



SUTHERLAND Presbytery Plan

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INTRODUCTION

“ Sutherland encompasses a large part of the northern Highlands and has some of the most striking and beautiful beaches and landscapes in the country. The area stretches north from Dornoch in the east, sharing a boundary with Caithness, and in the west stretches from Lochinver north to Durness and Cape Wrath.¹

With a land mass of over 2000 square miles, Sutherland (5 times the size of Orkney) has a total population of around 13,000 and as most of the densely populated areas are on the East Coast, much of the area is sparsely inhabited in smaller villages.

Sutherland is a remote area, falling within the Scottish Government's definition of 'remoteness'.

“ *Andrew Copus of the Hutton Institute was recently asked by the Scottish Government to draw up a map of Scotland's remote areas using this approach to remoteness. He recommended a definition that classed as remote those areas that couldn't access 10,000 people within a 30- minute journey. Based on this calculation, the resulting map shows clearly that Sutherland – not the islands - is the most remote part of Scotland. Only the south-east corner, with easy access to towns in Ross-shire is not classed as remote under Andrew's definition.*²

Poverty is a problem within Sutherland, with limited employment opportunities, many workers take on several jobs to make ends meet and with increasing costs, usage of food banks and larders is increasing significantly. Despite the remoteness of Sutherland, it receives 60% less government funding than remote islands³ and a Sutherland Fuel Poverty report from November 2021 outlines the significant challenges for households living in the area.

“ *The latest Scottish Government figures show that 33% of all households living in the 'remote rural' areas of Scotland – like Sutherland – are living in extreme fuel poverty with a further 9% living in ordinary fuel poverty. A total of 42% fuel poor households. These figures compare with 11% and 13% respectively for 'the rest of Scotland' – 24% in total.*⁴

Like the rest of the Highland Council area, Sutherland is experiencing population decline due to an aging population and the lack of job opportunities, which means that many young people migrate to Inverness and other cities for better employment prospects. The beauty of the area is desirable as a retirement location for many, and this has increased the price of properties, making them inaccessible to first time buyers, which also encourages migration. Several third sector charities are seeking to address this issue by building affordable housing on available land, such as the glebe in Lochinver, which was acquired recently from the General Trustees.

¹ <https://www.hspc.co.uk/explore-highlands.asp?county=6> accessed (04/07/22)

² <https://www.northern-times.co.uk/news/long-read-the-challenges-sutherland-faces-are-formidable-236193/> (accessed 05/07/22)

³ *ibid*

⁴ highlandcpp.org.uk/uploads/9/5/2/0/95206114/sutherland_fuel_poverty_report_november_2021_final.pdf (accessed 05/07/22)

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE PRESBYTERY OF SUTHERLAND

There are presently five full-time ministers in post within Sutherland Presbytery, along with one OLM and one Auxiliary Minister; two Readers and three Locums (one of whom is the Auxiliary minister). Of the full-time ministers, two are located within six miles of each other and one is in reviewable tenure.

Sunday services are being conducted in fourteen congregations across the presbytery and additional pulpit supply is being required each week. Most congregations are made up of elderly members, with the majority over seventy and there are few young people actively involved in church life. Poor public transport infrastructure and large road distances between congregations stretches resources but wholesale closure of churches would more rapidly increase decline.

An aging membership has a financial impact and demands more resources in terms of pastoral care and funeral services. Some congregations due to being in areas of natural beauty have a larger number of weddings but across the presbytery, baptisms are few and far between. In the past in the rural communities of Sutherland, church attendance was a feature of life every Sunday but with so many competing activities and the increasing secularisation of society church attendance has fallen dramatically over the years. Covid lockdowns introduced congregations to the live streaming of services and for some elderly members this has become the way they now attend church as they have remaining concerns over their health and safety.

The lack of those under forty attending the church presents the greatest challenge to the future of the church in Sutherland and addressing this must be the top priority for the planning process.

The presbytery has operated with stretched resources for some years however the move to a much larger presbytery in 2023 has now been approved. This will include several full-time positions at Presbytery level that is hoped will ease some of the administrative burdens at the local level.

Initial Consultation Workshops

Two consultation workshops were held in the east and west of Sutherland to make congregations aware of the reduced ministry allocation from seven to four full-time equivalent ministry posts. Feedback from these sessions led to the presbytery taking an overture to the General Assembly of 2022 requesting an increase to six.

Sadly, the overture failed, and this plan explores how future ministry can be conducted within Sutherland with four full time posts in alignment with the five marks of mission. Many innovative ideas were considered when working through the planning process but there are constraints that will limit what could have been achieved with additional resources, such as ministers in unrestricted charges and an aging Christian community. Despite these realities, we have developed a plan that will prioritise mission within four parish areas.

THE MISSION PRIORITY & STRATEGY

The mission imperative is clear in the Presbytery of Sutherland with declining numbers and aging members within most congregations across the presbytery. With few active young people involved in church life reaching them with the Christian message must be a priority but this must not be to the detriment of providing ministry support to the many middle aged and older people that need to be reached as well.

The Five Marks of Mission

As we start to map out the strategy, we will do so focusing on the five marks of mission, which have been defined in their simplest form as Tell, Teach, Tend, Transform and Treasure. Whilst a simple and memorable summary is helpful, it will need to be clearly understood without any ambiguity, so we have opted to summarise the five marks of mission with the following terms: Outreach, Discipleship, Service, Advocacy and Care for Creation.



Missio Dei – The Mission of God

As we start to outline our missional approach, it is important to note that *'mission is, primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier, for the sake of the world.'*⁵ Therefore, all that follows is presented in recognition of the importance of prayer, total dependence on the Holy Spirit and seeking to determine where God is already working, creating a hunger for spiritual reality. We noted earlier the need for a *'shift from church-centred mission to a mission-centred church,'*⁶ and we recognise that this will be challenging for some ministers and congregations, but it is an essential change of perspective.

