

The Church's Mission in New Housing and Other Development Areas



Introduction

This is a report on dioceses' role in supporting the Church's mission in new housing and other development areas. It summarises the learning from the fifteen dioceses which have received a share of the £7.25 million of R&D money made available by the Archbishops' Council and Church Commissioners for mission initiatives in new housing and other development areas. This learning has been gathered from discussions with representatives of those dioceses, written reports from them on the progress of their development projects, and from national conferences on the issues, most recently one held in London on the 14th January 2011 (which also included representatives of other dioceses with an interest in development issues). Information on new housing funding and reports from previous conferences can be found here: <http://tiny.cc/newhousing>. The contents of this report are as follows:

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Planning about Planning

I. Monitoring Developments

Planning mission in a new housing or other development area inevitably requires knowledge of what is being planned and engagement with the planners and developers. There may be many years – even decades – between the time the first plans are hatched for a development and when any bricks are laid, and the nature of the development may be very different then from when first conceived. Thus monitoring development plans requires sustained effort:

- Some dioceses (e.g. London, Exeter, Chelmsford) have dedicated officers (full-time or part-time) who, as part of a wider brief dealing with development issues, keep tabs on planning proposals. Such a post is difficult for the smaller, least-resourced dioceses to sustain (although there is potential for diocesan collaboration within regions).
- Diocesan Directors of Education often have networks which provide them with good knowledge about developments and it is important to ensure that this is shared fully with other diocesan officers. It is vital that the mission, education, property and social responsibility issues in relation to new development sites are kept together.
- A diocese's property agents could have the brief to inform it of development planning proposals.
- Some dioceses cover areas which have a huge number of development proposals at any one time. Even with a dedicated officer, priority has to be given to developments over a certain size.
- The diocese of London uses a mapping system as a tool for planning its mission in new developments (<http://www.london.anglican.org/Strategic-Development-Map.>)

2. Engaging with the Planners

The Coalition Government has recently instigated changes in planning procedure in the form of the Localism Bill. It is an attempt to move the decision making power over planning issues away from central government to local communities. Regional Strategies to deliver housing targets are being scrapped and instead local planning authorities will have more power to decide what is built and where. The Planning Inspectorate will no longer have the power to make changes to local plans; its task will merely be to assess their 'soundness'. It is possible that this will lead to an increase in development applications; however, there will also be more say at a local level to stop them. If a NIMBY attitude to local plans outweighs the need to provide housing, it is likely that the Localism Bill will lead to a further long-term decline in the number of houses built throughout the country. In countries like France, local authorities have long had more influence on development issues and in general it has proved an effective system. But it is as yet unproven in this country.

Neighbourhood planning is set to increase under the Localism Bill and 'automatic consent' will be in place if a development plan meets a certain set of requirements. Section 106 agreements (which set down binding terms upon developers in relation to the provision of services and infrastructure within a development) will broadly remain the same, but subject to some changes.

Since planning matters always progress fairly slowly, the present economic downturn has not particularly affected planning for medium to large developments. But it has had a significant impact on current development activity. This has been an added complication for diocesan mission planning but has generally helped give the Church more thinking time. Engagement with developers and planners is a long and time-consuming process. In some cases it can be more fruitful for dioceses to have contact

with the developer of a site *before* they take their plans to the local planning authority but it is important to let local authorities know of the Church's intentions and aspirations (e.g. to plant a church, build a school).

Developers always face a trade-off between a 'perfect' development and profit. And in an economic downturn, there is a greater risk of community facilities being sacrificed to make a development affordable. It is frustrating when developers build developments that are below the Section 106 agreement threshold, which avoid obligations in respect of community and service provision. But the Church has the opportunity to influence local decisions. This requires a clear vision on its part as well as persistency, as developers receive many requests from groups with conflicting interests.

