

6. Missional Use of Property

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Resolutions	6/1. The Conference receives the Report. 6/2. The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee, in consultation with others as appropriate, to develop and articulate a clear and theologically informed understanding of the Local Church and report to the Conference in 2027. An additional resolution relating to Strategic Area 3 will be brought on the Order Paper.
Background context and relevant documents	God For All: The Connexional Strategy for Evangelism and Growth – Strategic Update and Renewal (2025-2032) https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/20_God_For_All_2025-2032_DFKearR.pdf Conference Reports of the Oversight and Trusteeship Task Group: 2020 https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-2020-25-oversight-and-trusteeship_vdqsatB.pdf 2021 https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-2021-30-oversight-and-trusteeship_A5cyKZk.pdf 2022 https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-22-pc-44-oversight-and-trusteeship_6H9zJO2.pdf 2023 https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-23-pc-57-oversight-and-trusteeship.pdf 2024 https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/50-OTTG.pdf 2025 https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/54_OTTG.pdf Action for Hope https://www.methodist.org.uk/action/climate/action-for-hope/

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1. As part of its work over the last year the Connexional Council has reflected on a number of questions relating to the missional use of property. It has done this work mindful of its responsibilities under Standing Order 205(2).¹ In this report the Council shares with the Conference the work it has done and the further work it has requested. The Council wishes to hear the views of the Conference in order that those views can shape the further work. The Council is aware that some of the further work that it wishes to be undertaken includes work which relates to the faith and order and the law and polity of the Methodist Church and therefore brings resolutions to enable the progression of that work.

Introduction

2. The Methodist Church in Great Britain (MCB) owns many properties. These properties are made up of buildings used by Local Churches (referred to in CPD as Chapels), manses and a smaller number of other properties such as project centres, office buildings and even cricket grounds. This report uses the terms property and properties to mean all these different types of estates that MCB owns. Some of these properties are listed, which can create extra responsibilities and complexity. Most of these properties are held on the Model Trusts² by The Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP), who act as the Custodian Trustee and are managed by various Managing Trustee bodies as defined in Section 2(1) of the Model Trusts.³
3. During the last year the Resourcing Committee and the Connexional Council have recognised that as MCB looks to the next season with and for God in mission and ministry it is imperative that consideration is given to the best way to use, manage and support the properties that it owns in order to serve God and God's mission in God's world. This is a shared task across the Connexion with multiple committees and officers involved.
4. In 2021 the Conference established an aspirational target to become a net zero Church by 2030, and the Action for Hope Faith Plan was created to identify key areas of activity and the engagement required by all parts of the Connexion.⁴ An

1 *'In partnership with others in giving spiritual leadership in the Church, the Connexional Council shall keep in constant review the life of the Church, so as to assist in making its work and witness more effective'* SO 205 (2), CPD Volume 2 2025, p. 365 (<https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/CPD-Vol-2-0825.pdf>)

2 CPD Volume 2 2025, p. 243-262 (<https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/CPD-Vol-2-0825.pdf>)

3 CPD Volume 2 2025, p. 247 (<https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/CPD-Vol-2-0825.pdf>)

4 Action for Hope - The Methodist Church - <https://www.methodist.org.uk/action/climate/action-for-hope/>

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update on this is reported elsewhere in the Conference Agenda. A significant part of this aspiration relates to the properties we own. Similarly, progress towards meeting our net zero target is not just a matter of property management but one of mission, not least because “Caring for creation and all God’s gifts” is one of the commitments of A Methodist Way of Life and climate justice is one of the Conference agreed priorities in our commitment to be a Justice-Seeking Church.⁵

5. In 2024 the Conference ‘received and commended’ the God for All Strategic Update and Renewal report.⁶ In the Missional Growth and Leadership (now known as Growing Churches) section⁷ it articulated a renewed work on encouraging the missional use of property. The report noted:

*Property is potentially a huge asset for mission, but can equally be a distraction from it. **The strategic use of property for mission is about allowing property to be shaped by the needs of the church/Circuit’s mission rather than the other way around.** Where discernments are being made about improving, developing, or selling a property to release resources, these need to be shaped by the way in which the property will be used to serve and enhance the mission of the local church and circuit, including a consideration of the Church’s commitment to becoming a net zero carbon emissions Church. These discernments should be made with the property portfolio of the whole circuit in mind – enabling a more strategic approach to be taken to property in the wider missional context.*

6. The missional use of property means that the properties owned by the Methodist Church are used to further the purposes of the Methodist Church. It is recognised that from time to time the Conference’s articulation of the purposes of the Methodist Church evolves. These are currently primarily expressed through the decisions of the Conference contained within:

- Our Calling - <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about/our-calling>
- God for All and the commitment to be a growing, inclusive, evangelistic and justice-seeking church - <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/evangelism-growth/explore-the-god-for-all-strategy>

