

**Mission in the Diocese of Chester:**

**Building God's Kingdom**

**A Research and Development Discussion Paper on  
Church Buildings**

**First published October 2019, updated April 2021**

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'Unless the LORD builds the house,  
those who build it labour in vain.

*Psalm 12 :1*

## **1. Introduction**

People and buildings are the church's biggest assets, as God invites us to be part of bringing God's Kingdom to earth, as it is in heaven.

This research report focuses on one aspect of this - buildings. Its aim is to better understand and stimulate discussion on the role of buildings in the Diocese of Chester, both now and in the future. This includes understanding the financial resources required, the impact of buildings on the mission and ministry of the church and views on the best way forward to manage church buildings in the future. Such thinking seeks to contribute to discerning God's will for our Diocese. It calls for us to have a willing and open spirit to respond to considering church buildings and halls and, crucially, also their balance with other places and spaces used for ministry and mission.

A variety of research material has been gathered and generated. This includes relevant contextual information and statistics to help us see the bigger picture in our Diocese and nationally; a PCC survey inviting responses in the Diocese July - October 2018; and the learning from a selection of case studies of church building projects in our Diocese.

## **2. Executive Summary**

This research and development paper maps the current landscape of building assets and snapshot of parish-level views, and also gives a steer for key considerations for the future.

The need for Places of Worship mattered in Jesus' day and continues for us today, as one of three spaces used for mission and ministry, (the others being community spaces and private homes). In the Diocese of Chester, we have 348 church buildings, with an estimated 2 million visits to church services alone each year.

Church buildings can be valuable assets for empowering the gathered church as it collectively draws closer to God; a highly visible Christian presence in the community; a place of connection and support; and, as research shows, one factor in helping people come to faith.

Capital investment in making church buildings more versatile, accessible and with facilities, often combined with making the building structurally safe and watertight, has made a positive difference for some of our churches. In a 2018 Parish Survey and 14 case studies, the majority said that investment had made a positive impact in one or more of the following ways:

- Being more welcoming, comfortable and accessible for people.
- Opportunities to begin new ways of 'being church' and connecting with local communities.
- Better able to respond to needs of people, new activities, flexible to change to different uses of the space.
- Using the building more during the week and for a greater range of activities and services.
- Relationship-building is strengthened through better spaces to gather together as well as engaging with wider communities.

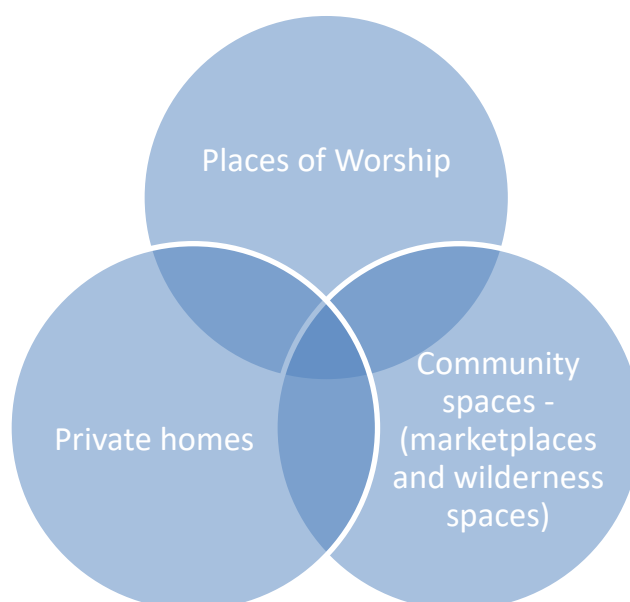
However, there are considerable challenges including needing to raise significant levels of funding, fewer people attending Sunday services and, for some, inheriting a location and/or form of building that may not be most effective or easily changed today. Parishes are collectively seeing to raise funds totalling at least £20million for capital works on church buildings and hall in our Diocese.

*Key findings*

1. The national focus on buildings makes it timely for our Diocese to also consider this issue.
2. We can learn from the three-fold use of physical 'spaces' for ministry and mission by Jesus and the early church – Places of Worship, Community Spaces (marketplaces and wilderness spaces), Private homes. The Church of England have significantly prioritised the first. Today, what is the right balance (and interaction) of places of spaces for the Good News to be shared most effectively?
3. At least two million visitors are welcomed in our Diocese each year!
4. Reflecting on the role of church buildings may assist shaping a vision for their right use, in line with the overarching vision for the church.
5. The impetus (nationally and locally) is for churches to be more people-focused and outward-looking, in which church buildings are one enabling role to achieve this by creating spaces where people connect in community with God and with one another.
6. Capital investment has led to positive impact in most churches in the case studies and the parish survey, linked to first discerning a clear overarching Godly vision for the church.
7. Vast sums of investment in capital works continue to be required.
8. Repairs are a priority need for capital works, alongside improvement works.
9. Church buildings both inhibit and enhance the growth of God's kingdom.
10. Parish thoughts on the future direction for sacred space include:
  - Change the permissions process to be more accommodating for change.
  - Being more missional in the use and focus of resources.
  - More capacity at Diocesan level to offer parish – level support with areas such as their missional potential, managing building projects and securing the finance.
  - The Diocese taking a more strategic approach to managing buildings, including closure of buildings that are no longer fit for the mission God intended and investing in those that do, combined with sharing space more frequently, both ecumenically and with wider communities.

### 3. Reflections on sacred space

In scripture, Jesus and the early church make use of three different types of physical space in which to live out God's calling in their lives:



#### *Examples from scripture*

##### *Places of worship and community spaces*

<sup>16</sup> 'While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. <sup>17</sup> So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and also in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there'. (Acts 17:17)

##### *Places of worship and private homes*

'And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people...' (Acts 2:46 - 47)

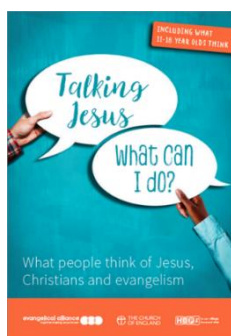
Sacred spaces could be viewed as places that we intentionally use for the glory of God, whether church buildings, halls or temporarily using community space such as halls and cafes. Well maintained and enhanced church buildings are a strong witness that the Christian faith is very much alive and making a positive

difference in our communities - our buildings 'speak'. They are our place for collective worship, a house of prayer and a resource for mission.

In '*The Report of the Church Buildings Review Group*<sup>1</sup>', published in January 2016, led by the Right Reverend John Inge, Bishop of Worcester, it makes the point that buildings themselves are not holy; simply, they create space that is set apart as a reminder of who God is and what he has done.<sup>2</sup>

In '*Church Buildings for People*', Nigel Walter argues that church buildings are active partners in creating space where the family of God grows together in closeness to God and one another. Church buildings create space to strengthen these relational bonds and provide a sense of rootedness.<sup>3</sup>

Church buildings are a visible Christian presence on our high streets and in our villages. They are instantly recognisable, acting as a 24/7 noticeboard that could be described as 'evangelism in stone', acting as a witness to the permanency of God, and in turn, the resilience of the body of Christ through changing times.



Research shows church buildings play an important role in people coming to faith. In the ComRes research report, '*Talking Jesus: Perceptions of Jesus, Christians and evangelism (adults and young people)*', both attending wedding or funeral (in a church building) and visiting a church building outside service times were both factors in faith formation.

