

Building Opportunities – Report of the Church Buildings Think Tank

BASIC INFORMATION

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Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Discussion and decision
Draft Resolution	- The Councils receive the Building Opportunities report - The Councils call for the formation of a follow on group to facilitate the next stage of this work, following the dissolution of the Church Buildings Think Tank
Alternative Options, if Any	Whether other denominations and partners might be involve in the next stage of work rather than this remaining a joint Methodist URC initiative

SUMMARY OF CONTENT

Subject and Aims	- Church buildings represent a major investment of capital, running costs and time. This in turn can limit local churches' mission. Can our denominations combine their expertise, creativity and resources to address these issues and ensure that our buildings are welcoming focal points of Christian witness? - Following presentation of the report, there will be time for discussion of key questions
Main Points	- The priority remains widespread cultural change at local level: local Church leaders must think creatively and bravely about God's mission in that place - Our denominations should combine resources and expertise, and consideration of joint mission objectives should be a requirement of consent to building projects - Churches should develop the skills and knowledge needed to play a more integral role in their local communities
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	- The Strategic Oversight Group of Methodist Church and United Reformed Church commissioned the Think Tank - A complementary strand is the 2010 URC Assembly's resolution which instructed its officers "to explore the possibility of collaboration in the area of property advice to local churches"
Consultations	Members of the Think Tank brought a wide variety of perspectives from each denomination.

SUMMARY OF IMPACT

Faith and Order	The think tank noted the ongoing need to look at the theology not just of buildings but also of resources and of land and sacred ground.
Financial	Resource-sharing between local churches including those of different denominations should release significant resources
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The recommended approach would involve closer engagement with communities and local authorities as well as grassroots cooperation among different denominations.
Risk	In view of the challenges of coordinating building advice in our two denominations, we recommend that lessons are learned from the current functioning of Local Ecumenical Partnerships and that staff from our denominations trial modes of collaboration through cooperating on Listed Buildings.

BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES REPORT

September 2010

1. INTRODUCTION

Our brief was to engage in visionary thinking aiming to address familiar issues in new ways, to make good use of previous work, and to look beyond the limitations of our Churches' existing initiatives and governance structures. As a coming together of representatives of the Methodist Church and the URC, we welcomed this opportunity to share perspectives and shed light on our own denominations' present situations. Where relevant we also explored possibilities for sharing mission and resources, in the belief that our findings should lead to recommendations for action, where possible.

For the purposes of this report, we have divided our conclusions into key issues in our work together (in ordinary type) and key findings and recommendations (bulleted and formatted in bold, italic type).

- We begin by identifying key strategic principles for future work on Church buildings (Section 2)
- We develop their implications for our denominations and their governance structures (Section 3).
- We suggest that this naturally leads to opportunities around shared mission (Section 4)
- We outline the kind of local sharing that would be possible by taking this approach (Section 5).
- Finally, we attempt to lay foundations for the much more extensive work of linking this process with the community context (Section 5).

Further suggestions for developing this work are contained in:

- APPENDIX 1 - The Way Forward
- APPENDIX 2 - Background on our denominations' governance structures
- APPENDIX 3 - A short note on the possible co-location of public services.
- APPENDIX 4 - Roadmap of the way in which the thinktank's key recommendations could be developed further.
- The Think Tank papers from which this report is compiled are available on request.

2. PRINCIPLES FOR FUTURE WORK ON CHURCH BUILDINGS

- ***Our first conclusion was that before any of the processes, resources or strategies to do with buildings become relevant, we must inspire Local Church Leaders to think creatively, widely and bravely about God's mission in that place, recognising that change is only successful when effected locally and supported by denominational policies.***

We noted that work focused on changes in our Churches' thinking about buildings, and in our relationship to the wider community has resulted in many new ideas and tools for change. However, our consensus was that these reports and programmes have not led to a significant change of culture. This is no reflection on their quality, merely their inability to take root in previous circumstances.

- ***Our denominations should carefully consider the practical context in which work on buildings operates, before investing too much in further aspirational or theoretical approaches to buildings.***

We considered typical symptoms of a counterproductive split between mission and buildings planning. Some Church buildings feature a strong separation between the worship space and the spaces where other healing and caring ministries are based: this may send a message that our communities are closed rather than open to the world. There can also be a preconception that Victorian Gothic is a norm, rather than simply one option. These factors can lead to situations where following tradition becomes an energy sapping 'end in itself'.

We note and approve the freedom which Fresh Expressions have given Churches to make innovative use of non-‘Churchy’ buildings, or indeed to use no building at all. We do not wish to tie congregations to traditional use of buildings if their discernment leads them to other possibilities. But we recognize the need for Churches to take full, mission-led ownership for all their buildings, being clear why they need and how they are to use their buildings, just as much as any other resource at their disposal.

- ***The primary guiding principle for all future work relating to Church buildings is that, if a Church chooses to use a building, whether traditional or modern, all planning should be grounded in mission. We wish to see local Churches being inspired to be much more creative with their building plans, rather than tied to what has gone before.***

3. TOWARDS A STRATEGIC VISION FOR OUR CHURCH BUILDINGS

- ***In both of our denominations, cultural change in the Local Church is a priority – inspiring and equipping the local Church to be mission-focused, releasing congregations to pursue their mission and what needs to happen to buildings will emerge in support of that mission.***

Central denominational initiatives can play a positive role in helping to influence, facilitate and inspire, rather than direct. Particularly in the Methodist context, it is important that we show how this work continues the process of Team Focus and the Property Consents Process by empowering the local Church and equipping it to discern and implement its mission.

