

Christchurch Deanery Motion.

Christchurch Deanery Synod calls upon Diocesan Synod to adopt the strategy set out in the paper Crossing the Threshold, a Hereford Diocese Toolkit, and consider the Use of Church Buildings as Community Assets.

The proposal is set out in detail in a number of attachments.

['Crossing the Threshold' Toolkit - Diocese of Hereford](#)

Preamble:

Use of church buildings as community assets.

Objectives.

1. Develop a new revenue stream
2. Enhance the value of the church to the local community
3. Place the church at the centre of the community
4. Encourage funding for upgrading the premises
5. Provide for growth of activities and appeal to wider audience
6. Be part of future developments in partnership with the LA (district plans)
7. Use of building 7 days a week
8. Help to cover on-going costs of utilities and maintenance

In September 2023 at the Zoom meeting on the three-year budget, paragraph 44 of the background paper expressed the need for a call to action. This is also put forward as a proposal in answer to the Financial Response to Budget Challenges paper DS24/07.

Rationale for adoption of this strategy.

Walking the Wessex Way encourages all parishes/ benefices to develop growth plans. The Church must look to develop greater awareness in our communities of the positive benefits that their local church brings.

There is a great potential for daily use of our church buildings by the wider community to bring in revenue, particularly to offset maintenance and utility bills. Some churches have become Community Centres for activities all week. Can we gather together information to help other churches do the same?

The report of the Church of England's Church Buildings Review Group was published in 2015. The report emphasised that, in addition to their role as places of worship, our church buildings need to be 'sensitively combined with service to the community. The imaginative adaptation of church buildings for community use in many areas is breathing new life into them'. Welcoming the community to make more use of church buildings may, in many cases, be the key to their continued survival.

APPENDIX 1: Attachments for the motion

Use of church buildings as community assets.

This paper is a response to the invitation by the Diocesan Secretary at the Diocesan Synod in November 2024: 'I would therefore encourage Michael to bring this proposal to synod as either a Deanery Synod Motion or a Private Members Motion so that synod's mind on this matter can be tested'.

It is proposed that:

1. Synod receives and considers adopting this strategy for its church buildings.
2. A working group should be convened to consider the way forward and produce proposals for supporting parishes in developing their churches as Community Assets.
3. Information is gathered from parishes/churches that have carried this out successfully as Case Studies to help guide good practice and show real life examples both in this diocese and elsewhere in the country.

Michael Minton January 2025.

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1. Rationale for adoption of this strategy.

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- Churches for life, not just for Sundays - Times article 2010 by the Bishop of Salisbury;
- we should keep our buildings fit for use as nurseries, learning centres, community hubs, shops.
- As well as sustaining faith these bring a wide range of benefits to our society.
- As public expenditure cuts lead to the axing of libraries and community centres, places of worship are often the last place where charities can hire a room to meet free, or at an affordable price.
- It is estimated that 80% of church buildings are used for purposes other than regular worship, such as providing nursery and playgroup education.
- Importantly today churches are places where communities are being built, the vulnerable supported and society sustained and strengthened.
- **Community, cultural and commercial uses**
- The medieval church building was an important community hub as well as a place of worship.
- With the closure of local pubs, shops and schools the church is often the last community building available.
- We encourage you to consider the needs of the wider community and discuss how your building can be most effectively used within your deanery's plan, complementing what other churches can offer.
- The legislation allows for parts of your church building to be leased to third parties for these purposes.
- **Remember:**

- The more uses, the more sustainable your church building is likely to be.
- **Churches and Faith Buildings - Realizing the Potential:**
- Official report from HM Treasury and The Cabinet Office in 2006 supported by CofE says:
- Faith Communities bring distinctive resources to local communities, supporting and empowering individuals, embracing a rich diversity of experience, skills and people motivated to change their communities for the better.
- The Bishop of London in 2010 stated the church has a wealth of assets in its unrivalled stock of buildings.
- There is a growing trend to return church buildings to their original function as places of worship and also places of assembly and celebration for the whole community.
- A report in the Times: the real key to their survival is the goodwill of the communities in which churches stand.
- The buildings must be made useful to local people and not only in a spiritual way. There's nothing sacrilegious about that.
- The medieval citizens who built these towering edifices used the naves for meetings, markets and even for stabling their animals.
- Plenty of churches have gone down other routes giving space to Farmers' Markets, crèches, cafes, theatres, drop-in centres, that bring in revenues:
- but more important is the symbolism: churches being reconnected to the 21st century in vital ways rather than squatting in town centres like comatose tortoises.

The Crossing the Threshold Toolkit: website: ['Crossing the Threshold' Toolkit - Diocese of Hereford](#): offers a step-by-step guide to managing a church building project.

