

***NEAR
NEIGHBOURS***

by faithful interaction

**Draft proposals
15th October 2010**

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The 'Near Neighbours – *faithful interaction*' proposals described in this document are a response to the opportunities offered by the Government's policies on localism, decentralisation and the Big Society. The Church of England's commitment to society, its vocation and its ecumenical and inter faith relationships, provide unique resources to strengthen human relationships in multi religious neighbourhoods. Near Neighbours proposes a £5 million programme of connected activities to be spent over the three financial years 1st April 2011 - 31st March 2014. (We believe that the effective delivery of these proposals will demonstrate the value of this approach such that funding of further related initiatives will be appropriate and of great value.
- 1.2. The activities will be delivered by the Church of England in partnership with a range of Christian, inter faith and other faith based organisations. It will engage through its local parishes and schools which between them constitute the widest network of locally based centres and communities in the country; and through inter faith dialogue and other faith based organisations. We will use the long experience of the Church Urban Fund through a new subsidiary to ensure consistency and accountability.
- 1.3. At the heart of the proposals is the ability to work from embedded local contexts without creating new structures or multiple layers of administration, to increase the number and depth of human relationships particularly in multi religious neighbourhoods. It will better enable 'Mr and Mrs Smith, Mr and Mrs Patel and Mr and Mrs Hussain', living in the same local neighbourhood, to relate more positively to each other and to release energies for the benefit of the wider local community. The reality of many of our urban areas is that there are significant separations between communities, including religious communities. Much cohesion focussed activity in recent years has not significantly impacted at street level and has been delivered by organisations which are external to the local context. It is through the development of human relationships at the most local level that the negative impact of these separations can be significantly addressed.
- 1.4. The Church of England is very well placed by its presence, its ethos and its relationships to deliver this programme for change. It works in close ecumenical partnership with other Christian churches, and has prioritised the development of constructive links with other faith communities. The programme represents a real shift away from governmental programmes to faith community programmes; away from centralised and top down approaches to locally rooted approaches; and away from quick fix initiatives towards long term patient relational approaches. It is part of the Church of England's distinctive role to be a pioneer on behalf of and with people of faith in society and the approach being proposed will open new ways for government and faith communities generally to relate to each other. The experience of recent years has been marred by an attitude which has tended to problematise religion and then sought, often by a multiplicity of public authority initiatives, to correct the perceived problems.
- 1.5. The Near Neighbours proposals aim to have a significant impact in four key locations These are the 'M62 mill towns' corridor, Leicester, eastern London and east Birmingham. These are areas of substantially multi religious neighbourhoods and each is served by a Centre developed through the Church

of England's Presence and Engagement programme¹. That programme has focussed on the equipping of churches, other faith communities and public authorities for confident relationship building. The Near Neighbours proposals will engage with the work of the Centres and on the partnerships and relationships that they have developed.

- 1.6. Near Neighbours will work through three inter related 'flows' which together will create a virtuous spiral in participating neighbourhoods.

Near Neighbours Fund

- 1.7. The first will be the Near Neighbours Fund which will provide sums of between £250 - £5000 to parishes² for local initiatives which increase the level and intensity of local cross-community relationships. These will be through small scale activities generated locally and administered through the local church. The turnaround time for applications will be about two weeks and consistent criteria will be applied and monitored by the Church Urban Fund and the Centres. The Centres may also foster initiatives through the relationships and networks they have developed.

- 1.8. In addition to the impact of the funded activities themselves - which could include environmental, social action or sports initiatives – they will have the effect of bringing forward a range of people who are able to be active and enterprising in their communities. These might be parents in the local school, a youth worker in the church, a member of the local mosque committee, a shop keeper, the local vicar or equivalent in a faith community – any of whom could have initiated and helped to take forward a practical local enterprise.

Developing relationships

- 1.9. The second 'flow' will be a range of more intensive ways in which these and other individuals from the faith communities will be enabled to encounter each other in short residential contexts. The Christian Muslim Forum has pioneered residential weekends in which 'pairs' of local ministers and imams from the same neighbourhoods spend a residential weekend together. The purpose is for them to get to know each other, their contexts and issues, to continue their relationship and to share it with the members of their congregations and mosque communities. Some 200 people have participated successfully in this programme and Near Neighbours will extend this and share it with the Council of Christians and Jews and with the Hindu Christian Forum. Other aspects of the proposals will enable engagement with Sikh and other religious communities³. There will also be a series of residential weeks for young adults from separated communities developed over a number of years in West Yorkshire and Leicester.