The Localism Bill could provide more opportunity for the Church's voice to be heard at local level about development issues. If there is a genuine shift in decision-making to local authorities, then the Church is well-positioned through its parish and diocesan system to influence local opinion. It will, however, continue to be a difficult task to engage with developers.

Church schools are often looked upon favourably by developers because of their educational reputation, and they can provide an effective base for ministry (this is discussed in the Planning for Mission section).

Some planners/developers still seem wedded to the idea of providing 'faith space' to all faiths which risks serving the 'lowest common denominator' in terms of provision. But a more common sense approach has been adopted in Barking Riverside where the development has four community hubs all of which have a faith space which are to be allocated on a leasehold basis. The planning authority had delegated the decision, about the allocation of space, to the local faith forum. The Muslims/ Jews/ Sikhs have not expressed interest in the first community hub and it is going to be used as LEP involving the Methodists, the Salvation Army and the Church of England.

Planning for Mission

I. Understanding the Context

George Lings, Director of the Church Army's Sheffield Centre, has called new housing areas an 'ecclesiological laboratory', since the nature of the transitional community necessitates a constant need for the Church to adapt its ministerial and mission models. He notes that some of the lessons about Church's emerging mission strategies are being learnt fastest in these intense, transitional environments.

So understanding of the context is a vital component of mission planning. This needs to go beyond merely knowing the physical size and shape of the new development. For example;

Identifying the character of a development

- **Is it in a business area?**
- **Are there going to be young families?**
- **Will it be a mostly transient community?**
- **Will there be anyone living or working on the development during the daytime?**
- **What do the people living in the development do during their leisure time?**
- **How will they respond to community projects?**
- **Will any of the residents already be part of Christian communities?**
- **What issues will bring the residents together?**
- **Are there already other groups working to create community?**
- **Is there a strong presence of other faiths, or other denominations?**
- **Are local parish churches well situated for reaching out to the development?**
- **Are local parishes willing and able to reach out to the development?**

Clearly there is a limit to how well these questions can be answered in advance of the development being finished and so mission planning has to operate on certain assumptions, whilst ensuring plans are left flexible and there are further mission audits as the development evolves.

2. Strategies for the Different Contexts

The different strategies adopted by dioceses for mission in new housing and development areas reflect both the varied contexts, and their 'theories of action' i.e. their views on what kind of mission activity is effective in terms of growing new Christian communities. All revolve around putting people on the ground, and doing so as early as possible in the life of a development. Some are mission-focused priests, seeking to attract people to more traditional forms of church; others (although the distinctions are not always clear cut) are pioneer ministers serving and witnessing to those completely unconnected to church.

For example, Peterborough diocese is seeking to create a new church community in each of its large new, (mainly Greenfield) housing developments, planting churches where possible from strong exist-

ing congregations, investing in pioneer ministers operating in teams to connect to the unchurched. Each member of the team has a mission focus which is geographical and thematic (e.g. young people, families, older people). Deaneries play a key part in developing the vision of the work.

In relation to the Liverpool One development project in the heart of the city, Liverpool diocese has been developing a 'River in the City' strategy, building a missional community of individual cells across the development, relationally linked to parish churches, chaplaincies and Christian networks. It seeks to connect the Church to the world of work and leisure, as part of a wider strategy to build a mixed economy Church which ministers within settled neighbourhoods and follows the flow of networks to plant churches in very different environments. The cell churches in Liverpool are the essential building blocks of the missional community, gathering together in larger numbers for worship and witness. The network is not resource intensive in terms of paid staff and buildings but is in terms of lay leadership. The role of the pioneer minister appointed in Liverpool One is to lead the overall network, establish the cells within it and identify, develop and relate to key teams of lay people.

3. Planning Mission using Church Schools

Dioceses have found schools to be a strong connection point for unchurched people, not just Church schools, but of course they clearly provide an advantage because there can be influence on the design of the building and working relationships. If the diocese acts early enough, it can stipulate design features so that the school can also serve as a church building e.g. with separate entrances, storage space. Some schools now contain parish offices. Evidence suggests that it may only take an investment of £10,000 to £15,000 to alter the design of a school to make it amenable to church use, considerably less than the costs of a new church building.

