

## Developing a connexional strategy for the use of Methodist Property in Mission and Evangelism

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<b>Status of Paper</b>	Final
<b>Action Required</b>	Decision
<b>Resolutions</b>	<p>88/1. The Council receives the report.</p> <p>88/2. The Council approves the principles of a connexional property strategy as outlined in the report and directs the Property Development Committee to bring to the Council a strategy no later than April 2018.</p> <p>88/3. The Council directs that work be undertaken to amend the policy behind SO 962</p> <p>88/4. The Council recommends to the Conference that it adopts the policy that trustees and consent-giving bodies must ensure that all relevant options are considered before purchasing or disposing of any property.</p> <p>88/5. The Council encourages the Property Development Committee to explore facilitating strategic partnerships at a strategic level, both within and outside the Methodist family.</p>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and Aims</b>	The paper sets out the principles of a connexional property strategy proposed by the Property Development Committee (PDC)
<b>Main Points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context of property for mission</li> <li>• The need for a connexional strategy</li> <li>• Resource allocation</li> <li>• Managing trusteeship</li> <li>• Considerations relating to purchases and disposals</li> <li>• Partnerships</li> <li>• Property development</li> </ul>
<b>Background Context and Relevant Documents</b>	MC/17/75 – Annual report of the Property Development Committee to the Council
<b>Consultations</b>	Reflects input gathered from across the Connexion

### Summary of Impact

<b>Standing Orders</b>	Revision of SO 962 and potentially others in CPD Part 9
<b>Financial</b>	Resources needed to implement strategy

## **1.0 Context**

- 1.1 The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission. It does this through:
- Worship
  - Learning and caring
  - Service
  - Evangelism
- 1.2 The use of all Methodist property must be demonstrably to fulfil this calling. One of the key priorities identified by the newly-formed Property Development Committee (PDC) was the need to develop and espouse a strategy for the use, development, acquisition and disposal of property which facilitates a coherent approach across the connexion.
- 1.3 The triennial Statistics for Mission report to the 2017 Conference brought into sharp focus the challenge facing the Church. New disciples of Christ are being created far more slowly than they are dying or leaving. If ever there was a time to mobilise the people called Methodists and maximise the missional return on the Church's significant property and financial assets it is now.
- 1.4 Since its inception in September 2016 the PDC has been overwhelmed by the response from across the connexion. It has caught the imagination of many, demonstrating the real need for the Church to tackle numerous issues in facilitating the most effective use of its property portfolio in mission.

## **2.0 Planning for mission**

- 2.1 In 2009 the Conference adopted radical changes to the way in which processes relating to property ownership and development would be undertaken. The previous system of connexional authorisation was replaced by one where consent to church and circuit property projects would be provided by district bodies;. An interactive website (the Consents Website) was introduced to facilitate this process, to ensure that managing trustees and Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP) as custodian could fulfil their responsibilities; including land registration and recording in the connexional database.
- 2/2 It was anticipated that these decisions would be taken by consent-giving bodies within the context of development master-plans which should be produced by district Policy Committees as defined in SO 962. However, experience has shown the language of this Standing Order has been less than helpful as it has generally been seen as 'putting the property cart before the mission horse'. A key feature of this strategy must be that SO 962 is revised and moved to a section of the standing orders which is explicitly related to the Church's duties in mission; not Part 9 relating to property. Any revision to a standing order is, however, a policy matter, and for policy to be implemented it will need resourcing.

## **3.0 Resourcing the work**

Across the Church there are good examples of mission plans being prepared and an approach to property that supports such plans. However, much of the burden for property care and development rests with District Property Secretaries (DPS). Many of these are volunteers, with varying levels of experience and expertise, often working hard but providing guidance in isolation. The role of the DPS should be clarified within Standing Orders and it may now be the time for the Conference to adopt certain minimum standards regarding the skills and capacity required to serve the Church effectively, as has been done for District Safeguarding Officers. There is a real need to provide more effective support to districts in resourcing the preparation of mission plans and the associated deployment of resources – property, finance

and people. This work has identified a significant gap between the capacity and expertise of the Connexional Team and the demands of the connexion. This strategy must urgently be accompanied by an increase in resources, recognising that this will best be achieved by a combination of Team members and professionals working under contract.

#### 4.0 Managing Trusteeship

A theme that arose, not for the first time, at the 2017 Conference was that of managing trusteeship, and the Secretary of the Conference is initiating separate work on that. The PDC has found numerous situations where property decisions have either been avoided or taken without seeing the bigger connexional (or even circuit) picture; often due to a variety of pressures on local managing trustees. Existing Methodist polity is that the managing trusteeship of church buildings is held by the church council that worships in that place. The Conference has put in place measures allowing this managing trusteeship to be transferred to the relevant circuit meeting, or even the district policy committee. However, there is evidence that such transfers are very much the exception and that in many cases managing trusteeship remains with church councils even where it is plain that they are no longer able to fulfil their duties, either through reduction in numbers or a collective loss of energy and/or expertise. A number of cases have come to the attention of the PDC where managing trusteeship has transferred upon a society ceasing to meet, the circuit meeting has then been unable to deal appropriately with the property, resulting in mothballed chapels, many boarded up in increasingly deteriorated condition. In many cases earlier, more strategic action would have seen a more positive development in the life of a local churches.