5 Justice Seeking Church – The Methodist Church - <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/social-justice/a-justice-seeking-church/priorities-for-justice-what-can-we-do/explore-the-five-methodist-priorities-for-justice/>

6 God for All Conference Report - https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/20._God_For_All_2025-2032_DFKeapR.pdf

7 God for All Conference Report, para 65 - https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/20._God_For_All_2025-2032_DFKeapR.pdf

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- Justice Seeking Church - <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/social-justice/a-justice-seeking-church>
- Action for Hope - <https://www.methodist.org.uk/action/climate/action-for-hope>

Recent work by the Council and the Connexional Leaders' Forum on this is reported elsewhere in the Agenda.

A Strategic and Missional Approach

7. Over the last year the Resourcing Committee and Council have therefore discussed how the Church can take a more strategic and missional approach to the use of property which will enable the strategic use of property to be shaped by the needs of the church/Circuit's mission rather than the other way around and to move towards our net zero target. Following its discussions the Council has come to a clear understanding of three strategic areas in relation to the missional use of property and requested further work on them to be undertaken.
8. **Strategic Area One: Having a clear and theologically informed understanding of the Local Church in relation to property.**
 - 8.1. The Council believes that there is a need to revisit the definition of the Local Church to remove the assumption that a church has to be identified with a particular property or vice-versa.
 - 8.2. The perception arises from the Deed of Union's statement that "'Local Church' and 'Society' are equivalent expressions and mean (subject to any exceptions provided for by Standing Orders) the whole body of members of the Methodist Church connected with and attending one particular place of worship".⁸
 - 8.3. Standing Order 003⁹ has a similar definition whilst 605A¹⁰ and 942¹¹ (which gives provision for multi-site Local Churches) use the language of Churches and Chapels whilst reminding us in the accompanying notes 'Normally a single chapel

⁸ CPD Volume 2 2025, p. 210 (<https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/CPD-Vol-2-0825.pdf>)

⁹ CPD Volume 2 2025, p. 268 (<https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/CPD-Vol-2-0825.pdf>)

¹⁰ CPD Volume 2 2025, p. 543 (<https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/CPD-Vol-2-0825.pdf>)

¹¹ CPD Volume 2 2025, p. 679 (<https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/CPD-Vol-2-0825.pdf>)

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is used in connection with a single Local Church'.¹² Paragraphs 4.7.3 and 4.7.4 of Called to Love and Praise¹³ speak of the nature of the Local Church.

- 8.4. As the work of 'God For All' flows out across the Connexion and in particular as New Places for New People flourish, diverse expressions of the Local Church are emerging (and by God's grace will continue to emerge) which, not least those emerging online, do not relate to and may never relate to a particular place or a Methodist owned property.
- 8.5. Church that may not relate to a particular property may seem to be a new and evolving way of being church but in many ways, it mirrors Methodism's earliest days. *Called to Love and Praise*¹⁴ reminds us:

*Over the years, Methodism changed from a connexion of United Societies into a denomination or Church. The movement's self-understanding altered as it grew into an independent organization with its own identity and structures. Societies were sub-divided into 'classes'. Preaching meetings, love-feasts, Watchnight and Covenant services nurtured their members. For these, separate Methodist buildings were erected and, though most Methodists did not wish to be thought of as 'Dissenters', the buildings were registered under the Toleration Act to prevent mob violence. Officers such as stewards and class leaders were appointed to manage the societies' affairs.*¹⁵

- 8.6. It was 'For these' - 'Preaching meetings, love-feasts, Watchnight and Covenant services'¹⁶ - that buildings were erected. MCB today carries the legacy of the late 19th- and early 20th-century season of ambitious church building, which resulted in some structures which have always been bigger than was needed, even at the time.
- 8.7. As we enter our next phase as MCB it may be that the 'For these' of our current times – Café Church, Forest Church, Church in School, traditional church; a mixed

12 None of these Standing Orders state that the particular place of worship, Church or Chapel has to be owned by the Methodist Church although the default understanding is often that they are owned. The 1976 Act has a definition for Church Property which is separate to that of Local Church.

13 Called to Love and Praise, Para 4.7.3 and 4.7.4, p. 54 & 55 - <https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/fo-statement-called-to-love-and-praise-1999.pdf>

14 Called to Love and Praise - <https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/fo-statement-called-to-love-and-praise-1999.pdf>

15 Called to Love and Praise, Para 4.2.4, p35 - <https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/fo-statement-called-to-love-and-praise-1999.pdf>

16 Called to Love and Praise, Para 4.2.4, p35 - <https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/fo-statement-called-to-love-and-praise-1999.pdf>

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ecology of growing existing churches and new churches – separate Methodist properties are not needed. We may again, in some or many places, be called not to be a property-owning church but to be a property-sharing and/or -renting church. There may be places where we think we need to own a property, but we could be liberated from such responsibilities because we simply need a place to meet.

