

Submission on behalf of the Methodist Church to the LURB Parish Councils Team

The Methodist Church

We write on behalf of the Methodist Church of Great Britain, which is a registered charity whose purpose is the provision of regular public acts of worship open to members and non-members alike.

We support the need for a clarification of the law in relation to the powers of Local Councils to make grants to churches and other church property for community benefit.

Our buildings

We have c. 4000 church buildings (many of which have ancillary halls and buildings) which are spread over the whole of the UK. Approximately c. 600 are listed buildings, and we have c. 1200 in Conservation Areas.

Our activities

Primary activities include the promotion of Christianity through mission and outreach, but as Christians, we are called to act justly, and to work for God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. The Methodist Church has a long history of living out our calling to justice and peace, by speaking up in the public square.

Today there is a Methodist presence in campaigns such as Make Poverty History, the Fairtrade movement and Jubilee 2000. As churches host debt centres, food banks, supper clubs and mutual aid groups, they continue to question why such help is needed. Not only do we want to see poverty and inequality alleviated, but we also want to change the structures and systems which bring it about in the first place.

A considerable amount of our missional and social justice work is carried out in our churches and other buildings. The sustainability of these places is very much dependent on external funding, including that given by Parish and Local Councils.

Community use

Our churches have long since been the venue for community use, as well as places providing social prescribing and wellbeing activities.

So much so, that they now provide important spaces and community hubs. Two have recently been supported by levelling up funding (Ashbourne Methodist Church and Truro Methodist Church) where the worship space and ancillary buildings are to be transformed into multi-purpose community hubs that will provide a wide range of event and meeting spaces, performance venues and flexible work areas.

Our smaller, village chapels are also providing important venues to overcome issues of loneliness and mental health, using community garden spaces and buildings to implement social prescribing. They actively work with others at a 'place based' local level, to enable people to build and rebuild friendships, community connections and a sense of belonging, as well as helping to access local and existing services.

Clarifying the law

Given the community benefit provided by our buildings, we believe the law needs to be clarified to make it clear that we stand on an equal footing with non-religious charities when it comes to discretionary grants from Local Councils for community benefit.

Joanne Balmforth, The Methodist Church 22 March 2023