



MISSION IN DONCASTER TOWN CENTRE FEASIBILITY REPORT

1 November 2021

Neil Harland, Mission Development Support Worker



DECISIONS TO BE MADE AFTER CONSIDERING THIS REPORT AFFECT CIRCUIT EMPLOYEES AND CURRENT AND POTENTIAL FUTURE USERS OF THE PRIORY CENTRE BUILDING. IT IS THEREFORE CONFIDENTIAL TO SHEFFIELD DISTRICT LEADING TEAM, DONCASTER CIRCUIT MEETING, FINANCE AND PROPERTY GROUP AND CIRCUIT LEADERSHIP TEAM, FEASIBILITY GROUP MEMBERS UNTIL AFTER DECISIONS TAKEN HAVE BEEN PROPERLY COMMUNICATED

CONTEXT

In December 2020, the Doncaster Circuit Meeting and the Church Council of Priory Place Methodist Church requested permission for the congregation of Priory Place Methodist Church to cease to meet and the chapel on Printing Office Street to be sold, but that mission in the town centre would continue to be maintained by alternative means. Permission to sell the building was granted by the District Leading Team, provided that feasibility review of future options for mission in the town centre first be undertaken and reflected on.

A town centre community outreach worker has been employed since November 2019 (therefore primarily during the covid pandemic).

It was initially anticipated that this review would be completed by September, but the extended national lockdown prevented this from being possible. Meeting new people and observing what is happening in the town centre was a slow process when we were not permitted to physically gather or travel. A brief update explaining the process and progress to date was prepared in July.

PROCESS

A feasibility group was formed, chaired by Neil Harland, Mission Development Support Worker. The group has met nine times, with numerous conversations with other parties being held by members of the group. Strong and differing opinions were held by members of the group about models of mission and attitudes to risk. This report written by Neil Harland attempts to fairly represent and reflect on these discussions whilst making the authors own recommendations and observations. Some of these are specific to a town centre context, others will helpfully be relevant to other future initiatives of the circuit.

Feasibility group members:

- Doncaster Circuit: Rev Tom Read, Rev Jonathan Bellfield, Rev Christine Sutherby, Aimee Rodham, Tom Sykes, Alan Mendum, Eric Hepworth,
- Town centre lay employees: McCauley Allcock, Charlotte Langston
- District: Neil Harland (Mission Development Support), Caroline Langston (The Foundry, High Street Centre), Rev Jonathan Haigh (Victoria Hall)

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

Town centre mission is not easy. It requires coming to know and being trusted by a broad spectrum of people, who have in common a place where they spend significant time, but often strongly differing life experiences and reasons for being present. As with many large town centres, central Doncaster is a place of **CONTRASTS** and contradictions. It is a place that belongs to many people, but one that we have to travel to be present in.

The nature of town centre ministry – the diversity of people to interact with, expectation of partnership working, presentation of challenging behaviour, and need to be present across the day and week – mean that it invariably requires **PROFESSIONAL STAFFING**. Town centre mission is not especially cheap. But effective town centre mission cannot simply be outsourced to a paid worker. It needs connection to the wider life of the circuit, and **PARTICIPATION** from a team of circuit members.

Despite costing money, energy and going beyond comfort zones, Doncaster town centre can be a place of fruitful mission, and an opportunity to bring Christ to people through a part of their life **BEYOND** the fraction spent close to their home (assuming this is near one of your churches). The following pages outline a range of **FOOTHOLDS** you already have, people who want to work with you, people in relationship with Methodists, and other opportunities you can explore. Not all of these will be possible, but within them there is more than enough to get started.

Echoing a message I heard right at the start of the feasibility review, a fresh start for town centre mission should have the **AIM OF CREATING A NEW CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY** (i.e. a new church). Because you are starting afresh, albeit with some doors already ajar, this should follow a patient but always intentional process of loving, serving, building community, exploring discipleship, and only then starting to see church taking place. This will be a long, if sometimes exhilarating, climb. In your favour, you are already in the foothills, and have happened across a community outreach worker with cutting edge pioneer training as your guide.

I have set out in this report **FOUNDATIONS** that you will need in place for town centre mission, or any alternative venture, to be fruitful. These are all essential, and none will happen without your deliberate intent. Some are conspicuously absent at present. This most pressing is to bring together a small team to lead this work alongside McCauley. This **TEAM** must forge a shared plan and expect to be amongst those rolling their sleeves up to implement it. Some people may need to be released from other roles to concentrate on this. The team must be highly accountable to CLT, but equally must know that they will be given **FREEDOM AND TIME** to act. They will need to **PRAY** regularly, and know that the rest of the circuit is praying for them.