**To find out more about the theological perspective on church buildings, including stories worth sharing to demonstrate what this looks like for real, please see Appendix A: Theological Reflections on Sacred Spaces.**

<sup>1</sup> The Report of the Church Buildings Review Group, p1 – GS 2008

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p25

<sup>3</sup> *Church Buildings for People: Reimagining Church Buildings as Nourishing Places*, Nigel Walter, Grove Books, 2014

## 4. Role of church buildings

To summarise, one way of seeing the foundational role of church buildings is reflected in the following diagram. It is phrased in a non-church language to help broaden the range of people who can join the conversation about the role of church buildings and provide a different lens in which to view them. These roles are relevant across the whole church family (all age). A church may have particular strengths rather than each role being of equal weight. When considering the roles, it is important to consider all under the umbrella of how they help people encounter Christ, either for the first time or in a deeper way.





1. **Pray, Reflect** - Praying together as a Christian community, with people, for people and for the world. Open for all (church building and churchyard) as a sacred space to be still, calm and reflect on life in the sacred ambience as a House of Prayer; a place for vigils at times of great need; facilitating Christian spiritual awareness.
2. **Encounter, Learn, Enrich** - Growing personally and as a Christian community in our understanding of and closeness to God (whole-life discipleship) through proclaiming the Good News afresh and maintaining a Christian presence locally, (the role of church buildings in faith formation). This becomes a foundation for a positive sense of identity, value, purpose and belonging. Volunteering enhances personal development and fellowship.
3. **Relational, wellbeing** - Hub of community life, bringing people together, supporting and caring, reducing social isolation by building friendships; a place of refuge and sanctuary; equipping people to deal with life's challenges through drawing closer to God; helping create a more just world through prayer, support, encouragement, practical help and social action.
4. **Celebrate** - Rejoicing and thankfulness in God's blessings through worship and relationship-building; celebrating major life events of baptisms (christenings), weddings and blessings; celebrating special times and events in local and national life, held in often the largest public building for villages and some towns.
5. **Respect, Remember** - An open door for all to enter; a space for conversations and action that transform injustices. A place of remembrance, respect and honour to God, people's lives, significant events (past, present and future) and creation, including commemorative services, memorials, funerals, prayers, projects or initiatives and the missional role of churchyards.
6. **Be Inspired, Discover** - Inspiring, creative, and uplifting space with a special ambience, often historic, with great acoustics. Treasure-houses, built to the glory of God and so often amongst the finest architecture for an area; increasingly open for visitors, part of heritage and cultural tourism and local life.
7. **Be Rooted** - Symbolising the permanence of God and longevity of commitment to local communities; encapsulating stories of people's lives, often in landmark buildings; creating a sense of rootedness of place and identity on a personal, local and national level, including a spiritual sense of rootedness as belonging to the family of God; site of pilgrimage, preserving historical/cultural research, artefacts and churchyards.

## 5. Challenges

Managing and using church buildings, however, are not without their challenges. These cannot be underestimated. In terms of time, people and finance, their demands are extremely high.

Major investment has and continues to be required in what are often historic and grade listed buildings to make them safe and fit for the purpose God intended, such as space for worship and group activities, better facilities, lighting, heating, access, and equipment, as well as essential repairs to the historic fabric of the building and its special features. This has not come easy.

Vast fundraising efforts continue to be led by local people, for local people, who are voluntarily serving in churches.

Not all our church buildings are now in the right location and/or easily adaptable. For some areas, new housing developments are significantly increasing the population of a village or town. Further consideration is needed for how best to respond.

Church buildings may not be the only or indeed the best space for 'being Church' in multiple ways to enable a greater 'blended' (mixed) economy of Church to flourish. This involves both inherited Church and pioneering ministries that include Fresh Expressions that take place in church buildings, church halls and other community spaces.

*How we use spaces intentionally for encountering God is a conversation that needs further exploration, to which this report is one contribution to such discussions.*

Some of the main challenges with church buildings are summarised in the following diagram, based on feedback from parishes in the Diocese and key factors identified in national research.





## 6. National context

The Church Buildings Council at the Church of England state,

'The Church of England is the largest steward of England's built heritage through its network of 16,000 parish churches. Among these are 45% of England's grade I listed buildings, showing just how special these buildings are'.<sup>4</sup>

There is increasing focus on the sustainable use and management of church buildings. This includes for the first time the government commissioning a report and launching a subsequent pilot scheme based on the recommendations in the report, Taylor Review. Research includes:

- **2016, '[Church Buildings Review](#)',** published January 2016, commissioned by the Church Commissioners and the Archbishop's Council, Church of England.<sup>5</sup>
- **2017, '[Taylor Review: Sustainability of Church Buildings and Cathedrals](#)',** published December 2017, commissioned by the government, Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).<sup>6</sup>
- **2018, '[Suggested Template for a Diocesan Strategic Review of Church Buildings as part of Mission Planning](#)',** published by the Church Buildings Council (CBC), Church of England, June 2018.<sup>7</sup>
- **2020, '[Evaluation of the Taylor Review Pilot: Sept 2018 - March 2020](#),** managed by Historic England on behalf of the government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Diocese of Chester is participating in the pilot, based on recommendations in the report.<sup>8</sup> Published Oct 2020.
- **2020, '[The GRA:CE Project Report by Church Urban Fund](#).** Growing Good:
- Growth, Social Action and Discipleship, by Theos and Church Urban Fund.
- in the Church of England Exploring the relationship between social action, discipleship and church growth.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/news/governments-english-churches-and-cathedrals-sustainability-review-welcomed>.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.hrballiance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/church\\_buildings\\_review\\_report\\_2015.pdf](http://www.hrballiance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/church_buildings_review_report_2015.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/english-churches-and-cathedrals-sustainability-review>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/diocesan-resources/strategic-planning-church-buildings>

<sup>8</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/caring-for-heritage/places-of-worship/churches-sustainability-review/>

- **2020, [The House of Good report: the economic and social value of church buildings in the UK](#)**, commissioned by National Churches Trust, October 2020
- **2021, [Churches, COVID-19 and Community: experiences, needs and supporting recovery](#)**. By the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture, University of York. Published March 2021. [Executive Summary and Full report available](#).

**To find out more about the national perspective, including the priorities emerging nationally, please see [Appendix B: National Context on Church Buildings](#).**

## 7. Diocese of Chester statistics

**Map.** Please click on this URL to access an interactive map of the Diocese, showing the location of all church buildings – <https://arcg.is/15rnXb>

**Number of church buildings** 348 buildings used for worship. (This includes Parish Churches, Chapels of Ease, Licensed Places of Worship and eight Private Chapels)

**Grade listings.** 42 Grade I, 66 Grade 2\*, 140 Grade 2, 100 Unlisted.

**Major Parish Churches.** Chester St John the Baptist; Congleton St Peter; Nantwich St Mary; Macclesfield St Michael; Stockport St George; and Stockport St Mary. As defined by the Church Buildings Council at the Church of England.

**Finance.** The current known fundraising target for capital works in the Diocese is £20m. Based on the Statistics for Finance, the greatest expenditure aside from Parish Share is capital expenditure on major repairs and new building work to church buildings, plus church halls and other property owned by the PCC, equating to 16%.

**Basic facilities in church buildings -** Based on the Statistics for Mission, in 2015 the number of churches that had toilet facilities was 174 (79%) churches and kitchen facilities was 134 (61%), out of 220 respondents.

**Open for visitors outside service times -** Out of 183 respondents, there was a mixed picture. The most frequent answer was 'occasionally' open (57), followed by open 'five or more days per week' (45), then 'never' open (37). The remainder were open in between those levels.

**Social Justice work by churches.** 216 churches responded, detailing 329 projects run by churches, with a rounded total 700 social action projects they were involved in.

**Visitors.** Based on the Statistics for Mission data, it is estimated that the total number of visitors to our church buildings could be around 2 million!

**Please see Appendix C: Diocese of Chester Statistics.** This includes further details on the above, plus the footprint of grade 1 and 2\* buildings, attendance at church services and a summary of the use of church buildings.