Neighbourhood relations

¹ GS1720 at <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/agendas/feb2009/gspapers/gs1720.pdf>

² A parish for the Church of England is a legally defined geographic area with a place of worship, a congregation and a licensed minister. It is connected to other parishes through the diocese. A parish serves populations which may vary in rural areas from a few hundred to tens of thousands in some urban areas. The whole of England is covered by the parish system

³ There will be discussions through the CMF and CCJ with other Muslim and Jewish organisations such as the National Mosques and Imams Advisory Board, the Three Faiths Forum and the Board of Deputies of British Jews to ensure as wide as possible buy in to the programme

- 1.10. The third 'flow' will address the ways in which neighbourhoods can better equip themselves to tackle together issues which they have identified as significant for them. The Nehemiah Foundation has been developing such programmes in recent years and will extend these to the four programme areas.
- 1.11. Through these programmes and the relationships that they generate, a substantial number of people in the four locations can be reached significantly; a further significant number mobilised through the small local projects fund; and young adults, local faith community leaders and local organisers will be equipped to identify and seize opportunities for change.
- 1.12. The New Economics Foundation will establish benchmarking research in the four localities so that the impact can be measured.
- 1.13. This programme combines for the common good, the local resources of the Church of England's parishes and schools, the partnerships with other churches and other faith communities and public funding. This provides further attractive opportunities for Trusts and philanthropists to contribute in ways which will maximise their contributions. The Near Neighbours programme does not create new structures and has very low overheads, using as it does, existing organisations at local and national level and the energies and commitments of people in their neighbourhoods.

In summary the proposals will:

- 1.14.help more people talk (real talk that means real change) to each other on the streets, help them better understand their neighbour and be more tolerant of the differences between them thereby reducing the prejudice and general lack of respect that disfigures our society. We will help Mrs Smith understand some of Mrs Patel's concerns and both of them to have an insight into some of the challenges they face. From this we will see more empowered local communities and greater levels of participation in civil society.
- 1.15. bring people together to build relationships and associations that help them to bond at deeper levels so as to nurture trust, mutual support and a sense of peace and security. The proposals will help to create relationships across difference and provide support for people to build a deeper sense of their connection with others. They will provide places for these relationships to develop and thrive and for them to become the foundation for trust.
- 1.16. encourage people to work together to make their neighbourhood a better place, creating common values and a sense of participation by giving people the skills and experience they need to build the Big Society. The proposals will help them mobilise and organise both to see and to be the change they want in their locality. They will build their capacity and empower them to make real change in their neighbourhood.
- 1.17.strengthen the sense of people pulling together to make things better where they live, and in wider society. We live in challenging times and want to help people recognise that we all have to play our part in building the common good, signalling a shift of power back to the people themselves so that they can take control of their own destiny.

2. The Church of England

- 2.1. The Church of England is a complex, diverse and decentralised set of communities, organisations and institutions held together by Christian faith and practice and by a desire to see the flourishing of England spiritually and materially. It is deeply embedded in the constitutional arrangements of the country as they have evolved over the centuries; it is rooted in rural and urban communities across the country; and it has contributed and continues to contribute to the stability of English society. It has a longstanding commitment to working in ecumenical partnership with other Christian traditions, both the historic churches and more recently formed groups. In recent decades with the impact of globalisation, its congregations have become very diverse and it has engaged extensively with communities of other Faiths as they have become part of English society.
- 2.2. The internal ethos of the Church of England, reinforced in canon law and indirectly in legislation, is embedded in a duty of care for all parishioners^[2], pupils, chaplaincy patients and others whom it serves without distinction. This is a foundational motivation which is distinctive and provides the basis for engagement with all others in the neighbourhoods. It is this ethos which drives the present proposal.
- 2.3. The Church of England is essentially a Church of local churches drawn and held together by a common faith and self understanding through a series of representational and administrative structures and ecclesial understandings. These have ensured that through the parishes and chaplaincies every neighbourhood, whether wealthy or disadvantaged, has a presence through churches, church schools, education and health chaplaincies and other church associated centres; many of these are ecumenical in their structures and relationships. It is embedded in the local community in about 20,000 'places'^[3] with buildings, people, professional ministers, youth workers and educators. This is on a scale in breadth and depth beyond any other voluntary organisation and enables the Church to reach into a huge range of different groups and communities, including 'hard to reach' groups. Many independent black-led churches are hosted by Church of England churches and halls, as are other ethnic or national churches and in a number of cases, other Faith groups..
- 2.4. The Church of England has had a very strong record in both ecumenical and inter religious relations over a long period domestically and internationally. Both bilaterally and multilaterally, the Church plays a major role in sustaining inter religious engagement, both 'face to face and side by side' at national, diocesan and local levels. The Church is generally trusted by Christian, other Faith and secular communities as not being an arm of government nationally or locally, and is used to working in partnership with a range of others^[4].
- 2.5. The Church has at all levels, sound, stable and transparent management and governance systems backed by internal and external legal provision and by elected local representation^[5], which provide mechanisms for management and accountability.