What to do about a town centre venue for mission is an important question, and proposed sale of a building precipitated this report. To build Christian community in the town centre you need **SOMEWHERE TO SPEND TIME** with people and a time and setting that works for them. However where to meet is ultimately a secondary tactical question, and should flow from who and how you will prioritise being with. I have laid out the main possible options, all of which have advantages and disadvantages. On balance my recommendation is that retaining ownership of the Priory Centre/ Priory Place building if possible would be the most effective and efficient course in the long term – landlords are rarely worse off than tenants. Yes the building is in a bit of a state, but no worse than has been turned around elsewhere. In the short term the costs of different options are potentially more similar than at first might be expected. But to re-iterate, following a contemporary missional model and addressing the foundations will be what determines fruitfulness.

In a world of deficit church and circuit budgets, cost of investment in town centre mission is a relevant factor. Over the next five years, you should expect to spend in the region of £125k, in addition to costs of a venue (which will vary depending on the choices you make). In a world of declining circuit membership, the **COST OF NOT INVESTING** in bold new ways of growing disciples is also a relevant factor. A new Christian community would not become financial self-sufficient within five years, but would start showing signs of doing so. I have also suggested other potential income sources.

Is a new chapter of Methodist mission in Doncaster town centre feasible? One of the reasons why the demise of Priory Place Methodist Church was felt so widely and so painfully was its role as a **SENDING CHURCH**. Members of Priory Place went out from their established familiar congregation of hundreds, using the missional tools of their day, and planted new-style churches amongst the communities of the new estates. Some of you now worship in these. As a circuit you have hundreds of members, you have access to today's missional expertise, in the town centre you have many communities who will bid you welcome, and an opportunity to make a fresh start. You also have fellow practitioners in the Methodist City Centre Network, a district which has pledged to support you *For Such A Time As This*, and a Connexional church gearing up to accelerate hundreds of *new places for new people*.

WHY DONCASTER TOWN CENTRE?

the worst of times...

Even before covid the centre of Doncaster contained some of the most deprived areas in the UK. Creation of Lakeside retail and leisure complex, and relocation of Doncaster College to north of Frenchgate has pulled custom from town centre shops, particularly in the Waterdale Centre. Concentration of employment in Amazon and other distribution businesses around the motorway network also creates a car-focussed culture, building on the localised nature of mining culture. Before the pandemic the town centre already had a high proportion of charity shops, pawnbrokers and discount stores. Recent loss of Debenhams and other stores will put further pressure on those trying to earn a living in the town centre.

Doncaster town centre has the highest rate of crime in South Yorkshire. Drug taking remains a persistent problem. *Everyone In* provided only brief respite for the regular rough sleepers to be found around the Priory Centre and elsewhere.

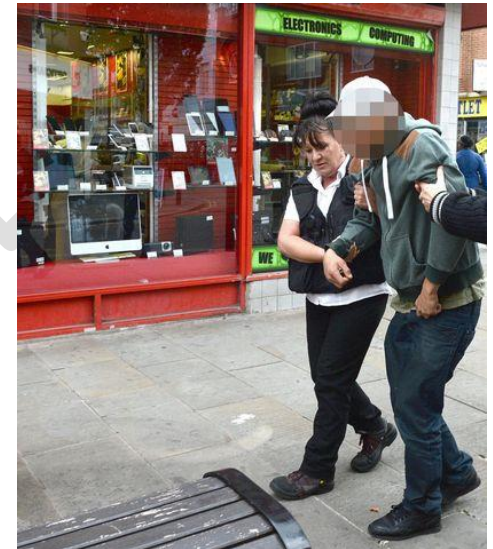
Despite these pressures, the town centre remains a place that many people spend time in across the week. People who work there, in retail or offices. People who shop there, out of habit or because they are reliant on public transport. Students of Doncaster College. People who drink there – in the bars or on the streets. People who live there.

Is now the time to be stepping away from people to be found in the town centre?

...and the best of times

Town centres have always been places of innovation and re-invention. Despite the growth of digital life, the centre of a borough of 300,000 people will remain a confluence of civic, cultural and commercial life. A place where people want and need to spend time.

Doncaster MBC has been for some years alert to the need to refresh the town centre, and have embarked on an ambitious investment in bricks and mortar. This is already visible through CAST, Wool Market, Savoy cinema, Danum Gallery, UTC, Doncaster College Hub, Civic Office, city gateway (station) etc. The recent successful bid to the UK government's *Towns Fund* will extend this programme. These won't solve all problems, but such concentration of public funds means that the town centre must increasingly become a local "destination" over the coming years. As I finalised this review, Doncaster MBC announced that they are once again [applying for city status](#) under the caption "a city in all but name", reinforcing this agenda.



Numbers of people living in the town centre will increase in the coming years, ranging from prestige marina flats to repurposing of spaces above shops. In a carbon conscious world, living within walking distance of public transport networks, meeting places and cultural amenities will become increasingly desirable.