- ***We recommend that our respective denominations combine and maximize the available support personnel and train volunteers locally to assist Churches to recognize when expert help is needed. In this context, we recommend that the Methodist Church should consider the possibility of continuing to support District Development Enablers.***

We discussed various instances known to us of Churches facing **steady decline**, which, rather than contemplating bold decisions about the future, drifted into a position of unsustainability. We consider that Ministers are the key agents in these situations, as they may be required to guide their congregations towards and through decisions such as closure, which may be very painful. Denominational support or other training should be available.

- ***A key part of investing in people resources will be equipping Ministers with skills in change management as early as possible in their careers.***

4. SHARED MISSION OPPORTUNITIES & GOVERNANCE ISSUES

We note that neither denomination has a central body able to assist with specialized issues relating to Church buildings other than Listed Buildings. The URC Listed Buildings Advisory Group (LBAG) could strengthen links with the Methodist specialist on Listed Buildings and conservation issues.

- ***We suggest that our Churches start planning a joint approach to the narrow area of Listed Buildings: we note that this work is timely, in view of current changes in the Methodist Church and discussions within URC Synods.***
- ***The Methodist Church holds a Resourcing Mission Forum which brings together those responsible for mission and buildings on an occasional basis. We recommend that our denominations explore these issues jointly at the RMF or a similar newly formed body. Web based contact with an annual physical forum would provide a useful arena for collective discussion of current issues and best practice, and build on the specific connection in the case of Listed Buildings to develop broader collaboration.***

Our discussions highlighted that **our denominations have different regulatory processes**. However, we envisage that the URC and the Methodist Church can develop shared vision for buildings through developing relationships that operate on three levels:

- i. national and denominational expertise –through the merger of Listed Building expertise
- ii. regional support – through resource sharing between Methodist District Development Enablers and URC Mission Enablers
- iii. local mission – through giving incentives to shared local mission

We consider that the developed practice of sharing will release congregations to become much more proactive and focused on taking ownership of their mission.

- ***The background to sharing should be our Churches' increasing focus on sustainable mission on behalf of the Kingdom, not just the sustainability of a particular Church building.***

5. STEWARDSHIP, MISSION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The basic Biblical mandate to share should increasingly be the foundation of our thinking about collective Church resources, in particular in relationship to the sharing of buildings and associated ministry. Rather than relying on centralized means of redistribution like levies, some of us would like to see more fluid and locally-originated means of sharing our wealth, time, expertise and other assets. We see this as one way of building cross denominational support through local unity.

- ***Those in our denominations responsible for making decisions about building projects should require consideration and exploration of joint mission objectives, before giving consent to a project. Our experience of the strengths and weakness of LEPs should be included in relevant planning.***
- ***The think tank sees joint mission audits as being a useful way of preparing for local resource-sharing. These should involve a much more extensive gathering of demographic and contextual information by our Churches than has previously been done and exploration of potential partnerships with public bodies and voluntary organizations to meet community needs.***

Many of these important matters connecting policy and theology are currently in the remit of the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT)¹ engages in shared responses by the Methodist, United Reformed, and Baptist Churches to matters of public policy.

- ***Current work on congregational giving – related to stewardship in the URC and financial discipleship in the Methodist Church - should be developed with mission and buildings planning and linked to the ecological agenda. We recommend that these issues which strongly link policy, theology and practice, should be included in JPIT's ongoing work.***

The Methodist Church's work on Carbon Reduction has resulted in the intention to form a new Energy Service, which aims to support the Church through encouragement, expert advice, information and incentives. These principles are closely in line with the recommendations contained in this report.

- ***We recommend that planning for cultural change in our grassroots be taken forward together with the new energy service.***
- ***Further work should be done to establish whether there are any circumstances that indicate mandatory strategic planning for Church buildings which are genuinely outdated. We suggest that buildings already identified as having environmental issues should receive attention as a priority.***

¹ <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/>

6. CHURCH BUILDINGS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

We recognise the need for further work on links between mission and community, but saw these issues as complex: it was beyond the parameters of our work to make specific recommendations about the community context of our Church buildings. We view these as important issues for Church families to ascertain.

Ultimately, each Church using a building must shape that building to reflect who they are and what they are saying to their local community, taking full ownership of their building's place in their mission. This is a major undertaking, and may require property advisers and consultants to work with them for the course of the discernment and planning process. We need our personnel to determine visionary approaches through local partnerships, and thus produce a holistic mission and buildings response.

- ***Our denominations should consider how we can benefit and learn from the experience and expertise of organizations like Faithworks, OneChurch100Uses and others, whether through consultation or specific projects. We specifically note the need for our personnel to have relevant training in dealing with the full range of relevant agencies in the course of buildings-related planning.***
- ***However, we hold that it is preferable for Churches to develop the skills and vision they need rather than rely on external agencies. As such, we suggest that our denominations explore how Churches can benefit from their experience and expertise, partnering or through utilizing their skills in training and consultation.***

APPENDIX 1 – THE WAY FORWARD

If the general direction suggested in the report meets with approval, there are various ways in which this work could be taken forward.

1. PROVISIONAL CONSULTATION

The think tank has now completed its work. However, we could remain available to expand upon some points which we discussed in our work together, but which we were unable to put fully into writing due to time constraints.

2. WE RECOMMEND THAT OUR DENOMINATIONS:

- Instigate new work to encourage local Churches to understand their relationships with their buildings and to assist them in responding to the wider mission of the Church
- Set out a strategy for coordinating existing property advice within and between their governance boundaries. We would also recommend that our Churches consider the possibility of involving other denominations and forming partnerships with public and voluntary organizations in this process in the future.
- Plot a 10 year route towards the implementation of our main property proposals if agreed.
- Expand the research and further develop a Church building theology, to encourage the exchange of ideas and approaches and act as a resource and training advocate perhaps to build a web based resource for all Churches.

