are part of one Church and these decisions will affect the other Christians and churches in the Mission Community; thinking and planning about buildings needs to be shared ecumenically as well as within denominations;
- 2) The denominations (and especially the Strategy Development Officers / Archdeacons) will support Mission Communities and the congregations within them, as they have truthful and realistic conversations about their buildings. The independent Churches Trust for Cumbria will also offer support.

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1 [www.churchcare.co.uk/shrinking-the-footprint](http://www.churchcare.co.uk/shrinking-the-footprint)

2 [www.methodist.org.uk/mission/climate-change/carbon-reduction](http://www.methodist.org.uk/mission/climate-change/carbon-reduction)

3 eg <http://methodist.org.uk/media/2223460/liturgy-for-closing-a-methodist-place-of-worship-0516.pdf>

### **Leg D : Supporting material**

- a) Churches Trust for Cumbria; the umbrella body – the National Churches Trust; SPAB; ChurchCare; etc provide useful websites;
- b) There are denominational organisations/websites eg ChurchCare, and Transforming Churches and Communities (<http://www.churchandcommunity.org.uk>)
- c) There is a short theological paper attached to this Strategy with three perspectives
- d) The Questionnaire for Mission Communities to use.

### **Review**

The Questionnaire could be amended/updated as ideas and issues arise while it is being used with Mission Communities, though keeping within the boundaries of one side of A4 for a preamble and two sides of A4 for the questions.

There will be a more thorough-going review in about a year. (There is a DAC meeting fixed for 7 June 2018, for example.)

### **Stakeholders**

- a) SSG
- b) the denominations
- c) Ecumenical Buildings Strategy Sub Group: Richard Pratt, Nick Mark, Alistair Smeaton, Jim Irving, David Andrews
- d) Churches Trust for Cumbria
- e) For the Anglicans, the Diocesan Advisory Committee; for the Methodists, the District Consent Giving Body; for the URC, the North Western Synod Trust; for the Salvation Army, ...

*Richard Pratt 8 xi 17*

## Appendices

### 1 Church of England buildings procedures

Church of England buildings are hedged about by complex legislation. The basic idea can be traced back to Theodore of Tarsus in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and it is that everyone in England lives in a parish which has a parish church where they have the right to be baptised, married and buried. So parish churches belong to the vicar (for the time being) for the use of the parishioners, and are guarded with all sorts of legal protections, for the sake of those parishioners.

A second strand is that Church of England polity is based on autonomy and checks and balances. So the Church of England does not have a hierarchical line management. For the most part each unit is fiercely independent, with parochial clergy not under the line management of the bishops and archdeacons. Instead, on the one side there is loyalty and on the other there is influence rather than power. This extends to the laity, with churchwardens amongst the oldest elected offices in the country (from the 13<sup>th</sup> century).

These two factors give a huge sense of ownership of their parish church to local people and usually that is entirely good. However, it can make it slow to cope with change.

A third strand is that all of this survived the reformation and the commonwealth. So when, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the state wished to regulate matters or make them independent from the church, eg marriages, burials or the planning system, the Church of England preserved its own versions of these systems. In particular, it operates its own planning system called the faculty jurisdiction. The archdeacons do quite a lot of the running of the system, with applications for a faculty going to the Chancellor of the Diocese (a judge) for decision after advice from the Diocesan Advisory Committee.

Although the Church of England is responsible for 45% of all Grade I listed buildings in the country, it gets no state aid other than Heritage Lottery Fund money and relief on VAT.

### 2 Methodist building procedures

In broad terms all property is held on Model Trusts of the Methodist Church Act 1976 and the rules governing its administration can be found in the *Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* (CPD) volume 2 part 9<sup>4</sup>. This property includes all land and buildings used for local church purposes, all circuit and district manses and most connexional (national) properties, together with funds which support the mission of the church.

CPD provides for two types of trustee – custodian and managing. The Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP) are custodian trustees who hold the title to buildings, have a duty to ensure managing trustees do not act in breach of trust but do not get involved in the day-to-day management. Local managing trustees are responsible for the day to day management of the property and exercise power or discretion in respect of it.

Under the terms of CPD each district synod<sup>5</sup> appoints a Consent Giving Body (DCGB) which is responsible for the control of all property projects for all district, circuit and church property. A

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4 [www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/cpd](http://www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/cpd)

5 [www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/structure](http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/structure)

private website<sup>6</sup> is used for this purpose and this enables the managing trustees for the three tiers of property for local church purposes to fulfil their responsibilities. The only exception is district property where the role is undertaken by the Strategy and Resources Committee on behalf of the Methodist Council which is the controlling body above the district. Special provision is made within the property consent system to enable TMCP to fulfil their role and for the Conservation Officer to deal with listed buildings and those in a conservation area to maintain the ecclesiastical exemption under the [Ecclesiastical Exemption \(Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas\) Order 2010](#). The roles played by TMCP and the Conservation Officer are vital.

### **3 United Reformed Church building procedures**

With the coming together in the United Reformed Church of three strands of Nonconformism Churches of Christ, Congregationalists and Presbyterians some kind of uniformity had to be reached which still respected the conciliar nature of the denomination. The denomination's seventeen churches in Cumbria all fall within the URC North Western Synod which in turn has a second tier in the form of the Cumbria Area. Legislation relating to our denomination is embodied in the United Reformed Church Acts of 1972, 1981 and 2000. This ensures that churches comply with the requirements in terms of their responsibilities as trustees at Custodian level and at local Church level which is the Elders Meeting who are the managing Trustees.

Most URC churches in Cumbria have as their Custodian trustees the North West Synod Trustees but some churches still have locally appointed Custodian Trustees. The majority of Manses are owned by locally appointed Custodian Trustees but the North West Synod has a voluntary policy inviting Churches to place their manses in the hands of the North West Synod Trustees to enable the Synod to be able to react better to changes in patterns of ministry.

The decision to sell a church or buy another building is initially made at local church level by the Church meeting on the recommendation of the elders' meeting which has been duly recorded. In the event of a church finishing up with no members the decision to close and sell then falls upon the District Council whose members are elected by the URC North Western Synod. In the event of a sale of a building the local church is invited to donate up to 20% of the proceeds to Synod. Once a Church decides to sell property that has to be ratified at both Area and Synod level.

Building alterations have to be approved at Area level and if the building is listed all Ecclesiastical Exemption procedures have to be followed. There is an overriding rule that if an individual church wants to spend more than £12,000 on a particular piece of work to either a church building or a manse then that requires Synod approval even if the church is spending money from its own reserves.

Proper maintenance of church buildings is encouraged by Quinquennial surveys and the availability of Synod grants for churches in need of financial assistance.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://online.methodist.org.uk>

Local United Reformed churches are encouraged to share their buildings with other Christian denominations and sharing agreements and the like are encouraged. Congregations are encouraged to use their buildings to promote mission.

#### **4 Salvation Army building procedures**