The public square

Most people in Doncaster are not members of a church. Most are not looking for a church. If we are to engage with people not yet affiliated to our churches, we must meet them where they are and be church in those places and situations. In some cases this can be through planned programmes of community building activities, located in our own local neighbourhood chapels with purposeful invitation to deeper engagement. This is happening in some places for some people in the circuit, for example in work with young families.

However this tends to engage only through the part of people's lives that is their residentially based leisure time. The circuit already invests in taking church beyond your walls through initiatives such as Baby Basics Doncaster and your RE Team. Mission in the town centre offers opportunity to mission with people from the full breadth of Doncaster as they engage in different spheres of life. A place where wealth, poverty, power, marginalisation, education, leisure, government, justice, commerce and leisure rub shoulders.

Doncaster circuit is not alone in articulating that the town centre is a place you feel called to grow church, in a new way. Methodists in Leeds and Nottingham have sold church buildings and are setting out to grow new city centre congregations in new ways. In Sheffield the Victoria Hall congregation has effectively restarted from scratch, and Sheffield Circuit has appointed a city centre deacon to work beyond these congregations. Birmingham are about to employ a pioneer to set up church amongst the street community.



Lakeside Village

During our feasibility work, the question has been asked "Why not Lakeside? That is where all the young people go now." Whilst this may be true, Lakeside is essentially a private square, not a public one. Members of the public are invited in by the proprietor for the specific purpose of spending money. Unlike the complex ecosystem of the town centre, there are limited cracks in the pavement for church to organically grow. There could be some missional possibilities in Lakeside, with permission of the proprietors – chaplaincy, worship in coffee shops, a megachurch may be able to convert a retail unit for worship funded by commercial activities. This may not be mutually exclusive to mission in the town centre but is a narrower seam to mine.

VISION – WHAT DOES FRUITFUL TOWN CENTRE MISSION LOOK LIKE?

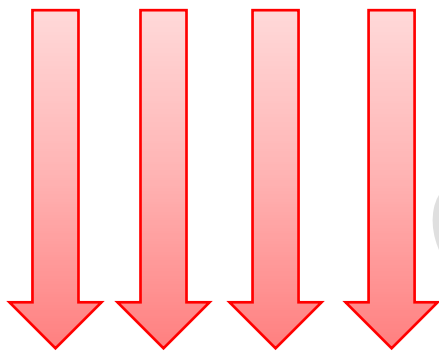
The current circuit mission strategy is based around Our Calling, and considers “intentional evangelism as its first priority”. The Circuit Leadership Team and feasibility group have articulated at that following the ceasing to meet of Priory Place, **CREATING NEW CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY** needs to be part of a wholistic distinctive Methodist town centre mission, otherwise we will likely duplicate work already being done by other agencies. Starting new churches (*New Places for New People*), including replanting into existing properties, is a key theme of Connexional *God for All* strategy for Evangelism & Growth, and shown by research as one of the most effective means of growing church.

On a seemingly more prosaic level, if town centre mission is worth doing, it has to be done for the long term. The circuit cannot afford to pour endless resources into town centre mission, and so whatever is done needs to work towards sustaining itself.

I am aware that you are planning to refresh your circuit strategy in 2022/23 and this conversation runs ahead of that process. Unfortunately waiting until 2023 to set a course for the town centre will mean that current relationships and funding are wasted.

As described above Doncaster town centre is a dynamic mix of people from different places, visiting for different purposes, and with different frequencies. In this context, being church means identifying a range of specific town centre subcommunities, and then following a process of parallel relational church-building with each, rather than putting all missional eggs in one basket. Some of these avenues will be quicker or more fruitful than others, and you will need to remain nimble to adapt to changes in the town centre ecosystem.

In a context where the circuit is essentially starting new work with new people, these parallel strands will follow a process described by the Fresh Expressions movement as:



MAKING CONNECTIONS meeting lots of people, hearing their stories, telling ours, being invited into their networks

LOVING AND SERVING meeting unmet practical needs, demonstrating love and trustworthiness through sustained action

BUILDING COMMUNITY creating safe and relevant opportunities for people to gather, know each other and us

EXPLORING DISCIPLESHIP creating relevant paths for people to explore faith and Christian life, and to make commitments

CHURCH TAKING SHAPE new and existing Christians together encompassing and shaping responses to all aspects of *Our Calling*, potentially in ways which look very different to the format of our existing churches

As a district, we are currently assessing “fruitfulness” of mission according to the following indicators, which might be helpful here:

Growing disciples

Culture of deepening discipleship

Lives being shaped by relationship with Christ

Sharing stories

Culture of invitation to relationship with Christ

People discovering or rediscovering faith

Helping the circuit discover its next new thing

Passionate contextual worship

Growing town centre worshipping communit(ies) at the heart of the mission

Worship timed and shaped to specific town centre cultures

Long term sustainability

Pays its own way after initial cash injection

Keeps growing leaders, volunteers and staff

Connexional

Recognised across the circuit as part of a shared mission and ministry

Contributes skills and expertise to circuit leadership

WHO WILL WE DO MISSION WITH?