3. TO BUILD ON THE OUR THINK TANK'S FINDINGS, WE WOULD LIKE TO SUGGEST THAT OUR CHURCHES:

- Consider forming a follow-on group after the dissolution of this think tank (perhaps named the "Property Vision Group" or the "Building Opportunities Group"). This group could act as an executive body able to offer strategic direction and help coordinate the work of those in our denominations who will take this work forward.
- Develop guidelines (with this group's assistance) for training those responsible for approving building work in our respective denominations, and a simple guidelines for Managing Trustees and Elders regarding their role in the process.
- Create strong links between this group, (or between the officials given responsibility for this work), and a similar mission strategy group which will implement the whole community discernment of mission.
- Give specific consideration to how, on the basis of these findings, and our ecumenical approach we may **enable local Methodist and URC Churches to work together, and thus discern their shared mission and response.**
- Assess the suggestions for further research (below) to accompany the actions outlined in the report.

4. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER WORK FOLLOWING ON FROM THIS REPORT

1. We suggest that **developing our awareness of the Church and its community will require extensive consultation with community groups and providers.** We see such consultation as a key element in creating relationships with Churches' local contexts, but we also recognise the need for research in our denominations. We recommend that the follow-on group proposed above assist in developing research into
 - The distribution of Churches

- Demographics of our congregations and the local communities
 - Perceptions of our Churches and their buildings among congregations and the local community
2. We are aware of the potential links between our findings work and current work on **congregational giving** in our denominations. In the URC this is being looked at as part of a broadened understanding of stewardship; in the Methodist Church, as part of Financial Discipleship. We recommend that future work on giving and the theology of resource should:
- Be developed alongside mission and buildings planning
 - Be linked to the ecological agenda
 - Explore links between resource, ecology and the theology of land as sacred ground
 - Be taken forward in partnership with the Joint Public Issues Team's priorities
3. We recommend that future **research into the nature of our denominations' building stock** aim to establish the links between criteria of age and environmental suitability, and the true role of listed buildings and heritage. In particular, we advise that the ways in which a listed Church or a heritage site can promote or be part of contemporary mission are explored.
- We suggest that the Methodist Heritage Committee, the Connexional Team's conservation officer, and the URC's Listed Buildings Advisory Group (LBAG) cooperate to facilitate this research complementing LBAG's development of a URC policy on the role of the historic Church building in mission.
4. Regarding **broader issues in heritage**, we suggest that it is taken forward outside the Think Tank, and recommend that the URC consult with the Methodist Church on the subject when they are looking at their system and co-ordination of approach across the denomination.
5. We recognise that there is often a call to sell buildings to fund other work such as Fresh Expressions and mission and evangelism. However, we would emphasise our denominations' responsibility to ensure that this does not lead to **unsustainable funding streams**.
6. We saw the issues involved in assessing corporate money flows and strategic planning as complex and going beyond the scope of the present exercise, but we would like to suggest that research is conducted into the future funding of the new mission work we recommend in our main report, and our local Churches take ownership of the strategic vision outlined in our report, our denominations conduct research into key questions involved in sustainability, e.g.
- In planning funding for mission and the personnel to ensure Church building work is informed by mission thinking, what is the appropriate balance between funding from investment income (as currently practised by the URC Eastern Synod) and funds generated by Churches?
 - What proportion of our buildings needs to be retained to enable the radical reorganization of our building stock that may potentially be needed?
 - Does this imply the need to develop new models for Church, based on fewer but more self-sufficient buildings, able to generate energy and funds for key mission and ministry needs?

APPENDIX 2 - GOVERNANCE IN OUR DENOMINATIONS

Whilst the names, titles and some procedures differ between the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church, there are several key similarities on which to build a unified system if that would be helpful.

This Appendix outlines the governance and decision-making processes relevant to Church Buildings in our denominations so as to put future discussion of this subject in context.

1. LEGAL OWNERSHIP

This is almost invariably NOT vested in the local church community, but in a legal entity created largely for the purpose.

For the Methodist Church that body is the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP) to which the ownership of virtually all Methodist property in England, Scotland and Wales (there are parallel bodies for the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey) was transferred by enactment of The Methodist Church Act 1976. TMCP hold this property as Custodian Trustees subject to the direction of the relevant Managing Trustees.

The United Reformed Church uses regional Synod Trust Companies and so there are 13 different bodies which hold most church buildings and manses on Statutory Trusts in accordance with the United Reformed Church Acts of 1972, 1981 and 2000.

These bodies would routinely check the accuracy of legal documents and enter into key transactions such as conveyances, for local church leaders. There are a few exceptions in both denominations where property is still held in the names of individual trustees for reasons specific to that property.

In both denominations, local church leaders hold responsibility for day to day management of buildings, including routine maintenance, decoration and repairs.

- Within The Methodist Church this means the members of each Church Council, Circuit Meeting or District Trustee body, who are collectively the Managing Trustees when dealing with property issues.
- Within the United Reformed Church this means the Elders working with and on behalf of the Church Meeting and whilst much of their role and responsibilities are similar to that of Managing Trustees, decision making is shared with the Synod Trustees in accordance with the United Reformed Church Acts.

2. MAINTENANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

In both denominations, the local Church Leaders (Elders and Church Meeting or Church Council) are responsible for routine maintenance and decoration, but also for any development of buildings.

Similar web based resources are available for general guidance:

- PLATO² Property Handbook (United Reformed Church)

² PLATO stands for Property, Legal, Administrative and Trust Officers. It is a self-help network that meets twice a year and communicates by email in-between. All Synods of the United Reformed Church participate, as do some central Church staff, but the group is not formally constituted as a council of the Church and has no authority.

