



Renewal and Reform Market Towns Discussion

31 January 2019

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Nineteen individuals from seven dioceses (Ely, Leicester, Lincoln, Norwich, Oxford, Peterborough, St Edmundsbury and Ipswich) gathered in the city of Ely to discuss strategies of mission and ministry in market towns.

The group highlighted key aspects of market towns, many of which have historically been regional hubs; small enough to possess a community with the feeling of a village, yet big enough to have notable amenities. Most market towns have seen significant post-war housing growth, although few have seen new church buildings. In the Diocese of Ely, market towns are characterised by high relative poverty and poor transport links. Congregations often represent a very small proportion of the population, with a strong correlation between church weakness and economic deprivation. These factors point to the need for a renewed focus on market towns, historically an overlooked scale of community (falling between urban and rural). We anticipate flourishing market town worshipping communities have the potential to act as centres for the resurgence of surrounding rural churches. The weak starting point of many market town churches, however, means this is a long-term goal.

The Diocese of Ely's Changing Market Towns project team (Mike Booker – Bishop's Change Officer, and Adam Evans – Strategic Programme Manager) outlined their 5-year, £4.5m strategy. In this first phase, the project focuses on seven market towns, intentionally prioritising the most deprived areas. The multifaceted approach makes use of strategic town restructuring, employing skilled people locally, a focus on long-term sustainability, and utilises the 'McKinsey Influence Model of Change' to ensure positive reception and engagement.

- The project is aligning church structures in market towns with more standard business models. For example: working with whole town locations, having one town leader, working across traditional parish boundaries.
- Changing Market Towns Workers – community workers with a skill-set tailored to each town, but each charged with overseeing outreach and growing fresh expressions of church.

- Operations Managers in each town – not traditional administrative clergy support, but, hands-on management, tracking lead and lag measures, enabling lay volunteers, and driving forward change with the town leader.
- Pursuing local sustainability through church growth, increased giving, lay ministry (enhanced by a new contextual learning centre in Wisbech) and social entrepreneurship.

In the afternoon, taking the lessons from the useful Ely presentations, the group broke into groups to discuss interventions and challenges in creating flourishing market town communities. Prayer was highlighted as both a starting point and a continuous requirement. It was recognised that structures and diocesan support may have to be reordered to facilitate delivery, though it was important to work with what each town had at its disposal – e.g. talented and organised clergy and lay volunteers, and conspicuous church buildings with the potential to be open, welcoming spaces. To build upon existing resources it is vital to encourage greater social engagement, to further train lay and ordained leaders, and to inspire confidence in existing congregations – both to do church well within the building and to be the church out in the community, confidently living out their faith in everyday life.



The Diocese of Ely's [Changing Market Towns](#) project is part-funded with Strategic Development Funding – part of the Church of England's [Renewal and Reform](#) programme, helping us become a growing church for all people and all places.



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