Corporate prayer in each parish area should be seen as much a priority as the activity being undertaken to reach unchurched people. Jesus used the metaphor of the vine and the branches to hit home to his disciples the meaning of *'without me you can do nothing'* (John 15:5) and we must recognise that this remains true. Our plans will only succeed with God's help, but that does not mean that we do nothing, instead we are encouraged to pray hard and work hard.

The work of rebuilding is never easy, yet we are reminded of God's encouraging words to those who had returned from exile to rebuild Jerusalem's broken-down walls: *'Do not despise small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin. All this may seem impossible to you now, a small remnant of God's people. But is it impossible for me? So don't be afraid. Be strong, and get on with rebuilding,'* (Zechariah 4:10 & 8:6, 13)

⁵ Bosch, D. J. (2011). *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (American Society of Missiology Series) (20th Anniversary ed.). Orbis. p. 391

⁶ Wickeri, P. L. Mission from the Margins: The Missio Dei in the Crisis of World Christianity. *International Review of Mission* no 369. pp 182-199. 2004

Making time for Mission

In his book '*Necessary Endings*' Dr Henry Cloud discusses the need for pruning to increase '*focus, mission, purpose, structure, and strategic execution*'. He identified three areas that need to be pruned if growth is to become a reality:

- Where sick branches are taking up time that should be devoted to healthy ones
- Where dead branches need to be pruned so that healthy growth can flourish
- Where too many buds are developing and threaten the fruitfulness of the harvest⁷

Increased parish areas and reduced resources present a significant challenge to the plan and that is why we begin this section by reviewing how things will need to operate if the necessary priority is to be given to missional activities. Clearly, the way things have been done needs to change and time must be made for the things that have the potential to grow.

We also need to be careful that we do not start too many initiatives otherwise we will stretch our limited resources and achieve very little.

Ministry Roles

We examined several possible ministry roles that could be introduced but given the vast geographical areas that require to be covered, we saw little alternative to deploying four full-time equivalent (FTE) ministers of word and sacrament within the four parish area groupings. It has been hard to recruit for full-time posts given the remoteness of the area and higher costs of living, so we concluded that part-time posts were not viable in our presbytery, however, in response to feedback from the Northern Parish Area, we have introduced two part-time posts, but our concerns remain.

Questionnaires were sent out to each congregation, which demonstrated that almost all congregations are already working on initiatives aligned with the five marks of mission. Yet despite all these great church-based activities they have not delivered growth within the regular worshipping congregations. Congregations with an aging membership demand a high level of resources for pastoral care and funeral services, and these demands will need to be balanced against and not distract from the mission priority.

Therefore, it is essential that the role of the ministry '*shift from church-centred mission to a mission-centred church*,'⁸ and the danger that things go on as before must be avoided. Missional activity must be seen as the number one priority for employed ministry staff as they seek to bring unchurched people to faith in Jesus Christ.

⁷ Cloud, H. (2011). *Necessary Endings* (12/19/10 ed.). Harper Business, p. 15-16, 29

⁸ Wickeri, P. L. Mission from the Margins: The Missio Dei in the Crisis of World Christianity. *International Review of Mission* no 369. pp 182-199. 2004

To ensure that real change occurs across the presbytery key aspects of our mission approach will be assigned to post holders. We expect that 0.2 of each full-time role will have presbytery wide responsibility in key areas, such as:

- Training of lay people in ministry and mission
- Mission to the under 40s and young families
- Mission to the over 40s and senior citizens
- Gospel outreach to NC500 visitors

Changing Perceptions

Church members perceive the role of the minister as it has been done traditionally in the past, but this perception needs to change as members start to take responsibility for tasks that were previously the responsibility of the minister.

Time must be freed up for ministers to prioritise mission and to devote the bulk of their time to reaching un-churched people in their communities. This means more responsibility will fall on OLMs, readers, elders and members for pastoral care and missional outreach as it was modelled in the early church. Training will be provided to those who are willing to step up and take on new responsibilities.

Please note that no elder will be asked to perform any duties, outside of their regular elder commitments, unless they express a wish to do so.

EXTENDED PARISH AREAS

Current Map of Sutherland Presbytery Parishes (based on seven full-time equivalent ministry posts (FTE))

Before we look to the future, the map below shows the current configuration of the parishes in Sutherland with the congregations that have no full-time minister in white.



The current configuration leaves a large void in the centre of Sutherland with a high dependence on locums, OLMs, readers and other pulpit supply, as many of the parishes have been vacant. Whilst this maintains a pattern of regular services, it does little to drive mission and evangelism.

The status of each congregation prior to the presbytery planning process is detailed below:

| Current Congregations | Status | Population | Church Attendance |
|--|---------------------------|------------|-------------------|
| Altnaharra & Farr linked with Melness & Tongue | Unrestricted | 1029 | 12 |
| Assynt & Stoer | Unrestricted | 1021 | 30 |
| Clyne linked Kildonan and Loth, Helmsdale | Unrestricted | 2629 | 45 |
| Creich linked with Kincardine, Croick, Edderton & Rosehall | Vacant | 2067 | 55 |
| Dornoch Cathedral | Vacant | 2478 | 110 |
| Durness and Kinlochbervie | Reviewable | 668 | 37 |
| Eddrachillis | Deferred linkage (Vacant) | 347 | 6 |
| Golspie | Unrestricted | 1661 | 20 |
| Lairg linked with Rogart | Vacant | 1349 | 27 |

The church attendance statistics were taken from presbytery questionnaires completed in July 2021.

Future Map of Sutherland Presbytery Parishes (based on four full-time equivalent (FTE))



The map above illustrates the parish areas which the four FTE ministry posts will cover.