^[3] 13000 parishes with 16000 buildings of which about 1000 (2001 Census updated) have more than 10% of their population as people of other Faiths, together with 4670 primary and secondary Church schools

^[4] The Church of England has initiated, sustained or partnered with others in all the bilateral or multilateral organisations at national, regional and local levels

^[5] All parish churches have charitable registration or equivalent, each has an elected Church Council and sends representatives to Deanery, Diocesan and national synods

- 2.6. The Church of England has over the past six years developed a national programme which draws on and values the lived experience of local parish churches in multi religious contexts. This 'Presence & Engagement programme'^[6] used the 2001 Census to analyse the religious composition of all 13000 parishes and to focus on the (then) 900 parishes with more than 10% other Faith populations (ranging up to 75%). Amongst many other activities, the programme has encouraged and supported the development of four Centres^[7] for the better equipping of churches, other Faith communities and local authorities to carry out their ministry and work in these contexts.
- 2.7. The programme has had a significant impact both on the equipping of the churches for their ministry of engagement with other faith communities locally; and in enabling the Church as a whole to understand better the significance of an increasingly multi religious society and how to engage with it. ^[8]

3. The Near Neighbours approach

- 3.1. We^[9] will begin our work by mobilising people through small grants (from £250 up to £5,000, sometimes more) to those who want to engage with their neighbourhood to make it a better place. We want to ignite the passion for change in more ordinary people who have a desire to make things better where they live and work. We would expect to see new community led playgroups, clean-ups, community celebrations, luncheon clubs, befriending schemes, and much more. We will help people to dream dreams, become entrepreneurial and then make their dreams a reality. This we will do largely by adding to the structures and relationships we have in place already and through the work of the Nehemiah Foundation in providing 'health checks' which will assist churches and faith communities in considering their neighbourhood and in exploring possibilities
- 3.2. Next we will identify those who already have influence in their neighbourhoods and build on their capacity to change things for the better. We will work with young aspiring community leaders and help them to build bridges, develop skills of mediation and negotiation and their capacity to make things happen. We will also work with local faith community leaders, help strengthen their leadership skills, their relationships with other groups of people and help develop good governance in their organisations.
- 3.3. To crown what we do, we will deliver a locally based programme of activity which will skill up and mobilise communities to achieve the change they want to see in their neighbourhood. We will find and develop local organisers able to identify and seize opportunities for change. These will be people who know their locality,

^[6] Summarised in: "Staying present and engaging faithfully": A report to General Synod January 2009:

http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/pdf_lib/37_report_to_General_Synod.pdf

^[7] In Bradford, Leicester, East London and East Birmingham

^[8] A recent document: "Sharing the Gospel of Salvation" provides an account of the ways in which the Christian understanding of the finality of Christ is lived out in local multi religious neighbourhoods: http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/pdf_lib/69_resource.pdf

^[9] 'We' in these proposals refers to the trustees and directors responsible for the Near Neighbours charitable company that will be established as a subsidiary of the Church Urban Fund. They will be appointed by the Church Urban Fund and the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England

its strong points and weaknesses and are able to work with the grain of what is already in existence.

- 3.4. The Church of England already has an extensive 'infrastructure' through its dioceses, parishes, schools and in many other ways. Together with the resources of the Church Urban Fund, the Near Neighbours proposals will enable us, with others, to build on what is there and provide it with greater capacity for delivery. We know what works and the support envisaged in this document would create additional possibilities exponentially beyond our present capacity to deliver. We believe that we can bring together a number of organisations and activities with which we have relationships in ways which will together deliver a local impact greatly in excess of any of their individual activities. We are in a truly unique position to do this through the networks - the faithful capital - that we are a part of and have direct and trusted access to. No other organisation has anything like this developed network of contacts, trust and experience of working at the 'nano level' in local communities.
- 3.5. As we deliver this programme of activity we will do it with three main values to guide our decision making:
- 3.6. **Relational:** First the primacy of a relational approach which builds trust and mutual accountability. We are already immersed in the experience of individuals and the communities where we work. Our overall aim is their flourishing and we know that the quality of encounter we have with them is the key to success. We begin by recognising the value of every person we come into contact with and working from there. Hence, we will always choose long term, comprehensive solutions which take seriously the lived experience and behaviour of the people we work with, their view of the world, what they think will work in their neighbourhood and their insights and capacities.
- 3.7. **Locally based:** Secondly, we will aim at specifically local solutions to local problems. We recognise that often local people bring key insights and ideas about how to address the problems they face but do not always know how best to them. We acknowledge the value of centrally organised initiatives in some cases but our focus is on locally based solutions. Our strategy for change is one which emerges from trust, the lived experience of people and their passion for change. This initiative will give us the capacity to build for the long term future.
- 3.8. **Faith based:** Thirdly, we focus our work on faith based activities and organisations because we are a Christian religious community and because this is the key way for us to reach those who are seldom heard and hard to reach. We have called the proposals 'Near Neighbours' because this refers directly to the teaching of Jesus Christ about the twin commandments to love God and love our neighbour. We are not exclusive about this and see ourselves working with others to serve the whole community according to their need not their creed or colour, their sexuality or gender, their disability or age. We see Christian faith and religious faith in general as having real potential to be an active and integrating force for good which builds flourishing and healthy communities..
- 3.9. We see in this initiative a real potential to connect our existing vocation with the concepts of the Big Society. It will enable mutual respect, relationships that increase supportive bonds and connections and the opportunity for people from different communities and identities to create better places to flourish in and

grow. In what follows we will describe what we want to achieve, how we will do it and what we need to make it work.