First created by the Diocese of Hereford in 2009, and subsequently updated in 2013, this newly updated resource is packed with 268 pages of advice, hints and tips for any group taking a community development approach towards adapting a church building for wider community use while balancing the needs of existing worshippers.

Thanks to the financial support from the Allchurches Trust and the expertise of the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance, this all-new toolkit is a free resource available to anyone to download here. It breaks down projects into three key stages:

- Preparing the Ground,

- Looking at Your Options,
- Delivering Your Project.

With numerous case studies, top tips and end-of-chapter checklists, as well as advice from experts in their fields, and with input and expertise from a range of national church organisations, this practical document draws upon the lessons learned from recent church projects of all denominations across the UK.

DEVELOPING YOUR VISION What do you picture? How do you see your church building serving God's mission locally? Begin by discerning and praying. Your overall vision and aims should not be too specific; particularly if your church may go on to do more projects. Example aims could be: • to improve the quality of life for the local community • to broaden the range of activities taking place within the local community • to improve the accessibility of your building for community events • to use the church building more effectively You may want to develop a vision statement which is usually one sentence and is an aspirational description of what your church would like to achieve or accomplish in the mid-term or long-term future.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND'S CHURCH BUILDINGS REVIEW In October 2015, the Church of England published a Review and Consultation document on how the Church might manage its church buildings in the future. It highlighted the challenge facing our parish churches especially the rural ones commenting that 'the underlying challenges are likely to grow unless decline is arrested and reversed' (para 54). This is a challenge affecting many of our denominations. www.churchofengland.org/more/mediacentre/news/launch-major-new-report-howchurch-england-manages-its-16000-church

In addition to the statistics contained within this report, the sobering fact is that about 98% of the population today have no formal commitment to their parish church. In other words, only about 2% of the population are on the electoral roll for their parish church, and even then not all will actually help fund it; the percentage on the electoral roll has been falling for many years, and now stands at about one third of the level of fifty years ago. (Trevor Cooper, October 2016) However, there is some good news: • Even if people no longer go to church in the way that they used to, we know that people still value and care about these buildings. 'More than 83% of Britons agree that the UK's churches, chapels and meeting houses are an important part of the UK's heritage and history and 57% of British adults said they had visited a church, chapel or meeting house in the last year'. Findings of the ComRes poll, commissioned by the National Churches Trust, which interviewed 2048 GB adults online between the 15th and 18th December 2016. www.nationalchurchestrust.org/2017poll •

The 2015 'Released for Mission' report states that 54% of Anglican parishes run at least one organised activity to address a social need in their area, tackling issues including loneliness, homelessness, debt, low income, unemployment or family breakdown.

- ‘The Church in Action: A National Survey of Church-Led Social Action’ (Church Urban Fund 2015) found that on average, churches are addressing seven different common social uses, and a third are tackling nine or more. 14% of churches use their premises for food banks, 81% are involved in food banks in some way, and 22% of churches offer debt or money management advice.
- This research also showed that churches are able to provide as many activities to address social need in rural locations as they are in urban locations; more over its analysis of the number of organised activities shows that there is hardly any variation between the activities provided in listed and unlisted buildings, indicating that listed status is not the barrier to social action it might be perceived to be.
- National and local government and public sector agencies are increasingly acknowledging the contribution of faith groups to social cohesion, education, and regeneration. Research is available which shows that faith groups have a special contribution to make. They are deeply rooted in community life, able to reach out to the most vulnerable groups, and are well placed to provide high-quality local public services

2. **Practical steps to develop this strategy.**

Using church buildings as community assets to raise funds

Diocese to develop standard hire agreements and policies.

Headline for communications; Use your church or Lose it. Photos of local church

Consider campaign under the headline ‘Your Church Cares’.

Love your local church: reasons:- see * below

If your church were not there: what would you miss?

Take a look inside- meet the people- see what they do for the community

Development plans for the church building; essential facilities required/ toilets/ serveries/ internet connections/ internet cafes/audio systems/ screens

Sponsorship ; Identify potential sources e.g. (Local builders like Pennyfarthing or Veolia, or Sand & Ballast).

Jessica Lewis is there to support Communications with local press and media Reports in local inhouse and local media.

Hold Events in church – PR opportunities. With Mayor/personalities.

Vision/Mission statements

Current activities reports for wider media, plus websites and Facebook/social media - videos

Generous June type podcasts.

Personal profiles and good works.

Support packages

Posters for church notice boards

Rewards for action taken - Medals or stars perhaps.

Ideas/suggestion boxes

Vision days; future of church and facilities required.

See Dibden project for kitchens and internet. Project Gensis attached.