## **8. Diocese of Chester Parish Survey 2018**

From July to October 2018, PCC's were invited to take part in a Diocesan-wide survey, exploring the use, management, role and thinking about church buildings and halls. A total of 20 responses were received. The findings are summarised below.

**For full responses, please see Appendix D: Parish Survey 2018 full responses.**

### **Q1 Have you enhanced your church building or church hall over the last decade?**

19 out of 20 said yes.

### **Q2 What work was done?**

- *To Church building* - the most frequent answers are audio/visual (A/V) and conservation of features, with a secondary priority of heating.
- *To Church hall* - improved meeting space is the most frequent work, closely followed by administrative/storage space, kitchenette and versatility of space for mission and ministry.
- *To both* - repairs are the overwhelming priority. Secondary priorities are lighting, heating, audio/visual (A/V) and energy efficiency.

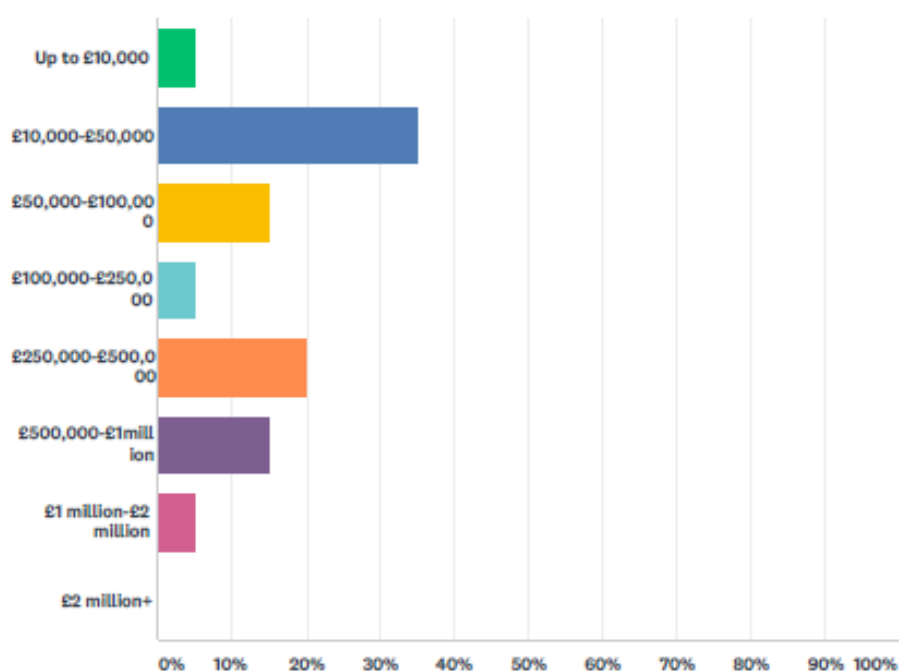
With all responses combined, it provides a fairly even picture of the breadth of needs for capital investment. Energy efficiency/environmentally friendly initiatives are the most frequent answer, followed closely with repairs, although further factors are not far behind.

### **Q3 What types of groups regularly use the church building and hall?**

- *In Church building* - 'visitors' are the most frequent answer, closely followed by schools and churchyard visitors
- *In Church hall* - over 60's groups and celebratory events are joint first, closely followed by health/emergency services/council use and counselling/support groups.

- *In both* - youth groups and leisure groups are the joint most frequent answer, followed by meeting spaces and visitors. Third most frequent are schools and baby/toddler groups.

**Q4 Approximately how much has been spent on the church building and hall over the last ten years for repairs and/or improvements?**



**Q5 How was the money raised for the building work?**

<i>Method</i>	<i>No. of responses</i>
Congregational giving*	10
Individual/specific donations*	8
Grants, including lottery fund	11
Normal or general church fundraising	7
Legacies	5
Fundraising events	3
Reserves	3
Rental income (e.g. room hire)	2



Loan or mortgage 2

Budgeting 2

(\*Responses include multiple phrasings, therefore the meaning of 'donations' may refer to both congregational giving and community or business giving. Therefore, it is likely congregational giving may be greater than indicated.)

## **Q6 Do you have a Friends Scheme?**

Most responses do not have a Friends Scheme, (16 responses), one respondent said yes, and three are considering it in the future. No respondents have a group that is no longer active. (NB: the Diocese has a list of churches that it is aware of which have a Friends Scheme, currently totalling 19).

## **Q7 What difference has investing in the church building made to the life and impact of the church?**

*Summary* – Out of twenty responses, all but one church that has invested in the building have seen a positive impact, especially increased church fellowship, community engagement, improved ministry, and a more welcoming, accessible and comfortable space for a variety of different people's needs and interests.



The majority (18) said the building project had made a significant difference to the life of the church, with two stating it made a minor or no difference to the life of the church. Re-occurring themes were:

- Being more welcoming, comfortable and accessible for people.
- Opportunities to begin new ways of 'being church' and engaging with people.
- Better able to respond to needs of people, new activities, flexible to change to different uses of the space.

- Using the building more during the week and for a greater range of activities and services.
- Relationship-building is really important. The projects helped strengthen this in relation to better space and facilities for church fellowship as well as engaging with wider communities.

*Responses -*

*'Buildings now more welcoming and comfortable, groups enjoy and will come back. New projection system in church makes services / sermons more interesting, Space in the Church Hall is more adaptable giving more space for social events and for contact after services'.*

*'New chairs in the church has improved comfort especially for the elderly and also given us greater flexibility on using the space. Improvements to the kitchen has enabled us to offer soup and sandwich deliveries weekly to the housebound and isolated in our community and made it possible to hold meals on in church/hall for up to 80 people at a time. We have also recently opened a weekly "pop - in" café which will generate additional funds for the church. Improved heating has made the church warmer more quickly and made the church more comfortable for all. Turned a storeroom into the church office which has improved administration and communications; and provides a focal point for non - ministry related enquiries. Hall is also used as a polling station for local and national elections generating a useful source of revenue'.*

*'HUGE! The works of 14 years ago changed everything! It previously looked as though the church was closed, even when it was open. The building is now used something like 40 hours per week (including for worship) rather than the 10 or so previously. It has made the building a locus for our ministry to the town. Hundreds of people drop in each month. The 'town' knows that the church is open, active and available, and that 'we are for the town'.*

*'Massive. The church hall and its Cafe builds significant bridges to the community. The church as a grade 1 listed building is already an attractional feature'.*

*'Considerable, enabling disability access to the hall, and greatly improved space and facilities'.*

## **Q8 Has investing in the building(s) made an impact on the growth of the church, either spiritually or numerically?**

*Summary - Overall*, most building projects have played a role in numerical and/or spiritual growth, as the building has helped facilitate greater and new uses and therefore more opportunity for relationship-building to share faith. Both aspects of growth, (spiritual and numerical) are equally mentioned 11 times each.



Four out of 20 said it was too early to comment on growth, as the project had not long since completed. This leaves 16 respondents able to comment. Out of these, 50% of respondents, (ten churches), had seen an increase numerically since the building project. Four churches (25%) particularly commented on better engagement with children and families.

An example of one response –

*'Different fresh expression services have added new people to our congregation and they have become active members of the church on the PCC and as helpers. It has also inspired 3 Alpha and 3 Lent courses as home groups'.*

On the other hand, the remaining six churches that could comment on growth had experienced no numerical growth or not explicitly mentioned it.

A small number of churches had experienced both growth and decline, for example, more people attending but not as regularly, new people attending but there has been drop-off as well, or growth in mission beyond the church walls.

Eight out of 20 respondents directly commented on the project resulting in spiritual growth, although it was implied in others. This included growing maturity as a Christian through greater involvement in serving, generous giving (financial and time), coming together with one vision, the church becoming more outward-looking and better able to engage in worship when physical needs are met such as a warm and comfortable building in which people can clearly see and hear the service.

