



Churches Together in Kent (CTK) Protocol for responding to new housing developments

The area covered by CTK will see significant developments of new housing over the coming decades. These range from developments of several thousand new homes - effectively new communities (such as in Ebbsfleet and parts of Ashford) - to developments of a few hundred new homes within or on the edge of existing communities. In seeking to respond to the mission and pastoral opportunities in such areas, it is important for the churches to develop ways of working based on fruitful, effective and prayerful collaboration. Depending on the particular situation, such responses are likely to be led by one or more denomination and/or local church, with the particular combinations varying from place to place. This protocol seeks to put in place a framework for such joint working.

Churches Together in England hosts a national New Housing Areas group. That group and its convenor are sources of valuable advice; its website gives many useful examples and case studies of responses to areas of new housing.

- 1. Churches Together in Kent.** CTK has established a 'New Housing Areas' working group; this group, convened by the County Ecumenical Officer (CEO), will seek to keep an overview of new developments and the responses of the churches, facilitating discussions between the relevant denominational leaders and local churches.
- 2. Links with Planning Authorities.** Good relationships with the planning authorities are essential in order to take forward the engagement of the churches with new developments. In Kent the relevant authorities are the District/Borough Councils, the Medway Unitary Authority, and the Ebbsfleet Urban Development Corporation.

Within each authority area, we would wish to foster good relationships with senior planning officers & potential developers in order to secure an understanding of developments being planned and how the churches might engage effectively.

- In some instances, there are already effective formal or informal relationships between churches and these authorities. In some of these, Anglican archdeacon and/or diocesan officers are the key link people; in others a local churches together group already has these relationships. Where such relationships already exist, the Church Leaders within CTK will encourage broadening their ecumenical range where appropriate. The CEO will liaise in order to agree who is best placed to report periodically to the CTK group.
- Where relationships of this kind do not exist, the CEO will liaise with denominational leaders and local churches in order to identify who is best placed to build those relationships, especially in relation to those authorities where significant housing development is envisaged.

The CEO and the CTK New Housing Areas group will endeavour to keep an overview of these relationships in order to ensure coverage across the county.

- 3. Larger Developments.** Developments of 1,000+ new homes are likely to merit focussed attention, mission planning and prayerful engagement. Responses will vary according to the nature and phase of the development. Some of these developments will be of such significance that they will merit a focussed project group. The county denominational leaders will know who is best placed locally and within denominational structures to be part of any such group – this is likely to include those with relevant expertise and authority to make decisions about allocation of resources. Each such group will need one or two people who are the key convenors – it will be for them to maintain contact with CTK through the CEO and the CTK group.

As specific plans for Christian presence and community begin to form in a given area, it is likely that one or more denominations and/or local church communities will take the lead on different elements. Such plans may include mission teams, ministerial appointments, schools, church or community buildings and other forms of Christian presence. As such initiatives develop, the denominational leaders will seek to ensure good levels of ecumenical partnership. If cross-denominational worshipping communities or other initiatives emerge, it will be for the denominational leaders and the CTK Enabling Group to agree the appropriate structure and oversight.

- 4. Smaller Developments.** Developments of fewer than 1000 new homes are likely to be best addressed by churches that are already present in the neighbourhood. For Anglicans, this will be the parish church concerned (though sometimes such developments may prompt alterations to parish boundaries); for others, it will be a congregation which is nearby and may have the capacity to engage with the new development.

The CTK NHA group and the CEO will seek to monitor responses to such developments, prompting local discussions and engaging with denominational leaders where necessary.

Guidance on responding to such developments is already available through Churches Together in England, and further such guidance is being produced.

This protocol is intended to be permissive rather than controlling. It is agreed by the denominational leaders within CTK as a framework for ensuring proper levels of ecumenical collaboration as the churches seek to engage with areas of new housing in our communities. This is not to restrict the freedom of denominations and local church groups to take initiatives; but it is to encourage fruitful conversation, prayer and planning as we respond to the call and opportunity to establish Christian presence in these places.