Link up Jordan Shepherd and Jessica Lewis; series of stories about use of church buildings and links with their communities.

Develop key theme of programme like Generous June: Your church Cares! Your Church- what do you know about its community support? Help protect and use it.

Liaison with Registrar and DAC.

Meet Local Councillors.

Engage with Neighbourhood and district plans on use of the church building.

Add to PMaps to join neighbourhood/district/town/village Plans.

Go to Council Development Officers- ask what they need – youth centres – libraries – meeting centres – markets – CAB – Hustings – Exhibitions of developments and local plans – building sites/projects.

Look for sponsors of building upgrades/heritage protection/ garden for recreation and peace/garden teas/rest centres/ rescue centres/ blood donors/ drug rehabilitation.

Community Centre links: bingo nights/dances/ entertainments nights/film nights where there is no cinema/ Presentations and talks.

Involve congregations in ideas? What activities do they get involved in/ rewards for introductions/ internal messages and posters/ concerts both internal and external/ look at permissions and licences.

Some churches now do gymnastics and wrestling.

Friends of the Church – separate accounts for repairs and developments.

Grants; most organisations offering these require evidence of benefits to the community.

- Looking at church websites there is a lot going on. This is just a small selection.

They tell who's who, Bible Study & Prayer, Community events such as overseas tours
Easter Plays, BBQ's, Fetes, Messy Church & Youth Activities, Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals
Toddler Groups. Market Day Coffee, Coffee Pop-in mornings, Concerts, Visiting choirs
Plays, Lunch-Time recitals, Jazz & Swing, School Services, Music & choirs, Gift shops
Shoebox collections, social support for unfortunates in society, Private prayer Counselling.
Wedding preparation talks.

Many ministers work with local authorities on events such as Remembrance Day and Memorials.

They visit schools and colleges.

Family workers and Youth Ministers play a big role in working with young people.

Others go into schools to Read the Bible and bring the good News to children.

There are services that are Streamed out to people not able to go to church.

Many run Facebook and other Social Media to bring information of events and offers of help to their communities.

3. Use of Church Buildings as Community Assets

Some thoughts on potential community uses.

- Library, Council Chamber, CAB, Social Services, Coffee shop, Credit Union, Blood donors, Relief Centre
- Concert Venue – Orchestras – Music Theatre – Choral
- Cinema, Video Streaming Live shows – Opera – Ballet
- Dance Hall, Gymnasium, Craft Fairs, Table Top Sales
- Sports Competitions – Boxing – Wrestling – Darts – Snooker
- Festivals in general, Music Festivals and Competitions, Jazz Festivals, Folk Music
- Theatre shows, Christmas Pantomimes, Wedding Receptions, Wakes, Birthday Parties
- Annual Lunches & Dinners for Local Organisations, Monthly Lunch Club
- New Residents Special Dinner and Club Presentations
- Internet Café linked to SKY TV programmes such as Football and Sports
- Youth Club/Activity Centre, Discos, Bingo Hall, Quiz Nights

- Emergency Reception Station, Blood Donors, Civic Receptions
- Cultural Organisations Events, Political Rallies, Hustings
- Meetings – Town Partnership – other major organisations – AGMs
- Council meetings

Extract from Crossing the Threshold

Across the UK, you will find churches hosting a variety of activities and providing space for a range of community services, which include: • civic events and cultural activities, such as exhibitions, drama performances, concerts and rehearsal space; • community services e.g. children's centres, mother and toddler groups, playgroups, after-school clubs or drop-ins for youth groups or elderly people; • support services e.g. projects to support the homeless, asylum seekers, refugees and other vulnerable groups, food banks, welfare/debt advice services, credit unions and Citizens Advice Bureaus, health centres, doctors' surgeries, satellite community police stations; • resources for school educational visits and local tourism; heritage centres; • public meeting spaces for councillors' surgeries and ward or area meetings, polling stations and other public meetings; • premises for vital services such as school halls, community shops, farmers' markets, libraries, cafes, internet cafes and computer clubs, training centres and adult education, arts centres, outreach post offices and community banks; and • short mat bowls, pilates, yoga, table tennis, exercise classes. All of these activities are taking place in 'living churches' that are still in use as places of worship. The activities may be organised by the church itself, by an outside organisation or by a partnership between the two. These uses have required varying degrees of physical intervention into the building. They cover a wide range of sharing options with many different types of organisations employing varying administrative and legal arrangements. The ideal project enables the building to continue as a place of worship, while at the same time helping to meet a specific need or needs of the community. Furthermore, using the building, and where appropriate, attached land, can better secure the building's future by generating an income. By providing additional services to the community it will create a wider group of people able, and importantly willing, to take on the shared responsibility of maintaining the building.