The parish areas which will be supported by the following allocation of ministry posts:

| Future Congregations | Tenure | Population | Church Attendance |
|--|----------------|------------|-------------------|
| Altnaharra, Farr, Melness & Tongue | 50% Reviewable | 1029 | 13 |
| Assynt, Eddrachillis, Lairg & Rosehall | Unrestricted | 2474 | 71 |
| Clyne, Golspie, Kildonan, Loth & Rogart | Unrestricted | 4748 | 80 |
| Dornoch Cathedral, & Kyles of Sutherland | Vacant | 4330 | 165 |
| Durness and Kinlochbervie | 50% Reviewable | 688 | 37 |

These four geographical parish areas are essential to provide parish ministry coverage for the whole of Sutherland. It is recognised that the larger geographies and larger areas will be challenging and therefore ministry expectations will need to change both at congregational and parish levels. The driving times between parishes are highlighted in Appendix 1.

The Northern Parish Area has been retained as two distinct parish areas that will be served by sharing 1 FTE post between 2 ministers at 50% reviewable tenure. In addition to the parish ministry posts, funding will be sought to create a pioneering post within Melness & Tongue to start afresh in this area and reach out to its expanding population.

The proposed Unions and rationale behind each parish area is outlined below.

Proposed Unions and Area Rationale

WESTERN PARISH AREA

(Assynt & Stoer, Eddrachillis, Lairg and Rosehall)

- Union of Assynt & Stoer, Eddrachillis, Lairg and Rosehall
- Four-way union to be established by working closely with each individual Kirk Session to determine least disruptive approach taking into account the associated changes to current individual charitable status and accounting processes.

Western Parish Area

It is envisaged that the Western Parish Area will unite the four congregations of Assynt & Stoer, Eddrachillis, Lairg and Rosehall. The initial proposal for this parish area was to form two unions between the congregations of Assynt & Stoer with Eddrachillis and Lairg with Rosehall, then create a larger union at a later stage. Feedback suggested that a union of the four congregations would be a better approach, given the complexity and costliness of setting up unions. The Kirk Sessions from the four congregations would meet and move forward at a pace the congregations was happy with, but the union would need to be completed by the end of 2025.

The inclusion of the union of Lairg and Rosehall into the Western Parish area of the union between Assynt & Stoer and Eddrachillis was based on geographical coverage and population figures. The union of Lairg and Rosehall within the Western Parish area was based on the proximity of both these parish areas and the previous linkage with the Kyle of Sutherland churches would be broken.

Consultation with all the individual Kirk Sessions will take place early 2023 to ensure the least disruptive approach is agreed.

Due to the distances between parishes, it will not be possible for one FTE to conduct live Sunday worship within each congregation on a weekly basis. Weekly worship for each individual congregation could potentially continue to be supported. This could be achieved by a combination of a rotational ministry presence along with a mix of the use of technology to live stream or host a pre-record weekly sermon. Using this approach, the congregation would still meet in their familiar building and participate in the singing of hymns, scripture readings and prayers together.

A detailed review in conjunction with an appointed buildings officer from the General Trustees office will be taken over the next 6 months to determine whether it is appropriate to retain all four church buildings or whether alternative proposals should be made. No decision to be made on any changes to buildings until this study is completed.

It is proposed that the current vacant manse in Eddrachillis would be put up for sale with a target sale date of end 2023.

SOUTHERN PARISH AREA

(Dornoch, Edderton, Creich, Kincardine and Croick)

- Union of Creich, Kincardine and Croick (Kyles of Sutherland Parish), Edderton with Dornoch Cathedral
- Four-way union to be established by working closely with each individual Kirk Session to determine least disruptive approach, changes to charitable status and accounting processes
- Potential transfer of Edderton (4 miles from Tain) into Tain Parish Church's parish

Southern Parish Area

The rationale for merging the parishes of Dornoch, Kincardine, Croick, Creich and Edderton are both historical and geographical.

The parishes within the Southern Parish areas are in relative proximity to one another and are therefore more easily accessible than in some of the other parish areas. Additionally, the Dornoch Firth Group that operates across each parish area has become a well-established area for over a decade and continues to work well. In recent years activities have become more Dornoch based but a regrouping of the congregations involved would benefit the area as a whole and involve more churchgoers and non-churchgoers alike in the five marks of mission.

As with the other parish areas, it will not be possible to provide a minister led service on a weekly basis within each congregation however worship could be arranged on a rotational basis, particularly within the Kyle of Sutherland parishes.

Due to the proximity of both Creich and Kincardine church buildings, a detailed review in conjunction with a Buildings officer from the General Trustees will be taken over the next 6 months to determine which church building should be retained for worship purposes and what alternative proposals could be made for the other. No decision to be made on any changes to existing building utilisation until this study is completed.

The current vacant manse in Ardgay will be assessed as to whether this could be utilised for pioneering ministry post or whether this should be put up for sale. It is envisaged that the manse in Dornoch would be more favourable for any new minister into the area, but this will be taken into consideration as part of the vacancy process.

Current discussions are already underway between the Church of Scotland General Trustees and Historic Churches Scotland in respect of the transfer of ownership of Croick church and these should be progressed with a target transfer date by end 2023.

A potential transfer of ministry responsibilities of the parish of Edderton back to the Presbytery of Ross will be reviewed and is based on its historical original placing.

Each individual parish congregation will be able to lean on each other's strengths and help with each other's weaknesses. A union into one Kirk Session will ensure diversity of thinking, aligned activities and outreach to all areas within the area.

In time, and if financially viable, it may be possible for this parish area to employ a locally funded assistant minister that could be based in the manse at Ardgay. It could also be possible for

ministers in training to spend part of their training placements or probation attachments across this area, with accommodation provided in the manse at Ardgay with full supervision and support from the minister based in the manse in Dornoch.

EASTERN PARISH AREA

- Union of Clyne with Kildonan and Loth, Helmsdale
- Union of Golspie and Rogart
- Deferred union of Golspie and Rogart with Clyne, Kildonan & Loth, Helmsdale at the point of demission or retirement of one of current ministers on unrestricted tenure Union of Creich, Kincardine and Croick (Kyles of Sutherland Parish), Edderton with Dornoch Cathedral

Eastern Parish Area

The Eastern Parish Areas would be made up of Golspie, Rogart, Brora and Helmsdale. The rationale behind this is based on population centres and distances between the 4 churches.

