

Strategic Guidance for the Use of Property in Mission

Introduction

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.

Property plays a significant role in enabling a presence within communities. A Methodist building that is welcoming, eye-catching and that acts as a focal point for community engagement can speak powerfully of God's love. Utilising a property either by redeveloping it for social purpose or incorporating a range of social uses into an existing building is as much a part of a mission plan as preaching, worship or community evangelism.

In 2018, the Methodist Council approved a two year Connexional property strategy to encourage Trustees to see and realise these possibilities. Through the PDC'S work, Churches, Circuits and Districts have been supported and encouraged where possible to use property to fulfil the Church's calling in a coherent way. Significant strides have been made with a number of good examples of mission in action and also valuable lessons to be taken forward in our future work.

Examples of successes include:

- Awards of speculative funds to a number of local Churches to assess the feasibility of potential development and refurbishment projects and contributions towards the costs of planning applications,
- Innovative approaches across the Connexion in the use of property and partnerships to fulfil the Calling of the Church. Follow this [link](#) for an example of an innovative project.
- An improved understanding by the PDC of the support required by Churches, Circuits and Districts to harness and optimise property for the Church's calling, and
- An increased awareness of the importance of property in the life of the Connexion.

Equally some of the lessons learned include the need to:

- Streamline processes and reduce property related tasks for Circuits and Districts,
- Focus on strategic partnerships particularly with regards to large or complex projects, and
- Continue providing support and training for Circuits and Districts with property matters.

Drawing on the successes and lessons learned, this guidance therefore sets out key priorities to enable effective use of property for mission across the Connexion.

1. Mission and Property Development Plans

1.1 Mission plans are a critical element of community outreach and service and should be adopted and implemented across the Connexion. These plans should make clear how the sensible use of property will support and facilitate mission and ministry. Property development plans (led by Circuits and Districts) should 'sit' as a subset of mission plans and should:

- Include all existing Methodist property (churches, manses, ancillary investment properties) and demonstrate how each property will contribute to delivering agreed mission plans. Follow these links for examples of mission planning: [Sample Circuit](#)

[Mission Plan 1](#) and [Sample Circuit Mission Plan 2](#) and see also our [Mission Planning Workbook](#).

- Enable effective use of listed buildings, taking account of current policies in respect of planning legislation as well as the need to make bold decisions about the application of finite resources. This should build on the current work to advocate for, conserve and modify our Historic Places of Worship, for continued and sustainable worship and community use. Careful consideration should be given to maintenance and conservation management planning to:
 - identify future and current constraints,
 - assess significance at a local and national scale, and
 - develop proposals for change; particularly for our higher-graded chapels and churches and those with complex and complete historic interiors.

It is hoped that a national survey of our listed buildings or 'Taking Stock' exercise, can inform and provide a useful tool for Districts and Circuits as they oversee or think about alterations /or refurbishment of their listed buildings. Follow this link for [guidance about listed buildings](#).

- Churches in rural areas should consider a variety of options in developing their mission plans. It is recognised that rural areas are highly distinctive in themselves. It is therefore advisable that rural churches engage where possible in strategic partnerships with neighbouring churches, circuits, local housing associations, ecumenical contacts and local authorities to develop missional opportunities. This may involve extra support from Districts and the Connexion. Reference can also be made to the National Rural Officer of the Methodist Church and the Arthur Rank Centre, who are well equipped in supporting rural Churches to explore their mission and purpose, and
- Consideration of local authority development plans as set out in strategic planning policy and the neighbourhood development plans. [Follow this link](#) for the National Planning Policy Framework.

1.2 All our buildings are potentially 'heritage' assets for mission: historic, listed or not, to brand new; they have been built or acquired to respond to our calling, and to do so within the Methodist tradition (they have 'history') – so that the Methodist story of faith can be faithfully told, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ be proclaimed. New buildings and more recent worshipping communities may have old roots, which go back several hundred years and in some cases stretch out across the globe. The deep heritage of Methodist witness needs to be identified during the mission planning process or during a property review, as a valuable opportunity to explore rootedness, authenticity and purpose.

1.3 Stories, as we know from the Bible, are powerful, and our churches can be effective in keeping stories alive and creating attractive and safe-spaces that inspire deep, authentic and powerful faith sharing, even when it is part of a process to let go of a building. The Heritage Committee is committed to working with the PDC to encourage the active engagement of districts, circuits or local churches with such stories and exploring the mission opportunities they offer, to exploit their potential to widen the church's community and draw people into encounters with God.

1.4 Property development plans should also include locations where a new Methodist property would be advantageous, or where partnerships with another Christian community should be explored. Work should be undertaken to ensure that decisions about property are taken in the context of the whole Circuits and Districts, reflecting where Circuits wish to prioritise Methodist presence and resources to achieve their mission plans. This work should be integrated with the 'God for All' strategy on New Places for New People and Churches at the Margins, which links into Standing Order 1005 and provides for the Methodist Council to appoint a New Town or New Area Commission where an expansion scheme to house a population of 20,000 or more is planned by a local authority. The Methodist mind-set should be to provide facilities for communities rather than a worship building for ourselves.

