

Mearns Free Church  
Property Group on behalf of the Kirk Session and Finance Committee  
Report to the Congregation

1. Background

- a. MFC rents Belmont House School (BHS) for worship services on a Sunday and for youth activities on a Sunday evening, as well as some ad-doc events, mostly on a weekend. BHS management has been very co-operative and MFC is grateful to God for this provision at a time of uncertainty on leaving the Church of Scotland.
- b. The Kirk Session, with the agreement of the Finance Committee, has asked a Property Group (Rosalie Menon, Sandy McDougall, Graham Mackay, Charles Amery-Behr and Murray McNicol) to consider heritable property (land and buildings) in relation to MFC.
- c. The Group has met several times, twice with Gary McFarlane, who is a retired GP, who together with Roger Fleming (retired architect) and Iain Cavin (retired quantity surveyor) have formed [Designed to Succeed](#) to provide property advice to churches. The three have provided property advice to many churches and the Group is grateful for their insights.
- d. The Group has formed a preliminary view about a potential start to the MFC property journey, which is the purpose of this document and which it has shared with the Session and Finance Committee.

2. Current situation

- a. MFC has no heritable property - neither building for worship nor manse accommodation for ministers.
- b. Belmont House School has served MFC well for the past 18 months but there is always a risk that this arrangement could end in the short term with no obvious plan B solution.
- c. Without having full use of premises, MFC is restricted in its gospel work
- d. There is considerable setup and take down work required every weekend (apart from school holidays, when the setup can be left in place)
- e. On the other hand, MFC does not have to spend time on property related matters - leaky roofs etc

3. Possible Options

- a. Options will come down to priorities and funding. Not everything can be done at once. The first decision comes down to doing nothing or doing something.
  - i. Do nothing - continue as we are in Belmont and react if and when there is a need to do so
  - ii. Do something - acquire a building for congregation/community or minister (manse). Or both but sequenced, according to funding available.
- b. The Group believes that although renting manses is not an ideal situation, it was more important to consider longevity and availability of premises for the Congregation and community engagement, in the first instance.

- c. If we are to focus on congregational or community type building then there are two basic options:
  - i. A church building for worship and other activities, Appendix 1 contains a possible specification.
  - ii. A community building - perhaps a retail unit visible to the community but not large enough for congregational worship. This would be suitable for engaging with the community - toddlers/cafe/youth/clubs etc. Glasgow West Church operates this model in the west end of Glasgow.
- d. The Group believes that giving consideration to a church building is the best option to start the MFC property journey. There are three basic options:
  - i. New Build - some limited investigation of available land suggest that there is little availability in this area and any that could have permission for housing would be price prohibitive. Aside from land, building costs are high and at least £3m would be required to complete a basic project.
  - ii. Purchase/Conversion of non Church Building - again there is little available with the size needed. There are/were some industrial buildings in Spiersbridge but would require a large amount of work
  - iii. Purchase of existing church building - to the Group's knowledge, there are no local church buildings, which are currently for sale, although this may change in the future.
- e. Of these options iii. is considered the best given current funds available to MFC through NMNC Trust Ltd.

#### 4. Proposal

- a. Significant funding will be required regardless of which option is decided upon, MFC should plan but also be open to change plans - we don't know how God will provide.
- b. It seems most likely from suitability of building and funding perspectives that a previous church building would be the most apt. Currently, there is none on the market and the timing of any movement is unknown.
- c. The Group therefore believes that we should plan for this, financially, at the current time, without any specific building on which to attach our vision.
- d. It may be necessary to move quickly if a building comes on the market and having funding available will be important
- e. This will involve a campaign of giving (through NMNC Trust Ltd) to raise a significant amount of funding for the purchase and renovation of a church building (subject to comments on plans, above). More detail below.
- f. Proposal is that any funds raised are specifically for heritable property but would request that those committing their funding be open to a church building, community building or/and manse.

5. Funding now, needs and target

- a. As the congregation is aware, NMNC Trust Limited (the pre MFC entity) has been continued and will be used to raise funding. It will therefore own any heritable property and provide it without charge to MFC.
- b. Current funds in NMNC Trust Ltd are approximately £160k and, on current giving, are expected to plateau once the new Associate Minister starts in August.
- c. There are many church buildings for sale at the current time.
- d. MFC is targeting a fund (including future pledges) of £600k, comprising existing funds in b. above, plus new funds and pledges of £370k and related gift aid estimated at £70k.
- e. The more funds we can raise as a congregation, the easier it will be to leverage additional grant and/or loan funding plus contributions from trust funds and legacies. It is estimated that £250k can be raised from these sources giving a total fund of £850k.
- f. An illustration of purchase, refurbishment and related funding is included at Appendix 3.

6. Next steps

- a. Informational meeting for congregation on 8 June 2025
- b. Report provided to congregation for information
- c. Pledge Form provided to congregation, providing flexible options for
  - i. Commitments - one to three years or when an offer for a suitable building has been accepted
  - ii. Cash or pledges
  - iii. Monthly / Quarterly / Annual / One off
- d. Pledge 'deadline' end of August 2025 in order for the congregation to have time for proper prayerful consideration
- e. Following which reporting of pledges by the Treasurer
- f. Quarterly reporting by the Property Group on progress
- g. Request ongoing for ideas from the congregation

## APPENDIX 1

### **Church Building/Campus**

#### **Specification/ Considerations**

- East Renfrewshire area, preferably in/near Newton Mearns
- Large flexible meeting space to accommodate up to 250 people (Current worship space 250sqm/ 2700sqft - likely minimum space req'd)
- Smaller hall for children's activities
- Breakout spaces (2-3?) for smaller groups
- Car parking plan for up to 50 vehicles
- Disabled Access
- Reasonable energy costs and heating
- AV and music
- Catering facilities
- Location - Community facing, good visibility

## APPENDIX 2

### **Methodology for purchase and development**

- Identify potential sites available for sale from various church denominations and surveyor listings in the area.
- Source the title deeds and drawings to assess the suitability.
- Review Planning Consent considerations (Change of Use Consent, Listed Building Consent etc).
- Apply MFC preferred criteria (location, size, cost etc).
- Review the schedule of accommodation against the proposed building/ land.
- Identify opportunities and liabilities.
- Review current condition/running costs/ EPC.
- Prepare the indicative cost of upgrade/ phasing potential.
- Identify strategic potential/ development opportunities.

## APPENDIX 3

**Illustrative purchase, refurb and funding****FUNDS RAISED**

	£
NMNC funds @ June '25	160,000
Funds pledged	370,000
Gift Aid	70,000
Total Raise	<u>600,000</u>
Loans / Grants / Trusts / Legacies	250,000
Total funding	<u><u>850,000</u></u>

**USE OF FUNDS**

	£
Acq'n & Pre-occupation Renovations (Ph1)	600,000
Further Renovations (Ph2)	250,000
Total	<u><u>850,000</u></u>

The total required will only be known for a concrete project  
 The property group think that a completed project may require  
 more then £850k but it is likely the costs could be spread  
 over a period.