Schools remain busy hubs, however, and may even have their own events over the weekend. It is important for school and church to have clear rules of engagement, covering issues such as the identity of key-holders, storage space, and who can use the school and when and what for.

4. Community Space

Schools are one possible solution to the issue of finding space for churches to meet and engage with the local community. There is a need for creativity in this area in view of the general reluctance of developers to provide any community space.

In New Braiswick Park, Colchester, a house is rented on the development so that the mission work is able to respond directly to the concerns and needs of the community as they arise. Activities include 'Messy Play' sessions for toddlers, baby massage sessions and community litter picks. It is important to ensure that developers and local authorities approve the use of a house for such purposes. If a 'change of use' is not approved then it can be difficult to keep a house open as a community centre if a complaint is lodged, even if the local council is helping to fund groups that meet within the house. Many residents like the idea of a community centre, but retain a 'not in my back yard' mentality.

Few dioceses are starting their mission planning in new developments with a view to building a dedicated church building. The 'traditional model' of ministry in new housing – appropriation of land for a church building plus the provision of stipendiary clergy – is inadequate in many places in terms of missionary outreach as well as being difficult to sustain financially. In some communities there remains the expectation (sometimes fed by developers) that the church must be represented by its own building. In those areas, a diocese might plan to build a place of worship but it would normally require first the building up of a sustainable church community meeting in shared space.

5. Enabling Parishes to Engage with Smaller Developments

Whilst larger scale developments require the diocese and deanery to develop a fresh vision of mission which stretches beyond existing parish activity, and possibly to re-allocate significant resources to the area, engaging with smaller scale developments normally relies on the efforts of the parishes in which they fall. The extent to which these opportunities are taken up heavily depends on the quality of local church leadership.

Some dioceses are seeking to encourage their congregations in their engagement with new housing developments e.g. mapping the relevant areas, helping to develop Mission Action Plans for the developments, providing consultancy support, sharing good practice etc. Dioceses can face the situation, however, where those parishes which are 'up for mission' are already reaching out to their new developments and don't need much help, and those parishes with little current or planned engagement with their new housing are not keen to accept advice.

A few dioceses have witnessed some quite radical changes in the mission emphasis of some of their parishes because of the stimulus of some new building in their locality.

6. Working with Ecumenical Partners

Working ecumenically is often a necessity in dealing with planners. It is also important that the Church witnesses to the truth and that its concern is to build the Kingdom of God, not the kingdom of the Church of England. Churches Together in England seek to facilitate partnerships over new housing issues at a local and national level ([Churches Together Website](#)). In general, ecumenism works best when focused on mission, whether at strategic planning level or actually on the ground.

Although the Church of England is an established, national church, there is merit in it allowing other denominations, where strong, to take the lead in certain development areas. With finite resources, the Church has to determine priorities about its work. That said, in many areas, there is room for many more churches. For example, one part of London has over 400 churches, yet there remains a pressing need to reach out to the community there so the Church of England is still seeking to expand its mission in the area. Collaboration with ecumenical partners should seek to optimise mission activity not limit it.

It is important to recognise that there are often significant differences between what other denominations and churches can bring to the table in terms of resources. The Church of England has to be clear what it wants to achieve in any situation. Discussions with other partners inevitably require some sort of negotiation and compromise about different interests so the Church needs to stay focused on its initial aims. It is important also to have clear agreements about resource issues (finance, physical space, appointments etc.).

The Church of England needs to be aware of the existence of churches (e.g. Newfrontiers) which may wish to be involved in new housing mission work but which have not been part of traditional ecumenical groups and discussions. Such churches often show more entrepreneurial spirit and make quicker decisions than the more historic denominations. This can make it more difficult for planning, but that only enhances the need for partnership with them where possible.