Brora and Helmsdale are already in a linkage and will become a union at the most appropriate opportunity. Rogart is at present without a minister, and it is proposed that they would form a union with Golspie as soon as is practical. The order in which the unions between the four churches are to proceed is yet to be determined.

As Brora linked with Kildonan and Loth Helmsdale and Golspie both have ministers on unrestricted tenure, this parish area would remain in a deferred union with one other until one of the two current ministers have either left or retired. The total population of Golspie, Brora, Helmsdale and Rogart together are high for Sutherland, although the distances involved are relatively short. Due to the cumulative distances and the fact that the 4 churches would ultimately become one union with one Kirk Session, it is unlikely that it would be possible for all churches to have a service with the minister in person every week. However, technology such as is already installed in Clyne Church could be put in all 4 churches so that the same weekly service could be accessed by all.

A detailed review in conjunction with an appointed buildings officer from the General Trustees office will be taken over the next 6 months to determine whether it is appropriate to retain all four church buildings or whether alternative proposals should be made. No decision to be made on any changes to buildings until this study is completed.

NORTHERN PARISH AREA

(Durness & Kinlochbervie, Melness & Tongue and Altnaharra & Farr)

- Northern Parish grouping retains two distinct parish areas on 50% tenure basis
- Proposed union between Altnaharra and Farr with Melness and Tongue
- Ministry tenure reduced to 50% for Durness and Kinlochbervie once current reviewable tenure is reviewed in September 2024
- Ministry tenure reduced to 50% for the linkage of Altnaharra and Farr with Melness and Tongue once current minister on unrestricted charge retires or demits
- Funding for pioneering post within parish of Melness and Tongue to be sought
- Plan to review whether more centrally located manse required for future use
- Potential deferred transfer discussions of the easternmost parts of the parish to Caithness Presbytery

Northern Parish Area

The Northern Parish Area incorporates the parishes of Kinlochbervie and Durness in the northwest, Melness and Tongue in the centre, with Altnaharra and Farr, in the northeast. Although there has been a linkage between the latter two congregations this has not worked well, and it is acknowledged that priority and a different approach must be given to this area to re-engage with the community.

The original proposal for this area was to merge it into one large parish area and as the two manses are positioned in the outer extremities of the area it was envisaged that these would be sold, and a new manse acquired in Tongue. This proposal was met with very strong opposition as it was felt that even with a centrally located manse, the geography was too vast and there were concerns about the mental well-being of the minister responsible for the area.

Based on this feedback, it is proposed that two ministers based in Kinlochbervie and Bettyhill on 0.5 FTE tenure be retained. Kinlochbervie and Durness would retain a minister at 50% FTE located in the manse at Kinlochbervie. The existing ministry tenure is on a reviewable basis and the presbytery has agreed that a review would not be held until September 2024. At that point the continuation of the post will depend on whether the ministry allocation for the whole of the area has reduced to 4 FTE.

As part of the property review that will be taken place over the next 6 months the church building at Durness will be assessed to determine whether this is retained or whether this building is sold, and regular worship relocated to a more modern community owned premises on a rental basis.

Upon demission or retirement of the present minister, currently on unrestricted tenure, the proposed union between Altnaharra and Farr with Melness and Tongue will retain a minister at

50% FTE based in the current manse at Bettyhill. Prior to progressing any union future discussions should be arranged to be held with Caithness Presbytery to explore whether there are opportunities to merge some activities within the Bettyhill area, where there is already some crossover within local schools.

A detailed review in conjunction with an appointed buildings officer from the General Trustees office will be taken over the next 6 months to determine the reduction of church buildings required. No decision to be made on any changes to buildings until this study is completed. The congregation of Farr Church, Bettyhill would be consulted as to the possibility of a future sale of the church buildings and worship relocating into the more modern, welcoming local community hall.

Discussions to take place with an appropriate trust in respect of the transfer of ownership for Syre church with a target date of transfer by end 2024. It would be expected that a condition of transfer of ownership would enable worship services to be conducted there as and when appropriate

Melness and Tongue is expected to see significant population growth due to the development of a Space Hub in Melness. This has been designated as a priority pioneering area, and it will be discussed further under the heading of pioneering ministry.

Pioneering Ministry

In addition to the four FTE parish ministry posts, there is a need for pioneering ministry to serve across the parish areas of the presbytery. Pioneering ministry is distinct from parish ministry in that its main aim is to spread the good news of the gospel beyond existing church boundaries. Pioneers connect with people outside of Church, creating new ways of doing Church together in their community. Pioneering ministry looks at potential new areas for church planting and growth for mission.

The development of a Space Hub in the Melness area creates an opportunity to start afresh in this region. The development of the Space Hub is already underway, which will employ 61 people in the short term and 250 over the longer term,⁹ and outreach to this growing community is seen as a priority as is pioneering to develop new worshipping communities across the northern parish area.

In 2023 a Seeds for Growth fund will be launched in which presbyteries can apply for a grant to fund new pioneering positions. The planning team propose to apply for two full time pioneering positions that will primarily focus on two main areas

- 1 FTE Pioneering ministry post to the under 40s. The focus would be to engage with the younger demographic within the region focusing on developing deeper relationships within the school settings and enabling new ways to connect with young families.

⁹ Sutherland Space Hub puts 'north on the map an innovator in space technology' <https://www.northern-times.co.uk/news/sutherland-space-hub-puts-north-on-the-map-as-an-innovator-257870/> accessed 31/05/2022

- 50% FTE Pioneering ministry post to rural areas and industries. The focus would be to the Crofting, Fishing and agricultural communities within Sutherland bringing ministry to these industries natural hubs and gathering points.
- 50% Pioneering ministry post within the Melness and Tongue area with priority focus on church planting and new growth. This will coincide with the development of the Space Hub in Melness.