- 8.8. Our current understanding and definitions of a Local Church being linked to 'one particular place of worship' limit our understanding of the Local Church and can create difficulties in the recognition of some New Places for New People.
- 8.9. The Council has therefore requested that further work is undertaken to develop and articulate a clear and theologically informed understanding of the Local Church and invites the Conference to direct the Faith and Order Committee to undertake this work in consultation with others as appropriate.
9. **Strategic Area Two: Having a clear rationale and framework for Methodist property which enables a missional use of property.**
- 9.1. The Council believes MCB needs a clear rationale which articulates when it is appropriate and when it is not appropriate for the Methodist Church to own a particular property. This rationale needs to be supported by a framework which enables Managing Trustees to implement the rationale in their context and access appropriate support in doing so.
- 9.2. The rationale and framework will need to include what appropriate uses for Methodist property are (for example being used to host a Local Church (existing / new / evolving replant) or as a manse to house a Methodist minister), where properties should be and how many properties we require in a particular context. The rationale and framework will to be rooted in God's mission for God's world expressed in Growth and/or Mission Plans (<https://www.methodist.org.uk/grow>) in Districts, Circuits and Local Churches (existing and new) and include Methodist properties meeting the net zero target and how decisions about those that do not will be taken.
- 9.3. The Council recognises that among the key matters which will need to be considered as the rationale and framework are developed are heritage sites and significant locations. The framework will need to have a clear rationale, rooted in growth (spiritual, missional, numerical), that reflects the contexts of those properties, and enabling decisions to be made about which should be retained that are:

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- 9.3.1. of historic value to the Methodist Church and wider community, considering how these are supported and where responsibility lies for the resourcing of this support. This will need to include how we respond to those properties which are listed buildings and the consequential responsibilities that listing places on trustees. It will be important that the rationale and framework articulate the Methodist Church's understanding of the inherent value of church property and its link to the importance of presence in communities which leads to the expression and exploration of faith.
- 9.3.2. in strategically significant locations for the future of the Methodist Church, eg City Centres. How these are supported and who is responsible for the resourcing of this work will need to be articulated.
- 9.4. The framework will include a discernment process by which Circuits can make strategic and missional decisions about which properties to sell and which to retain. This process will be rooted in the Growth Plans (<https://www.methodist.org.uk/grow>) of Local Churches and the creation of a thriving mixed ecology of churches (existing and new) in the circuit.
- 9.5. Whilst decisions around individual buildings can only be made by the appropriate Managing Trustee body the Council believes that the encouragement to implement the rationale and framework in Districts and Circuits, once agreed, is likely to mean decisions are taken which significantly reduce the number of properties MCB own. Whilst this will be difficult for some, the sale of properties will ensure that those we do own meet the missional needs of MCB, including being net zero.
- 9.6. Where the number of properties that the Church owns is reduced the income from sales will enable the adaptation of those properties which are retained so they meet the net zero target and can be warm, accessible and hospitable places that speak of our Christian faith and are fit for purpose to meet the needs of the growth plans.
- 9.7. It is important to note selling properties does not mean closing Local Churches in all situations. The churches can continue to meet in other premises or in some circumstances in the same property by renting space from the new owners.¹⁷
- 9.8. The Council is aware that if a significant number of church properties is sold, attention will need to be given to how Managing Trustees process the art,

¹⁷ <https://www.wandamethodists.org.uk/news/sale-of-otley-methodist-church-completed.html>

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artefacts and records currently held in these properties. To enable this, the framework will need to include a shared understanding of why and when we should capture the stories and artefacts from our properties and how they contribute to recording our history and connect to ongoing mission and ministry. The Heritage Committee is currently developing an updated Heritage Strategy which will connect with this, particularly in relation to contested items.

- 9.9. The Council has therefore requested that further work is undertaken to develop a clear rationale and framework for Methodist property which enables a missional use of property.

