

Missional property enabler - Property fit for its mission

Tom Rattigan AIOSH



Serving the Methodist Church
in South Yorkshire,
North Nottinghamshire
and North East Derbyshire

Property fit for its mission

This report sets out some observations within my role as district missional property enabler as well as what current and future strategy could be, as well as where support, change and encouragement is needed. You should know while reading this report that while I come from a commercial background and some of what I talk about is sometimes matter of fact and very honest, that said, the people and communities is what I hold most important. This is not to say that one is more important than the other but realities and choices should be made in an informed way. To try and simply this process I have commented on each point whether direction is needed, if I am informing, or if this something to be aware of. This is not to say questions could not be raised about each part.

Topic	context	Response
The property portal and its use	<p>The consents portal is the interface that is used to record decisions, documentation and permissions on property projects, as required in standing order 900 onwards in CPD.</p> <p>Currently some projects have no documents uploaded, lack of information on project plans or how they may affect communities or how they relate to church/ circuit missional strategy. This is particularly the case in sale of sales of properties. Whilst this may feel an administrative task, it is the route we are required to take in order to demonstrate that decisions with major financial or strategic implications are taken with governance in place and within standing orders and Charity law. Recording this information on the portal provides a clear and traceable record of decisions taken, which protects current and informs future managing trustees.</p> <p>This is starting to change slowly, and it is recognised that this is a change in process compared to what some parts of our district have been used to.</p> <p>Going forward we have been advised by the Connexional Conservation office and TMCP that they would not expect projects to be accepted without core information being recorded. In particular Standing Order 932 requires that authorisation for property projects not be given unless:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The managing trustees have approved a mission policy and the project is consistent with this• Advice of Connexional and district officers has been taken into account. This includes the current Connexional property strategy	<p>Decision - Supportive of only full and detailed projects to be considered, consisting of a fully filled out projects plan and any necessary documentation to evidence process and decision process.</p> <p>District approval to be granted prior to active marketing engagement or contractual agreements.</p> <p>Actions following</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Work with circuits to ensure required documentation is understood early in projects, so that it can be recorded without creating delay or additional work2. Review of required documents with other bodies to simplify and consolidate– TMCP, conservation, circuits.3. Flow chart for sales to be produced to clarify

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<p>Advisory panel</p>	<p>In line with other districts and to support continued work it is suggested to set up an advisory panel to help with decision making and support, especially on larger, more complicated projects, suggested as including all those with cost over £100k.</p> <p>This panel would not hold the power to sign off projects, this would still ultimately be the responsibility of the District Property Secretary, but the group would be able to support this role in practices, support and questions. This reduces possibility of key risks or potential improvements being missed in expensive capital projects which could have a generational impact.</p> <p>The group, around 3-5 members in total would, be made up of both professionals, a QS, planner or engineer would be great to have but also people who have experience in missional use of buildings or expertise.</p> <p>We have some ideas of people who may sit on this group and areas/projects that would be covered. It would meet 4-6 times a year to hold conversations and discussions as needed.</p>	<p>Decision - for this panel to be formed as a supporting role to DPS?</p> <p>Actions following</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communicating and encouraging participation in this panel within circuits to recruit members 2. Review effectiveness of this group after 12 months 3.
<p>Eco matters</p>	<p>There are a number of churches that are interested in furthering the environmental sustainability of their buildings. The district has set no target through I would suggest that we adopt the upcoming Connexional time line (likely 2030) as a simple way of communicating commitment and then produce a strategy accordingly.</p> <p>Six churches have expressed interested in having surveys done in looking at the building, its wider use and how it may be heated in the future. This would be done via a building wide survey by a specialist firm.</p> <p>Suggested that district offers to part energy efficiency surveys in up to 10 churches. This would be up to the value of £1,000 match funding, either spent with a preferred contractor or locally arranged if better options exist.</p> <p>We currently have 12 churches out of 156 sites signed up to ECO Church, this is 19% of sites.</p>	<p>Decision - make up to 10 grants of £1,000 available for churches for a building survey on heating, building use and carbon inefficiencies.</p> <p>Actions following</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 10 surveys completed and made accessible to other churches 2. Identify common themes, and how to target support for churches in making practical improvements 3. Offer support to each circuit in exploring ECO Church/ ECO Circuit

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Stream lining and community of practice	<p>We have started an open invite drop in session that includes training on certain subjects, Fire, health and safety or building development. This is the start of a community of practice for those responsible for church buildings.</p> <p>We hope that this will grow, depending on capacity and evaluation of what is needed and works well.</p>	Actions for information <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Establish training regularly for building work2. Work with Connexion on a training guide for managing buildings3. Development of relationships with TMCP
Property strategy and mission planning	<p>The coronavirus pandemic has rapidly accelerated a predicted trend of congregations ceasing to meet. Often our default response is to rapidly proceed to commercial sale of the premises in the current condition as quickly as possible because of limits on key peoples' time, available funds or specialist expertise.</p> <p>Out of perceived necessity this sometimes happens in cases where we recognise that there may have been better long term missional, community or financial alternatives, and where we are selling long term assets to finance day to day expenditure. This is an uncomfortable position with regard to missional stewardship and as trustees under charity law.</p> <p>TMCP have advised that due to the sudden increase in properties being put up for sale and their fixed levels of staffing, there will inevitably be delays to their processing and approval of these, they are expecting significantly longer completion times. We are therefore at risk of having buildings marked for sale standing empty for as long.</p> <p>Connexion also are looking at how the property strategy and how its implemented, this strategy is ratified and should be implemented in district through currently is not in our own or used to look at wider building uses or what happens after or alongside a congregation. They are also investigating creating a commercial partnership to help Methodism profit from properties sold and subsequently redeveloped, although this will take time to develop.</p>	Questions are for discussion. <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What are the limiting factors on circuits pursuing missional alternative uses?2. In what ways could District enable and support circuits to overcome these challenges in their contexts?3. If a strategy and support could be developed to enable creative use of buildings around the district long term, what is to be done in the short term with buildings that are already being looked at for sale?4. In practice, what does this mean for district authorisation for sales?

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	<p>Our mission strategy suggested that we “Support churches/ circuits in exploring and developing innovative models of property management and development, or partnerships with other providers of local public spaces, in response to missional needs and bringing to bear property expertise from across the District.”</p> <p>Given the current context there is a pressing need to explore whether there are better missional or financial alternatives to sale of property assets that are not required to meet mission plans that circuits have capacity to prioritise. Any proposals would need to have due regard for financial imperatives that circuits may have for immediate market-price sale, risks associated with property management, and not to create unreasonable extra work for circuit officers.</p> <p>This alternative use of buildings would ultimately look at growing church and community around those buildings and would have missional cores. There are already a number of examples of alternative uses around the district, soft play centres, a boxing club or run by independent charities. Well planned sales will likely remain the only viable option for some buildings. I would add that an alternative use may be something completely new or a new way of engaging with church and community.</p>	
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