The following are some examples of opportunities to be explored from the conversations and research that have been possible in recent months. It may not be practical to do all of these, and other options would arise from future explorations and relationships. However they hopefully give a flavour of where you could practically start from

NIGHT TIME ECONOMY - STREET PASTORS

Following closure of Hall Gate URC, the ecumenical Street Pastors team have relocated to Priory Centre, offering a highly visible and practical chaplaincy to users of late night bars and clubs. There are also opportunities to work with members of their volunteer team on other projects.

Needs premises for storage and support team



NOWHERE BETTER TO BE

Large parts of the town centre, including around Priory Centre have in recent years been places that people loiter, often suffering from drug abuse, homelessness or mental health problems, with nowhere better to be. The circuit could provide purposeful indoor collective activities, which over time could lead to faith exploration. Partnership with other organisations will be important in this.

The Oasis congregation in Sheffield offers a blend of simple food and informal evening worship for 30 people. In partnership with the Salvation Army it now also includes Recovery Church, a midweek Bible study and support group.

Needs premises

SHOP WORKERS/ SMALL BUSINESSES – RETAIL CHAPLAINCY

McCauley has begun a programme of visiting local shops offering chaplaincy. As with any form of chaplaincy, a minority are keen for support, and others are busy/ un-interested. Consistent presence and sharing of contact details will lead to supporting individuals in a time of crisis.

Next step could be to offer a one-off social gathering for local shopkeepers and businesses, as a recognition of the challenges they have faced through the lockdowns, seek views on how Methodism could serve the town centre, and identify common interests/ concerns around which a regular activity could be built.

Basingstoke Town Chaplaincy has built up an ecumenical town centre chaplaincy team, allowing them to be present at many locations (shops, station, courts, colleges, offices). They use a shop unit as a chaplaincy centre.

There may also be opportunity to link with Doncaster College Multifaith Chaplaincy

SOCIAL CAFÉ VOLUNTEERING

Established volunteering project in partnership with Doncaster College and Stirling Centre providing work/ social experience for adults with learning difficulties. Heritage Lottery funding enabled a short trial of an employed manager, with possibility of increased opening hours and menu. This indicated the café is not yet at a scale to sustain staff wages, but has sufficient other volunteers to work alongside the college/ centre and their clients.

Next steps would be to offer further activities that the college/ centre volunteers could participate in, leading eventually to unforced opportunities to explore discipleship and worship in appropriate ways. If based at Priory Centre, the neighbouring centre for young people excluded from school could also become a partner.

Needs premises with a kitchen & café seating

The Crossing have closed their commercially run café in the centre of Worksop. They are instead using their café space to host purposeful hospitality and volunteering in partnership with a local foodbank, MHA and other organisations.

SOCIAL CAFÉ CUSTOMERS

Customers have largely been retired, looking for a place to sit with an inexpensive drink and find company. Market days are most popular. This has been a place where people without religious affiliation regularly approach us for deep pastoral support. Clare Bryce from DMBC Community Support Team has regularly based herself in the café for similar reasons.

By advertising cafe clientele could be widened.

Next steps would be to provide community-building activities for café users, e.g. a quiz, craft group, singing group which followed on immediately from the café session

When Central Chesterfield refurbished their Cornerstone café they actively chose to retain a relaxed volunteer-run social café rather a high spec Costa ambience. The café is used as a venue for a range of support groups.

Needs premises with a kitchen & café seating



“An ex-convict who had not long been released from prison came looking for prayer to reconnect with something he had experienced in his childhood. He didn’t want to go back to crime, but knew that without God he wouldn’t be able to resist the temptation. For him returning to prison was better than living in cheap accommodation surrounded by violence and drugs. It was at Priory Centre where he found me. I spent a while in prayer with him. He is just one of the many people who have come into Priory in desperate need of comfort and conversation.”

McCauley Allcock

FAMILY FUN

[Create Space](#) provided free drama workshops, craft and family space in Frenchgate over the summer holidays. Being backed by the Arts Council, it met its objectives of providing brief respite from life's pressures. However we know that life-changing transformation takes sustained intentional relationship. The circuit could offer a regular free-access family drop in space during school holidays. This could lead in to Messy Church, the already established Boys Brigade or other discipleship activities. Central Family Hub or others could be willing to support.