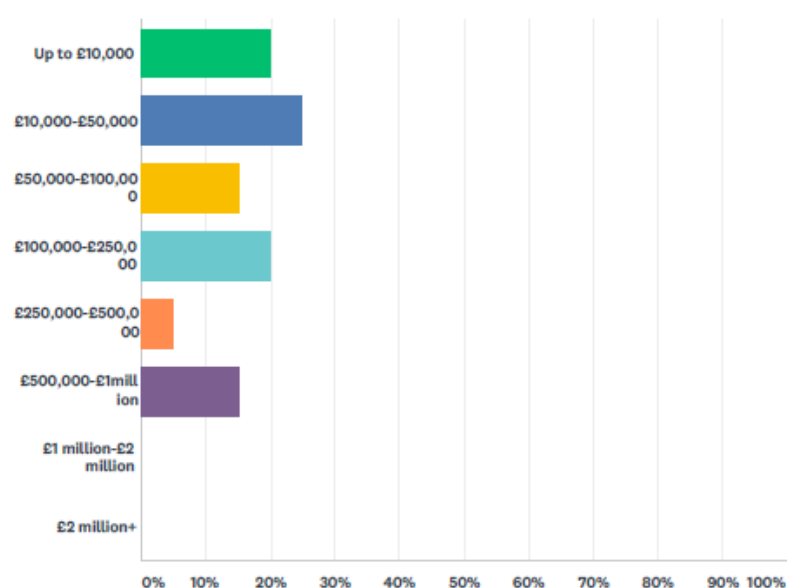
An example of one response -

*'It changed the mindset of the church to be more outward - focused, recognising that in God we have something special to offer. Numerically there are probably more people attending, but not as regularly. As previously said, total numbers through the doors has rocketed, including some dropping in to worship. We feel as though we would not have attracted as many young families recently had we not done the work - it was a forbidding and less comfortable building then'.*

### **Q9 Thinking about the future, what changes/improvements do you envisage carrying out in the next ten years?**

- *For church building* - conservation of features of the building is the most frequent need, followed by repairs, lighting and versatile space for mission and ministry.
- *For church hall* - a range of work is needed, but this has a lower level of need than work on church buildings (indicated by fewer responses). Work includes suitable facilities for young generations, kitchenette, W.C., and heating.
- *For both* - Repairs dominate the work needed, followed by environmentally friendly/energy efficiency work and Audio/Visual.

### **Q10 How much do you anticipate this future work will cost?**



## Q11 How do you think the spaces used by churches *inhibit* the growth of the kingdom of God in our Diocese?

- Summary

Out of the ten responses, nine churches agreed there were inhibiting aspects to church buildings.

The most frequent factor was that church buildings create a negative first impression for those not familiar with entering them. They are spaces that can be intimidating, unwelcoming, uncomfortable, and not accessible.

This was closely followed by how resource-heavy church buildings are in terms of financial upkeep, time and people, with concern there was too great an emphasis on buildings rather than people and the work of the church, and too strong a 'heritage' focus.

Thirdly, respondents mentioned some church buildings have unsuitable space for mission and ministry, which inhibit their use, especially for group activities and more contemporary forms of worship. One respondent sums up the comments by writing,

*'Intimidating and alien environment for unchurched people. Uncomfortable seating. Cold & hard to heat. Often dark & dingy. Huge financial drain inhibits mission and ministry. Often inaccessible physically. Often unsuited to running groups for children etc. Cost and delay of faculty proceedings. Size of building (if too large or too small) restricts growth. Surrounded by graves & often dark churchyards'.*

The following examples of comments are grouped into key themes that emerged-

- Negative first impressions of not welcoming

*'We have mixed views; some believe Churches present a big barrier to most people to even set foot inside. Once inside even if the welcome is good, the pews are hard the lighting poor and the service is a mystery to most people. Whereas others*



*believe churches to be beautiful historic places and they appreciate Anglican traditions'.*

*'Churches can be alien buildings which people find it uncomfortable to enter'.*

*'Access, especially when it is dark, can be an issue'*

*'They can suggest a backward looking or "heritage only" image of Church'.*

*'A church that keeps its doors locked except on Sundays is by definition a place of exclusion. We therefore now have the church open from 09.00 until 12.00 every weekday; sometimes unattended (with valuables locked away)'.*

- Resource-heavy

*'We can too easily become fabric and maintenance focused. It can create a very static view as church as location rather than church as the people'.*

*'They can be a huge drain on financial resources, and so on time and energy to get funding - distracting us from the church's mission to make disciples. They can give two impressions of: 1. "everything is alright - if they have a building like this the church must be 'loaded'". 2. "church is not for me because my life is a mess, and doesn't connect with this beautiful (and gothic) building.'*

- Physical space unsuitable, challenge to making changes

*'Too rigid in their layout to encompass modern forms of worship and to be of use to other groups in the community. They can be depressing and oppressive, lacking a welcome. More importance can be given to the building as a museum by professional objectors to change rather than to the people who are the church and their needs. The churches can be historic buildings but there must be a balance with their need to do God's work'.*

- No issue - *'We believe we work closely and our 'sacred space' is valued and used efficiently'.*



**Q12 How do you think the spaces used by churches *enhance* the growth of the kingdom of God in our Diocese?**

- Summary

A total of 19 responses were received, which is nearly double that of the previous question. The most frequent related to the role of church buildings as spaces where people meet with God. Further factors within this are a visible sign of God's presence in the community and one aspect is creating a positive church experience that people would want to return. This was closely followed by loving service to the community in a myriad of ways, which often overlaps with the first point about being positive witnesses to God's goodness.



One respondent wrote,

*'Enormously! Looking at so many ways people use our spaces, it is only limited by our imagination'.*

The following examples of comments are grouped into two themes that emerged -

- Spaces where people meet with God, a visible sign of God's presence in the community, a positive church experience

*'Our church buildings are loved and appreciated, by people of all ages, in our Diocese. Our spaces enable us to have a focal point for our worship'.*

*'They are visible signs of God's presence in this place. They speak of God's love of people in life and in death. A well kept church and churchyard shows WE care for environment, our worship, loved ones in churchyard'.*

*'For some coming into a traditional building can be helpful to aid persons spirituality'.*

*'The buildings can be inspiring, uplifting and a place of comfort and security. They can be welcoming and warm, bringing strangers into the love of God. Working together adds strength to our mission'.*

*'The buildings tend to be very visible in the public space (enhancing when in good repair/distracting when poorly maintained) and people tend to know where their local one is. Through welcoming people into our buildings we can reflect something of God's warmth and welcome, and use them as vehicles for teaching about God and our faith, and as a quiet space in a noisy world. We also use them for social action and mission (foodbanks, nightshelters, etc). Our spaces are also GREAT places for those times of public celebration and expressions of sorrow. Anglican buildings also tend to be the most inclusive in terms of ALL are welcome (even if not all can gain access!).'*

*'Our church is often considered a welcoming Church. It is also the local Church for the Community and many people feel a connection to us. Recognising the "belong then believe", there is an opportunity to increase the use of the Buildings. This could meet a number of needs and then people may move on in their Spiritual Journey. We recognised the need for increased Community use of the Buildings covering the areas identified in the Questionnaire. Encouragingly we are undertaking many of the activity listed. Our aim is to have a busy and lively Church Centre, aiming to be a Church in the Centre of the Community'.*

*'A friendly, welcoming, comfortable, warm church that isn't stuffy'.*

*'If they are welcoming, appealing and accessible they will attract more people to worship in them and use them'.*

*'The history of many faithful people gathering to worship and follow Jesus is a light in the community. We seek to reconnect people with their spiritual heritage and our building can help with this as it has been here for a while!'*