#### 5.0 Purchases and disposals

At a time of numerical decline in the Methodist Church the default position has become that the majority of buildings are sold. Often this takes place as quickly as possible as trustees understandably seek to avoid ongoing work and cost of upkeep. The PDC acknowledges that there are often cases where this is the correct course of action; particularly where they are part of Replacement Projects and where the income generated is being used to redevelop new or improved property. Indeed, noting the changing context of the Church, the definition and criteria for Replacement Projects should now be reviewed. **The Committee's view is that sales should only be undertaken once the trustees have demonstrated that a thorough evaluation has been made of potential other uses for the property within Methodist ownership.** It proposes that this evaluation should feature a set of questions such as those below (not at this stage seen as exhaustive):

1. Is there no longer potential for Methodist mission from this property?
2. How does this church property shape and give expression to the circuit/district mission plans?
3. What alternative uses might be made of the property/site as an expression of Methodist mission and ministry?
4. Is the site of strategic location within the locality?
5. What other Christian presence remains in the locality, particularly in rural areas? Is this the only community space in the locality?
6. What are the alternative uses with the site vacated, taking into account amongst other things the local authority strategic plan - could it be redeveloped to generate income for mission elsewhere?
7. What ecumenical/other partnership opportunities exist for using the property?
8. Are alternative sites available to better fulfil mission?

If, after working through these questions, it is clear that sale is the most appropriate course of action, then trustees need to be more proactive in maximising the value of the site. This may involve gaining planning permission prior to sale, agreeing overages etc. Professional guidance

should be obtained prior to the decision to sell being taken. Proof of both of these steps being undertaken should become part of the Consents process, without which consent should not be given.

## **6.0 Partnerships**

One of the benefits of property ownership within any given location is the potential for partnering with other like-minded organisations for mission and evangelism. This has been the model for many churches via Local Ecumenical Partnerships. The PDC proposes that this should be a much more overt part of the connexional property strategy. In some cases the potential is for partnering with other churches or Christian charities involved in mission and social action, including particularly those within the Methodist family. In others there are opportunities for partnering with bodies providing health care or education. There will be instances where partnerships can flourish without major alteration to property, whereas others will involve the wholesale redevelopment of a site; maybe to provide social housing or care. The strategy should be one specifically of partnership; not simply financial income derived from a lease or licence where those using the service have little chance for interaction with the church or to encounter God's love.

## **7.0 Property development**

- 7.1 The Church's rich heritage means that many properties occupy prime positions – often on sites that would be difficult to afford with current market valuations. When all other avenues for use in have been exhausted, one alternative to sale is to develop the site commercially in order to generate income. This is not straightforward and will apply only in a minority of cases. In order to ensure that the potential value is maximised, risk minimised and that the Church's reputation is properly protected, a new Methodist Property Development Company should be formed as a wholly owned subsidiary of the Methodist Council. A benefit of connexionalism is the ability to ensure that the income generated can be directed to where it can be used to maximum effect, rather than remaining where resources are already concentrated.
- 7.2 As part of the mission agenda, these developments should be funded by ethical investors as far as possible, including the utilisation of Methodist money currently earning negligible returns in deposit accounts.

## **8.0 Resource planning for mission**

Whilst its brief relates specifically to property, the PDC recognises that to be used most effectively, the care and development of property must be considered as part of the overall picture of resource planning. Effective reserves policies need to be prepared and regularly reviewed, as do plans for the deployment of ministers, lay employees and volunteers. The undertaking of quinquennials, and implementation of their recommendations continues to be an important part of this.

## **9.0 A connexional strategy**

The Methodist Church is a connexional church and needs to manage its property assets as such. Its ability to fulfil its calling within a needy and broken world will be enhanced by a coherent approach across the Connexion, combining the local knowledge and vision of managing trustees with an overarching strategy to acquisition, redevelopment and sale of property for mission and evangelism.

## **10.0 Recommendations**

1. That the principle of a connexional property strategy as outlined above be endorsed;
2. That a policy be developed to make more explicate the missional framework envisaged by SO 962 and that the standing order be re-drafted in light of such a policy;
3. That the Council instructs the SRC to consider the resource requirements of implementing a strategy such as is considered in this paper;
4. That trustees and consent-giving bodies must ensure that all relevant options are considered before purchasing or disposing of any property as outlined in section 5.0;
5. That the PDC is encouraged to explore facilitating strategic partnerships at a strategic level, both within and outside the Methodist family;
6. The property development be facilitated by the formation of a new development company (see separate paper).

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTIONS**

- 88/1. The Council receives the report.**
- 88/2. The Council approves the principles of a connexional property strategy as outlined in the report and directs the Property Development Committee to bring to the Council a strategy no later than April 2018.**
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