As things currently stand, presbytery cannot assume that full funding will be granted for these pioneering positions and therefore these posts cannot be guaranteed within this current version of the mission plan. The team will build upon the assurances made by the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland, after the overture presented in May 2022 was overturned, that they will work with the planning team to assist with any application to the Seeds for Growth fund. It is envisaged that vacant manses could be used to accommodate any pioneering ministry post e.g. Pioneering ministry to the under 40s could be based in Lairg manse, which would enable them to access all parish areas within the presbytery. An application for a Ministries Development Staff (MDS) post will be made before 14th November 2022 to seeking funding for youth work across the presbytery and initial pioneering work in Melness.

Additional pioneering opportunities will also be considered for each parish area subject to grant applications from pioneer mission funds. These could include a focus on industries such as pilgrimage, tourism, and explore the potential for pioneering ministry within the proposed space station in the Northern area of Sutherland.

ASSET MANAGEMENT BUILDING AUDIT (AMBA) BUILDING CATEGORISATION

Effective mission planning requires “well equipped spaces in the right places” and within Sutherland Presbytery a rationalisation of the buildings is required to ensure we meet this aim. However difficult these decisions are to make; they must inevitably be made to ensure a viable future for the Church. In 2021 the Assembly Trustees of the General Assembly introduced the Asset Management Building Audit (AMBA) for every Presbytery within the Church of Scotland to gather relevant information on all church buildings to give an accurate report on the current condition of each property, effectively acting as an MOT for each building. This process has now become a fundamental basis on which Presbytery planning is to be conducted.

As part of the planning process, every church building within Sutherland Presbytery was visited by an independent member of the planning team and assessed using the AMBA toolkit. Each church building was assessed on the same basis with the completion of a series of questions within a detailed excel spreadsheet. Supporting photographic evidence was also required to be submitted. Once the AMBA forms were completed they were sent into the General Trustees who then scored each building separately as show in the table below. Within the Presbytery planning process, these buildings will then be assessed to determine whether they can be categorised “A” or “B” status. Where a building is designated as Category “A” status that indicates that under current proposals the building is required to be retained as an integral part of the Presbytery Plan. If a building is given a Category “B” status that indicates that the building should either be “improved, renovated, sold, let, or otherwise disposed of.”

As no set decision has been made on any of the buildings within Sutherland Presbytery in the first instance, they have all been classed under Category “B” and further assessment will be required. A further more detailed review of all the buildings within Sutherland is to take place within the first six months of 2023 at which point the buildings will then be categorised with an “A” or “B” status. This review will be conducted with the assistance of a Buildings Officer appointed by the General Trustees. No decisions to be taken on any Category “B” buildings until these reviews have been completed and associated congregations consulted. Once the buildings have been identified as Category A or Category B, a date for release will be indicated for those listed as Category B. Proposals for timescales of building release dates (should this be applicable) have been indicated in the table below, these have been set on a staggered basis per parish grouping and will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Where a decision has been made, and the advice is to sell the building, a target date for the completion of the sale has been indicated.

| <u>BUILDINGS</u> | <u>AMBA SCORE</u> | <u>% of overall score</u> | <u>CATEGORY</u> | <u>DATE</u> |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------|--|
| WESTERN PARISH GROUPING | | | | |
| Assynt Parish Church | 76 | 65% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = Dec 2025 |
| Eddrachillis Parish Church | 74 | 63% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = Dec 2025 |
| Eddrachillis Manse | | | B | Release date by end 2023 |
| Rosehall Parish Church | 68 | 58% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = Dec 2025 |
| Lairg Parish Church | 82 | 70% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = Dec 2025 |
| Lairg Manse | | | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = Dec 2025 |
| SOUTHERN PARISH GROUPING | | | | |
| Dornoch Cathedral | 70 | 60% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = July 2024 |
| Dornoch West Church Hall | 75 | 80% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = July 2024 |
| Dornoch Manse | | | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = July 2024 |
| Creich Parish Church | 60 | 51% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = July 2024 |
| Kincardine Parish Church | 68 | 58% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = July 2024 |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------|----|-----|---|---|
| Ardgay Manse | | | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = July 2024 |
| Croick Parish Church | | | B | Discussions underway with GT's & Historic Churches Scotland for Transfer of Ownership – Release date Dec 2023 |
| EASTERN PARISH GROUPING | | | | |
| Bunillidh Church | 65 | 56% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = July 2026 |
| Clyne Parish Church | 81 | 69% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = July 2026 |
| Clyne Parish Church Hall | 86 | 74% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = July 2026 |
| Brora Manse | | | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = July 2026 |
| St Andrews Parish Church | 66 | 56% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = July 2026 |
| Golspie Manse | | | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = July 2026 |
| St Callan's Church | 58 | 50% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = July 2026 |
| NORTHERN PARISH GROUPING | | | | |
| Kinlochbervie Parish Church | 75 | 64% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = Dec 2025 |
| Kinlochbervie Manse | | | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = Dec 2025 |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|----|-----|---|--|
| Durness Parish Church | 55 | 47% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = Dec 2025 |
| Melness Church | 58 | 50% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = Dec 2025 |
| St Andrews (Tongue) | 34 | 29% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = Dec 2025 |
| Farr Church (Bettyhill) | 59 | 50% | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = Dec 2025 |
| Bettyhill Manse | | | B | Decision required = July 2023 Release date (if appropriate) = Dec 2025 |
| Syre Church | 46 | 39% | B | Discussions to be held for transfer of ownership with an appropriate trust – Release date July 2024 |

Future role of OLMs, Readers and Retired Ministers

The changes above will necessitate consultation with OLMs and readers to align their activities with the missional goals of the plan, though that may be through direct action or helping to free up others to prioritise mission. There are a number of retired ministers within Sutherland and future opportunities, if desired, should be explored as appropriate.

Sunday Services



Instead of having two or three services on a Sunday in different locations, which demand extensive travel, one service will be broadcast via livestreaming to smaller satellite churches with local participation of members in readings and prayers from different locations and congregations.

