

thinking about your (re)development project

We live in interesting times with rapid and major economic, technological, cultural and social change. Our churches are not keeping up with, or shaping/leading, the key changes and it is likely that too many of them will close. There is a danger that without a fundamental and rapid shift some churches will become irrelevant to the changing communities and culture that they are located within. This shouldn't be the case; we have a wonderful world and life transforming message and we are one of the few organisations that is everywhere and for everyone! Our buildings are a key statement of our presence and mission but we have to be much clearer what it is that we want to say through them.

Far too many congregations are consumed by the building maintenance imperative. As you make your way through this publication it will hopefully become clear that this is not what we are about. We have to break out of the management of decline mode and again play an animating and leading role in our

fundamentally to rethink the roles of our buildings and spaces. We can all learn from Jesus, the early and innovative churches, other faiths, successful local schools, businesses and community-based groups, that amazing change, even in the most disadvantaged or difficult areas, is possible. Buildings and spaces can be a signal of that change, but they are not a replacement for it. The core role of our buildings is to be spaces for inspiration, celebration and creativity and they should provide a dynamic platform for engagement and mission with our communities.

This document is intended to help you think or rethink from first principles what your development¹ project actually is (not necessarily what you think it is!). In many cases, this is likely to include rethinking from first principles, about the mission, purpose, offer and impact of your parish/deanery. Frankly, we want to avoid adding to the many churches/communities that are

communities. This will mean a fundamental rethink in our approaches, messages and spaces, even as our core essence and many of our principles stay the same. Within this new reformation/revolution we will also have

¹ By 'development' throughout this document we mean either a completely new development or a redevelopment of an old site.

burdened with poorly conceived and delivered development projects. Most importantly, we will ask you to be clear about why, and for whom, you are building. The design and construction element of any project is the obvious, but in reality it is only a small part of any development project. How we conceive, present, involve others and the related mission and business development work, are all necessary to underpin a successful development of our buildings and spaces.

This publication is only intended to be an introduction to the issues. Of course we would say this, but do talk to us about our rapid development programme (**rdp**). There are also other websites and guides around and some time searching will help you with your project.

'the church' is now actually experienced as an outside organisation. Given the level and extent of change in many communities, it may mean that even the oldest churches effectively need to operate as a new churches.

Change is not just local – the wider ideas of career, employment, 'community', being younger or older, as well as gender relations, have all changed dramatically in recent decades. How time and space are 'used', our socialising, our expectations, and ambitions are, for many, unrecognisable. Within this ferment there is a strong desire for 'something'; nourishment, peace, spirituality, love, friendship etc, expressed by many people. Our revitalised buildings and spaces could be somewhere to go where people create, celebrate and connect!

In such a challenging time (and we do not just mean the economy) - is taking on a building project the best use of any church's time? The answer in many cases is an emphatic 'no!' Like many other organisations and businesses facing a challenge to their viability a development project can be a huge displacement activity.

Even worse, too many churches head straight to an architect and/or surveyor to start getting unnecessarily expensive drawings done and, when there is no external intervention (divine?), in some cases they actually then start building.

Leaving aside the poorly designed and uninspiring nature of many of the resulting buildings and spaces, the majority of these projects actually end up making little or no difference to the community, achieve very little in mission



1. what is our offer in changing communities?

At the centre of most of our communities there is a Church of England church. How do we turn this incredible physical legacy into an asset, so that it can provide a dynamic and sustainable resource for our mission and be a centre of light, belief and hope? In some areas

terms and do not represent a good use of money or energy.

who are we building for?

Do we fully understand our changing community? Are we operating on obsolete assumptions? Even if our church is very old, we always have to take a fresh look, to ensure that it is still relevant and that it resonates with local people. All communities have changed; there are new people, new buildings, new services, new expectations and new lifestyles. When you are investing a lot of energy and money into a proposed project, it must be very clear *who* it is that you are planning *specifically* to try and reach.

We all have limited resources. There are great strengths in the “we are here for everyone” model – except that, in reality, what that means is we actually end up being here for nobody (or worse only those people who look like us!). If you are looking at engagement and growth then you need to choose *one or two* meaningful local groups as the focus for your key messages, offer and investment. Who is it that you really want to reach? Again, be specific (not “the community” or “young people”). Who exactly is the development project and new spaces going to help you reach? If the primary purpose of your building is to reach these identified groups then what are the features of the spaces that will engage/attract this group? This is what should drive the design! Mock medieval will not work for young people or young families! Who were those pews designed for – not young families? What about some cultural references for new immigrants, ecological features for/with local schools, café for shoppers/dads/night clubbers? Where are the bicycle racks going to go? How will this idea/design element help get us noticed? Ensure that the flexibility in any design is maximised so that you can

respond to the continuing changes - how will your community be different again in 10 years?

For example, the young people that you are trying to reach may be looking for somewhere to hang out (an open porch), and/or somewhere to produce performances for their networks (the crypt!). Others may want a herb garden and chicken coop for local young families which is linked to a fabulous new kitchen for fun cooking, reading, playing and eating sessions and for meeting/eating/praying in.