Mission Implementation

I. Pioneer Appointments

Recruiting the right people for the job is a truism for all Church appointments but the special characteristics of development areas can mean it is more difficult to work up the job description and personal specification of the 'right person' to minister there.

The evolving nature of mission work within development area suggests the need to keep the job description fairly open albeit set within a long-term vision.

***Example** – In Leeds for the role of Business Pioneer there was a huge amount of background information and research that was needed before a role description and person specification could be released. There was consultation with the business industry and it was related to other issues within the city. The job was advertised locally as well as in the Church Times so that the net was thrown open a little wider for more responses. Using phrases such as 'self-starter' and 'motivated' in the advertisement signalled that someone who was willing to start with a blank piece of paper and write their own job description, would be welcome.*

Dioceses are also emphasising, when looking for pioneer ministers, the need for people with a proven track record on work within pioneering situations, entrepreneurship, being 'light on their feet', managerial experience, cultural connections to the group(s) to whom they will be ministering, and a strong ability to network with people. Dioceses testify that getting the right sort of person is more important than whether they are ordained or not. Some have found Church Army and other lay pioneer appointments very effective.

There needs to be clear supervisory and monitoring arrangements for pioneers, once appointed. This provides accountability and support for the work, and can cover issues such as widening or narrowing the scope of work, changing the nature of their role, or dealing with a difficult ministerial issue. There is a risk with pioneers (as there is with all ministers) that they will focus their work on areas of interest rather than the wider vision for the role.

There needs to be clarity over terms of service: some dioceses are employing ministers through the diocesan board of finance, other ministers are office-holders. Others have set up separate companies to in order to employ either lay or ordained ministers. This can though add more complexity than is necessary. Whatever the employment status of pioneers, it is important to have clarity about the finances of their work (budgets, expenses etc).

It is vital, in their day to day work, that pioneers are resourced and supported by other ministers and teams of laity in parishes/deaneries. Harnessing the skills of local congregations is essential since no pioneer can be expected to have the full range of abilities needed to minister to new housing areas.

The Fresh Expressions team and the Church Army's Sheffield Centre are working in collaboration to provide networks for pioneer ministers, including those operating in new housing and other development areas. (See www.sharetheguide.org and www.churcharmy.org.uk).

2. Evolving Strategy

The importance of understanding the context of a new development does not stop when it finishes being built or when a minister is appointed to it. On-going contextualisation and feedback from the ground are essential to refine mission strategy. Some dioceses have demonstrated the seriousness of this by expecting their pioneer to re-write their job description each year.

Regular mission audits give a wider perspective to the Church's work than the views of church leaders/members on the ground. Pioneers in some dioceses are using informal channels of communication, such as talking to the developer's sales team, to paint a picture of the evolving shape of the development. In parallel, they have conducted deeper, more formal interviews, which have yielded lots of qualitative data which has been logged to help build a perception of residents' views, including that of church from the outside. Such interviews can be very revealing e.g. making clear how little some residents want community or church. Repeating the interviews at subsequent intervals enables changes in perceptions to be tracked. They have also proved to be a great relationship builder and just by asking people to examine why they have not attended church has proved to be an effective evangelism tool.

(The Anglican Church Planting Initiatives (ACPI) website has some useful resources for mission audit questionnaires and ideas. <http://tiny.cc/churchplanting>).

3. Building Sustainability

Some pioneering work may be short-lived in nature but if a new, sustainable Christian community is to be created in a new development area, then the mission work and its finances need to have solid foundations. Some pioneers have done effective mission work for a time but left little behind them once they had come to the end of their term and left. To address this, dioceses are emphasising the importance of pioneers working in teams, involving other ministers and with laity, so that a pioneer gifted in networking and evangelism worked alongside those gifted in building up disciples and the life of the church community. There is a case too for appointing pioneers on longer terms, although some are probably best suited to 'start-up situations' and then moving on to new areas to leave others to develop the mission work. Some dioceses have appointed pioneers on three-year terms, to fit with the funding they have available, but this left very little time to build any work. 5-7 years seems a more appropriate timescale, although a church community on a new development could take 10 years or more to become sustainable (financially and in terms of generating its own leadership).

