York Circuit Council 12th June 2024

Circuit Leadership Team Report - Circuit Consultation: Next Steps

At our last circuit council meeting on 6th March 2024 we dedicated much of our time to serious, thoughtful and positive discussion of the circuit consultation proposals presented by the circuit stewards’ team. A copy of these is in the minutes of that meeting and also included at the end of this document for ease of reference. The March meeting agreed these proposals and referred them to the circuit staff, circuit stewards and Circuit Leadership Team for further consideration. We noted that, as the York Circuit Council, we take ownership of the proposals and, as members of the Council, we were all asked to advocate for them enthusiastically with our Church Councils, providing encouragement at local church level.

The various reports being presented to our forthcoming meeting on 12th June 2024, coupled with all the initiatives and ongoing work in our local churches and communities, demonstrate how much we have to celebrate across the life of the circuit. Developments are not only taking place in how we seek to express our following of Jesus, as individuals and as church communities, but also in the way we organise ourselves. Churches have already begun to change the way in which they relate to governance and their buildings. Some communities share a safeguarding officer. Some meet in premises which are not church buildings. Some gather together digitally. Some now belong to a different or new church. Change is constantly present.

Since our last meeting we have made progress in three areas:

1. **Audits on Circuit Property and Church Buildings**

An initial audit has been prepared at circuit level and has been circulated to circuit staff and circuit stewards, so that it can be made more comprehensive through input from the churches themselves.

1. **Carecent**

The Carecent Executive Committee has held two meetings looking at directions for the future. In order to sustain and develop its core activities it has two proposals to bring to the Circuit Council.

1. It seeks permission to proceed with a feasibility study to develop the current premises, creating more space for its activities, the costs to be covered by Carecent funds.
2. It seeks permission to proceed with engaging a part-time employee (16-20 hours per week) to work alongside the Carecent Project Manager, providing additional assistance, particularly with afternoon activities. This is to be funded by Carecent.
3. **Circuit Staffing and Configuration**

Following the last circuit council meeting the circuit staff and circuit stewards have focused on the urgent questions of stationing and circuit configuration.

We recognise that two members of our staff, Judith Stoddart and John Schofield, intend to move to other circuits in the summer of 2025 and so we propose seeking another city centre deacon and a presbyter. This requires immediate action in order that, if agreed, we can go into the stationing process this summer. We see this as a first step with regard to staffing and reconfiguration. As consultations progress over the coming months we will continue to explore with our circuit lay employees how their gifts and callings might be most creatively deployed. At the same time we want to explore imaginative possibilities in relation to our mission, including New Places for New People.

With regard to the circuit consultation proposal on the merging of church governing bodies, the Circuit Leadership Team recognises and values the creative balance between decision-making at circuit level and at local church level and the importance of ongoing dialogue, not only between the Circuit Council and local Church Councils, but also across local churches committed to working together in developing liberating, creative and innovative ways forward.

To facilitate this we propose to group churches together. The intention is that each group begins to engage in its own thinking about how it wants to shape its future and what decisions it needs to make with regard to its work, people, governance and buildings. One of the next tasks for circuit staff, circuit stewards and the CLT is to work out how best to facilitate those discussions.

The proposed groupings are as follows. For ease of reference they include the names of those in specific roles of local church oversight and work. As conversations progress it may be that a specific church needs to be relating more directly to communities in one of the other groups.

**September 2025**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Haxby, Strensall, Sheriff Hutton, Huntington (Thornton, New Earswick) | 2 Presbyters  Lay Employee | John Hayward  Rory Dalgliesh  Lorraine Jones |
| Copmanthorpe, Bishopthorpe, Acomb, (Holgate from 2026) | Presbyter | Seeking presbyter in stationing for Sep 2025 |
| Poppleton, Lidgett, Hessay, Rufforth, Clifton | Presbyter | Elizabeth Cushion |
| Central, Southlands, City Centre | Deacon | Seeking deacon in stationing for Sep 2025 |
| Easingwold, Villages Together Heworth, West Thorpe, Acaster Malbis, (Stillingfleet) | Presbyter,  Lay Employee | David Bidnell  Alyson Christy |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Clifton Moor, Heslington | We very much value the Methodist-Anglican partnerships at Clifton Moor and Heslington and recognise that conversations need to take place separately on how we continue to make our Methodist contribution in both communities. |