There are key questions that you need to ask as you begin to consider a development project:

1. Who are the main groups of people in your community that you are not currently reaching?
2. What are the three key changes in your community in the last ten years?
3. Who are the main groups of people that have moved in/changed over the last ten years?
4. What are the three planned/probable main changes in your community in the next ten years?
5. What are the top five positive things in your community?

You will need to identify who the key *new* stakeholders are (related to the recent/planned changes). When did you last seriously engage them (i.e. had lunch)? For example, have you met with the manager of the “new” supermarket? Is your local university opening a new student hostel next year? Have you met with the accommodation and welfare service manager (and offered to host a welcome barbeque!)? Where do the newest group of international students, refugees, migrants, employees, shoppers, clubbers or visitors

meet socially? What are the implications of these trends and in some cases the competition for your possible development? How are you responding proactively to the new and emerging opportunities in your community and how will your proposed development project be designed to enable you to respond to them?



2. spaces

The building itself is not the important thing; it is what goes on inside and out and what it says about you... A development project is a great opportunity for re-engaging with your actual/potential community and should help you to sell the real change that you are making and the incredible offer that you have. There are some early steps that you will need to take in order to realise the opportunities that you have.

- What is it exactly that you are planning to offer?
- What will the experience of your church offer feel like?

- What emotions/senses/smells does it generate? Take the idea of 'friendship' for example - where will your chill and chat zone be?
- Will there be places for performance/display if your offer is joy and creativity? If it is wonder, then when will you get a skip in to remove the clutter?!

We certainly do not need more buildings and spaces 'that look like churches'. Many of the spaces in our churches that are currently underutilised were once central places for collective life, commerce, creativity and personal/communal growth and celebration. We need to rediscover this!

A new and real message (e.g. welcome) will mean wider changes in your offer too; such as brighter spaces that are easier to navigate for the overwhelming majority of people who are unchurched. A more smiling and friendly welcome from everyone to all those who come in the door is essential. In all areas of life our expectations have changed. For younger people they have never known anything else. Could you get rid of that ugly/cluttered noticeboard and buy some nice couches? What social networking does your parish do? The reality and perceptions of church have not kept up. We need to aspire to inspire for our churches and our offer!

Many of the parishes that we have worked with have discovered forgotten assets when they have taken a fresh look at themselves; such as a crypt, green space, kitchen, meeting room and a potential new brand. These rediscovered/rethought or 'new' features have become

the actual or potential assets that form the basis of their changed development. We now need to think in terms of *spaces* (both indoor and outdoor). Some projects have evolved from being an expensive building project to being an inspiring and exciting landscaping/redecoration/rebranding or a radical reorganisation of spaces project.

what does success look like?

As with all projects, we must understand what our actual measure of *success* is. We strongly believe that, for the right project, the development process can be a useful

tool for re-engaging with local people, stakeholders and potential customers. The purpose of a development project is

to rethink, re-engage, reposition and relaunch our offer. There may be other, simpler and cheaper ways of doing that -

- What are you doing with your current spaces? Can you rethink the functions/management of existing spaces?
- Are there better ways to deliver what you want to do? (i.e. go to people and not expect people to come to you – Jesus sat on a rock in a field and the early church met in caves and homes!)
- Who *specifically* do you want to use your building? (This is not about renting spaces but about engaging people.) How do you really know what they want?
- What are the best design solutions? More flexible use of the main church space, pop-up sofas/tents, more animating landscaping, etc?

A development project is not itself the change needed. At best, it is a signal of what is

needed. In some cases it can actually stop us from making the real changes that are so urgently needed. This is not to say that the opportunity provided by a building project is not a fantastic opportunity, but that the process of developing, designing, delivering and selling a development project is primarily a *symbolic* one - to communicate/act out/show the change.

There are often easier, quicker, more creative and often more inspiring ways to do this, and certainly cheaper ones. Better coffee, real investment in marketing and smiling more, may be more effective at reaching and welcoming people than wasting a few million pounds (it's a church, so everyone adds a zero and a few years) on what can often amount to new loos, heating and a new entrance!

3. selling your project

Delivering your project is going to require collaboration and creativity. You will need to identify and leverage your allies and stakeholders. You will need help and the best way to get that help is to excite and involve them in your project from the beginning.

Getting people interested and excited about you, your offer and your project means getting out and selling yourself. You will have to spend some money (invest to grow vs. save to die). A minimum of 10-15% of any organisation's budget should be going into development and marketing. It always amazes us that a parish that is willing to entertain the idea of spending millions on a building, but balk at spending £10,000 - £20,000 on marketing/engagement with young people and/or community celebration activities. Do not wait for the building to be finished to reconnect with your target groups for growth - it will be too late. You need to be doing this before, during and after a building project.

The Church of England alone has 16,000 buildings. If another/better building is the answer, then what is the question?

In addition to some of the more obvious stakeholders, we strongly encourage you to look at engaging entirely new stakeholders. They can help to inform, energise and assist you in the development project, and reflect the changing nature of your community, and the new groups that you may be seeking to reach. New stakeholders contribute new thinking, new business and new mission opportunities that can help your project be more successful.