2. Partnerships

2.1 The Methodist Church will continue to embrace partnership working; in recognition that there will be times when Our Calling will be advanced by working in collaboration with others. Partnerships are not to be entered into lightly. True partnerships can be time consuming and unless there is an early agreement on common purpose, they can be fraught with difficulties that can endanger any or all of the partners.

2.2 Therefore, the Connexional Team will support Circuits and Districts to explore which potential partners are most likely to share objectives with Our Calling. It could be expected that many of these will have Methodist roots, but not exclusively so. These will include ecumenical partners, third sector bodies focusing on community engagement, Christian charities focusing on helping the Church to engage with society and specialist charities such as Methodist Homes (MHA). The types of projects may include, but not limited to:

- partnering in redevelopment for social purposes,
- imaginative experiment and ecumenical co-operation,
- sharing a building for other social mission,
- sharing a building for worship, and
- partnering in redevelopment for commercial purposes.

2.3 Discussions should be held with such potential partners so that a broad framework for co-operative working can be agreed. This could then be used by Districts, Circuits and local Churches in a proactive way, remembering that good ideas may come from our partners rather than us. The key to enabling the best partnership opportunities will be the strength of mission and property plans which will guide the location, type and size of property required to fulfil Our Calling.

2.4 Probity in procurement is important. In all cases, proper procurement rules should be applied.

3. Purchases and disposals

3.1 At times, selling will be the best option to further our mission. This is not failure but recognition that the world evolves, and we need to respond in new ways for the time we are in. Our priority will always be to make the best use of our property.

3.2 When all other opportunities to use our buildings for mission have been explored and exhausted, the redundancy of one of our buildings should be embraced as the closure of a chapter of a Methodist story faithfully told, where we will ensure the memory of that story

is preserved and see that the next chapter is commenced in ways that remain faithful to the story so far, and to the Gospel.

- 3.3 Sales will often occur when a Church society ceases to meet. If a property is no longer required for its original purpose, given the details of the Circuit and District Mission and Property Development Plans, it may well be conceivable that the property could be redeveloped (possibly in partnership with others) for an alternative local community use. Equally, Circuits and Districts should endeavour to formulate their Mission and Property Development Plans to identify areas where fresh mission and community outreach are possibilities and it could well be that the sale of a redundant property could help fund such developments. [Follow this link](#) for key questions to be considered when a property is to be sold.
- 3.4 When disposing of the property or working in partnership, we will be mindful of charity law, the model trusts and the objectives of the Methodist Church in Great Britain. Within those criteria, priority will be given to final uses that enable or are consistent with our mission. Purposes may include worship by others, social buildings such as affordable housing, social mission or pioneering expressions of church.
- 3.5 While the primary aim of any sale will normally be to secure market value, under-value sales may be allowed in accordance with the requirements of the Methodist Council, normally with covenants securing additional value achieved in any future sales.
- 3.6 The proceeds from sales will be distributed in accordance with the policies for the time for the Methodist Church in Great Britain, with priority given to the following objectives:
 - investment in sustainable programmes and projects that achieve our mission goals,
 - reinvestment in capital assets that support mission,
 - investment to provide sustainable income streams for missional work, and
 - paying off existing debt.
- 3.7 Professional property advice will enable all Trustees to maximise the value of a site, for missional and/or financial purposes. This may involve gaining planning permission prior to sale, agreeing overages and restrictive covenants etc. External professional advice should therefore be sought prior to all decisions to sell Methodist property.

4. Environmental and ethical matters

- 4.1 In all matters relating to property, serious consideration should be given to the Church's commitment to addressing a zero-carbon agenda in the context of climate change, as expressed in the Conference Statement, *Hope in God's Future*. Attention should be given to the 2010 Conference directive that Circuits should endeavour to use model trust money to put in place high standards of energy efficiency and also directed that Circuits should endeavour to provide smart meter devices in manses.
- 4.2 All developments should as far as possible be funded by ethical investors with the principles of the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment being applied to funding packages wherever possible. [Follow this link](#) for good practice examples.

5. Role of the District Property Secretary

5.1 The role of District Property Secretary will continue to be crucial in facilitating effective use of property for mission. Work will therefore be undertaken to guide Districts in clarifying minimum standards for the post. These standards will attempt to set out the skills and the capacity required to enable consistency of support across the Connexion, as well as sufficient local knowledge.

5.2 The standards may mean that some Districts will consider paid posts to attract personnel with the right skills and experience. To minimise costs, it may sometimes be advisable for District Property Secretaries to work across Districts. This will strengthen the approach of mission and property plans and also the ability to attract the right partners. Where possible, District Property Secretaries should work with District Mission Grant Officers/District Grants Committees.

6. Property consultancies

6.1 Work has been undertaken to establish a panel of surveyors and other professional bodies for accessible advice on property matters. This has worked well in some areas.

6.2 Further work is planned to include local and medium sized firms on the panel. This will increase the choice of surveyors and enable bespoke services particularly in remote areas of the Connexion.

7. Grants

7.1 Through the speculative fund, the Council will continue to support a grant-making process at the initial stage of a project by part funding feasibility studies, pre-planning applications or similar. This would enable money held Connexionally to support the risks associated with property projects at the feasibility stage. Follow this link for the [applications process](#).