This raises difficult issues for dioceses in terms of the amount of financial support they provide to mission work in new housing and other development areas. It is important to avoid too short-term support; yet also to avoid creating long-term dependency; and to ensure that decisions about on-going financial support are taken in the light of agreed milestones about the effectiveness of the project (see later section). The issue of financial sustainability is relevant for existing parish ministry throughout dioceses, not just mission in development areas. Dioceses need to have consistent policies about sustainability and subsidy or else there is a risk that the mission in those areas will get squeezed out by the need to sustain existing church structures.

A number of dioceses are seeking to ensure that sustainability is an in-built feature of mission in new housing and other development areas from the very start. This can be done in different ways. For example, by starting work with part-time paid ministers or unpaid workers (i.e. cheaper models of church). By insisting that pioneers focus on financial sustainability rather than expect some other part of the Church to pay for them. By ensuring new communities are linked to parishes which are financially sustainable and growing, both spiritually and numerically. Or by ensuring that sufficient funds are raised to sustain the work *before* the new community is built up (this is something which the free churches, with their emphasis on sacrificial giving, are often good at doing).

4. Legal Structures

Another way to help the sustainability of mission work in new developments is to ensure it has proper legal foundations. New housing developments, particularly the larger ones, invariably cut across existing parish boundaries. Pioneer ministry in city center developments has a much larger horizon than the individual parishes within it.

In these circumstances, dioceses are using Bishop's Mission Orders (BMOs) to give legitimacy to the mission work being undertaken. The consultation associated with creating the Order and the clarity they provide has been deemed very helpful in some situations (e.g. where developments span two or more parishes). But there is recognition that BMOs are not a panacea, and they can be a little messy, some dioceses are concerning that going down the BMO process too early undermines local ownership of new housing projects, although there may still be a case for creating one as a last resort to smooth over church relationships.

5. Assessing Effectiveness

There needs to be objective assessment of the effectiveness of a new housing or other development mission project, not just because of the external funding provided to them (and ultimately if a project was not going well, decisions have to be made about stopping it), but also so that the Church can learn from what is being achieved.

Such an assessment requires, at the beginning of the project's life, a clear vision of what is to be achieved and a set of milestones against which progress can be measured. The objectives of a project may alter over time, but this did not prevent the need to assess effectiveness. It is important to have 'milestones and not millstones' i.e. objectives that are realistic and which flow naturally from the vision for the mission work in the development. Metrics also have to be appropriate to the context which may not necessarily be focused on Sunday attendance.

Performance indicators currently being used by dioceses include:

- Weekly attendance – including all expressions of church and worship
- Non church events attendances (Community projects)
- Frequency of community engagement events
- Number of baptisms as a result of the ministry
- Giving figures
- Number of people attending an enquirers course
- Number of people at school assemblies
- Evidence of engagement with all age groups
- Percentage of houses within a new community currently being engaged with

Those dioceses receiving a share of new housing and other development funding from the funds managed by the Church Commissioners have been asked to provide change performance indicators for their projects and then measure progress against them. Again this is not just about ensuring 'value for money' (important though that is) but to help capture and share knowledge about mission in development areas.

The Church Commissioners have developed some national performance indicators to give the overall evaluation of the new housing funding. **These include:**

- Comparative impact on attendance figures
- Projects that become self-supporting or moving demonstrably in that direction
- Projects developing and thriving beyond their current leadership
- Decision making in the wider Church influenced by learning from the projects and ways of cascading this learning