It is not just about new groups. How do you engage with the current users of your facility? If you are thinking about rebranding (good idea, do it!) as part of your redevelopment,

proposal (especially if you don't communicate early enough and effectively). Residents can also be a valuable source of support and supporting information (e.g. building history, local aspirations) and they can contribute some useful ideas and leads. How will you demonstrate your openness to all? (The welcome starts *before* you open!)

Stakeholders may contribute to working groups, co-host or sponsor events, etc. Links with other businesses/organisations and others will also increase funder/financer confidence about the level of support for your project, project management and its viability. Funders particularly want to see signs of wide community participation. This is essential for funding from the National Lottery and most other foundations. People have to be involved from the beginning (not consulted after!) for it to be credible. You could even enjoy it!

One example for a smaller scale development is the potential option of utilising prefabricated ecobuildings, working with the local FE college to provide the labour, using their construction students, to lay the foundations and to help erect things as part of their educational programme or outside it but enhancing it.

How you present your project will influence people's views and support for it. Local authorities, funders and financiers are rightly suspicious, and more than little tired, of projects that present themselves as problems needing help. This is particularly the case with 'church hall' style projects! Are you clear how your project helps meet local priorities (community renewal), responds to local demand and aligns with opportunities (e.g. how it



are they excited and willing to be a part of the project development and delivery? How will your proposed project and changed offer add value to the existing users and provide for a re-energised joint offer *with* new people?

The local community will always be a key stakeholder. A parish or deanery is an area-based organisation. The local community will have legitimate interest in your development and may be pleased to see more investment (faith) in their area. What are the benefits for the local area from your project? There is of course a risk that they may oppose your

renewal), responds to local demand and aligns with opportunities (e.g. how it provides new services to a new/underserved demographic)? Be clear about the solution that you are seeking to provide, the investment you are offering and the resources you can contribute before you begin asking any other people to make contributions. Inspiring enthusiasm and confidence, rather than immediately asking for help, is more likely to be effective at getting the support you need. For example, getting councillors excited about your project, especially if they don't have to fund it, may mean that they will work with officers encouraging them to facilitate your project (which could save you money).

The first two years of your project development plan should all be about engaging and exciting people. By involving local colleges, schools and universities in designing and populating your current and new spaces (e.g. giving over the church for two weeks as a gallery while the congregation engages in community service and participates in what is going on in the church) is one way of engaging and exciting others about your emerging offer. It also provides great opportunities to accumulate new and innovative ideas and cheaper/more relevant project promotion materials (spreading the good news). Spending several thousand pounds on events, engagement and activities will more than pay for itself and help build the excitement for the project.

A new development is a process, and to get it right needs time and everyone invested early on. Exploring (real) options amongst yourselves and with your key and new friends should take at least 1-2 years. Then keep involving them in co-designing and selecting the final options. These 1-2 years of engaging others for their ideas, passion and creativity will also feed your own as well as build and renew relationships!

This is the best use of your time and the more you do now, the more you will gain later in the form of goodwill, excitement, involvement, resources, ideas, impact and funding as well.

4. conclusion

We live in a culture where Jesus, faith and Christianity are no longer part of the mainstream and in many ways the church has become invisible. We now need to reconnect and become relevant again, while promoting our unique essence and fantastic values. This will *not* primarily be on our own terms, but it should always be open, confident, generous and positive. You reap what you sow, and we have not done nearly enough sowing. Now, more than ever, it is time to get out and sow in our communities!

The world has changed; people's expectations and aspirations have changed and so have their perceptions of *all* beliefs and institutions. We need to reintroduce 'church' to whole new generations who have no idea of who we are or what we do or why. Ideas of 'church' and people's perceptions of us have become fixed as old, boring, unfriendly, posh, creepy, dark, dead and cold, etc. In many cases, they are right. New heating and loos will not change that enough! Your designs, feel, image and 'story' need to be rethought from first principles, in ways that will resonate in your local context and challenge outdated perceptions.

We have a great brand leader (Jesus) and brand values (peace, love, justice, hope and joy) and we need to be truly open and generous to all. We should be exciting, welcoming and inspiring. This *is* what your project should be about and it is this that will bring people on board with what we, and they, want to do. It is not about expensive flat lines drawn on paper, graphics or even recycled wood, bricks and mortar.



A development can be exciting and realise substantial additional profile and value for your parish, your mission and your local community. It can also be a frustrating and stressful experience, but by careful thinking, engagement and planning and a high level of creativity, you and the project team can save a lot of energy, time and money, deliver a project that makes significant impact and engages new people in something worthwhile, exciting, vibrant and even fun!

Be clear with yourself, colleagues and stakeholders why this is the best use of your resources, time and effort to deliver on your mission objectives. Are there other more creative/better/cheaper ways to achieve the same objectives? Taking risks is never easy but we are seeking to demonstrate the good news, and this requires inspiring and constructive risk taking.

contact

Our rapid development programme (**rdp**) covers many of these issues in more detail and includes a range of in-depth buildings resources that are made available free of charge to participants. For more detail about **rdp** please visit our website or contact us.

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