Needs premises



SACRED SPACE

Whilst for many people, we need to start with building trust before introducing structured worship, some people would seek out an accessible calm sacred space in the town centre for individual or collective spirituality. This could include other groups mentioned above, but also others such as office workers. This may require an accessible dedicated space with appropriate décor, visual imagery, soundscape/ music. It should be widely advertised. Could the circuit's [Christian Mindfulness](#) course, or others such as [taketime](#) be adapted.

A regular pattern of prayer needs to be present from the start, if only for team members at the start of the day.

Needs premises for individual prayer/ reflection



MARKET STALL

Potentially overlapping with markets chaplaincy, meeting people outdoors has proven to be a good way of starting conversations with new people. Either at a hired market stall or outside the Priory Centre, a regular stall offering for example quick craft activities could be an opportunity to invite people to join a regular group located elsewhere.

MARKETS CHAPLAINCY

Doncaster markets retain an important social as well as retail function for those who work or shop there, and are being invested in by the council. A pervasive presence chaplaincy could be an effective opportunity to make the circuit visibly present and build relationships with individuals. Some form of chaplaincy base, within or beyond the market, would facilitate deeper conversations.

[St Matthews](#) provide chaplaincy to Sheffield's refurbished Moor Market through their Parish Nurses. The Church Army hire a stall for prayer activities, conversation at Sheffield's Christmas Market.



CHARITY HUB – OLDER PEOPLE

Several of the organisations that use the Priory Centre building are focussed on providing support and reducing isolation amongst older people (Home Instead, Alzheimer's Society, U3A, Age UK). Pro-active action could be taken to bring in other organisations who would also support this constituency, making the Methodist centre a recognised place to find community and support. The circuit could set up its own intentional activities and groups for people already visiting their building.

Victoria Hall has made itself a key location for Sheffield's asylum seekers, primarily through being landlords to Assist and City of Sanctuary charities

Needs premises

STRONG FOUNDATIONS

Whatever form your town centre mission takes, you will need strong foundations. If any of these is components missing, the work will likely be ineffective. Positive action is needed to ensure that each of them is in place.

Strong leadership team

People who are deeply committed to mission in the town centre, willing to learn from other towns/ cities, ready to invest time and energy in making things happen, adaptable to changing circumstances, and taking responsibility for all aspects of the work.

As a minimum half a dozen circuit members in addition to your outreach worker

You may need to release gifted people from other roles they currently hold to get the right balance in this team

This team would double us as the outreach worker's management team, and one of its members should be a member of CLT.

Stable vision

The leadership team need to be of one mind as to what they are trying to achieve, whilst holding in creative tension how best to implement this. This vision needs to be clearly and regularly expressed

They need to know they have the trust and long term backing of the CLT and circuit meeting (whilst remaining accountable)

Effective communications

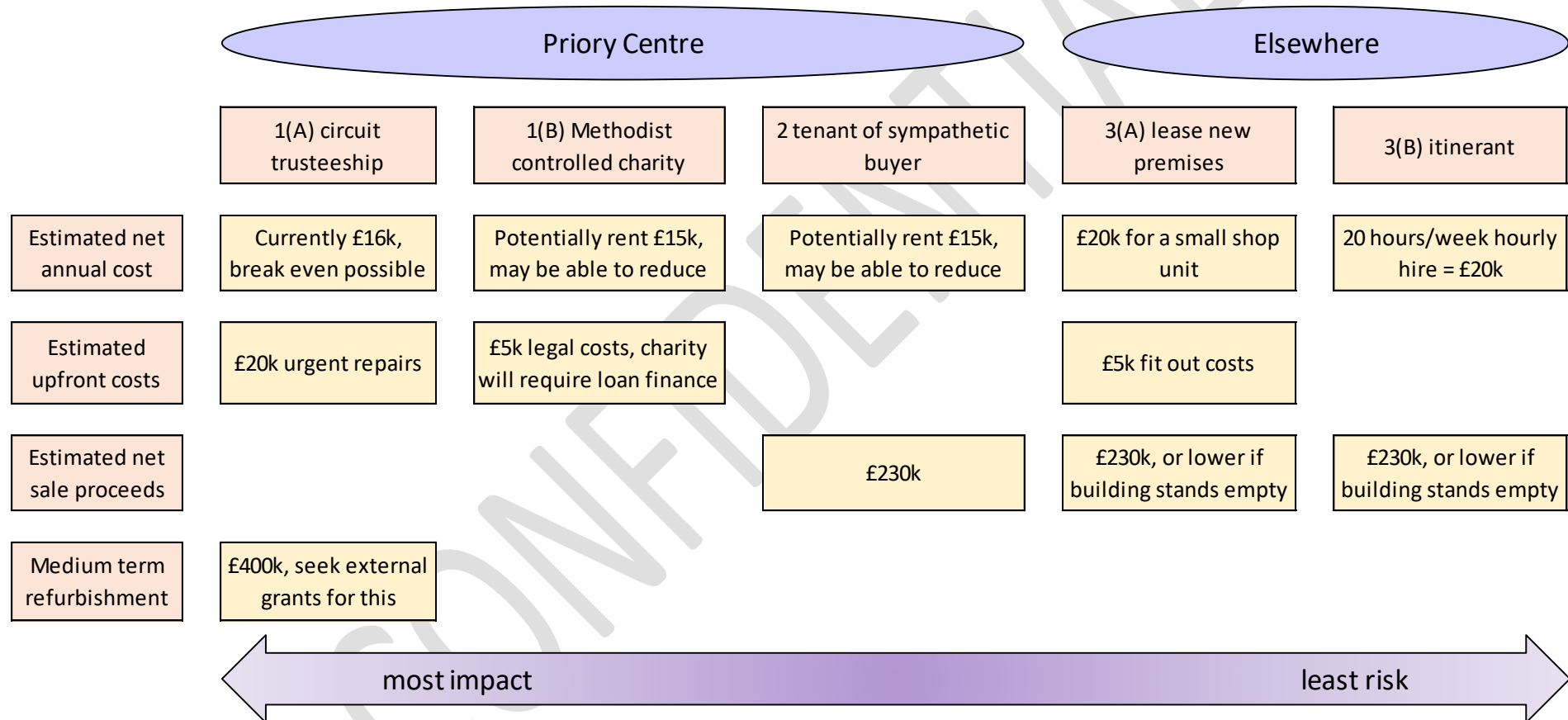
Because the town centre does not exist in isolation, this mission needs to be able to effectively share news across the circuit