- Property Consents Help and Guidance (The Methodist Church)
- There is a legal requirement that every listed building undergoes a Quinquennial Inspection by an independent and qualified professional. The Methodist Church requires this of all buildings and United Reformed Church Synods generally encourage the practice also. Whilst seen by some as an unwelcome chore, it is meant positively as a set of fresh eyes may well identify developing problems that those using the premises constantly may miss through familiarity. If used correctly, it also causes the preparation of an outline budget to cover essential work over the next few years.

3. STRUCTURAL ALTERATIONS AND OTHER TRANSACTIONS

- Neither denomination has successfully defined the term 'Structural Alteration' and so it is open to different interpretations which could be a problem within any future unified process. The requirement common to both denominations is that any project involving structural alterations must be authorised by a superior church body before local church leaders implement the work and take responsibility for its successful completion.
- The process for obtaining such permission is different in each denomination:
 - The Methodist Church has recently moved from a paper based system of schedules designed to attain central 'Approval' to a web based process whereby an appropriate body in each district or a similar body acting on behalf of The Methodist Council confirm that the proposals of the appropriate managing trustees for a local property are consonant with the purposes of and mission strategies of the wider Connexion by giving them their 'Consent'. This change supports the belief that important policy decisions about property are best made locally where there is likely to be a better understanding of the local circumstances, particularly the mission challenge, than a central body can ever hope to have.
 - In the United Reformed Church approvals systems vary around the Synods, with some Synod Trustee bodies taking a more proactive role than others, but the role of Church Meeting is crucial in all decision making in accordance with both the legal and theological framework within which the Church operates.
- Similarly, both denominations require local church leaders to seek Consent or other permission for transactions involving:
 - The acquisition of a new interest in a property.
 - The giving up of the whole or part of an interest in church owned property.
 - A proposal to share a building.
 - Listed buildings or buildings in a Conservation Area.

4. MANAGEMENT OF FUNDS

There are differences between the denominations, and indeed within the United Reformed Church, in the way in which proceeds of the sale of church property are managed.

- Within The Methodist Church, managing trustees have always been able to spend income as they saw fit, but spending of capital was strictly controlled. However, since Conference 2009, they also have full authority to spend capital on buildings or any other projects, provided that the purpose is within the purposes of the Church.
- Whenever Methodist buildings are sold, the net proceeds of sale are subject to a levy to the Connexional Priorities Fund, unless the sale proceeds are required to fund a linked project to buy or build a replacement property. This applies equally to churches and manses.

- The ambition of this procedure was to build up a central fund that could distribute money to situations where a mission objective had been identified but funds were not available.
- Currently, the levy is set at 20% on the first £100K of any net proceeds and 40% on amounts above that.
- The United Reformed Church is served by 13 area Synods who currently have varying methods for dealing with the proceeds of sale of church buildings in accordance with the United Reformed Church Acts.
- In 1990 the Methodist Conference and all (the then) 12 Provincial Synods of the United Reformed Church adopted the advice of a consultation of representatives of the Provinces and the Methodist Property Division that capital contributions by one church towards a building scheme on a shared chapel owned by the other church should be made as non-returnable grants. This is worth remembering and does demonstrate that it is possible to move forward by consensus without varying current governance practices as such.

APPENDIX 3 – A NOTE ON PUBLIC SERVICES CO-LOCATION

Recently, in the House of Lords, the Revd Lord Mawson (a URC minister) asked whether Her Majesty's Government have considered co-locating public services in under-used Church buildings. The potential of co-location to bring the Church back to the centre of community life and engage with its communities was debated.

"If the church stops hiding behind committees and archdeacons, and instead shows strong business-like leadership, it can play an important neutral role in bringing partners to the table and in opening up conversations with the health provider, the local authority, the school, the housing provider and the shop." (*Lords Hansard, 22 Feb 2010*)

Partnerships with Local Authorities, local housing associations, public services and voluntary organisations are strongly advocated, breaking down barriers and pooling resources. The creation of social cohesion along with a spirit of enterprise presents an opportunity to restore life into underused assets and make more efficient use of limited funds.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has expressed its support for community focussed organisations who act as focal points to identify needs of the communities often not met by the public or private sector. Churches host such enterprises as cafes, nurseries, playgroups, counselling, shops, libraries, post offices, police help points, drop-ins for youth or elderly people, exhibitions, health centres, drama or concert performances and many more.

Neither the Government nor the think tank expect to be able to transform things overnight, and it could be argued that a solely top-down approach would be counter-productive. However, partnership at a local level can be made most effective by policies which give support and help people to change cultures and the way in which they think.

APPENDIX 4 – A ROADMAP FOR EXPLORATIONS BASED UPON OUR FINDINGS

(FOUNDATIONS FOR A VISIONARY APPROACH TO CHURCH BUILDING STRATEGIES)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 ROADMAP

The Church Buildings think tank's findings and recommendations have focused on general principles and work areas where Churches can work together, specifically the Methodist Church and the URC. But we considered it would be useful to present some of our more detailed reflections on how these recommendations might be implemented in practice, to assist decisions on how to develop the next stage of this work.

1.2 CONTEXT

If the proposals contained in the main report meet with approval, persons and groups charged with the responsibility of taking this work forward will benefit from a roadmap of options to consider. This paper presents a small number of options for taking forward the principles and recommendations outlined in the main report. It is not our intention to provide definitive solutions to any issue but to suggest areas for further investigation, and we are aware that further research may suggest different approaches towards fulfilling the same objectives.

1.3 CURRENT PROGRAMMES AND GUIDANCE

We recognise the wide variety of programmes for mission and development and guidance processes adopted over the last 10 years by both denominations, some shared with others. We suggest that, as part of the recommendations in The Way Forward, Section C:

- i. a catalogue of all mission and building focused programmes and information is produced both as a resource and as a means of understanding how they interrelate.
- ii. this catalogue assess existing programmes against the recommendations and findings we have advanced, specifically noting the need for greater recognition of the part that buildings and facilities play in conditioning the response from the Local Church family.

2. A MISSION-CENTRED APPROACH TO BUILDINGS

We have commented extensively on the relationship between the need for new strategic thinking on buildings, and key features of our governance structures in Sections 2 and 3 of the main report. This part of the report summarises some of our further thinking around useful perspectives as this work is taken forward.

2.1 THE NEED FOR DEVELOPING A JOINT LOCAL MISSION STRATEGY

The Church's response to its mission has traditionally been focused upon the local Church family. Denominational structures and governance principles have grown to support and reinforce this understanding. Thus, the wider Church recognises the full breadth of our communities' spiritual and pastoral needs, the inequalities and other social problems of our generation and continuously creates report and initiatives to generate a suitable response. But the local Church, responsible for undertaking this work frequently feels under resourced and quite naturally develops a much more limited view of mission.

The think tank noted extreme cases where this leads to congregations 'reinforcing their doors and windows' to protect them from the results of this mismatch between expectation, resource and

visionary engagement with mission, and observed that:

- In practice this focus can lead to independent but overlapping local projects, perpetuating the former barriers between local Church families which can almost appear as competing interests.
- This division of Christian people and financial resource between local Churches has the understandable impact of creating a restricted or selective view of the Church families' response to the wider needs of the community in terms of spiritual guidance, a caring and healing ministry and providing a support network to both start and facilitate the spiritual journey of individuals.
- The long established practice, determined by procedure and governance of Investing in individual denominational projects can result in funds not always being used in the most effective way and perpetuates the barriers between local Church families.

2.2 THE ROLE OF LOCAL CHURCH

We saw a great need to encourage a change of heart and mind to move away from 'competitive mission'. Recognising that all projects should be mission led, there is a clear need for all local Church families to work together. Our denominations should consider how we might encourage managing trustees, Elders and Church Councils to look boldly into the future and to have the courage to 'dream dreams' and develop visions of a world in which the Church and community work hand in hand?

This is in many respects a matter of 'culture change' but in practice this is the key element in the success of all the proposals contained in the think tank's work.

2.3 HELPING LOCAL CHURCHES GROW TOWARDS A MISSION-SHAPED FUTURE

We feel that the focus upon mission 'delivery' should move to the whole of the local Christian community who can be encouraged and empowered to make an honest assessment of the community needs, not limited by the work they feel able to handle as individual Churches. Developing a real understanding of these needs must surely lead Churches to consider responses that make the most use of all of the available people and building resources in the Christian community. To make such decisions and see them through to fulfillment, a church needs to be strong, confident and energetic for the timescale might cover several years. This requires:

- Helping individuals gain a fuller understanding of the breadth of responsibility they take on in agreeing to take some form of leadership within the Church family. This should emphasise the need to be visionary and to understand that much may have to be given up to facilitate a response
- Encouraging Churches to become less self preserving and to leave behind the inherited desire to maintain and protect the establishment they inherited.
- Developing a real desire for reaching out through a healing and caring ministry
- Understanding how the processes of reaching out and Church development works in individual Churches. Once understood, buildings and projects can be shaped to support this process
- Churches either choose to address and respond to the significant community and social needs or become ever more introverted and reinforce their buildings to separate themselves from the impact of these problems.

We realise that this approach is radical and challenging and do not mean to claim that all other traditional approaches must be jettisoned. However the kind of cultural change the think tank is advocating would benefit from a strong call to a creative and daring view of local mission, and we believe that this should form the context for our denominations' messaging in the coming years.

2.4 PARTNERSHIP

In addition to a shared discernment by the Christian community to establish local mission needs this can be carried out in partnership with:

- The community
- Mission enablers and training officers from the denominations involved
- Christian agencies experienced in this field, who may be able to provide particular help in realising shared solutions
- Local service providers and Social Services who may become partners in resulting projects, bearing in mind that the Church has always been the largest national supplier of 'social services'
- Schools and education authorities
- Local employers
- Police

As well as being an intrinsic part of fulfilling our Churches' mission in the community, a partnership approach has the advantage of preventing the development of introspective Church cultures leading to entrenched positions and reluctance to face changing contexts. It is often the case that this culture of reinforcement becomes the main focus of attention. This can go on for an extended period during which the church continues to decline to the point when it is too late, and there is insufficient membership, resource or energy left to consider anything radical.

In areas where the Christian community is represented by a single Church family or a geographically wide spread presence this process is still relevant, the greatest difference may be in the resulting response which may generate more radical approaches to being Church, perhaps approaches which will free the Church family of the burden of building 'ownership' or share the buildings available with the community or other agencies.

2.5 JOINT IMPLEMENTATION OF MISSION STRATEGIES

Having developed a local mission strategy in partnership it will be for the local Churches to work together to develop a response. This can take a variety of forms, for example:

- A coordinated response where each Church family develops an agreed area of work, remaining as independent families linked by a common shared project. This approach may struggle to justify sufficient funding to enable each family to develop their buildings as required and maintain them all as sustainable institutions.
- A shared response where the Churches jointly develop a buildings and facilities development plan to facilitate the ministry which will then be implemented over time and will probably involve a degree of rationalisation and recycling of funds from disposal of buildings or parts to develop a sustainable Christian community.

2.6 FROM DECLINE TO REVIVAL

We view the potential for local, mission-fired sharing is as central. All decisions about what to do with Church buildings are made locally rather than centrally. For example, the Methodist Church has always held the view that building activity must be in support of local mission; and its 2008 Conference resolved that consent to any proposals will also be made in the local District. So, the notion of central regulation has been abolished and so any hint at compulsion from 'The Centre' would be most unwelcome in Methodism. It would be equally unwelcome in the URC for similar reasons.

This leads us to underline the need for more support for those individuals who can influence local decisions, such as ministers and (in The Methodist Church) District Development Enablers. These Local Church Leaders could help managing trustees and Elders to make bolder decisions about property development, or in some cases, closure. It is often the case that in the absence of a major traumatic event such as a collapsing roof, fire, or financial crisis, local churches feel comfortable in their existing situation and it is easier to drift than face up to a radical change, until it is too late.

The way that Churches can move beyond confining attitudes will differ according to local circumstances, and the think tank is not in a position to make specific recommendations. However, we note for further consideration the work that Blyth URC Church has done with the assistance of One Church 100 Uses, which has transformed the situation and created a viable community enterprise, , and we recommend that Methodism consider the possibility of this kind of approach. Discussion with community partners, organisations like OneChurch100Uses and relevant training will be important parts of our Churches' growth towards a freer and more dynamic response to their mission.

2.7 FACILITATING AND SUPPORTING SHARED MISSION:

The kind approach we recommend that our denominations take to Churches, based on encouragement and empowerment, will vary according to local context, but we hold that it will enable congregations to think about certain key issues (amongst others):

- An understanding of why we reach out. Arguably, if it is for 'us' - to grow our Church family and keep it viable - then it will be very difficult to generate true sharing as others join on our terms with no expectation of change as a result. If it is for those we serve locally, then we have already developed an acceptance that the Church family has to change each time another joins. This is a fundamental building block in the process of true resource sharing.
- Tapping into local congregations' genuine desire for a healing and caring ministry, which as it is naturally shared can grow spontaneously.
- Encouragement to break down the existing barriers through shared local support structures, shared ministry, shared financial support
- Explorations of denominational harmony, covenant or even unity
- A move away in all departments of the denominations from seeing local mission as only doing what we are able or have facilities to do. What is seen as the holistic mission of the Church at Denominational level must be continued through into the local Church. A Churches mission then becomes their response to the mission of the Church
- Encouraging a 'do what you do do well' approach and the satisfaction which grows from that. It will be important not to raise the guilt complex to another level.

*(He couldn't move a mountain
Or pull down a big oak tree
But my daddy became a mighty big man
With this simple philosophy*

*Chorus
Do what you do, do well boy
Do what you do, do well
Give your love and all your of heart
And do what you do, do well)³*

2.8 ELEMENTS OF SHARED NATIONAL AND LOCAL WORK:

As this work develops organically, we see the potential for our denominations to assist its wider reach through establishing a shared National and local programme

- To make joint assessments of the local social needs and problems requiring Christian healing and caring ministry. This must include the major social issues which we normally discount as being too big to address.
- Provide real shared denominational help to the groups of Churches to develop a mission programme as a response which utilises the shared people and financial resources.
- Provide assistance to develop a long term strategy for developing and achieving the shared

³ Do What You Do, Do Well (Ned Miller)

- property which will provide the facilities required.
- Put into place means by which funds can be released from 'redundant' local and other buildings and create the circumstances where they can be invested where needed. This will enable the offer of really significant financial support for shared projects, particularly those that involve rationalisation to enable Church families to believe that they can dare to dream.
- Actively discourage any investment in Church families who do not fully embrace this process where possible.

This will require the unlocking of denominational trust barriers featured elsewhere to enable assets to be combined and investments made in other denominations buildings. This may require a reasonable time scale for the principles to be accepted and so work should start now.

The joint follow-on group whose existence is proposed in The Way Forward, Section C, would logically take responsibility for comparing and contrasting the different governance issues to do with property ownership in both denominations, and develop recommendations for harmonising our processes into an effective shared system

3. CREATING SUSTAINABLE CHURCH FAMILIES

3.1 TOWARDS VIABLE MODELS OF SUSTAINABILITY

We have recommended that more work is carried out in gathering and compiling financial information in Section 1.4 of the main report. Amongst other advantages, this would help meet the widely held desire to achieve a situation where all Churches who occupy their own buildings can achieve full sustainability. This would mean they were able from their own income to properly maintain and alter in response to needs and for this process to account for a portion of the total income which allows them to properly fund ministry and their mission and outreach.

As the governance structure of both denominations assumes that this process will be determined locally and therefore it is difficult for the national Church to be able to plan or unduly influence this process to achieve a sustainable distribution if this were to be considered desirable.

As membership of our two denominations has declined over several years, similarly to other Churches, the funds charged as a levy on sale proceeds and therefore available for redistribution through grants has grown faster, than demand. This process does mean that significant funds from the sale of redundant buildings have become available to help with funding for mission projects anywhere in the Church, not necessarily the location where property has been sold.

Over time and with longer term planning buildings and sites of Methodist, URC and other denominations will become available for disposal and the proceeds will become available for reinvestment in creating Sustainable Christian communities.

The way in which local sharing will direct the reinvestment of resources is hard to predict at this stage. The natural result of Churches being viewed as superfluous to collective requirements and funds becoming available will not necessarily result in reducing the number of Churches, but probably involves new patterns of

- More sustainable buildings
- Fewer sole-owned buildings, as sharing develops

The full implications of sustainability are complex and go beyond our current remit, but a simplistic view of an approach based on these principles would suggest the following steps:

1. Church families growing and joining to create sustainable communities.
2. Recognising that particular ministries may need to be funded from wider sources to achieve sustainability

3. Assessing the sustainability of Fresh expression ministries which may not initially be self financing.
4. Finding methods of placing the proceeds that will become available over time through the sale of Methodist, URC and other sites.
5. Over time and with longer term planning buildings and sites of Methodist, URC and other denominations will become available for disposal and the proceeds will become available for reinvestment in creating Sustainable Christian communities.

And it will imply

6. A wider acceptance of the principle of resource sharing within and between Denominations for the benefit of the Kingdom.

(The current localised recycling reflecting property values and Church distribution will lead to a patchy result. We hold that denomination-wide procedures for recycling funds be further investigated, as outlined in Sections 4 and 5 of Appendix 4. This will enable a fairer approach to taking a slice of this money to fund manse and retired housing and pension).

3.2 SUSTAINABILITY AND THE USE OF BUILDING FUNDS FOR EXTERNAL PURPOSES

The think tank was concerned that current mechanisms whereby pensions, building maintenance and revenue funding are topped up by a levy on the proceeds of property sales is effectively living off our capital. As well as undermining faith in the energy of our congregations' ability to finance their own mission and investment in the wider Church, this policy is probably unsustainable for the denominations in the longer term.

We suggest that funds released from investments should be applied to premises and project pump priming rather than revenue. This needs to be connected with a major review of giving to establish a course towards a better balance between funding and running costs. We consider that this involves:

- creating a picture of a Church community achieving this balance as a target for others
- moving support for mission projects from investment funding to revenue funding as soon as is practical without endangering worthwhile initiatives.

4. IDEAS AND APPROACHES RELEVANT TO CULTURAL CHANGE

The think tank anticipates that the shared forum advocated in Section 4.2 of the main report will make the sharing of expertise and wisdom easier, and offers some preliminary perspectives to contribute to this work below.

4.1 FIRST QUESTION: BEING MINDFUL OF THE PURPOSE OF OUR BUILDINGS

As noted in Section 5 of the main report, we recommend that Churches ask themselves "what is our building for?" and even "do we need a building?"

Owning a building is a corporate statement and offers the opportunity for control over the shaping influences of the buildings we all occupy. Most nomadic Churches seem to naturally move towards creating their own 'temple' so building ownership and what comes with it seems to be a natural 'corporate' desire.

A building can be a powerful statement and resource for the community and the Kingdom. However there are issues related to ownership which should be recognised as Churches think through their work:

- National and locally across the denominations the significant investment of time and money in buildings and its resulting fragmentation needs to be challenged: is it the most effective use of limited resources?

- There are some outreach projects where the association with a Church building is too great a barrier to the effectiveness of the work.
- The ongoing capital and emotional investment in buildings can generate resistance to alter and change particularly in relation to relocation. Are we tying ourselves to dead stone to the detriment of our living mission?
- Buildings and establishment issues can be a significant barrier to greater ecumenical partnerships and local growing together.

Various potential gains from congregations adopting a more flexible approach to procuring the facilities are mentioned in this report. Two of the most obvious and encouraging to local Churches may be

- Buildings that are more responsive to change
- Capital may be freed up for the further resourcing of mission.

4.2 WORKING WITH CHURCHES

'We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us': Winston Churchill.

The think tank noted that, just as our understanding of being Church and how we organise ourselves as a Church family is shaped by our inherited structures and denominational theology our approach to mission, patterns of Worship and reaching out are strongly shaped by the location and nature of the buildings we occupy. This section offers some preliminary thoughts to assist Churches to become conscious and thus freer to choose whether to adopt the traditional approach or not in each case, rather than imitate blindly.

The majority of Church families occupy buildings largely constructed and shaped to suit previous generations of Christians who may in some cases have had an understanding of being Church that was different from ours. We can be restricted in what we do and shaped in our understanding of Church and our continuing mission by the location, accommodation and nature of these buildings. It is widely accepted that we need to recognise these influences when planning alterations or new buildings.

We set out below some of the aspects of Church buildings which we suggest need to be recognised when seeking to achieve effective and responsive buildings.

- **The nature of our process of reaching out and growing as a Church:** If we make a conscious effort to understand how this process works in our Church family we can then review the layout and nature of the building to establish if it hinders or assists. Many Churches now develop social spaces to increase the opportunity to bump into, welcome or interact with the community through activities and by the way the building is entered and used, but this only works if this process is understood and lies at the heart of the way the Church reaches out.
- **Location:** Much of our distribution and geographical location within communities is inherited, perhaps driven by factors and community shaping which no longer exists. Continued ill-considered investment in particular locations can be less beneficial and an honest and perhaps painful assessment needs to be made of the right location for each aspect of the work of the whole Church locally before further investment maintains the inertia. Data is available within each denomination about the sizes of worshipping communities and the buildings they occupy. This could be used to create joint assessments of the nature and scale of potential duplication of buildings in some locations.
- **What the building is saying:** We are all very used to judging individuals and organisations by the nature of the buildings they occupy. The nature of the building and the way it is looked after can speak much louder than the communication efforts of local Churches. We suggest that the following are relevant areas to consider:

- The state of repair and nature of the building can be seen as a reflection upon the nature and conviction of the Church family.
 - Does the building and particularly the worship space speak of a response to God's love which is relevant today?
 - Does the building speak of an outreaching community in the way it welcomes, confuses or resists visitors?
 - Does the building look closed or the access unwelcoming during the week when the surrounding area is open for business. Is the Christian faith only relevant on a Sunday morning?
 - Does the nature of the building, its state of repair and its furnishings speak of the past or does it speak of a faith still relevant today?
 - Are building users aware that this is the Church family home, or is it a public hall? Seriously consider the communication process what you may be saying when looking upon letting the community use the buildings as outreach. Community access via the back door speaks volumes although often not to us.
 - Does the building speak of hope or despair?
 - Is the building a beacon of hope and refuge or a blot?
- **Change:** Change is a significant factor and opportunity in the Christian journey. Flexibility in layout, ease of adaptation to new uses will improve the opportunities for accommodating future changes in the Church. (It is widely recognised that the Church is in a period of significant change and this will impact upon all aspects of Church life)
 - **Expert advice:** It should be recognised that building technology and planning advice is not always the same as building design and theological advice. Property advice therefore falls into two categories:
 - Maintenance, repair and asset protection or facility management. This needs to be supported by good technically qualified advisors (but it is often difficult to recognise when you are perhaps out of your depth)
 - Building design, theology and development advice which may not need to be offered by the same personnel as the first category.