This will require investment in technology such as large screens, computers and video equipment.

The missional initiatives that are proposed within this plan, have been carefully considered in terms of their ease of implementation, capability to be resourced and the likelihood of them delivering on the planned objectives.

Worship Services

Due to the geographical coverage that each individual minister will have to cover it may be that worship services out with a traditional Sunday morning will have to be introduced. Having different types of worship services on different days of the week would enable the minister to maintain pastoral relationships with a congregation. Services out with a Sunday could also provide an outreach opportunity for those that are unable to worship on a Sunday morning due to other commitments. The use of technology as mentioned earlier could also be used to provide different styles of worship that may appeal to different demographics.

Training of Church Members & Elders

Discussions are underway with HTC, Dingwall for the provision of training on pastoral care and leading worship. Training materials have been acquired from Angus and Hamilton presbyteries so that in-house training of elders to take funeral services can take place.

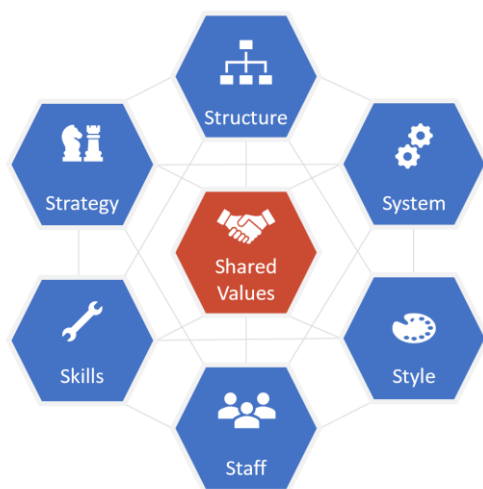
As it is envisaged that church members will be actively involved in evangelism and outreach, training will be provided on how to unobtrusively move conversations to matters of faith and deliver a simple outline of the Gospel message within each parish area.

Whilst the plan offers guidance and some examples of good practice in missional outreach it leaves each congregation to decide the initiatives that will be most effective for outreach into their local communities and the training that will be required to support them.

Please note that no elder will be asked to perform any duties, outside of their regular elder commitments, unless they express a wish to do so.

MAKING THE PLAN WORK

As there are many aspects to this presbytery plan the McKinsey 7S Framework has been selected as a model that will be applied to each of the new parish areas as they form and to ensure that each operates cohesively and effectively within the context of the larger presbytery plan.



At the centre of the model are the **shared values** that will underpin each parish area. The code of practice for Prioritising Mission will combine with local shared values.

- Strategy – the mission and specific objectives
- Structure – the leadership structure
- System – the way things are done practically
- Style – the culture that drives the vision
- Staff – individual roles and responsibilities
- Skills – assessing and developing skills

Shared Values

At the heart of the plan are the five marks of mission, which will help to focus the minds of each congregation on what is important - Outreach, Discipleship, Community Service, Advocacy and Care for Creation. As each parish area forms there will be a need to create shared relational, behavioural and spiritual values that build strong relationships between the congregations. Facilitated workshops will be needed early in the formation stage to agree these shared values and determine how to embed them in the life of local congregations

Structure



The Special Commission on the Third Article Declaratory, in 2010, noted that “the living out of the commitment of Article III may well involve an increasing number of communities where the ministry is exercised largely by the eldership and membership of the Church, albeit under the oversight of an ordained minister.” (8.5.6)¹⁰

The plan envisages parish areas under the leadership of an ordained minister who will develop the eldership and membership of the congregations to lead worship, take funerals and engage in missional activities within their communities.

The plan seeks to preserve the identity and ministry of congregations and empower them to become more effective in their local areas. One advantage of such areas is that one treasurer may be able to produce the accounts supported by a simple local finance process.

System

Earlier in the plan mention was made of the need for IT infrastructure and this would include broadband, a PA system, large screens, and other specified equipment so that services can be delivered locally via zoom, live streaming or other methods.

Appropriate individuals will need to be recruited and trained to manage the IT desk.

Readings and prayers could be delivered locally in the different churches each Sunday to enable as much participation as possible. It may that some congregations may wish to have a worship leader lead the local service with the sermon being delivered via zoom and there may be other configurations developed at a local level.

On at least a quarterly basis, the minister would lead a service from each of the congregations in the parish area.

Style

Leadership styles will vary across the parish areas in line with the uniqueness of the minister, but the overall approach will be consultative. The culture that will operate in each area will have its own local characteristics but foundational to everything will be respect for each other and allowing for differing opinions to be expressed. A key role of the minister will be that of facilitator and cheerleader who encourages everyone to get behind the vision.

¹⁰ <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/presbytery-planning/presbytery-mission-plan-act-guidance-code-of-practice> (accessed 07/07/22)

Staff

Within each area there may be OLMs, Auxiliary Ministers, Readers, Youth Workers, Treasurers and other volunteers and each will bring their own set of skills. It will be important to give clarity to each member of the team as to their roles and responsibilities, and to set up regular developmental reviews.

Skills

A skills audit should be conducted early on, which identifies and seeks to utilise these skills for the benefit of all. There will also be skills that need to be developed and it is envisaged that elders will be trained to conduct funerals and offer pastoral support. As readers can conduct weddings, they should be able to help alleviate pressure in busy parishes such as Dornoch.

Strategy

The strategy is the key to implementation, development, and the overall success of the plan and as it is so critical, it has been covered elsewhere in the report.

Presbytery has the ultimate responsibility for the success of the plan and as such will monitor each parish area in line with the Prioritising Mission Code of Practice to ensure that the mission is prioritised within every congregation and parish area.

It is envisaged that the success of each parish area will be specifically monitored and assessed within the presbytery's local church review process.

The Implementation of the Five Marks of Mission will be a priority in each parish area.