How do all circuit members know of and own circuit-wide projects such as town centre mission (or Baby Basics, RE Team)? Will more knowledge of effective outreach unlock increased giving?

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Financial plan | <p>Share understanding of what (if anything) will be needed from wider circuit to fund mature town centre mission, and what seed funding needs to be invested to reach maturity</p> <p>(See “financial cost of missional activities” below)</p> |
| Consistency | <p>When we say “the church will be here for you”, our actions need to be matched by our actions. This is particularly complex in project-based work and exploratory seasons, where specific activities may be laid down if ineffective or dependent on short term grant funding.</p> |
| Prayer at the centre | <p>Town centre mission needs to be built on regular collective prayer, by its leadership team, in its activities, and by people across the circuit.</p> |
| Volunteering programme | <p>People will be drawn to support aspects of the mission from a range of contexts, including beyond Methodism, and beyond any church. A further seed team of people from across the circuit (in addition to the leadership team) willing to lend hands on support will accelerate development of the work.</p> <p>Volunteers need to be appropriately trained, supervised and supported. Safeguarding must always be front and centre, not an administrative task. Regular dialogue should be maintained with the district safeguarding officer.</p> |
| Partnerships | <p>Ecumenical relationships within the few churches in the town centre seem to be weak and uncoordinated, although McCauley has made some progress in building individual relationships.</p> <p>Charlotte and McCauley have a good relationship with DMBC Community Support team and a range of charities and we have had sporadic conversations with Business Doncaster. Further networks with civic and third sector leaders need to be built up.</p> |

VENUE – FOR GATHERING, INDIVIDUAL CONVERSATIONS AND HOSPITALITY

To build Christian community and transform lives, we need somewhere to spend time with people, as illustrated by the possible starting points above. Where to gather may feel be the most important decision to be made. In practice, however, it is a tactical decision about what will best support your vision and the people you seek to be with. You may start with one option and switch to another as circumstances dictate. Not all activities would take place onsite under any model.



Each of these options has advantages and challenges. Hiring new premises will likely cost more over the long term, but sale will generate one-off cash proceeds and reduce financial risk.

OPTION 1(A) – RETAIN THE PRIORY CENTRE UNDER CIRCUIT TRUSTEESHIP

HOW WOULD IT WORK

- Part time building manager and part time cleaner/ caretaker employed to manage and upgrade building and balance books, building on work started over the last two years
- Hire space surplus to missional need to cover costs, increase footfall, and build community and partnerships
- Seek grants to step by step modernise the building

OPPORTUNITIES CREATED

- Destination – people know where to find you, and can come to your venue for a range of activities
- Builds on the relationships you already have
- Opportunities for partnerships with other organisations e.g. joint events, creating a charity hub
- Chaplaincy to building users
- Saves time spent looking for alternative venues



RISKS/ CHALLENGES

- Commercial risk sits with the circuit e.g. if lettings dry up or urgent repairs appear which cannot be funded by grants
- A building manager and caretaker/ cleaner will need to be recruited and managed (Charlotte, the current manager, will leave soon due to change in personal circumstances)
- Building responsibilities could distract from mission
- Current tired state of building limits accessibility and invitation to some communities and individuals

Over 20 years [High Street Centre Rawmarsh](#) has been gradually redeveloped in a deprived community into one of our most impactful community venues, with 95% of its £3m funding having come from non-Methodist sources

MONEY

An extra £320 per month in lettings is needed to cover running costs. This is equivalent to four additional weekly bookings. Whilst this seems a lot, it is less than the increase in bookings which has been achieved over the last two years, showing the impact of an employed building manager and pro-active marketing.