**September 2026**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Haxby, Strensall, Sheriff Hutton, Huntington (Thornton, New Earswick) | 2 Presbyters **or**  Presbyter and Deacon  Lay Employee | John Hayward  Seeking a second presbyter or a deacon in stationing for Sep 2026)  Lorraine Jones |
| Copmanthorpe, Bishopthorpe, Acomb, (Holgate from 2026) | Presbyter | Seeking presbyter in stationing for Sept 2025 |
| Poppleton, Lidgett, Hessay, Rufforth, Clifton | Presbyter | Elizabeth Cushion |
| Central, Southlands, City Centre | Deacon | Seeking deacon in stationing for Sep 2025 |
| Easingwold, Villages, Heworth, West Thorpe, Acaster Malbis, (Stillingfleet) | Presbyter, Lay Employee | David Bidnell  Alyson Christy |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Clifton Moor, Heslington | We very much value the Methodist-Anglican partnerships at Clifton Moor and Heslington and recognise that conversations need to take place separately on how we continue to make our Methodist contribution in both communities. |

**Next Steps**

Circuit Stewards

* To prepare profiles for the proposed deacon and presbyter appointments

Circuit Leadership Team

* To work on the facilitation of conversations among the groups of churches
* To work on ways of deploying circuit staff most creatively and effectively
* To think imaginatively about possible New Places for New People
* To work on a core budget and a reserves budget, considering how reserves might be used in staffing and projects across the circuit
* To continue to work with the Carecent Executive Committee on Carecent’s proposals and plans

Church Groupings

* To consider and plan together on questions of ministry, governance and buildings
* To think imaginatively about New Places and New People

We recognise that there is still much more work to be done, but we hope that these proposals begin to give us a framework around which we can develop plans, not only in relation to existing churches and communities, but also in new areas. We acknowledge that this whole process brings with it potential challenges for us all, but we commit to working with those challenges in ways that create hope and excitement for whatever lies ahead.

To end, here is our prayer, taken from the circuit stewards’ report in the summer circuit newsletter.

God of beginnings and endings,

Take the past with its memories,

take the present with its activities,

take the future with its uncertainties,

and make of all three one whole;

that our lives may be in harmony with your Spirit of peace.

**Appendix: Circuit Consultation Proposals as Agreed**

Governance Proposals:

1. The York Circuit Council encourages work to begin on merging Church Governing bodies within the Circuit.
2. The Circuit Council directs the Circuit Leadership Team to put together a framework as to how this might happen with the aim of making progress by September 2025.
3. The Circuit Council directs that planning for the resourcing of the Circuit from September 2025 should be on the basis of a reduced number of Church Governing bodies.

Buildings Proposals:

As a guiding principle, the York Circuit Council agrees that there should be a reduction in the number of church buildings in the Circuit and agrees that they should either be affirmed in their current use or sold, or the possibilities of community use in partnership with others should be explored. The use of Circuit properties should also be considered; whether they are still required or should be sold, or put to creative missional use, e.g. housing refugees, housing a non-stipendiary or house for duty ordained minister, housing lay employees and others in a community house etc. To this aim:

1. The Circuit Council encourages an audit to be conducted on every church building in the Circuit.
2. The Circuit Council agrees that an audit should be conducted on all Circuit properties, these being the 10 manses, Aroma Café and flat, as well as the Melbourne Centre and Circuit Hub.
3. The Circuit Council agrees that the income and costs associated with the closed Churches (currently Trinity, Dunnington, New Earswick, Stillingfleet and Stamford Bridge) be ring-fenced from ongoing Circuit finances, and that any deficit from the management of these properties be funded from either the reserves received from these Churches or from the proceeds of a future sale.

People Proposals:

1. The York Circuit Council agrees that staffing (lay and ordained) should be organised in ways that encourages the development and use of specialist gifts and passions.
2. The Circuit Council agrees that, in collaboration with the Carecent Executive Committee, a ‘city centre chaplain’ role should be developed, with funding both by Carecent Designated Funds and the sale of city centre properties. The post-holder’s responsibilities could include seeking to address some of the causes of poverty and homelessness.
3. The Circuit Council agrees that opportunities should be explored for ‘New Places for New People’ seeking to attract connexional funds which are available, e.g. in new housing developments, marginalised communities, online and digital communities etc.
4. The Circuit Council agrees to encourage the development of partnerships with community organisations whose goals are consistent with those of the Methodist Church, including other denominations.

The proposals agreed by the York Circuit Council will be actioned under the direction of the Circuit Leadership Team: Janet Bowling, Nick Dawson, Vic Paylor, Ann Smallwood, David Bidnell, Elizabeth Cushion, Victoria Etherington, John Hayward, Louisa Taylor, Stephen Leah.