4.3 TRADITION AND HERITAGE

The roots and heritage of both the Methodist Church and the URC are expressed in many of their buildings. There is both a need to preserve the important part of this heritage to enable the story to be seen and interpreted whilst enabling buildings also to be responsive to current needs.

Church buildings are often associated with community, family and Church family memories, particularly relating to significant milestones and the association with past family members. We all relate to different and particular aspects of Church buildings and furnishings. The slow to evolve Church building can be seen as a refuge in an ever changing world and we are tempted to hold onto the statement of stability longer and more possessively than we perhaps should.

- If the building you occupy has a recognised heritage role to play or if it embodies historic fabric and fittings which are protected by 'Listing', which aspects are helpful and facilitate the Church family and which do not (setting aside the potential difficulties in responding to this which can be used as a reason not to consider change)?
- Do you see your mission as holding onto a building as a community resource and pattern of being Church which is an unchanging refuge?
- If so is this sustainable in the longer term?
- Are the building and furnishing elements that the Church family feel they need to

preserve purely a family matter. Will their preservation become a barrier to others joining the family or do they make a positive contribution to reaching out. Be objective?

- What are you prepared to give up, to achieve your needs as described elsewhere?

4.4 COLLECTIVE THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

- We would encourage a greater understanding of the theology of Church buildings as this is almost always lacking in any programme addressing outreach and planning for the future. This needs to be provided in conjunction with outreach and mission advice and we would urge a much greater emphasis placed upon creative and well considered building Theological advice. It may be that training schemes for those involved with offering local advice would be beneficial.
- We recognise that there may perhaps be as many theologies of Church buildings as there are theologians. However that supports the need for our Churches to engage theologically with buildings. The think tank's desire is that any building used by our Churches reflects and expresses the local Church's understanding of itself and its mission

5. THE ROLE OF REDUNDANT BUILDINGS

Beyond the process of recycling which we envisage as developing naturally from local sharing, we considered cases in which buildings become genuinely redundant.

5.1 SHARING AND DECLINE

We recognise decline, and planning for it ('managed decline') as the 'negative' aspect of this process. And whilst we foresee the potential of great growth in Church families through fresh expressions and less conventional ways of being Church, this may not produce a greater need for the existing building stock, nor the income to sustain extensive buildings of their own.]

Generating a suitable approach to redundant building disposal:

- The message of an empty Church or an unsuitable change of use should be avoided if possible.
- It is not easy to see how buildings can be 'gifted' to suitable community users and still maintain the recycling of funding. Unless this approach has real mission advantages.
- Does the Church become a developer of housing and commercial buildings? Is the developers risk too great for the Charity to accept or should we with good advice be able to benefit from this approach?

Think tank participants noted that moves towards our denominations becoming commercial developers raise challenging issues, and we were reluctant to pursue this area in depth. However, we recognised that it is important to remember that this is an option that may have a significant role in an entrepreneurial culture which interacts with our communities in contemporary and relevant ways.

5.2 SHARING WITH THE COMMUNITY

We have discussed the broader issues of locating our mission in the local community, and also the possibilities for an entrepreneurial attitude to our buildings and resources, in Section 5 of the Main Report. We gave careful consideration to the motivations and practicalities of such gifting, but concluded that further work was needed before any clear principles could be discerned.

The Church holds its buildings in trust for the charitable purposes of the Church. Gifting parts of Church buildings for community use can be considered in what is perhaps a small minority of cases, just as raising income from buildings by community lettings may be a necessary part of the journey to sustainability. However, the part this plays in responding to the mission strategy must be carefully and critically considered: if the Church plays no part in touching the lives or meeting with those who use

the buildings in such ways, we must question the relevance of this process to the mission-focus we are advocating in this report.

Moving to a position where Church buildings are only used for reaching out in loving and healing service in whatever form this takes must be considered to be a key aim.

There is significant external funding available that can help building work but almost inevitably the main purpose of the Project must be 'Community Use' rather than Church, which perhaps underlines the importance of some of what is said above.]

6. ISSUES FOR OUR SHARED BUILDINGS EXPERTISE

We have identified the potential of sharing property expertise within the URC and Methodist Churches. There are several specific points we would like to note:

Property advice falls into 2 categories:

- Maintenance, repair and asset managers. There is a danger of offering well meaning but perhaps unhelpful advice at local level. Advice needs to be supported by good technically qualified advisors and does suffer from the commonly held belief that a DIY grasp of building technology and a real understanding of building fabric, particularly more historic fabric is all that is needed.
- Building design and theology advice to Churches which enable the full potential of existing and new buildings to be achieved.

In line with the collective mission –led approach we have advocated, we note the need for advisors who have developed a sense of buildings theology and can work with Churches locally and encourage visionary thinking. Inappropriate concepts and initial briefing information can prevent visionary thinking: these would restrict the work of the Church for another generation.