*'When they are actively and creatively used to point people to Jesus Christ'.*



- Loving service to communities

*'The recently refurbished church community centre is an asset that we need to fully utilize. It presents an opportunity to serve the community by positive and needed activities. People take ownership of these spaces to meet with God and experience his presence'.*

*'Comfortable buildings for funerals / weddings etc encourage people to come again'.*



*'By allowing the use of the church for appropriate community events (our church is one of the few buildings locally with seating capacity for over 250) it builds links with local people. For example the local primary school have their Christmas carol concert here. We recently held a concert with the Community Choir where we were joined by the children from the local Primary School choir which brought in an audience of nearly 200 and raised £800 for Claire House; a local charity. This has a very positive effect on our image as a community supporter. The various initiatives to provide soup and sandwich, bereavement lunches, Thursday coffee mornings, Monday café, Young At Heart Club all run by the church from the church Hall provide additional support to the vulnerable and lonely in the community helping to build our presence and God's work. Plus there are a number of children's activities in the hall helping to enhance the relationship with young families locally. The hall is also used by other "non - church" groups (Guides/Rainbows); keep fit; yoga; badminton; TWGuild; Art classes, community choir, Family events etc. The hall is often used by families for refreshments after a funeral helping to provide support to people in a time of need; these events are usually "staffed" by members of the church'.*

*'Some great examples of building projects, providing buildings accessible to and used by the community. People identify with church as theirs even if they don't come. Great not to have to set up a building each time we use it. With appropriate re - ordering and in good condition, can be attractive and practical facilities. Reverence and architecture and history resonates with people'.*

*'We are fortunate to have large spaces that allow us to serve the community in many different ways. Visitors using the facilities have expressed interest in the church by feeling comfortable as they make use of our spaces. Activities in the church and church centre help people to feel welcomed, loved and encounter God e.g. hundreds attend the Crib Service, a monthly lunch for the lonely. The different kinds of spaces allow us to respond to what people are coming for and what they need. We have missional communities in a hard to reach area, holding services in a local school building and a missional allotment, both meeting people where they are'.*

*'The location, profile and historic nature of the church make it iconic for the community and attract visitors'.*

**Q13 How best do you think we, the Diocese of Chester, should move forward with regard to allowing 'sacred spaces' to flourish, and so in turn play their part in enabling The Church to flourish?**

- Summary

At total of 18 responses were received. Comments covered a range of topics. The most frequent, (particularly emphasised six times, with eight comments in total), was to change the permissions process to be more flexible with making alterations, simpler, quicker, less bureaucratic and time - consuming.

The second most frequent comment, (mentioned six times), was to be more missional, which overlapped with a need for more support from the Diocese in making buildings fit for mission, including assisting with their missional potential, managing building projects and securing the finance, (mentioned five times). This also links with the call for the permissions process to be more accommodating for making alterations to church buildings.

There was a call for the Diocese to take a more strategic approach to managing buildings, raised five times, including closure of buildings that are no longer fit for the mission God intended and investing in those that do, combined with sharing space more frequently, both ecumenically and with wider communities.

The following examples of comments are grouped into key themes that emerged -

- Changes to permissions process

*'Be much more flexible in allowing churches to make alterations that encourage people to actively play a part in church life in a pleasant and welcoming place for worship. Provide help and advice for projects enabling a flourishing church. Shorten procedures and delays in getting approval for change'.*



*'Please improve the speed and efficiency of the faculty process. Become more accommodating during the process, recognising the practical use of the building for a worshipping community who give sacrificially to maintain and improve it. Encourage and support re - ordering and modernisation projects'.*

*'Respect, encourage and support congregations in altering their churches to suit all forms of worship and use. The faculty process should be simplified and streamlined to reduce timescales. Reports on plans are expensive, take too long and generally reveal nothing new. Architects and the DAC should be able to make decisions, unless the building is Grade 1, to reduce the power of outside bodies objecting. These frequently have no church base, have no alternative solutions and run up bills while offering nothing'.*

*'The Diocese needs to consider carefully the restrictions it imposes on churches, i.e. the faculty process. Its focus should be less about what can't be done rather providing an advisory service leading to approval, at speed and at low cost. The Diocese may consider itself to be exactly that, except the process does not lend itself to be so. It requires submission in a set format and then a response that usually consists of a number of questions and then further consideration before approval – a lengthy bureaucratic process at best. Two examples: When we were considering installation of a new heating system we visited a number of churches that had done so. At one we asked about the faculty process. The incumbent responded that he didn't apply for one on the basis that whatever the response it*

*would not be taken out! Our own experience with replacing the church pews – why a faculty should be required is a nonsense and serves no purpose. The fact that we have no faculty has made no difference. The fact that to replace chairs requires a retrospective faculty is all the more non - sensical. It's an illustration of a self - serving bureaucracy and is generally perceived negatively when it should be seen as a positive service. The Diocese needs to consider carefully how it can be so'.*

*'The diocese is too restrictive in its reluctance to embrace modern practices in resolving architectural problems and interior decoration'.*

- More proactive in strategically thinking about building assets, including working ecumenically; more missional focus

*'The diocesan faculty system is too long - winded and too slow to respond. Particularly for smaller churches with fewer people with experience to drive/develop buildings projects (repairs and developments) - How many clergy are drawn into managing the projects. So a central diocesan team of experts (architects/surveyors/project managers/fund - raisers/etc) would help. Also to include help with communication for mission/heritage displays, etc. Could the diocese be more supportive of development for mission rather than as guardians for conservation and heritage. There are also too many church spaces of all denominations. The diocese could be a voice and mediator for ecumenical sharing of use and reducing the overall number whilst retaining a sense of local identity'.*

*'Carefully assess each building - play up the very historical building (tours etc) , renovate well the buildings that are well located and can be renovated straightforwardly; those sapping resources that aren't significantly historical or well located - sell them or change use. In short use the building well or don't have it.'*

*'More multi - use of church buildings. Share buildings ecumenically. Close/mothball some churches. Churchyards should have environmental/green/recreational aspect.'*

*'By having a flexible and open approach and ensuring money goes where needed, eg pioneering and missional communities and not necessarily only into buildings. Removing unnecessary bureaucracy and hindrances that faculties and listed buildings can provide'.*

*'Being proactive in supporting churches to develop their sites to be more flexible and 'usable'. Making 'updating' church spaces easier and, where possible, removing restrictions and conditions which can increase the cost (and sometimes make any project too expensive)'.*

*'A reflection is that the Diocese focuses on the Church Building only, via the Quinquennial report. This tends to lead to action on the Church building, and our hall has been somewhat overlooked. So it would be good for the Quinquennial report to look at all the Church buildings in the future which are potentially available for Mission. That way we keep a more balanced outlook. Recently there has been more workshops with other Churches where good practice can be shared. The Diocese should continue to promote these so we can share good practice between Churches. Consideration of a "Church Health Audit" to see what we do well, and what we may not be seeing currently against the 5 marks of Mission. So thus balancing the focus on Buildings with the Focus on Mission. It is recognised that this is onerous for the smaller parishes, but should be available to bigger parishes in a more systematic way, perhaps as part of Archdeacons visitation?'.*

*'Supporting schemes that enable flexible use of church buildings, ideally including grants'.*

*'Our beautiful ancient building enables us to achieve our mission'.*

*'Draw people in'.*

*'Every 'sacred space' needs to pay for itself independent of congregational giving'*

- More support to parishes (additional to comments above)

*'Help with finance or in obtaining finance'.*

*'Pro - active advice on making spaces more useable, flexible and attractive'.*

*'Help people conduct time management surveys of their buildings - so max use made 24/7 of space we have'.*

- Any other comments

This part of the Parish Survey gave the opportunity to raise any further issues or re - emphasise points made earlier.

*'At a time, when for many, incomes are relatively static and inflation is increasing; it is becoming very difficult to encourage increased planned giving but the cost of repairs continues to climb. We are fortunate that we have received legacies which have enabled us to undertake some improvement work but for those churches where this is not happening then the prospect of maintaining their buildings must be a nightmare. Even simple things cost a huge amount (for example cleaning our church guttering was well over £3000 of which the bulk was for scaffolding). Given that our planned giving and general income just about meets the parish share we have very little left over for repairs; and to ask the congregation to come up with more money would in some cases be a step too far. As a warden I dread the day when we need to undertake a major repair, so far I have been fortunate but I do worry about this for the future'.*

*'Provide long awaited training to spread the good news in the community to anyone we meet'.*

*'Always hold the theology of 'the church as people' the driver for this. Also don't be afraid to ask is this building fit for purpose'.*

*'Buildings are incidental... it is the people who are important when building God's kingdom'.*

*'The faculty system is a nightmare'.*

*'Consider insurance for use of buildings by outside groups'.*

## 9. Diocese of Chester Parish case studies



Case studies of church building projects have been gathered from across the Diocese, totalling 14. It seeks to rejoice in what we have and share the learning with others who may be considering a similar project. The impact of such projects has also been gathered to contribute to the research in this publication.

To read the full stories of case studies, please see the separate publication, **Appendix E: Case Studies: Building For God's Kingdom.**

For the purposes of this publication, a summary is provided below.

### **Q1 Why did you undertake your building project?**

The following summary paraphrases the responses. Full answers are provided in the appendices.

- **To be 'church in the community'**, reach out to support, serve and connect with the whole community, making God visible through hospitality, welcome and generosity. Greater engagement with the local community, loving our neighbour as ourselves. A spirit of 'open doors' to share the Good News of Christ with the wider community, being more open during the week as a seven day ministry to all. Encouraging



increased use of the building by the community, groups and organisations. Enabling more ways of 'being church' for greater involvement in the community.

- **Better access for all, welcome and care**, being open, warm, well - lit, well equipped, better facilities and more flexible space, improved hospitality, fit for the purpose God intended as a 21<sup>st</sup> century church.
- **Better first impressions** of the church (exterior) to give a more positive welcome, raise the profile of church, being more visible, being more open and looking 'open for business' in order to change a negative perception.
- **Preserving the heritage**, as well as its 24/7 witness to the permanency of God.
- **Health and safety** reasons to make the building structurally safe and watertight so current services and activities can continue.
- **Better opportunity for fellowship** in the congregation.
- **Better operational running** of the church, such as better able to run services, better storage etc.
- **Making the church sustainable** both now and in the future.
- **Expand church youth work.**

## **Q2 What difference has the building project made to the church building, church community and its impact in the wider community?**

### Enhanced building

- Better condition of the building and its artistic and historic features
- Improved health and safety
- Improved visual impact of the building
- More accessible for all
- More welcoming space
- More family and schools - friendly space
- Improved internal space, facilities and comfort
- Addressed practical needs in the running of the church, such as storage, managing large services and events, pastoral support etc
- Improved long term maintenance

### Enhanced use of building

- Building more regularly open throughout the week



- Wider diversity of people using the church building - members of the community, groups, organisations; also, greater range of ages, interests and needs
- Established or enhanced role in the locality
- Improved and/or increased role of hospitality and welcome
- Beginning new and different activities for the church, schools and wider communities; for example, concerts, events, café, art group, young family groups, social justice projects, fellowship gatherings, services, baptism and funeral gatherings, and so on
- More imaginative engagement with people; for example, through the use of art, Fresh Expressions of church, exhibitions, concerts
- More mid - week services held
- Growth in attendance at mid - week services
- Growth in attendance at events and activities, especially mid - week
- Growth in attendance by young families
- Growth in schools engagement
- New relationships developed or strengthened with community leaders, organisations and groups - a good witness and stronger links for joint working
- More bookings/use of the space by community groups, organisations and members of the community
- Raised profile of the church in local community, increased awareness locally of the significance of the historic building
- Better operational running of the building, such as accommodating larger services and events, children's activities, hospitality, suitable space for pastoral support etc
- More financially sustainable as a better used building increased regular income, such as from events

#### Impact on congregation

- Fellowship increased, for example, chatting over refreshments after the service
- Unity of spirit enhanced through closer teamwork and focused vision
- Raised confidence levels
- Greater faith (reliance, trust) in God

### **Q3 Did the project impact the spiritual and/or numerical growth of the church?**

#### Spiritual

- Spirit of unity strengthened in congregations during the project through greater team working.
- Increased confidence to focus on new missional activities.
- Growing in discipleship through active service, increasing volunteer satisfaction and commitment.
- Raised enthusiasm and pride in the congregation, which led to more unity and a more positive outlook.
- Cultural change in the congregation accepting wider role of being more welcoming and outward-looking, confident and responsive in sharing the Good News.
- More creative freedom to express God's love in numerous ways; for example, hosting quiet days, events, art exhibitions.
- Drawing closer to God, increased faith in the congregation, trusting God more.

#### Numerical

- More people attending mid - week services.
- More people and wider range of people attending activities and events, especially older people and young families. Also wider range such as more visitors - families, shoppers, meeting place for events, wider ministry.
- More young families, increased attendance at Fresh Expressions aimed at families; for example, Café Church on Sunday and mid-week activities. Increase (for some, considerable increase) in young families on Sundays as well as during the week.
- Increased use by specific groups such as schools, weddings.
- Difficult to ascertain if project led to growth but our congregation is growing.
- No (or occasionally slight) growth in attendance at traditional Sunday services.
- Raised the profile of the church locally

### **Q4 How the project was financially resourced?**

- Considerable and generous contributions from members of the congregation
- Legacies
- Grants - national and local
- Sale of property or other asset
- Donations from members of local communities, including special appeals such as 'sponsor a stone/slate'
- Fundraising events
- Friends scheme
- Church reserves
- In kind support from the local community (such as use of equipment or giving products for free)
- Loan

### **Q5 Learning points**

Each case study was asked to reflect and respond to five learning questions in relation to their first-hand experience of their building project:

1. What went well?
2. What went less well?
3. What have you learnt that would be useful to share with others?
4. As a result of the learning gained during and after the project, have you now changed any aspects of your approach/work? Please explain.
5. General reflections

A summary of the responses to this question and collated full responses are given in the report, 'Case Studies: Buildings For God's Kingdom'.

## **10. Conclusions**

### **10.1. Conclusions summary**

The need for Places of Worship mattered in Jesus' day and continues for us today, as one of three spaces used for mission and ministry; complementing community spaces and private homes. In the Diocese of Chester, we have 348 church buildings, with an estimated 2 million visits to church services alone each year.

Church buildings can be valuable assets for empowering the gathered church as it collectively draws closer to God and creates space for those relational bonds to be strengthened; a visible landmark building of a Christian presence in the community; a place of connection and support; and, as research shows, one factor in people come to faith.

Capital investment in making church buildings more versatile, accessible and with facilities, often combined with making the building structurally safe and watertight, has made a positive difference for some of our churches. In a 2018 Parish Survey, 19 out of 20 churches said that investment had made a positive impact by one or more of the following, which is echoed in the case study report of 14 recent building projects in the Diocese. Common themes of positive impact include -

- Being more welcoming, comfortable and accessible for people.
- Opportunities to begin new ways of 'being church' and connecting with local communities.
- Better able to respond to needs of people, new activities, flexible to change to different uses of the space.
- Using the building more during the week and for a greater range of activities and services.
- Relationship-building is strengthened through better spaces to gather together as well as engaging with wider communities.

However, there are considerable challenges with managing and developing church buildings, including needing to raise significant levels of funding, fewer people attending Sunday services and, for some, inheriting a location and/or form of building that may not be most effective or easily changed today.

This research paper has shown there is a call from parishes for greater support with capital investment to repair and enhance them, yet a reoccurring theme is for this to be achieved in a focused and meaningful way. Parishes commented on the need for the overall approach to church buildings (capital projects and the use of space) to be more missional. Also, for the need for greater strategic planning in considering building assets.

In the Parish Survey 2018, thoughts were shared on the right way forward with thinking about church buildings, totalling 18 responses.

- The most frequent, (particularly emphasised six times, with eight comments in total), was to change the permissions process to be more flexible with making alterations, simpler, quicker, less bureaucratic and time - consuming.
- The second most frequent comment, (mentioned six times), was to be more missional, which overlapped with a need for more support from the Diocese in making buildings fit for mission, including assisting with their missional potential, managing building projects and securing the finance, (mentioned five times).
- There was a call for the Diocese to take a more strategic approach to managing buildings, raised five times, including closure of buildings that are no longer fit for the mission God intended and investing in those that do, combined with sharing space more frequently, both ecumenically and with wider communities.

In response to comments on the permissions process, Faculty Jurisdiction Rules have now been further reviewed to make them less bureaucratic. The revised Rules are intended to make the permissions process less onerous for those in parishes who have responsibility for church buildings, and to increase the efficiency of the faculty process. There will be a considerable increase in the number of List A and List B items (some works that previously needed faculty permission will now be List B, and some works that were List B will now be List A). The new rules are expected to come into force in April 2020.

Ecclesiastical Exemption means that for (open for worship) Church of England churches the Faculty Jurisdiction system replaces the requirement for (and

runs parallel to) Listed Building Consent from local authorities. It crucially means that the Church retains control over works taking place inside the buildings, but in order to maintain this privilege it must have parity with local authority permissions processes/scrutiny.

## **10.2 Key findings, with suggestions for consideration**

### **Key finding 1 - The national focus on buildings makes it timely for our Diocese to also consider this issue**

Church buildings have received far greater focus nationally over recent years, including, for the first time, the government commissioning a report on their sustainability.

#### *Suggestion*

*For Diocesan central resources team.* It is timely for the Diocese of Chester to explore church buildings in a more focused way, with resources to enable this to happen as part of mission action planning.

### **Key finding 2 - The three-fold use of physical places and spaces by Jesus and the early church still has great relevance for us today**

These are 1. Public places of worship; 2. Community spaces (marketplaces and wilderness places) and 3. Private homes.

#### *Suggestion*

What is the right balance of these places and spaces today for ministry and mission? Is there need for a better balance? If so, what is right to let go of and take up? What is the relationship between the spaces as part of a blended ecology of church (inherited and pioneering ministries)? These and more questions are needed as part of ongoing discussion at all levels – parish, deanery and Diocese.

### **Key finding 3 - At least two million visitors welcomed in our Diocese!**

It is a startling fact that in the Diocese of Chester, it is estimated nearly two million visits to 348 church buildings take place every year to attend church services alone! They are a significant space in local communities for spiritual, pastoral, social, cultural and physical wellbeing, and often are a significant heritage asset.

#### *Suggestions*

*For parishes.* Could reviewing the use of your church building (how often, for what? etc), help discern if the right balance of use is in place, encourage new ideas to develop, and/or help advocate the role of the church in its community?

*For Diocesan central resources team.* Exploring the frequency of the use of the building is not an area that has been explored centrally in the Church of England, as the focus has been on the number of people rather than number of visits. Counting number of visits, (repeat visitors and one-off visitors), is standard practice in the culture and heritage sector. It conveys how well used the building or venue is to gauge its value to people locally and wider. This may be something to explore further within the Diocese and nationally in the Church of England to advocate their role and significance.

### **Key finding 4 - Reflecting on the role of church buildings may assist shaping a vision for their right use, in line with the overarching vision for the church**

The role of church buildings could be seen as a place for collective worship, a house of prayer and a resource for mission. They could be described as places of connection that create spaces for God to meet with people through:

- Prayer and reflection
- Encounter, learning and enrichment
- Fellowship, healing and support
- Celebration
- Respect and remembrance
- Being inspired and discovering

- Being rooted.

### *Suggestions for parishes*

How do these roles of church buildings help you review and consider your vision for the church building?

If church buildings are one factor in people coming to faith, as shown in the *Talking Jesus* research, how are you intentionally praying for this happen and providing stepping stones for people to explore their faith journey further? See p12 for details.

What stories do you have worth sharing of God moving in people's lives through creating the right environment in the church building or hall? See pages 15-18. Please send to Email: [emily.allen@chester.anglican.org](mailto:emily.allen@chester.anglican.org). Subject: Stories worth sharing.

**Key finding 5 – The impetus (nationally and locally) is for churches to be more people-focused and outward-looking, in which church buildings are one enabling role to achieve this by creating spaces where people connect in community with God and with one another.**

A desire to have a 'lower-threshold' to entering the church building by being more accessible and welcoming, with more versatility inside for a greater range of uses is a key driving factor for many building improvement projects in the Diocese. Nationally, an emerging area is considering social entrepreneurialism; in our Diocese, the most common examples are community cafes but there is potential to explore this area further.

### *Suggestions*

*For Parishes.* Could your building and/or land be used to social entrepreneurial activities that bless local people as well as provide not-for-profit income to invest back into the life of the church?

*For Diocesan central resources team.* Is social entrepreneurial potential for church buildings and/or land (church or glebe) something we want to invest in exploring further? If so, how can we learn from other Dioceses and build capacity to do so?



**Key finding 6 - Capital investment has led to positive impact in most churches in the case studies and the parish survey, linked to first discerning a clear overarching vision first**

The desire for people to grow closer to God, combined with loving service to communities, are the overarching reasons why churches invest in their buildings. This includes being a visible Christian presence, the desire to better engage with local communities, be more welcoming, accessible and fit for the purpose God intended in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Also, ensuring church buildings can remain open and active by addressing safety concerns with the historic fabric of the building. Out of the five marks of mission, loving service was a strong motivating factor and impact of the projects, closely followed by teaching and nurturing people in their Christian faith.

Overall, most building projects from the case studies and parish survey have played a role in numerical and/or spiritual growth, as the building has helped facilitate greater and new uses and therefore more opportunity for relationship-building. Weekday services and activities was an area of growth. Discipleship growth for the congregation during the building project was also evident.

*Suggestions*

*For parishes.* Appropriate investment in church buildings and halls where there is a clear vision for mission and ministry seems a positive trajectory to continue where this is appropriate. For parishes, therefore, the need to discern an overarching Godly vision is essential as the first step; then step two is to discern how a building project may or may not be one aspect in enabling the overarching vision to become reality.

*For Diocesan central resources team.* The need for greater parish - level support in discerning the overarching Godly vision is required, as indicated in the parish survey and also from ongoing conversations with parishes in general. Without this, the vision for the building is likely to remain either unclear, which means no/slow progression happens; or the investment will be ineffective at making the anticipated difference to the life of the church and its impact locally.

*For Diocesan central resources team.* There may be benefit in further exploring how building projects and the use of sacred space on a day-to-day basis relate to missional principles, such as the Anglican Five Marks of Mission. And/or it could be exploring missional priority areas such as young generations, prayer,

discipleship and evangelism. To give examples, would there be benefit in this type of questioning to form part of the faculty process, Archdeacon Inspections, parish mission plans and so on?

### **Key finding 7 - Vast investment in capital works continues to be required**

The very high financial costs of running and maintaining church buildings are stark. Nationally in the Church of England, the annual financial expenditure is 19%, which is second only to Parish Share.

Parishes are collectively seeing to raise funds totalling at least £20million for capital works for church buildings and hall across the Diocese.

Finance for capital works is largely raised from donations (congregational giving and individuals). Complementing this are grants, fundraising events and income generation. With declining congregation numbers, the pressure to raise significant funds from outside the congregation is ever increasing. Future financial investment from respondents to the parish survey varied, from typically £10,000 - £50,000, £100,000 - £250,000 and up to £10,000. Approximately 15% of respondents are seeking £500,000 - £1m.

#### *Suggestions*

*For Diocesan central resources team.* Ways to increase the capacity to support parishes with fundraising was strongly conveyed in the parish survey. Currently there is one full time Diocesan Church House role assisting with external fundraising amongst other areas of work. Further conversations are needed of the merits and drawbacks of different approaches to address this need for parish-level support, which may include increasing Diocesan central staff, ways to increase peer support, partnership working with other organisations and Dioceses, commissioning support from external organisations or freelancers, Diocesan grant bids and so on. It is important to consider other Diocesan work that may strengthen congregations to be more resilient as they prioritise joining in with God's plan to expand his kingdom on earth, for example, discipleship, fresh expressions and so on.

*For parishes, deaneries, Diocesan – level.* Although noting the pie-chart on expenditure does not fully reflect resources committed in their wider sense, it may be a useful starting point to open conversations if it was produced with

specific details for various levels; for example, parishes, deaneries, geographical missional areas and Diocesan level. Also, whether there is a right balance in financial expenditure is a discussion that needs continuing. This issue was raised several times in the parish survey. Also see point 8.4., which explores whether it is right to keep all buildings.

### **Key finding 8 - Repairs are a priority need for capital works**

Repair and conservation work are a priority for capital expenditure on church buildings for respondents to the parish survey and often part of the case studies, with a second priority of making the building fit for the purpose God intended, including lighting, versatile space for mission and ministry and access. For church halls, a range of work is needed but this has a lower level of need (indicated by fewer responses). Hall work includes suitable facilities for young generations, kitchenette, W.C. and heating. Where a church has both building assets, repairs dominate the work needed, followed by environmentally friendly/energy efficiency work and audio/visual.

#### *Suggestion*

*For Diocesan central resources team.* The need for funding for the repair and conservation of the fabric of the building and its features remains essential to ensure sacred spaces continue to be used, along with their wider improvements to ensure their use can be maximised. Advocacy for funding for repairs as well as improvements is needed.

### **Key finding 9 - Church buildings both inhibit and enhance the growth of God's kingdom**

A summary of comments is given below from the parish survey.

**Key finding 9a). Inhibiting.** The most frequent comment was a negative first impression for those not familiar with entering them - they are spaces that can be intimidating, not welcoming, not comfortable, nor accessible. This was closely followed by too great an emphasis on buildings rather than people in terms of financial investment, time and church buildings having a 'heritage' focus. Thirdly, respondents mentioned some church buildings have unsuitable space for

mission and ministry, which inhibit their use, especially for group activities and more contemporary forms of worship.

**Key finding 9b). Enhancing.** The most frequent response was around their role in helping people meet with God. This was closely followed by loving service to the community. Further factors were a visible sign of God's presence in the community and one factor in creating a positive church experience.

#### *Suggestions*

*For parishes.* This means that investing in buildings to make them more inviting and welcoming and useable matters, as well as preserving the fabric of church buildings as an important visible sign of God's presence and maintaining a useable space. Consideration of opening church buildings more during the week may be of benefit to further explore.

*For Diocesan central resources team.* Although noting comment above, there was no indication from the parish survey to preserve all church buildings at any cost. On the contrary, it was commented several times that we could take a more strategic approach and be braver when considering appropriate closures.

### **Key finding 10 - Future direction for sacred space**

In response to how we, the Diocese of Chester, should move forward to allow 'sacred spaces' to flourish, and so in turn play their part in enabling The Church to flourish, parish survey respondents covered a range of topics. The most frequent was to –

**Key finding 10a). Change the permissions process** to be more flexible with making alterations, simpler, quicker, less bureaucratic and time - consuming, with some calling for more decisions to be made within the Church of England (Diocese and/or parish level) for buildings that are seeking minor changes or are not highly listed.

#### *Suggestions*

*For Diocesan central resources team.* Ongoing work to continue by the DAC to raise items with the national church that may simplify the permissions process. Also, opportunities for the DAC to deliver training on the faculty process.

**Key finding 10b). The second most frequent comment was to be more missional.** There was a call to be more balanced throughout the work of the Diocese, including priorities for discussions and strategic work, gaining approvals for change, financial investment (missional work, church halls as well as church buildings), and capacity building for parishes.

*Suggestions*

*For Diocesan central resources team.* See point 4 on need for greater capacity to support parishes discerning an overarching Godly vision, as this is foundational to all other work.

**Key finding 10c). This was closely followed by the need for more capacity at Diocesan level** with buildings, including their missional potential, managing building projects and securing the finance.

*Suggestions*

*For parishes and deaneries.* Exploring further ways to increase the capacity of parishes and pool resources could take many forms. As examples, at low – level it could be mentoring/peer support between parishes, reviewing shared administrative support and so on.

*For Diocesan central resources team.* Ongoing support with advice on access, understanding local communities, significance of the church buildings, fundraising and project management. Also see point 4 re. early support for parishes in vision work.

**Key finding 10d). The Diocese taking a more strategic approach to managing buildings** was also raised as many times as capacity building, including closure of buildings that are no longer fit for the mission God intended and investing in those that do, combined with sharing space more frequently, both ecumenically and with the wider community.

*Suggestions*

*For Diocesan central resources team.* Presently, our deaneries are support units rather than planning units. Bishop Peter asked for comments on the role of deaneries in his 2018 discussion paper, *Supporting and Developing Missional Communities: A Contribution to Discussion*. A more strategic view of building

assets could be the type of work a deanery could explore if their role changed (or smaller cluster of churches).

This could lead to place-based strategies developed for areas such as towns or at deanery level, working ecumenically to discern the best Christian witness and service. The role of buildings could be one aspect within this.

Place-based strategies need an outward-looking approach to consider how the church relates to local communities. Collaborating with local authorities to raise the profile of churches and identify opportunities for partnership working may also be beneficial. Discussions are needed on the best way to take this forward. For example, at what level should these discussions take place, by whom, how and so on.

It may be beneficial to look further at new missional opportunities; for example, new housing developments and how this affects current churches and their buildings.

## **11. Where we go from here**

The first step is to share the findings from this report at the Diocesan meetings of the Mission and Pastoral Committee for each archdeaconry (MAMPC and CAMPC) and at Diocesan Synod, as well as uploading to the website. One suggestion is whether there is merit establishing a forum(s) on church buildings and fundraising to share thoughts and offer practical support to a greater number of churches. Comments are very welcome on this paper. Email [emily.allen@chester.anglican.org](mailto:emily.allen@chester.anglican.org)

## **Closing prayer**

May our sacred spaces be places that host stories worth sharing of what God has done in people's lives. May they be relational spaces, building connections with God and with one another as conversations go deeper and our awareness of his presence grows. May our buildings be beacons of light in our communities, places that people are drawn to and find they are houses of peace. And as God in his loving-kindness continually calls people to himself, may our spaces be a clear and tangible message of 'home' to the ever-widening family of God. Built for His Glory, may we discover afresh the full depth of this meaning in each of our localities for such a time as this. In the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.

## **Supporting documents**

<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>Theological Reflections on Sacred Spaces</b>
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>National Context on Church Buildings</b>
<b>Appendix C</b>	<b>Diocese of Chester Statistics</b>
<b>Appendix D</b>	<b>Parish Survey 2018 full responses</b>
<b>Appendix E</b>	<b>Case Study Report: Buildings for God's Kingdom</b>

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