Current tenants include Greek Orthodox Church, Changing Lives, Alzheimer's Society, U3A, Theatre Gang, Doncaster Choral Society

The building clearly suffers from long term lack of maintenance, although this has not deterred new tenants.

| | £'000 |
|----------------------------------------|-------|
| Centre Manager (21 hours @ £13) | 16 |
| Caretaker/ cleaner (16 hours @ £10) | 9 |
| Utilities | 5 |
| Insurance | 6 |
| Comms, advertising, admin | 3 |
| Maintenance & minor works | 5 |
| | 44 |
| Current lettings (Sept-Dec annualised) | 28 |
| Further lettings required | 16 |

- **Urgent quinquennial repairs** have been costed at **£20k**
- External grants could be sought to cover long term upgrades/ refurbishments (e.g. landfill, lottery, charitable trusts). Being a professionally managed listed building used by a range of groups will help with funding, as will the track record of the £100k in grants from Heritage Lottery towards employment and covid costs over the past two years.
- **Longer term** potential upgrades (remodelling of entrance, toilet replacement, new lift, remodelling downstairs chapel) have been estimated at c.£0.4m. This work is not immediately urgent and should be phased.

OPTION 1(B) – CREATE METHODIST-CONTROLLED CHARITY

HOW WOULD IT WORK

- Create a new charity Methodist-controlled charity (e.g. three circuit appointed trustees, three district appointed trustees, and three other trustees)
- This charity would lease the building from the circuit for minimal rent (e.g. for 15-25 years) and employ a manager and caretaker
- The charity would be responsible for repairs and refurbishments, and would eventually return an upgraded building back to the circuit
- The circuit would have access to the Priory Centre building, but would be protected from capital and running costs

[The Foundry Sheffield](#) is a Methodist-controlled charity holding a 15 year lease over the Victoria Hall building in Sheffield. The congregation are now tenants in their own building, but being freed of property responsibilities has enabled them to focus on planting the new Oasis congregation and other outreach.

The Foundry Sheffield is responsible for all building repairs and upgrades. In 2013 it inherited operating annual losses of £110k and a £250k quinquennial backlog. Income has been significantly increased, and large sections of the building since refurbished.

ADDITIONAL RISKS/ CHALLENGES

- Suitably skilled, committed trustees would need to be found for the charity, including three circuit representatives
- Creates some inflexibility in when the circuit could use the building

MONEY

- The charity would be responsible for all repairs and upgrades to the building, but would need a loan from circuit/ district until it built up its own reserves
- All profits would be retained by the charity for investment in the building
- Circuit may need to pay the charity to lease back space in Priory Centre (e.g. 3 weekly sessions in lower hall + one permanent meeting room = **£15 pa** at current letting rates)
- Legal fees (**approx £5k**) would be incurred in creating the charity and the lease

OPTION 2 – OFF-MARKET SALE TO SYMPATHETIC BUYER

HOW IT WOULD WORK

- The Greek Orthodox Church currently letting the building for Sunday worship and some midweek activities are potentially interested in purchasing a chapel of their own.
- The Greek Orthodox Church are a gathered language-specific congregation and so their work is not easily confused with that of the circuit

OPPORTUNITIES CREATED

The Orthodox Church may be willing to

- continue letting to current tenants, which would generate goodwill amongst those we already have a relationship with
- rent space in the building to the circuit at low cost to use as a venue for your town centre mission

These could be part of pre-sale negotiations.

RISKS/ CHALLENGES

- Sale may be slow to arrange, meaning we have to maintain a service to building users and be uncertain about our own venue for several months
- Orthodox Church may not be willing to let part of the building back to us – it would become their building, not the circuit's
- Relationship with the Orthodox Church may deteriorate over time

MONEY

- Fernie Greaves have recommended an advertised sale price of £400k, leading to estimated proceeds of **£230k net of property levy.**
- Hiring back one meeting room for sole use by the circuit plus three weekly sessions in lower hall would cost **£15 pa** at our current lettings rate. It may be possible to negotiate guaranteed free Methodist access for specified hours in exchange for a lower sale price.

When the Talbot Lane congregation ceased to meet, Rotherham & Dearne Valley were concerned about the difficulties of selling a listed building in a depressed town centre. However they were approached in confidence by Grimm & Co, a local educational charity looking for a gothic-looking freehold property. Working with Fernie Greaves and TMCP, the circuit were able to arrange a quick sale at deemed fair market price without the building standing empty or “for sale” signs.

