

‘Our hope is that others will catch this vision and be willing to share our mission – to provide homes and build communities where people love to live’



...s about the progress that has been made a year on from the
...hurch and Community.

Around eight million people in England live in overcrowded, unaffordable or unsuitable homes.

This is a shocking statistic. Whole sections of society are affected, with those living in poverty bearing the worst of this injustice.

The crisis is 'neither accidental nor inevitable' found the *Coming Home* report, from the Archbishops' Commission on Housing, Church and Community. The Church of England needs to 'lead by example' in tackling the crisis, as part of a wider effort at all levels of society, including Government, local authorities, landowners and individuals.

The Commission set out a vision for what good housing should look like - rooted in five core values – the five 'S' s: sustainable, safe, stable, sociable, and satisfying.

In July, the General Synod of the Church of England gave overwhelming backing to the report, recognising "that the housing crisis harms all society and responding to housing need is an integral part of the mission and ministry of the Church of England, particularly in so far as it affects the poorest and most marginalised."

What are we doing to move forward with these aims?

In almost every community there are local churches, often with land and buildings. Can there be small scale developments of four to 10 homes there, for young families unable to afford a local home, or older people with nowhere local to downsize to, or people needing supported living accommodation, or prison leavers with nowhere to go?

Coming Home shows examples of the transformation to lives that can occur when churches become involved. Keswick Community Housing Trust, in the Lake District, has built more than 40 affordable homes in an area where local people are priced out of the housing market. The catalyst to this work was a relatively small area of land made available by a local Church of England parish.

We have larger plots too, where we can play a key role in shaping new communities – again, emphasising the importance of true affordability and inclusivity.

This isn't about selling off church land. By retaining ownership where possible, we can more actively help to ensure high quality, eco-friendly homes for those who need them most.

In the North East, churches of all denominations are working to identify church land where homes can be built, using expert consultants funded by Big Society Capital.

In the Diocese of Chelmsford which I serve, we have several emerging initiatives in East London for new churches and almshouses for key workers.

In Kent, the Church Commissioners and Shepherdswell with Coldred Community Land Trust, working with English Rural Housing Association, have received approval for 13 new homes, in line with the aims of *Coming Home*.

In Gloucester, the church is seeking to turn a redundant church site into homes for homeless people. And just outside the city, a new factory is building “living pods” – modular homes – for ex-prisoners and others to live in, using modern methods of construction, and closely aligned with the diocese, whose Bishop is the Bishop for Prisons.

At national level, a team is being formed with development experience and expertise, able to support dioceses and parishes who want to help tackle the housing crisis.

Gloucester Diocese has a property development company, The Good and Faithful Servant, with a growing number of projects across the diocese. They are now exploring how they can work with other dioceses to expand the model across the country. Work has also started towards setting up and registering a Church Housing Association with a national remit and strong local management and pastoral support structures.

With the help of Knight Frank and Eido Research, a geospatial map of all Church of England land and buildings across England has been created to assist dioceses in stewarding their assets and strengthen their approach to housing and other developments.

We are also supporting some pilot schemes that could be blueprints for the future and models for other churches to follow. These include a ‘how to guide’ for parishes and churches wishing to develop their land or buildings.

The Commission has already been active in supporting pioneering schemes that could be expanded across the church.

As Joanne Thorns, the Church of England priest who is helping coordinate efforts to locate land in the North East, said: ‘we don’t want to just build accommodation and then walk away’ – this is about creating communities as well as homes.

There’s a sixth ‘S’ – Sacrifice. At the heart of the Christian story is the sacrificial self-giving of Jesus Christ. So we’re working to mobilise the Church to play a far more substantial – and sacrificial – role in tackling the scandal of rotten, unaffordable, unsafe housing which too many of our fellow citizens have to endure.

Our hope is that others will catch this vision and be willing to share our mission – to provide homes and build communities where people love to live.

- Bishop Guli was appointed the Church of England's first Bishop for Housing last year, leading the work to implement the*Coming Home* report.

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