Outreach

The word 'outreach' has been chosen deliberately as historically proclaiming the Good News was seen as something that was solely done within the church context. With few non-Christians attending churches, it is essential that missional outreach to share the Good News is done in the communities and places where people are located. This plan does not advocate how this work is done within the local context, but it does require that outreach into the community is given priority. All activities should build relationships so that sharing of the Gospel can take place in a similar way to how Jesus connected with the woman at the well of Samaria.

1. Engaging and attracting those aged 40 and under (children, young people and families)

The days when lots of young children came to church are long gone and most congregations have very few children involved in church life, unless they have a Boy's Brigade or Girl's Brigade company. We need to move away from thinking that the only measure of successful youth ministry is how many children attend our Sunday Schools, instead we need to find new ways of engaging with young people in the places where they are located.

Schools

Primary and secondary schools provide excellent opportunities to connect with young people. Where there is an openness to teach about the Christian faith on a weekly basis through the curriculum of excellence these opportunities should be taken and there are plenty of excellent resource materials available that inspire pupils to fully engage with the subject matter. A few pilot projects have presented the Christian message through art, film and drama and similar

projects are encouraged. Where the school and church are located close to one another, this can provide opportunities for special services at the end of term and at Christmas time.

Young families

Many of the churches in Sutherland have halls, which are often utilised by community groups and provide a helpful income to the congregation but do little for mission. Each congregation is being asked to review how they utilise their halls and to prioritise projects that fit with the church's mission objectives. Programmes such as Mainly Music, Scripture Union's Prime Time, Summer and Autumn holiday clubs and other youth programmes are to be encouraged. We should look for ways to extend café church and messy church programmes into each parish area.

2. Developing mission through new worshipping communities (including online worship)

The Presbytery of Sutherland is totally committed to mission and with several new initiatives are being piloted or in the process of being launched. These include Café Church, Messy Church, Mainly Music, Songs of Hope, Capture Video projects and a water station. Some of these pilot projects have been granted funded by the Small Grants Fund, Adapt & Thrive and SSPCK. Funding for further projects will be required and new applications will be made in 2023 for IT infrastructure and pioneering projects. All these projects have the potential to help congregations within the presbytery reach age groups and parts of their communities that they are currently struggling to connect with in a meaningful way.

Workshops will be held quarterly across the presbytery to come up with new ideas and to share best practice on the initiatives that are delivering the best results.

Discipleship

The key measure of effective outreach is the number of people who become disciples and make a commitment to follow Christ. In previous generations almost all baptisms were of young children but today in a society that has little exposure to the Christian faith, baptisms will mostly be of adults and, potentially, their children.

In most congregations there are only a few people who have read the Bible all the way through and have a detailed understanding of its content. Many members want to have deeper insight into what the Bible says. Reading groups, such as Immerse Bible Reading programme are to be encouraged as they help people to read and reflect on the whole Bible over a three-year period.

Service

Before church initiatives are launched detailed research should be conducted into the needs of the area. Whilst some research data is available online, there is no substitute for consultative dialogue with key service providers within an area, such as medical practices, care providers, council support staff, police officers and direct engagement with the public. Often this type of engagement reveals needs that are hidden from view and these can guide the development of services that can make a real difference to people's lives.

Poverty is a recognised problem across Sutherland and many congregations are already involved in food banks and food larders, which are becoming increasingly essential as living costs escalate. There is a shift towards food larders rather than food banks, as they tackle waste as well as

poverty and have no restrictions on who can access them. Ministers and church members are encouraged to become actively involved in these important community services.

Pastoral care also extends beyond the church membership into the whole community whether that is simply sending a card at a key life event or by offering services that meet the needs of those across the generations.

Advocacy

Domestic violence is an issue in Sutherland and each congregation has been encouraged to adopt the Violence against Women Charter and more recently the plight of Ukrainian refugees has been a focus for prayer at church services with vigils being held in some churches.

Congregations are encouraged to get involved in advocacy to give voice to the voiceless. Organisations such as CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide) campaigns for the rights of Christians and other faith groups across the world and church members can influence outcomes by writing letters to MPs and other key decision makers. The presbytery plan leaves each congregation free to determine how to take its advocacy work forward and decide locally what issues it is most passionate about.

Care for Creation

Every congregation in Sutherland is expected to become an eco-congregation with every major purchase being considered through an environmental lens before being ordered.

Workshops and films that promote care for the creation should be shown in church premises and available to all within the community. Partnerships with local rangers and groups such as Take One Action, which provides films on eco related topics are encouraged.

Conclusion

The reduction in full-time ministry posts to four FTE posts is extremely challenging for an area as vast as Sutherland but the planning committee has sought to allocate resources fairly. Areas that are more scarcely populated will require post holders to cover larger distances and in other areas post holders will have larger populations to work with.

The planning process has been difficult, but it has been consultative. Most of the congregations have been positive about what has been proposed although they all recognise the challenge of prioritising mission with much reduced resources. One member of presbytery summed up the situation as follows: *'There's nothing we can do but accept change but if we put our backs into it, we might be surprised at what can be achieved'*.

The original proposal was widely accepted in three areas, the west, east and south but concerns were raised in the Northern Parish Area about the size of the area and the wellbeing of the post holder covering such vast distances, even from a centrally located manse.

As already mentioned in the plan careful consideration was given to the feedback from this area and the allocation of 50% ministry to Altnaharra & Farr linked with Melness and Tongue; and

50% ministry to Durness & Kinlochbervie addresses the issue of distances. The remaining concern is whether these posts will be attractive as 50% ministry allocations when they come to be refilled at some point in the future.