10. **Strategic Area Three: Trustees of Local Churches**

- 10.1. The Council believes that the biggest challenge in being strategic about the missional use of property is that currently any Circuit or District wishing to be strategic about property is prevented from implementing its strategy by where Managing Trusteeship is held, particularly in relation to those properties used by Local Churches.
- 10.2. Districts are required by SO 962 to have a 'development master-plan for the Methodist church building and circuit staffing of the District'¹⁸ but have limited ability to implement the master-plan they are required to have. There are similar strategic tensions with setting growth priorities as a circuit and the allocation of human and financial resources in the right places for the right reasons.
- 10.3. The Council believes it is important that the authority to make strategic decisions (and implement them) for God's Mission in God's World is placed with the most appropriate oversight body and that in doing so this body can be attentive to questions of power, economic justice, and resources amongst other factors in its decisions making. Where Managing Trusteeship is best held needs to relate to the wider responsibilities of trusteeship (charity and managing) and a strategic approach to growth.
- 10.4. Reflection therefore needs to be undertaken on (the policy question) how Local Churches (existing and new) could be led and governed so that a strategic approach to growth (spiritual, missional and numerical) is the priority. Other considerations include, how trusteeship continues to be held by a single body which 'has authority and oversight over the whole area of ministry of the church,

18 CPD Volume 2 2025, p. 687 (<https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/CPD-Vol-2-0825.pdf>)

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including the management of its property',¹⁹ whether this body is a Church Council, Circuit Trustee Body, or District Trustee Body.

- 10.5. It is important for the Conference to note that the Council is not suggesting reverting to a pre-1976 model of Methodist oversight with separation of powers. In general, before the implementation of the Methodist Church Act 1976 in 1977 the trusteeship of property and finance were managed by 'The Trustees' and the spiritual and missional life of the local church by the 'Society Stewards'.²⁰ This separation was not always helpful and led in the 1976 Methodist Church Act to the Church Council being the single body which 'has authority and oversight over the whole area of ministry of the church, including the management of its property',²¹ recognising that the management of finance and property is a spiritual and missional task.
- 10.6. What the Council is now asking is in the 2020s (and beyond) what is the best oversight body to hold for charity and managing trusteeship for Local Churches which will enable MCB to be strategic about being a growing, inclusive, evangelistic and justice-seeking church in terms of its worshipping and missional life as the body of Christ and the resources (property, finance and human) which enable that.
- 10.7. The Council has noted the work done by the Oversight and Trusteeship Task Group in relation to the trusteeship of Local Churches and its report received by the Conference in 2021.²² Whilst the Council hears the caution in the report it notes it is now five years since that work was done, the strategic questions are becoming more urgent, and the difficulty of finding trustees who have the appropriate skills and capacity is increasing.
- 10.8. The Council recognises that by asking the policy question 'Where is trusteeship, charity and managing best held?' models may emerge which would lead to a

19 CPD Volume 2 2025, p. 533 (<https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/CPD-Vol-2-0825.pdf>)

20 'Although matters could have been ordered otherwise the system which emerged was one in which different aspects of church life at society and circuit level were the responsibility of separate bodies. In particular property (and for many years also children's work) were outside the control of the Leaders' Meeting. Property was vested in, and administered by, separate and self-perpetuating bodies of trustees.' The Genesis of the Methodist Church Act – can be downloaded from <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/governance/cpd/>

21 CPD Volume 2 2025, p. 533 (<https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/CPD-Vol-2-0825.pdf>)

22 Oversight and Trusteeship Report 2021, Section 8.7 e, https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-2021-30-oversight-and-trusteeship_A5cyKZk.pdf

'major departure from our long standing polity'²³ but believes the exploration of the policy question would enable the church to ask whether this is a departure God is inviting us to make for the sake of God's mission in God's world as we follow God's call to be a growing, inclusive, evangelistic and justice-seeking Church.

- 10.9. Acknowledging that questions of policy related to the law and polity of the Church are a matter for the Conference, the Council therefore requests the Conference to direct the Council in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee and others as appropriate to explore the policy question of 'Where is trusteeship, charity and managing, best held?'

Invitation to Confer

11. This report has outlined the understanding the Resourcing Committee and Council have come to in relation to the three key strategic areas and the further work that the Council wishes to be undertaken.
12. The Council invites the Conference to confer on these three key strategic areas and the Connexional Council's understanding of them. The Council will ensure the Conference's feedback is fed into the further work that is to be undertaken.
13. The Council invites the Conference to confer on the following questions:
- What would members of the Conference want to see included in a 'a clear and theologically informed understanding of the Local Church'?
 - What thoughts do members of the Conference wish to offer in relation to a rationale and framework for Methodist property?
 - What thoughts do members of the Conference wish to offer in relation to heritage sites and strategic locations?
 - How would members of the Conference describe an appropriate trustee body for Local Churches which will enable Local Churches to be growing, inclusive, evangelistic and justice-seeking and is attentive to the human resources we have?

23 Oversight and Trusteeship Report 2021, Section 8.7 e, https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-2021-30-oversight-and-trusteeship_A5cyKZk.pdf

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*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 6/1. The Conference receives the Report.**
- 6/2. The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee, in consultation with others as appropriate, to develop and articulate a clear and theologically informed understanding of the Local Church and report to the Conference in 2027.**

An additional resolution relating to Strategic Area 3 will be brought on the Order Paper.