OPTION 3(A) – SELL AND LEASE NEW PREMISES

HOW WOULD IT WORK

- Sell the Priory Centre building on the open market
- Attempt to find new locations elsewhere in the circuit for as many of the current user groups as possible
- Lease smaller premises, e.g. a small retail unit, as a base for town centre mission

OPPORTUNITIES

- Freedom from long term maintenance obligations
- A shop unit would potentially be an easier “threshold” for people beyond the church to cross into

RISKS/ CHALLENGES

- Loss of relationship with existing user groups
- Without user groups, the premises may stand empty more often when the outreach worker and volunteers were not on site, and so would not project a Methodist presence
- Priory Centre building may be slow to sell, with heightened risk of vandalism whilst closed given its location
- Securing suitable new premises may take time

MONEY

- Fernie Greaves have recommended an advertised sale price of £400k, leading to estimated proceeds of **£230k net of property levy.**
- **Vacant building insurance** has been quoted as **£18k pa** by Methodist Insurance, which would further reduce sale proceeds. Fernie Greaves have advised that the building would take 9-12 months to sell.
- Letting a small shop unit would likely cost roughly **£20k pa**, plus fit out costs (potentially **£5k**). This is **more expensive** than the current deficit on the Priory Centre, which you would expect to reduce over time (assumed 1,000 sq ft unit - equivalent size to the Priory Centre lower hall - based on town retail premises currently available for rent, 30% service charge)

[Leeds Methodist Mission](#) have vacated their large Oxford Place complex (which is being converted to a revenue generating Methodist-owned hotel). The mission now operates from a small city centre office with larger wellbeing and creative events being held in a range of central venues as a temporary solution until they can secure a lease on a suitable venue to lease as a gathering place.

OPTION 3(B) – SELL AND RENT OTHER SPACE BY THE HOUR

HOW WOULD IT WORK

- As 3(A) above, except all gatherings would be held in space controlled by others, e.g. meeting in a coffee shop, Danum Library

OPPORTUNITIES

- Meeting on neutral spaces may make us more approachable and accessible to non-church visitors
- No property obligations

MONEY

- Sale proceeds as above
- Relatively little committed property outgoings, but at cost of limited activities
- If activity levels do grow (which they will need to for impactful mission), 20 hours/ week of activities at cost of £20/ hour would **total to £20k pa**

RISKS/ CHALLENGES

- As 3(A) above
- Gathered activities would be significantly restricted e.g. coffee shops would potentially only let their space to us at times when town centre was quiet
- Harder for people to know they can find us at a particular place and time
- No opportunity for signage to be present at a time when we are not – Methodist name and presence disappears from town centre.
- Significantly limited opportunity for partnerships
- No opportunity to store equipment (e.g. for Street Pastors)

FINANCIAL COST OF MISSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Town centre mission, if led by a full time member of staff will likely cost approximately £36k each year excluding premises, **£26k pa net of Connexional grant.**

Paid hours could be reduced, but this would impact on the work, decreasing the number of relationships which can be formed, and slowing down the rate at which new community can grow. Town centre ministry needs to provide relevant outreach to targeted groups of people at the time they are in the town centre. Staff and/or volunteers need to be regularly present at these times.

This cost is not dissimilar to the minimum cost of any focussed pioneering project reliant on a full time paid member of staff.

There are four years of Connexional grant not yet claimed towards a full time town centre outreach worker (£38k in total). The Connexional grants team are aware that Priory Place has ceased to meet and that this feasibility review is being undertaken. There is also £10k of district grant not yet claimed

A new Christian community would not be expected to be fully self-sustaining within five years, but should expect by that stage to see clear signs of progress towards financial sustainability by then.

Options for paying for the net cost include:

- possibility of bidding for further district grants up to £20k (or more if entitled to New Places for New People funding)
- Income from events
- Grants for specific events/ activities
- Fundraising
- Personal giving
 - If we believe starting a new Christian community really could happen, 20 people giving £20 per week = £26,000 pa after Gift Aid
 - Of course many people spend time in the town centre because they are economically disadvantaged, and we should never ask people to give more generously than we ourselves are willing to give
 - Giving could at first be some form of circuit gift day, if this is a shared vision that people could unite behind
- Some form of tent-making activity, provided that this does not draw too much time and energy
- Including within overall circuit ministry budget and assessment

| | £'000 |
|------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Salary | 24 |
| NIC, pension | 4 |
| Publicity & comms | 1 |
| Training & admin | 2 |
| Events & hospitality | 5 |
| | 36 |
| Connexional grant (four years remaining) | (10) |
| Net cost to circuit | 26 |