With the expected population growth in the Melness area the proposal of a 50% pioneering post based in that area is necessary. There is no guarantee that this funding will be granted, so at some stage the presbytery will need to review this further and through discussions with Caithness, after the new enlarged presbytery is established in 2023, it may be that more creative solutions might emerge that are not presently available within the scope of the Presbytery of Sutherland.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1:

Mileage distances between current parish areas.

| Driving distances and times between churches | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------|------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | Brora | Bettyhill | Bonar Bridge | Dornoch | Durness | Golspie | Helmsdale | Kinlochbervie | Lairg | Lochinver | Melness | Rogart | Rosehall | Scourie | Tongue |
| Brora | | 57 (1h35m) | 27 (38m) | 16 (25m) | 79 (2h5m) | 6 (9m) | 11 (15m) | 71 (1h46m) | 24 (36m) | 70 (1h45m) | 56 (1h10m) | 14 (19m) | 32 (48m) | 68 (1h31m) | 62 (1h48m) |
| Bettyhill | 57 (1h35m) | | 55 (1h41m) | 66 (1h59m) | 40 (1h27m) | 63 (1h45m) | 45 (1h36m) | 61 (1h55m) | 45 (1h24m) | 90 (2h35m) | 17 (36m) | 55 (1h38m) | 54 (1h45m) | 68 (1h44m) | 13 (22m) |
| Bonar Bridge | 27 (38m) | 55 (1h41m) | | 13 (21m) | 71 (1h58m) | 21 (28m) | 38 (1h) | 57 (1h24m) | 11 (13m) | 49 (1h19m) | 42 (1h3m) | 21 (28m) | 16 (32m) | 54 (1h13m) | 49 (1h17m) |
| Dornoch | 16 (25m) | 66 (1h59m) | 13 (21m) | | 77 (2h3m) | 11 (15m) | 27 (37m) | 68 (1h43m) | 22 (31m) | 62 (1h36m) | 65 (1h52m) | 11 (16m) | 25 (40m) | 66 (1h28m) | 60 (1h34m) |
| Durness | 79 (2h5m) | 40 (1h27m) | 71 (1h58m) | 77 (2h3m) | | 74 (1h58m) | 91 (2h21m) | 18 (38m) | 56 (1h34m) | 52 (1h28m) | 30 (1h5m) | 68 (1h52m) | 65 (1h50m) | 25 (45m) | 29 (1h2m) |
| Golspie | 6 (9m) | 63 (1h45m) | 21 (28m) | 11 (15m) | 74 (1h58m) | | 17 (23m) | 65 (1h37m) | 18 (23m) | 90 (2h10m) | 62 (1h47m) | 8 (10m) | 27 (41m) | 62 (1h22m) | 57 (1h26m) |
| Helmsdale | 11 (15m) | 45 (1h36m) | 38 (1h) | 27 (37m) | 91 (2h21m) | 17 (23m) | | 82 (2h6m) | 35 (47m) | 80 (2h3m) | 69 (1h25m) | 26 (37m) | 44 (1h3m) | 79 (1h56m) | 52 (1h43m) |
| Kinlochbervie | 71 (1h46m) | 61 (1h55m) | 57 (1h24m) | 68 (1h43m) | 18 (38m) | 65 (1h37m) | 82 (2h6m) | | 47 (1h11m) | 43 (1h4m) | 48 (1h44m) | 57 (1h26m) | 55 (1h35m) | 15 (21m) | 48 (1h28m) |
| Lairg | 24 (36m) | 45 (1h24m) | 11 (13m) | 22 (31m) | 56 (1h34m) | 18 (23m) | 35 (47m) | 47 (1h11m) | | 46 (1h4m) | 46 (1h5m) | 11 (13m) | 9 (16m) | 44 (58m) | 38 (1h) |
| Lochinver | 70 (1h45m) | 90 (2h35m) | 49 (1h19m) | 62 (1h36m) | 52 (1h28m) | 90 (2h10m) | 80 (2h3m) | 43 (1h04m) | 46 (1h4m) | | 92 (2h4m) | 56 (1h25m) | 36 (58m) | 28 (37m) | 83 (2h10m) |
| Melness | 56 (1h10m) | 17 (36m) | 42 (1h3m) | 65 (1h52m) | 30 (1h5m) | 62 (1h47m) | 69 (1h25m) | 48 (1h44m) | 46 (1h5m) | 92 (2h4m) | | 53 (1h8m) | 53 (1h39m) | 55 (1h50m) | 5 (12m) |
| Rogart | 14 (19m) | 55 (1h38m) | 21 (28m) | 11 (16m) | 68 (1h52m) | 8 (10m) | 26 (37m) | 57 (1h26m) | 12 (15m) | 56 (1h25m) | 53 (1h8m) | | 22 (35m) | 54 (1h11m) | 48 (1h13m) |
| Rosehall | 32 (48m) | 54 (1h45m) | 16 (32m) | 25 (40m) | 65 (1h50m) | 27 (41m) | 44 (1h3m) | 55 (1h35m) | 9 (16m) | 36 (58m) | 53 (1h39m) | 22 (35m) | | 42 (36m) | 47 (1h22m) |
| Scourie | 68 (1h31m) | 68 (1h44m) | 54 (1h13m) | 66 (1h28m) | 25 (45m) | 62 (1h22m) | 79 (1h56m) | 15 (21m) | 44 (58m) | 28 (37m) | 55 (1h50m) | 54 (1h11m) | 42 (36m) | | 55 (1h20m) |
| Tongue | 62 (1h48m) | 13 (22m) | 49 (1h17m) | 60 (1h34m) | 29 (1h2m) | 57 (1h26m) | 52 (1h43m) | 48 (1h28m) | 38 (1h) | 83 (2h10m) | 5 (12m) | 48 (1h13m) | 47 (1h22m) | 55 (1h20m) | |
| (Ref: https://distancecalculator.globefeed.com) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Notes | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| All mileages are rounded up to the nearest whole number | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| The mileage is the first number, the time is in brackets | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Distances one hour and over are highlighted in yellow | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| The times are taken using average traffic flows at the time taken off the website - these are mid morning times, the new ones added in are evening times. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Comments | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| The blue highlights the huge distances covered in the presbytery and one of the consequences of reducing to 4 ministers, however it is split up, is the sheer amount of time spent travelling on poor roads and in all weathers. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |