A Report from the
Barnstaple Archdeaconry Church and Community Research Project

Aspects of Life in North Devon and Torridge and The Church's Response
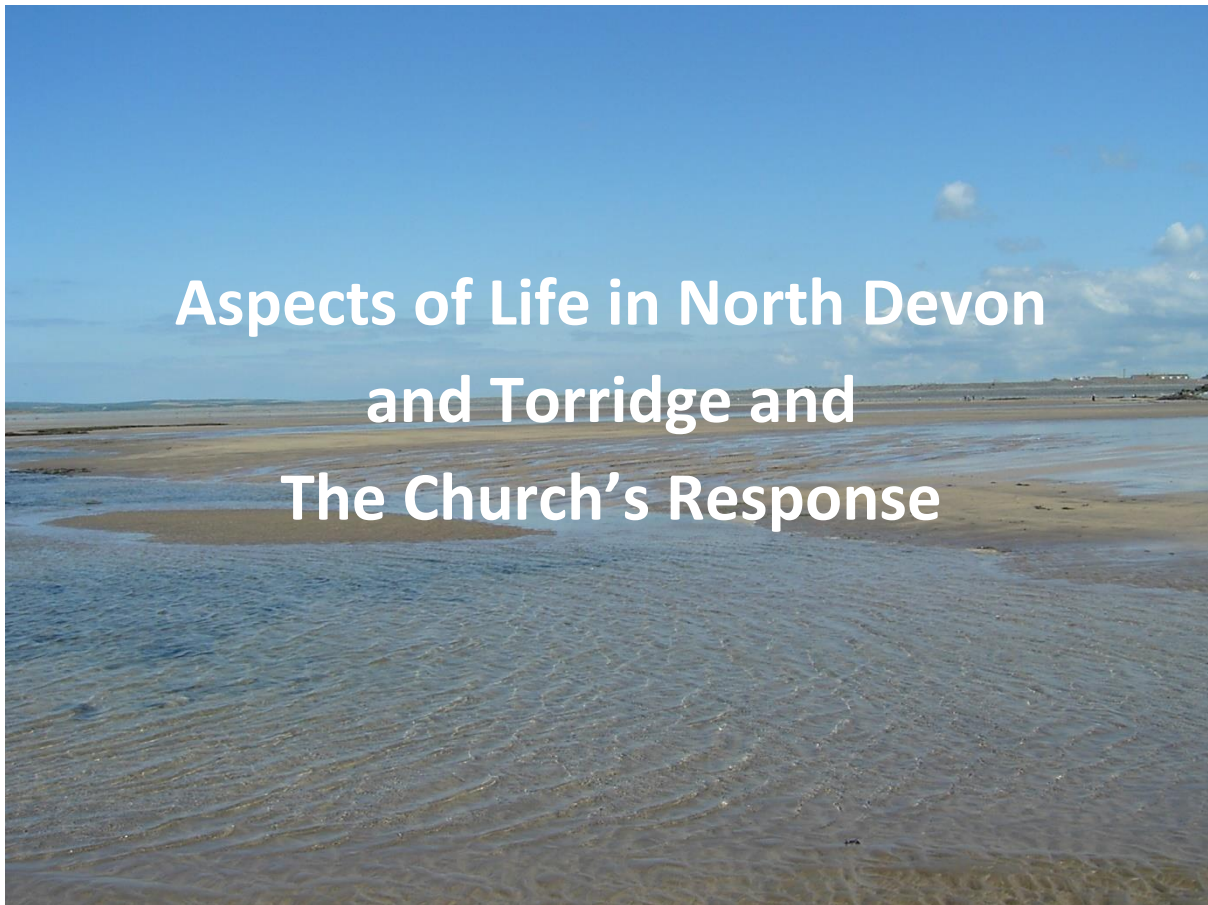
By Rev'd Penny Dobbin

February 2016 to February 2017

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Foreword by the Archdeacon of Barnstaple

Those of us with homes in Northern Devon know how fortunate we are to enjoy countryside and coastline of stunning natural beauty. Green hills, dramatic coastal paths, lovely beaches and attractive villages all make this a glorious place to live, and one which draws holidaymakers and retirees alike. We also know that there is a strength and vitality about community life in our villages and market towns which would be the envy of many larger towns and cities. People can be deceived by the sleepy image, but there's a lot going on!

Natural beauty and community life, however, can mask poverty, blinding the casual observer to the range of challenges Northern Devon faces in agriculture, employment, education, health and social care. The richness of our natural environment often goes hand in hand with significant deprivation. Low paid employment, government cuts and lack of inward investment due to low population density and relative isolation - you don't go through North Devon to get anywhere else – all make it difficult to tackle this deprivation.

This report offers an overview of some of the strengths, problems and opportunities in Northern Devon. It is a church report, but not I would say a 'churchy' report, because its focus is on our communities and their needs, on what is already offered by statutory and voluntary bodies, on where the church fits into the bigger picture. It's about the church looking outward, to help us reflect on what we might be able to offer in partnership with others. The church has been around longer than most organisations in Northern Devon – some 1500 years and more! We are part of the fabric of local community life. We know how each village 'works', and how different that can be from one village to the next. We have local knowledge to contribute, local networks we are part of. And we have the desire to build and strengthen the physical, mental and spiritual health of our communities - one of our three Diocesan priorities is to serve the people of Devon with joy.

The report covers the Barnstaple Archdeaconry, which is one of four archdeaconries in the Diocese of Exeter (the Church of England in Devon), and is virtually coterminous with North Devon and Torridge District Councils. The area has some 150 C of E churches, but also many churches of other denominations, and this report is alert to the joint ecumenical co-operation between our churches in serving our communities. The author is Revd Penny Dobbin, formerly a researcher and project manager for Burmah-Castrol, then a vicar in Torridge, who took a keen interest in local business, government and politics, and became chair of the Torridge Strategic Partnership from 2004 to 2007. I'm grateful to Penny for the time and dedication she has put into this project on an entirely voluntary basis. She said she needed something to do in retirement! I hope this report will stimulate conversations, create opportunities and open doors for partnership in the service of our communities in Northern Devon.

The Ven Dr Mark Butchers, Archdeacon of Barnstaple

Notes and Acknowledgements

I am inordinately grateful to everyone who has contributed to this project in so many ways. Those who offered me time out of busy lives for interviews, contributing their knowledge and insights, looking out data and information for me, those who scoured the newspapers and those who gave me the support and encouragement when the writing up got tough and who helped me see more clearly the purpose of it all.

The research took three forms, namely:

- Interviews with people from various organisations and businesses
- A three month survey of our local newspapers
- Background Reports and Internet and Conference based research

I have not listed the names of those who contributed individually to this research for reasons of confidentiality in some cases. However, they included local councillors and politicians, local government officers, Health and Social Care managers, Public Health practitioners, business leaders, individual business people and those working in business advice, charity trustees, community groups and third sector infrastructure organisations, educators – teachers, head-teachers and the Diocesan Board of Education, people working with children and families, parish priests, the farming community and farming support organisations, environmental groups, the police and other statutory services.

Engaging in conversation with so many enthusiastic, caring, dedicated and knowledgeable people was a privilege, a joy and an experience I will always be grateful for. The personal understanding and reflection they were able to offer was more than I could have gained from reading a thousand books. I hope I have managed to catch at least some of the essence of their contributions.

I would like to thank the Archdeacon of Barnstaple for sponsoring this project and for his unstinting encouragement, patience and feedback.

I would like to thank the members of my local churches who for three months assiduously read our local newspapers and made notes of items for celebration and encouragement, items of concern, and what they saw as opportunities and threats to our communities - their work threads throughout the report.

I am grateful to The Wayfarers Group - a small group of people who meet at Holy Trinity Church, Westward Ho! to reflect on matters of faith and of life in general. In particular their insights into the nature of community and of ageing were very helpful.

During the project I have also been privileged to be chaplain both to the Chair of North Devon Council and to the Mayor of Northam. In this role I have attended most of the full council meetings for both authorities and have learned so much about the issues affecting

our communities, from presentations and the insights of councillors offered during meetings, and seen first-hand the dedication and service of all our councillors and officers.

I talked with many people, and I hope I have managed to accurately represent the picture of what they told me. Where there were alternative viewpoints on the same issue, I have tried to offer a balance. I apologise for anything I have unwittingly misrepresented and any other errors, and will be happy to correct for any future editions, if people let me know.

All the individual subjects will have been covered more academically and in more depth by others. Rather than duplicate their work, I have tried to draw out the connections that exist between the different aspects of our lives, how one thing affects another, and how we may, as churches and partners in care for our communities, make new bridges and help people to form even stronger connections with whatever positively affects their wellbeing.

I am sorry though that not all aspects of life have been able to be covered within the timeframe of the project - in particular I have gathered little on sports and the arts.

The "End Notes" link to several background reports and news articles that helped with this research, as well as providing links to at least some of the organisations relating to the aspects of life covered. Appendix 3 – Resources and Links – will contain more in the way of links, resources and further reading and will be published separately to this main report.

As I mention in the summary and Introduction, this project has been sponsored by the Church of England, but the word "church" is used to represent the wider church with all the richness of our different denominations. I am sorry that some aspects will sound "Church of England" centric – this is because most of my experience and knowledge comes from this tradition.

The Church of England in Devon (Diocese of Exeter) is divided into four "archdeaconries" for ease of pastoral and administrative management. The "Barnstaple Archdeaconry" covers almost all of the civic districts of North Devon and Torridge. I have adopted the term "Northern Devon" for this report because this is the term generally used to denote the combined areas of North Devon and Torridge civic districts. It doesn't necessarily roll off the tongue as easily as north Devon, with a small "n", a geographical term many are familiar with, but I hope it avoids confusion!

Please feel free to pass this report on to any others you feel may find it helpful, though we would be grateful if you could credit the "Barnstaple Archdeaconry Church and Community Research Project" when doing so.

Finally, should anyone like to discuss any ideas further, my email address is penelopedobbin@outlook.com

1   Summary and Introduction

1.1   Project Aims

The aims of The Barnstaple Archdeaconry Church and Community Research Project (BACCRP) were:

- to inform the church of the socio-economic, environmental and political issues affecting the lives of people in our area, thus helping it to frame its response to these
- to offer an overview report to all those from the wider community who have taken part in the research (including public sector agencies, the voluntary, business and environmental sectors)
- to identify areas where the church can work in partnership with others for the common good.

1.2   Connections and Disconnections: Bridges and Boundary Areas

The underlying theme has emerged of connections, disconnections and building bridges. The hope is to bridge the gaps between isolation and community, poverty and abundance, low aspirations and high hopes, state provision and care in the community, rural and town, skills shortages and job opportunities – and so much more. And as we build the bridges, we work in the boundary areas between the two.

All our lives are connected – education and business, housing and health, people with nature, farmers with those who eat their produce, the different village groups sharing a village hall, the carer and the cared for, those who make goods and those who provide services. Our lives are intertwined in so many personal and organisational ways.

A network of connections carries with it strength and resilience – and any person or organisation held within such a network is unlikely to fall far before their connections hold them up. We need each other, we work much better together, and it could be said that we exist in relation to each other. We each have different skills and talents to bring to our whole community life and all are needed.

With strong connections come reconciliation and peace. When people know each other and are open to one another, they accept and care for one another. When we can connect people, projects and ideas all flow more freely.

But when people or organisations become disconnected the whole becomes weaker, lives become less secure, until people can become so disconnected, so far away from what nurtures and sustains, that they come to hang precariously by a metaphorical thread, and feel they no longer belong in the whole. And not belonging, as one contributor to this project said, is at the root of so much of what causes pain and disillusionment in our society.

Social isolation, health and economic inequalities, barriers to education, feelings of powerlessness and disenfranchisement, lack of expectation and aspiration yet a shortage of skills, have all been raised during this project, and many of these came into sharp focus during and after the EU referendum campaign (April to June 2016).

1.3   Our Place in the world

Our relative geographic isolation and lack of road and rail infrastructure can be seen as an obvious physical "disconnection". Certainly this causes some issues: greater expense and time for the transportation of goods for our businesses, the difficulty for people accessing services not available locally and of recruiting people slightly off the beaten track, for example. However, it is also a cause of some of our greatest strengths and has contributed to our stable and deep-rooted communities, our ability to get on and solve problems locally, the way in which people work together and our great base of committed people and volunteers. And being on the edge sometimes allows us to be more creative – perhaps we have less to lose – or perhaps we can innovate under the radar!

We have world class businesses in northern Devon – rooted locally with global exports. We have a world class environment – for many years the North Devon Biosphere Reserve was the only such UNESCO designated place in the UK. And we have world class people – committed, enthusiastic, caring, and ready to help each other.

As a church, we are rooted locally in every single parish, but we are connected to a worldwide (and beyond!) network of people and cultures.

Yes, we have problems in northern Devon, but we also have solutions we can share with others. We can draw on expertise from all over the world and we can offer ourselves as a centre for cutting-edge research and practice in finding innovative solutions for the problems that remain.

The internet and new technology are beginning to enable us to leapfrog the physical barriers and to communicate and work with people in all parts of Devon and globally, whilst remaining rooted in our beautiful landscape.

1.4 The Roll-Back of the State and Increasing Personal and Community Responsibility

Another strand in the project has been observing the move towards more individual responsibility on the part of families, communities and businesses and less direct provision by the state. Alongside this, it has been recognised by many different organisations, including the church, that we have, over recent decades, developed what might be termed a "service provision" culture which can have the effect of creating dependence and reducing self-confidence. A frequent phrase now heard is that we are moving from a "doing unto" to a "doing together" approach. This approach, perhaps initiated by reductions in public funding, but now seen by many as a "good" in its own right, means that we have entered a time where individuals and communities need to take on more responsibility for their own health and wellbeing, in all sorts of ways.

So, with many more agencies – voluntary groups, staff "Mutuals", Community Interest Companies, neighbours and families and private companies - now providing many of the services we use, we are moving away from a hierarchical system to a connected community of service. Management of the whole is more diffuse, and there will be different expressions of services in different localities depending on the people and particularities of each community. Our strong communities and the willingness of people to come together for the common good make us well placed to make this transition, which by no means affects only our part of the world. But bridges of knowledge, understanding and contacts will be needed more than ever to ensure fluidity of the whole, avoid duplication and gaps and ensure the safety nets are in place.

With restricted funding, the major agencies need to focus on their priorities – schools on educating children, the NHS on helping people to be well. But some schools, for example, are increasingly spending resources on supporting families in order that the child may be in a position to learn. Similarly, the main determinants of health are housing, education, employment and lifestyle – these are not health issues per se, but they have a huge effect on the demand level for the NHS.

So we need to forge new connections and ways of working that enable our people, our economy and our environment to move to increased prosperity and wellbeing. Many organisations are doing exactly this already, and very effectively. But there are still gaps, small bridges that the church may be in a good position to help build, with

its presence in every community, supporting where we can and relieving some of the burdens on the public agencies enabling them to focus on that which only they can provide as part of our overall community of care.

1.5 The Church and Common Aims

Though this project has been sponsored by the Church (of England), it is not about the church but about serving our people and communities in the best way we can, and working together with others for the common good.

The church has a presence in every parish in northern Devon, with more than one denomination in some villages and our towns, often connected through a "Christians Together" network. In a very rural area such as ours, this presence of people and buildings offers a connection point for any agency wishing to develop their rural outreach or to work with an established group already in place - for example in the provision of more "care in the community". A church, for example, can offer a meeting point for a network of home based businesses, a centre for local learning, and a place for any agency that needs to hold a local "surgery".

As a church, we share many common aims with other organisations in relation to reducing inequality, supporting education, working for justice, serving those in need and striving for the wellbeing of all creation. And perhaps holding all these things together, the desire to help people feel that they belong in an inclusive, accepting, caring community. We hope that by identifying some of the gaps we can bring the assets of the church to work more closely with others in building bridges to greater wellbeing for all.

1.6 Conclusion

Our community of North Devon and Torridge is a highly complex ecosystem of people and organisations all dependent upon one another for their wellbeing. The more we can understand the ecosystem, the more we can work together to maintain the conditions that will enable it to thrive.

Instead of stone and concrete, we can together build bridges based on providing opportunities for people to get to know each other, building lasting relationships of trust and care, learning from each other, creating solutions to problems, networks and sharing ideas and burdens and building hope and expectation for the future.

These bridges will arise from the creative mingling of people, ideas, gifts and needs; and they will be supported on the pillars of the strength of our communities, our superb natural environment, the huge commitment and dedication of so many

individuals working in both private and public organisations and in voluntary and paid positions, and the vibrancy of our manufacturing and small business economy.

1.7   How this report might be used

"There was rather a lot of it to enjoy" said my friend after taking me to see "My Fair Lady" in the West End as a birthday treat! I loved it of course, but it was quite long …

Please read whichever sections of this report seem interesting and useful to you. It is structured with informational sections on the different aspects of our socio-economic life with the longer sections including overviews and summaries.

The final section - "Concluding Reflections" - discusses the common aims between the church and other agencies working together in our community, partnership working in general and the gifts the church offers. It also considers where there are disconnections with thoughts about how these might be bridged. It lets the good news of our fantastic people and countryside have the last word.

Appendix 1 gives a summary of some of the main opportunities arising for our churches to serve our communities including those in partnership with others. Appendix 2 lists various websites which provide contact information for churches both ecumenically and by denomination. Appendix 3 will be published later as a "Resource" companion to this main report.

The report will be shared widely within the churches as well as with all those in partner agencies who have contributed. I hope people will ask the question "does any of this resonate in my community, or with my work, and if yes, how might we respond?" and perhaps new possibilities for celebrating the good, working together and serving our communities may emerge.

If anyone would like to follow up any thoughts or ideas in the report, or would appreciate any help with contacts, please get in touch – my email can be found in the "Notes" at the start of the report.

2 Community

2.1 Overview

2.1.1 People often describe northern Devon as an "island" because though it is physically attached to a land mass, it has many of the characteristics of an island community. We have a long coast-line and many of our towns and villages are sea-facing. We have the north Devon link road running east-west but routes to Exeter and Plymouth (especially from the Torridge side of the area) tend to be smaller country roads. We have a train station in Barnstaple running to Exeter – but not direct to Tiverton for onward travel to points east and north. Whilst "Connecting Devon and Somerset"[1] are working to install superfast broadband across our area, we still have slower speeds and often non-existent mobile signals due to the rural nature of our area.

This relative isolation has positive and negative effects. Such disconnection can lead to deprivation and low expectations, but also engenders a desire to support community life. There is also a distinctive collective identity in northern Devon which people feel is worth protecting.

2.1.2 We have villages which operate like extended families. We have small towns that serve a wider hinterland that still have 'proper' shops, medical and dental services, police and fire presence, and centres for sports and the arts. We have towns and rural areas which have much poverty, but still have a great sense of community and people helping each other.

2.1.3 This community spirit applies in all sectors and in all walks of life. In private and public sectors, rural and urban settings, paid and unpaid, amazing people are working together to make life better for everyone, offering generosity of spirit, time, skills, money and equipment. It is also believed, by those working county wide, to be especially strong in north Devon, perhaps because of our relative geographic isolation, lower rates of migration, in and out, and hence quite stable populations, and lower numbers of second homes.

It is a significant factor in helping our business community to develop and grow and manifests itself in informative and supportive business networks and practical activities to improve our townscapes.

2.1.4 Having such a strong foundation of community spirit and many volunteers already in place is life-giving and inspiring in its own right. In our age of austerity, and the changes to the way public services are being provided with people and communities being asked to take on more responsibility for their own health and well-being, it will

also stand us in very good stead in the years to come.

2.2   Identity and Belonging

2.2.1   Farming has played an important part in shaping our landscape and our communities for centuries. Though the number of farms has decreased in recent years and they are not always passed on within the same family any more, many families still have very deep roots in a community, having lived there for generations. People born and brought up in northern Devon have enviable networks of school friends, neighbours and people they have known in local businesses over many years, and extended families connect communities. This produces a sense of rootedness and belonging such that being from "here" becomes part of someone's identity, perhaps without them even thinking about it. Whatever other anxieties may pervade a person's life, being part of this kind of network can offer a basic sense of solidity and confidence to work from and provides a network of belonging and mutual support that underpins our culture.

2.2.2   The sense of continuity – of seamless inheritance from generations past - and our relative isolation has meant some things have changed more slowly. This can be part of what makes our area so special but it can also mean that some in our communities are resistant to change, even where it is vital for the sustainability of the community. Change can represent a break from the continuity of the past, but it does not have to change the core of who we are.

2.2.3   There is evidence that community cohesiveness and co-operation are related to the stability of populations[2], and indeed, northern Devon has seen less movement and inward migration than some other parts of Devon. But this is changing, especially in our towns, where new housing has increased in recent years and new people are moving in.

2.2.4   A sense of belonging and rootedness can enable people to welcome new members. As an example, the "Mission-Shaped Church"[3] report encourages a church community to change its "shape" as each new person joins. In this way new people feel listened to, valued and included and the community grows in depth of understanding and diversity. In many cases this does happen in our communities, and the presence and gifts of new members of the community are much valued, though, of course, there are communities where there is less integration, and sometimes new people prefer not to get too involved in the common life.

2.2.5   Belonging is a fundamental human need, it is part of the glue that makes our communities strong and cohesive, and it has both physical and spiritual meaning for

us. We belong in families, communities, workplaces, and landscapes – we all belong to something that is greater than ourselves. But for some the sense of belonging is breaking down which is not only deeply painful on a personal level, but also hurts our communities.

Younger people are finding it extremely hard to live and raise families in the places where they were brought up because of the availability and cost of housing. If people have to move away from their networks there will be an immediate loss and disconnection from at least some of the strands of the network which may not be remade in the new location, leading in some cases to loss of confidence, anxiety and other mental health issues. Older people can feel they no longer know the area they live in because of so much change.

The nature of work itself is changing rapidly with many more people working alone, or without the support and job security of previous generations, again especially for our young people. Others are struggling financially and feel unable to partake in activities that help form our sense of belonging.

One of the overall senses nationally we feel in the post-Brexit discussions is that many people are feeling alienated from a society in which they feel they have no stake, are not listened to, and where they feel their needs and aspirations are not taken into account. We cannot be immune from this general sense in northern Devon where in both Torridge and North Devon the vote was around 60% in favour of leaving the EU.

The Bishop of Burnley wrote a passionate article in the Church Times[4] explaining how and why the people of the northern housing estates feel abandoned in so many ways, how the working class vote in the referendum was an expression of anger by people who feel forgotten and disempowered, and how the church's response over the years has also been less than adequate. We may not have the same scale of estates in northern Devon, but we do face many of the same issues of deprivation, employment patterns and financial struggle and the analysis and reflection in this article is therefore also relevant for us.

The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke in the Lords debate on the EU referendum[5] and at the general synod in July[6]. He said *"The biggest thing it seems to me that we must challenge, my Lords, if we are to be effective in this creation of a new vision for Britain – a vision that enables hope and reconciliation to begin to flower – is to tackle the issues of inequality. It is inequality that thins out the crust of our society. It is inequality that raises the levels of anger and bitterness" and "Greater equality seeks*

the common good, and opens opportunities for aspiration in all households. The shock of Brexit must be one that forces us into a juster and a fairer society, and a more equal one." He also said that we must renew our commitment to education, to public and mental health and to housing, as we have done before. These issues are all discussed in this report.

2.2.6   As well as our local communities, we also belong to the wider story of humankind. The church is connected throughout the world (and beyond) yet is also completely grounded in the local. Churches belong both in and to their local communities, and as a body are also connected to the worldwide church. For instance the Exeter Diocese which serves all of Devon has partnership links with the Diocese of Thika in Kenya and the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf.

2.2.7   There is also something we might term a "spirituality of belonging". One contributor to this project said *"Where people's lives are spiritually anchored as part of a community there is a sense of belonging. We need to help people to understand that they belong to a particular place and community, to something that is deeper and larger than themselves - and land, farming, market towns, churches are all central to this - and play a role in creating a continuing community and help develop a sense of living community and not life in a rural museum. The church can play a vital role in helping people to understand that we are part of something that has endured for centuries and that we are passing on to the next generation."*

2.2.8   The church can in a sense "hold" and give shape to community life:

- The church building itself can stand as an example of history, continuity and change, helping people to connect with the past, the present and the future of their communities, regardless of where they originated from and what their circumstances might be.

- For families, the village church is still a very popular place for children to be welcomed into the world, for couples to marry and for loved ones to be mourned and laid to rest.

- Celebrating the seasons of the agricultural year helps to anchor people in the rhythm of life. Plough Sunday (celebrated in January) marks the beginning of the agricultural year with blessing and prayers for plough and seed. Rogation Sunday is held, usually in May, as a time to pray for blessing on the growing crops, and for resistance to blight and disease. The tradition of 'beating the bounds' has been preserved in some communities and in more recent times the scope of Rogation has been widened to include prayer for the world of work, for

accountable stewardship, and prayer for local communities, whether rural or urban.[7] Lammas Day, 1st August, welcomes the first fruits of the harvest – with a Lammas Loaf – and then of course Harvest Festivals are celebrated throughout September and October.

- In times of particular concern – for example in the foot and mouth crisis, or times of international natural disaster or terrorist atrocity, of local tragedy, or national mourning, the churches offer a place of quiet for reflection, for symbolic action, for expressing deep and painful feelings.

  Churches are able to develop liturgy that holds a situation and enables burdens to be laid down, and even when something seems beyond human comprehension, to help us move to a place where we can begin to think in terms of reconciliation and peace.

- Then there are times of community celebration – celebrations for our Queen's 90th birthday for example – or a royal wedding. I have been involved in some amazing "Civic Services" in recent years – some instigated by the mayor or council chairman, others by a group of local churches. These services offer an opportunity not only to celebrate the life and work of the council, but also that of so many dedicated community groups. Again, the church can offer a way of shaping such community celebrations with time for thanksgiving, time for sharing experience and aims, time for prayer for asking for needs to be met, and of course great celebration, networking and fellowship.

- Into this category we might add newer community needs for particular groups and organisations – and I think particularly about the slightly tongue in cheek reports of funerals for business start-ups[8],[9] - but why not?

  In any failed endeavour there will still be things to celebrate and to give thanks for, an understanding of what went wrong to be developed, things that may need forgiving in ourselves and in others, relationships that may need reconciliation, things that need to be let go, and the seeds of new life that need to be nurtured for the next venture.

  Sometimes being able to put things into this kind of perspective can be helpful in moving on. The church has the language to help "shape" such experiences and enable people to move on to the next place.

2.2.8   As a final note on these ideas about belonging, there is a flip side.

Being rooted we can be sustained and nurtured by the local, but reach out through links that transcend the physical. The roots of a strong tree branch out and intertwine over wide areas underground and the tree can grow tall and see far away. It can branch out healthily, grow fruit and send out seeds that can be carried for miles and grow new trees in new places. But leave a tree in a pot and its roots become pot-bound, it does not thrive and eventually shrivels and dies.

Some aspects of our communities can tend towards boundedness rather than rootedness. Horizons become lower, understanding is bounded by only what we can see or are told, and the bar for aspiration and expectation is set very low. We will talk more about aspiration in section 5, but how can people want, expect, aspire to or desire what they have never seen or known?

As well as doing all we can to help people feel they belong in their place and time, we also need to help people reach out to wider knowledge and experience.

2.3   Community in Rural and Urban Environments

2.3.1   Rural areas are disadvantaged in some ways – with regard to access to services for example - but in terms of community care the question is often asked "how can we bring a village mentality into our towns?"

The practical care and neighbourliness found in our villages happens very naturally and in general, people look after each other very well. If someone needs to go to hospital it is likely a neighbour will take them – or if help with shopping or cooking is needed, it is likely it will be arranged. This is often taken just as part of life in our rural communities and has always been the way of things in northern Devon, but isn't the case in all parts of the country, and is something we shouldn't take for granted.

2.3.2   As population size and density increases it is more difficult for "everyone to know everyone". Whilst networks of extended family and friends are clearly present in our towns as well as our villages, though generalising, people in towns are perhaps more likely to spend leisure time in networks of people sharing similar interests rather than because they live in the same geographical area of town. Conversely, in a village, with a smaller variety of activities, an entertainment such as a party or a fete is more likely to attract people because they live in the village and so people have the chance to meet. In villages too, there is often a greater percentage of people

around during the day-time – whilst in towns, particularly with a younger age profile than a village, more people will be out at work or school during the day.

2.3.3 In rural areas there tends to be more natural mingling of church and community. Sometimes this is through practical activities – such as the village helping out with church and churchyard maintenance and members of the church playing their part in wider community activities. Most people are involved in more than one group, which helps the overall connectivity of the community.

Paradoxically there may be fewer opportunities for people to meet on a geographic basis in a higher population centre, which can make it less easy to know our geographic neighbours well. One person commented that people can feel more isolated in a town than in a supposedly isolated rural area and that people have forgotten how to be neighbourly.

2.3.4 However, not all rural communities are perfect! Smaller populations can be disproportionately affected by one or two strongly negative or powerful voices. This has been known to cause deep division and even for people to move away from the community.

2.3.5 Perhaps for all of us – as individuals, organisations, and churches – the challenge is to create opportunities to spend time with the people we live close to – in natural ways of living.

2.4 Sustainable Rural Communities

2.4.1 There is a sense among some that policy making occurs in the towns, for the towns, and that the rural areas and their needs are not always well understood.

2.4.2 It is generally accepted that we need more sustainable growth in our villages, yet for various reasons, including land supply and the desire to reduce car journeys, planning often draws people into the towns to live. We need a thriving countryside with young and older living alongside each other, helping each other – sufficient people to maintain schools and other facilities where people live.

2.4.3 A number of issues can be considered:

- Rural services can be sparse – it is much easier to develop services in a town or city where there is a critical mass of people to serve and infrastructure and related services are in place.

- As well as financial poverty, in our rural areas we also have "access poverty", where services can be so difficult to access for many, and this has a multiplying effect on the problems experienced by those who are struggling financially.

- Many rural roads are falling into serious disrepair, while bus routes are sometimes few and far between. For example, from Ashwater there is one bus to Holsworthy, one to Barnstaple, and one to Tavistock each week. Access to work as well as services such as GPs and shops can be very difficult.

- The lack of rural transport has an impact on where families without a private car can live – this is demonstrated by the lower number of bids for social housing in some of our rural areas. It means families can't stay in villages where they may have good support networks available.

- There is great sadness when rural facilities close such as when the HSBC branch closed in South Molton in 2016. Not all banking customers either have access to the internet (ref rural broadband) or the ability to use internet banking. The bank branch provided much more than a basic banking facility – it was a meeting place and somewhere people could receive confidential help in reading a letter. People felt a connection to local staff and where staff knew if a customer was vulnerable in some way they could also help in the fight against financial fraud. Clearly bank branches are becoming much less viable with the move to internet banking – yet there is still a need.

- Affordable rural housing is a major issue and as already mentioned can lead younger people having to move to towns rather than bring up their families in the place where they grew up. High Bickington is a good example of a Community Property or Land Trust[10] which includes housing, shared work spaces and a new Community Centre and there are others being developed in our area – see Devon Communities Together for more information[11]. There has been recent government encouragement to make affordable housing available on small pockets of land in villages and some funds have been released to enable communities to explore this. In some places, where it owns land, the church may be able to participate in this process, though most church land is rented to farmers.

- Living in rural areas is generally more expensive. For example, often there is no gas available and oil is a more expensive fuel for heating. Alternative fuels, such as wood from managed community woodlands could be explored more actively. Shopping and daily journeys to school or work are more costly and some extracurricular activities for school children may be impossible to access for

transport reasons.

- The issue of high speed broadband is mentioned elsewhere in this report – but its slow roll out in rural areas has a significant impact on rural business especially. Where community solutions for providing "air-borne" broadband are considered, churches may be able to be involved through the use of their towers. This approach is discussed in relation to supporting rural business in section 4.

- Employment opportunities for young people especially in our rural areas are also in decline, especially with less land-based employment, and many young people leave the area altogether. The increasing number of small rural businesses offers a real hope for increasing rural employment going forward.

- Without better access to services, local employment and more affordable housing, the age of our rural populations is likely to continue to increase, with impacts on the sustainability of our rural schools, the ability to care for the elderly and less intergenerational contact within families and communities.

2.4.4   There is much that communities can and are doing to support local sustainability.

- Where the lack of rural transport restricts access, community enterprises can thrive.

  In Ashwater the village community shop employs a manager for 4½ days a week, as well as having 30 to 40 volunteers to help. The shop acts as a post office and a meeting place, and occupies the same site as the parish hall, art club, camera club, skittles, table tennis, horticultural society and so on. A vibrant community can support this kind of community partnership, but it is dependent upon the demographics and geography of the village and may not succeed in all cases. In Ashwater, the community is very connected with many "activators". The village also has more of a centre. Clawton, on the other hand, is a long village largely placed along a main road, where walking is dangerous, there is less communication and though there is a school, there is no post office or shop. It covers a large area, but is less densely populated than Ashwater.

  In St Giles on the Heath a community shop serves people from as far away as Launceston. Around 900 people per week visit the shop (with a population of 560 in the parish this shows how many are coming from further afield). The shop also acts as a drop zone for councillors, meeting agendas and internet deliveries. It employs three people, from the village, and supports local businesses by selling local produce and vegetables from farmers. The enterprise is an example of the

new breed of village shop and is kept afloat by community cohesion and use and has become a hub of the community as well as a convenient place to shop.

- We have discussed elsewhere in this section, how rural communities have a high level of general "neighbourliness" with people helping other people to access the services, particular health, that they need, and running activities to support particularly the elderly, and churches are at the forefront of this work.

- Supporting and helping our rural businesses to grow (discussed more fully in section 4) is one of the most important ways of building the sustainability of our rural communities in the long term.

- Community Transport is vital in our rural area to combat the lack of public transport. Go North Devon[12] serves the frail, disabled and isolated in North Devon district and Wheels2work[13] helps young people access work and training. But especially with funding cutbacks, charities such as Go North Devon, relying on grant funding, are under severe pressure. Go North Devon needs to raise £25,000 a year just to keep going. As well as grant funding, income comes from a shop and from local businesses – who also often help in kind – and the board is constantly exploring ways to ensure the funding to support their vital services.

  In Dorset, community transport is run by a company in Ealing and some other counties put services out to contract. Local geographical knowledge is vital to run an effective and efficient service and as my contributor said *"Go North Devon is both of community and in the community".* Go North Devon offers health transport, shopmobility, cancer care car, ring and ride, and the "Out and About" service. It offers a personal service and the drivers are able to keep an eye on frail elderly people and help with other problems. Go North Devon connects people with each other, people with services and volunteers, staff and clients all together. It is also "dementia aware".

  Some may decry the use of the car, but for those living in rural areas it is an essential part of life and allows villages to remain viable. If we want to reduce car usage, we need to put much more effort into community transport schemes. We have the expertise, but - not least for safety and accessibility reasons – such schemes need to be run professionally (either paid or unpaid) and will cost money.

2.4.5   Go North Devon is an excellent example of the many excellent local charities offering services in our communities and given the sparsity of rural services, it is hard to contemplate the shape of our rural life without them.

Supporting others who are already providing a service is a great expression of offering loving service to our community. There are many local charities in danger of having their funding cut significantly this year as a result of cuts in local government funding. Financial help is vital, but support through developing awareness in the wider community and volunteering are also valuable.

2.4.6   The question was posed to me by one contributor *"is anyone taking an overall look at what makes and keeps rural life sustainable in terms of health, business, care of the elderly, education, employment and housing".* There are different organisations doing very valuable work in all these areas, but whether there is one forum to bring it all together is unclear. The Devon Communities Together "Rural Futures Conference" addressed many relevant issues, with excellent speakers, and The Rural Services Network has produced a toolkit[14] for developing sustainable rural communities from a planning perspective.

The socio-economic group of the recently formed Devon Churches Rural Forum will also seek to address some of these issues and explore what the church can do to support the sustainability of our rural communities, both in practical projects on the ground in individual communities, through further research and working strategically with partners.

2.5   Community and Social Media

2.5.1   For those members of the population who use it, social media can also play a part in helping to develop and maintain community. For example, Westward Ho! is a large village but still has a strong community base and a village centre with thriving shops and meeting places. However, the landscape of buildings and community is changing very fast. Large blocks of luxury flats are being built and are often occupied as second homes or used for holiday properties - though some are lived in permanently. One asks how long Westward Ho! can maintain its close community bonds in the midst of such growth. There is, however, a very active community Facebook page, which works, on the whole, very well. If someone loses something on the beach, others will look out for it; petty crime is kept an eye on, and people can express concern or support about community issues. People keep up with each other's news and arrange to meet in person. There is certainly some "ranting", but this is usually dealt with well by the moderator. It is therefore possible that this virtual meeting place can be used to help new residents, and visitors, to join in with a community by making contacts with people more easily than they might initially do with only face to face meetings.

2.5.2 Churches need to be part of this newer way of communicating. One vicar said to me that he believes *"the key thing about a church presence on social media is to be a positive affirming presence – to be salt and light in the midst of all that is going on"*.

2.6 Organisational Infrastructure

2.6.1 We are very blessed in northern Devon with both the North Devon[15] and Torridge[16] Councils for Voluntary Service (NDVS and TTVS) and also Devon Communities Together[17](DCT), all of whom understand deeply the ways and needs of small groups and communities. North Devon Plus[18] supports the business sector, including some social enterprise and Community Interest Companies. Our various partnerships can also be considered as part of our organisational infrastructure, bringing together as they do the people and organisations with the skills to move projects and strategies forward. The North Devon Biosphere would be a good example[19].

People in these infrastructure organisations work alongside local people to develop new community facilities and services at their own pace, following whatever route is right for that particular locality, and providing whatever type of support is most needed. They are able to help with identifying funding sources, governance arrangements, safeguarding and other legal requirements and offer locally accessible training appropriate to the needs of community and voluntary groups. They also offer a conduit to wider partnerships and discussion forums, and act as consultees on Third Sector issues. Devon Communities Together especially provides a locus for the discussion of issues facing all our rural communities and supports communities in "Neighbourhood Planning" and more.

2.6.2 As well as offering support to individual groups and communities, the organisations host projects and services and work jointly with communities to develop new services.

One good example of this is the "Good Companions" project running under the "Supported Rural Independent Living Project" hosted by TTVS[20]. The project recruits and trains local volunteers to provide practical support for older people living in some of the most isolated rural areas in Torridge. It encompasses such activities as a memory café and social events operating from hubs in Halwill, Woolsery and Winkleigh run by volunteers from local churches and the community. A paid co-ordinator, supported by TTVS, goes around the clubs, helping with policies, procedures and safeguarding etc. Volunteers and members can share any concerns with the co-ordinator who can help find solutions. People volunteer for this work because they care and want to support their neighbours. They are less interested in the administrative and legal aspects of such subjects, which can feel quite onerous.

The paid co-ordinator provides an invaluable service without which such initiatives may not be sustainable. This is an excellent example of communities and professionals working together to provide a service neither would find easy to offer on their own.

2.6.3   In another example of practical support, a post of "Community Connector" proved very valuable in Ilfracombe as part of the "One Ilfracombe" project[21] because people so often said they didn't know what was available or where to go both for social activities and for health and social care services. The Community Connector enables many more people to access services than might otherwise have done so, but is also able to help people find more local solutions rather than always approaching formal care services. Underlying the idea of a "Community Connector" is the need to develop a "connected system", where we are all more aware of what is available for people, at whichever "point of entry" their need is made known.

2.6.4   Our community infrastructure organisations and partnerships provide a vital role in bringing the right people together and offering the nurturing that enables community organisations and projects to thrive. Their efforts are multiplied many times by the efforts of the volunteers.

Most of them are reliant to some extent on grant funding – often from local government – with whom they share the overall responsibility of supporting our society. However, austerity is driving a change within the whole public sector and grant funding is much reduced as a result. Thus many of these organisations are going through the painful process of re-defining their core activities, developing business plans, and exploring options for new revenue streams, some of which will involve setting up trading arms, or charging for services offered. These organisations also need to be used and supported by as many organisations as possible within the community to remain viable.

2.6.5   Not all our churches are aware of the support that is available to them through NDVS, TTVS and DCT including help with finding funding, locally based training, and getting new projects of the ground. Whilst some processes and training needs are church specific, there is a great deal that these organisations can offer locally and cost effectively – see websites for contact details.

2.6.6   The church itself is a major infrastructure organisation – with people, buildings and networks in each parish in the county, and it could be helpful to explore how we can best work with other parts of the infrastructure. This question is discussed more fully in section 8.

2.7   ABCD and Place-Based Working

2.7.1   Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) builds on the assets that are already found in the community and encourages individuals, associations and institutions to come together to build on these rather than concentrate on their needs.

A significant theme arising, particularly from the health and social care arena, is the phrase "doing with, not doing to". For many years our culture has tended towards "needs meeting" in our public services and in our social action work. We identify a need and set up a project to alleviate it, with the best of intentions, but this approach can create a particular kind of relationship between the person or organisation offering the service and the person receiving it.

The alternative is to get to know people, develop relationships, listen and understand, and then together develop solutions and support. More equal and mutually supportive relationships are formed where each person involved learns from the other. Asset Based Community Development is based on the gifts that abound within the community, and releasing them to help everyone thrive. Rev'd Al Barrett, Vicar of Hodge Hill Church in Birmingham, offers an excellent summary and reflection of this approach.[22]

All this means we need to be able to discern each other's gifting. Some people might naturally offer themselves but others need to have their gifts recognised and be encouraged before they may take up a new role. People in vulnerable groups may need particular encouragement in offering themselves, but all will have gifts to offer to the whole. As mentioned earlier, in a model from Christian tradition, we might think of the image St Paul gives us of the community being the "body". Each part of the body is necessary for the proper functioning of the whole, one part cannot say to another "I have no need of you", all are equally necessary and the weaker parts are specially honoured.[23]

2.7.2   Place-based working is about bringing together many services to work together to support a particular place or community, rather than each service offering its own services across a wide area.

"One Ilfracombe" combines both Place and Asset based approaches and offers excellent experience for others wanting to understand the successes and lessons involved in such working.

One Ilfracombe grew from various prior initiatives (in particular the "Transform Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder" programme), with much experience of

neighbourhood and partnership working to build on. In its current guise, its first objective was to "assume management of our town". It had, at the time, no formal authority to say this, but the local community felt that, in many ways, people outside their community were running things within it. The basic principle was discussed with leaders of town, district and county councils and was supported as it fitted with the agenda for communities to take more responsibility for themselves.

Much more information about the projects involved in One Ilfracombe can be found on their website, but the place-based approach is helpful in that it allows the connections that exist between the different areas of life to be seen more as a whole picture and less as separate problems.

Place-based working can also take account of the culture of a particular community. Each community has its own corporate personality, culture and background and what works in one place, may alienate in another. It is good to "build community" but we need to understand the "naturalness" that underpins the community before causing any disruption to it, and this will be different in each place and takes time to become clear. In particular the naturalness of village community care where people take of each other according to need, may not flourish if a more formal project were introduced.

Whilst seen as a positive approach, it can also be challenging for the public agencies to relate to too many different place based project teams or partnerships at once. Place based working works best when it is led by the community.

2.8   Volunteering

2.8.1   Volunteers are the life blood of so much of our community life, but more than one contributor said *"they are becoming an endangered species"*. Some existing volunteers are getting older and some need more support than they used to. Many want to help others, but, as discussed, are less happy with the need for DBS checks and other aspects of modern governance. There is also concern about the formal responsibilities of trusteeship and people need to know that they will be supported should something go awry.

There is less early retirement generally and less early-retired people moving to our area since both the financial crisis and the rise in State Pension age. Many grandparents are committed to child care and fuller employment means fewer gaps between jobs. All this means, in some instances, the voluntary sector is struggling to find enough people. However, there is also evidence from a community survey by

DCC in late 2016 that many people who already volunteer would like to do more but don't always know how to.

2.8.2   Some traditional volunteering has an image of going along somewhere each week, doing one's work of volunteering and going home. Younger people want to be more involved and see the difference made by the things they are doing and in particular want to be much more part of the decision making process – but do not like coming to meetings!

Part of this is related to the use of social media – it can help very much with communication and people discussing things in a virtual world as part of the decision making process, but it also has downsides and different voluntary organisations vary greatly in the ways they use (or don't use) social media. To be able to harness everyone's talents we need to meet people where they are, but this is not always culturally or organisationally easy.

There is an opportunity to research the helpful ways of using social media and new communication methods, recognising that there is also a generational gap that needs to be bridged for us all to be able to work together.

2.8.3   During "Volunteers Week" in June 2016, NDVS hosted a "Volunteer Awards" event to celebrate volunteering in our community. Our volunteers need to know how much they are appreciated and valued and though many people prefer to stay out of the limelight, events like this can both show real appreciation and raise the profile of volunteering. Both NDVS and TTVS offer great support and information for volunteers – there is more information on their websites.

2.8.4   Civic Services also offer opportunities to celebrate volunteers and community groups serving our communities, and there may be opportunities for bespoke community based celebration services.

2.9   A Welcoming, Loving Community

A welcoming, loving community is a joy for all. My most memorable experience of this was when I stayed with the Northumbria Community (a dispersed Christian community with a retreat house in Northumberland). I arrived feeling somewhat fragile and frazzled and not very sociable – really I just wanted to curl up somewhere quiet on my own. However, I was met with a gentle welcome, and tea and cake with a group of people. Later we shared supper but what I didn't realise at the time was that the people cooking and serving the food were not "staff" from outside paid to look after us, but members of the home community, offering generous and loving

hospitality. The next day, an invitation to share in the washing up felt like an invitation to be a part of the community. Community members all had their specific jobs to do – cleaning, looking after the garden, cooking, listening to us retreatants as prayer guides and leading services, yet they always had time to talk and to share. All the time I was there I never felt as if I was a nuisance, but completely accepted, honoured and valued as a person. The effect of this was really significant in enabling me to open myself out to others, and feel confident and unafraid. It was a significant life moment for me.

This sort of acceptance and flourishing is what we all want for all who live together in community – whether it be in a religious order, a village or town, a school, a church or workplace, but making it real isn't always easy and needs deliberate effort.

Acceptance, non-judgmentalism and inclusion don't always happen naturally. Patience, compassion and generosity of spirit are needed, and just as in any family, in community we need to bear with one another and forgive each other when things go wrong – a process which takes time, openness and understanding if it is to lead to real reconciliation.

Sometimes being in community can feel overwhelming and we need our own space to retreat to. And again, this isn't always easy in overcrowded housing or houses of multiple occupation – and it is one reason why village life also doesn't suit everyone.

Churches have a particular understanding of community based on mutual love and service, though sadly we all too often fall short of the ideal. But with enough small acts of loving kindness and care, we can all help the development of "community" in our communities.

2.10 Summary

2.10.1 Northern Devon has a very strong sense of community in both rural and town communities. This is due in part to our relative geographical isolation, historically stable populations, extended family networks and new people coming in who want to be part of a real community. This strong community manifests itself in natural neighbourliness, support for local charities and high levels of volunteering.

2.10.2 A sense of belonging is vital to people's sense of who they are, their self-esteem and commitment and participation in local life. Belonging is generally very strong, but is beginning to break down in some cases. The church is able to "hold" the community in many ways, and help people feel they do belong.

2.10.3   The shadow side of being a deep-rooted community is boundedness which can arise in some communities and has negative impacts on aspiration and expectation from life.

2.10.4   There are significant differences between rural and town communities. Whilst the rural areas may suffer from "access poverty" in some ways it can be easier to feel isolated in a higher population area. Being able to recreate a "village mentality" in our towns could help to reduce isolation and loneliness and help us all to care for each other in the community. The challenge is for all of us to create natural ways for people to get to know each other in geographic localities.

2.10.5   Rural sustainability is a huge issue with regard to rural transport, access to services, affordable housing, employment opportunities, sustainability of our schools and other village infrastructure, including churches, and changing demographics. Communities can and do do much for themselves with examples of thriving community shops that have become village hubs and community rural transport and housing schemes. Devon Communities Together is a major resource in helping communities address these issues. It is hoped that the Devon Churches Rural Forum, in conjunction with partner agencies, may be able to explore this area more deeply.

2.10.6   Judicial use of social media networks overlaying geographical communities can be beneficial in enabling contact between new arrivals and the existing community and in helping visitors feel welcome. It also offers an increasingly useful method of community communication, bridging generational divides and enabling easier communication between people out of the village at work or school, and those who are able to be more "out and about" in the village, during the day.

2.10.7   We are very blessed with our community infrastructure organisations – TTVS, NDVS and DCT. Their work is vital in underpinning the vibrancy and sustainability of the third sector and they support communities in many new initiatives. It would be helpful for the churches to explore the support available to them through these organisations more fully.

2.10.8   ABCD is an approach that builds on the gifts, talents and assets already present in a community and seeks to use the gifts and ideas of all, so all both serve and are served, and feel a sense of ownership and participation. Place based working takes a holistic view of a particular geographic location, rather than a more sector specialised offering to a wider area. One Ilfracombe is a case in point. Community Development needs to be sensitive to the culture of the particular community, and place based working can take account of this, rather than a one size fits all approach.

2.10.9 Volunteering is the lifeblood of our community but the landscape is changing and they are becoming fewer. Younger people prefer to work in different ways and we need to learn how to accommodate this. Appreciation and celebration of our volunteers helps to highlight the good news in our communities.

3 Health, Well-being, Social Care

3.1 Overview

3.1.1 Health and Well-being is an area where connections abound. First, our mental, physical and spiritual health is intertwined. For example, persistent pain generally has both mental and physical components and some mental health concerns, such as depression, can be assisted by working in the physical and spiritual spheres. Secondly, the wider determinants of our health include housing, education, employment, lifestyle choices, access to green spaces, income, support networks and family circumstances. Health is really one area where we cannot afford to look at any one factor in isolation.

3.1.2 Prevention of ill-health, although cost saving in the long run, is very difficult to get right.

One contributor said to me in respect of social care (but it could be applicable in many circumstances) *"People don't hit a crisis out of the blue. Crisis costs a great deal of money and is horrible for the person. But there are so many points where earlier intervention could have been made – but the money isn't always available for this. The Fire service has been marvellous in preventative working and house fires have reduced considerably – we have a lot to learn from them".*

Evidence from Public Health shows that there is, broadly, a ten year lead up to someone's point of crisis. It is also possible to profile communities to project likely health and well-being trends and risks, which can help prioritise preventative work. Positive interventions from neighbours, friends and family as well as health and social care practitioners can all be helpful in preventing a crisis point.

One GP-led project the BBC is following in Fleetwood, Lancs[24], is based around the question "What makes me well?" and in promoting these activities - not all of which will necessarily be obviously health service related - aims to both prevent and alleviate disease. Social prescribing and physical activity options are increasingly finding favour as an alternative to traditional health care.

3.1.3   In northern Devon our health services are in the midst of significant change. Both the Success Regime and the Sustainability and Transformation Plan are works in progress in our area and there is considerable disquiet and local campaigning against possible changes to service delivery. This is a developing situation and up-to-date information can be found via the NEW Devon CCG website[25]. One expressed concern regards some seemingly divergent clinical and pastoral viewpoints: the reviews are led by clinicians and are thus based on the most effective clinical outcomes, but, moving hospital services, for example, has significant pastoral effects for people in terms of travel (especially from rural areas) and visiting people in hospital. On the other side, care at home, where possible, does have positive outcomes for patient and carers.

3.2   Inequalities

3.2.1   The 2015/16 Public Health Report for Devon makes interesting reading[26] and includes health related data for each area of Devon as well as comparisons with the rest of the country and internationally. It also includes useful chapters on the relationship between poverty and poor health outcomes, as well as how the amount of inequality within a society affects health outcomes irrespective of absolute income. The report makes the point that people in lower socio economic groups will not only experience shorter life spans, but also a shorter time of healthy life without disability. In northern Devon, the largest life expectancy gap at ward level is 13.9 years between Ilfracombe Central and Orchard Hill (Bideford).

3.2.2   The Marmot Review[27] (Fair Society, Healthy Lives) explains these issues and makes recommendations to reduce inequality in our society – for those unfamiliar with the subject this review forms the basis of much policy and strategy making in the area.

3.2.3   Health inequalities are directly related to factors such as neighbourhood deprivation, educational attainment, housing conditions and employment status, as well as lifestyle choices, so all these factors need to be considered in order to reduce inequality and improve health for all. The mechanisms by which health outcomes are worse the lower one is on the social gradient are many, but it is known that being disadvantaged in a social hierarchy affects how we think about ourselves, which can lead to mental health issues and related physical health problems. There has also been some recent research, albeit in primates, which suggests that being lower on the social gradient affects an individual's immune response[28].

3.2.4   Marmot says "put simply, the higher one's social position, the better one's health is likely to be". Inequality affects everyone in our society, not only those at the lower end of the spectrum, because everyone on the health gradient has less good outcomes than those above. So, Marmot says, only addressing the needs of the most

disadvantaged in society does not solve the inequality problem. As well as it being a matter of basic justice, it is necessary to reduce the steepness of the gradient to reduce the level of inequality and improve health outcomes overall.

3.2.5   Indices of multiple deprivation by postcode are available through the Church Urban Fund's look up tool[29] and this link[30] gives access to the amalgamated poverty and deprivation data report for the diocese of Exeter (geographical area of Devon). The maps show starkly the levels of deprivation across huge swathes of our rural community, as well as parts of our towns.

3.2.6   Our Public Health team in Devon would be interested to work with churches to understand our communities more qualitatively, as well as through the data. The overlay of Lower Super Output area data with what churches know about their communities could be very helpful in understanding public health issues in Devon. Looking at levels of community participation may be of particular interest. Where this is low churches can and do act as catalysts for community animation.

3.3   Mental Health

3.3.1   More people are presenting with mental health problems generally in the UK, and north Devon is no exception. In 2015, 4000 people accessed the Devon Partnership Trust's depression and anxiety disorder services[31] and in summer 2016 in-patient wards at NDDH were running at 95% capacity against a recommended level of 85%. Increases are due to many factors including financial distress, the impact of accommodation insecurity and the use of social media particularly among younger people. Personality disorders, sometimes linked to substance misuse, are also rising.

3.3.2   Mental health is as wide an area as physical health and includes people with eating disorders, dementia, drug and alcohol related problems, depression and anxiety as well as specifically named mental health disorders. In any given year, one in four people will experience some form of mental health problem and overall 23% of all health related suffering is mental, but only 12% of health service resources are spent in this area. And people with mental health problems will very often have an associated physical health problem (and vice versa). Mental health problems have a massive effect on length and quality of life.

3.3.3   There is something referred to as a "health drift" towards northern Devon. For example, sometimes people with mental health issues may lose their employment. As a result they may then need cheaper housing and come to northern Devon, where the cost of living may be less than other parts of the county. Employment

support for people with mental health issues would be particularly helpful.

3.3.4   Childhood deprivation has significant consequences for later mental health and so it is important to be able to support children and families as early as possible. More can be found in section 5 of this report. Perinatal depression is associated with problems for children so we need more support in this area also.

3.3.5   Dementia is a huge issue. There are many more people living with dementia at home than hitherto and also people who would previously have been in hospital are now in care homes.

Plymouth University, in work funded by the Seale Hayne Educational Trust with support from the Farming Community Network has been conducting research into the particular issues surrounding rural dementia[32]. Their results, referenced here, make recommendations for the rural community and how all agencies involved can help.

3.3.6   There can be complications for churches and Christians supporting mental health. We need to consider how we might pray with people – especially people who may be deeply psychotic and where differences between psychosis and spiritual experiences may be hard to judge. We have also to be aware of the possibility of manipulation or dependency. Our churches are open to all and all are welcome, but proper awareness and training are essential.

3.3.7   A WHO report in March 2016 surveyed 15 to 20 year olds from 42 different nationalities. British school children were the most troubled in the world due to the pressures of school work, image, economic decline, and the perceived threat from terrorism. It is postulated that social media and the use of smart phones with news streaming can make these threats appear closer and more personal and build up emotions more quickly. There has been a threefold increase in the last 10 years in the number of secondary school children who said they would consider suicide. In the UK the percentage is 17%.

3.4   Connecting Wellbeing and Nature

3.4.1   In the whole of Devon, not least in northern Devon, we have a beautiful and open environment. It is well known that many health benefits, physical, mental and spiritual come from connecting with nature. There are proven health and well-being benefits if people can just see "green". A growing body of evidence for positive outcomes for outdoor learning and "social prescribing" of gardening and developing shared community growing spaces is also proving beneficial both for mental health

and in producing healthy food to eat.

Research has shown that people who are in touch with nature use their phone half as much each day, have significantly higher self-esteem, are significantly more conscientious, emotionally stable and open to new experiences. The survey also showed that smartphone addicts take seven times more selfies and are less sociable than nature lovers [33] [34].

3.4.2   On the indices of multiple deprivation, whilst we score quite low on the "inside" housing environment in some areas, we score particularly highly on our outside environment, but not everyone can benefit. In particular, it can be difficult for older people, people with disabilities or illnesses, members of minority groups and people without independent transport to access the coast and countryside. It follows also that different groups have different requirements in terms of access.

3.4.3   Both health and environmental groups recognise the benefits and the needs in helping people to connect with nature and this is an area of particularly successful partnership working. The Natural Devon partnership and the North Devon Biosphere Reserve have core aims and values that couple the wellbeing of people with the wellbeing of nature. Natural Devon ran "Naturally Healthy" month in May 2016 and this was followed by the Devon Wildlife Trust "30 days wild" in June 2016 where people were encouraged to interact with nature.

3.4.4   The natural environment can be part of the solution to reducing health inequalities. The church is well placed to add to the whole in this area, with various outdoor activities for children and older people and meditation exercises such as "awareness" walks.

3.5   Older Age, Loneliness and Social Isolation

3.5.1   We have a higher than average proportion of older people in northern Devon than other parts of the country. Whilst everyone experiences life individually, there are some common issues that many older people will face, and it is clear that there are many connections between mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing.

3.5.2   Ideas of identity and belonging, meaning and purpose, change as we get older. People who are now needing care themselves, when they may have cared for others all their lives, may question the meaning of their lives and their place in the world. There can be fears for the future, for practical matters such as arranging care, for further deterioration of health, and increasing thoughts of mortality. Older people can also face an immense amount of loss – of life partners, of confidence, of friends

and family, of physical touch, of physical and mental ability, of memories, of independence. Such loss can lead to tremendous sadness, anxiety, depression and other mental health issues. It may also result in changes to behaviour including less partaking in social activities, exercise and opportunities to be outside in nature and all of this can lead to deterioration of physical wellbeing.

3.5.3   Of course, older age can also be a time of great spiritual growth, with more time to reflect and be still and to discover new ways of being. Becoming dependent upon others for our care is a direct reversal of how we have strived to live our lives and often comes with thoughts of frustration and loss of control which can be hard to bear. However, in reality we are all dependent upon one another – none of us grows all our own food, makes all our own clothes or builds all our own homes. One of our reflection group members reflected that *"a growing dependence upon others might enable a greater understanding of our dependence upon God, which can bring a deep sense of peace".*

3.5.4   Older people also have great gifts of wisdom and experience and are the guardians and conduits of much of our history. In our churches, and our communities of older people, perhaps the greatest service we can offer is to help people know they are valued, that though physical ability may be failing, the gifts they are able to offer, whatever their situation, are still greatly valued and appreciated by the whole community. As one member of our reflection group said, of visiting an old friend with increasing dementia, the important thing seemed to be saying (not necessarily in words) *"though you may be forgetting, we are not forgetting you, you are still valuable and important to us".*

3.5.5   It is important, in working with these issues, that we do not fall into the traps of "needs meeting" and "doing unto" that we discussed in section 2, but rather apply the approach of coming alongside, getting to know people, discerning gifts and talents, and seeing what emerges together, thereby ensuring that whatever outcomes do arise offer a mutual blessing to all, and perhaps a new sense of purpose for the older members of a group.

3.5.6   Of course there are practical matters to be addressed, and as mentioned, loneliness is a huge problem of our time. Most of our churches, along with many other organisations, are already offering much formal and informal support, from the provision of lunch clubs, craft activities and coffee mornings enabling people to come together, to more formal pastoral care, befriending and visiting at home - these latter are discussed further in the next section.

3.5.7   Loneliness and social isolation, though related conditions, are not interchangeable. An article on the NHS website[35] explains the research that has identified this. The conclusions are that *"Social isolation is associated with a higher risk of death in older people regardless of whether they consider themselves lonely"* and the article goes on *"This suggests that factors other than loneliness – such as having no-one to check on a person's health – may contribute to increased risk of death."*

3.5.8   In Holy Trinity church in Westward Ho! we have also reflected that ageing is not something we speak about very much. Adverts on television are designed to keep us looking and feeling younger – not exploring how to live well in our older age. Age UK and other charities offer hugely valuable support in this area.

We have begun to reflect on the possibility of offering a series of sessions called "Let's talk about ageing" where all aspects of older life, mental, spiritual and physical health, practical and financial matters can be discussed.

3.6   The changing face of Health and Social Care

3.6.1   Over recent years many of our services have been subject to "austerity". Local government, the police, the NHS have all either had their budgets cut, or have seen demand rise to such an extent that even increasing resources are insufficient to keep up. The social care budget is under severe stress, although DCC has increased it by 15% in the last two years.

3.6.2   We may want our health service and social services to provide for all our needs for our whole lives, but the demand is infinite. Average life expectancy is increasing and our age profile in northern Devon is higher than average, but the resources available to these institutions are not infinite, even in buoyant economic times. However, many people take the view that they have paid into the system through NI and taxes for all their working lives in the belief they would be cared for as needed. As one contributor said to me *"Expectations on the health services are not set out clearly and people get disgruntled if their own expectations are not met. A new settlement is needed".*

3.6.3   We are moving away from a system where much was done for us and into one where we need to take more responsibility for our own health, for our own care and for that of others in our communities – our families, friends and neighbours. As we know, much about care in the community is cultural and difficult to design and in some of our communities for this approach to work we need to re-learn how to connect with each other and be sociable – to have time to *"pop in for a cup of tea"*

and naturally look after each other. Yet over the years barriers have built up that militate against this behaviour – neighbours may feel they are interfering, or that they haven't the "expertise" or are just too busy.

3.6.4   Whilst there is much that feels right about the general approach of reducing dependence, taking more responsibility for our own health and lives, and in increasing neighbourliness, the transition, like many transition times, is confusing and challenging for many. More may need to be done to help communicate and discuss changes in the way services are provided with people before they come to need them so that they have more opportunity to plan for themselves and their families and know what to expect.

Support is also needed to help increase and release community capacity where it is needed, and develop good working partnerships between statutory, private and third sector groups.

3.6.5   The response to these challenges has to be, and is, multifaceted.

- New contracts were put into place for personal care across Devon during 2016 under the general theme of Living Well at Home. In northern Devon this service is co-ordinated by NDHCT (Northern Devon Health Care Trust) with private and community sector agencies through a service known as "Devon Cares"[36]. NDHCT is the first NHS Trust also to manage social care provision in this way. They have established a local board including community organisations.

  The service is working hard to meet need in the area and is having considerable success, with people receiving a timely and effective service. Reducing demand by promoting independence and personal and community resilience is an important part of the strategy.

- The national government has recently increased the allowable precept councils can raise through council tax to pay for social care. DCC consulted on council tax proposals through its website.

- Care is becoming more "outcome focused"- helping people into greater self-reliance through carers working with people to improve their mobility, general ability and independence alongside continuing care where it is needed, but with less emphasis on "doing for". The aim of this is to spend the available money in a different way, delivering the right services to those with more pronounced needs. Support, where it is needed, is more often than not, most successful if it is provided quickly and for short periods of time – restoring people's confidence

and well-being. Only a relatively small percentage of people should need longer-term support and even then the emphasis is on maximising independence.

- When someone is initially assessed by social services, the aim is to establish what outcomes they need to be able to live independently. For some information and advice is sufficient. For those whose needs are more complex, a "personal budget" may be agreed, which may be taken directly and the person manages the care for themselves (called a Direct Payment), or, DCC can arrange the care needed direct. How much someone may be expected to contribute towards their personal budget is subject to a financial assessment[37]. Direct Payments account for about 30% of all personal budgets.

- All those entitled to a personal budget are kept under review, although demands on the service can mean that those who are at more significant risk, or whose needs may vary, are given priority for review.

  Improvements to people's lives can be made. Perhaps a person with learning difficulties can be supported into employment – they will feel better and may need a reduced care package as a result. There are people who become more frail (but, even then every effort is made to help them to be as independent as possible), and whose care needs will need to be revised upwards, but others do get better and then their care can be reviewed to help them back into independence.

- In terms of prevention, we know social isolation can lead to care referrals – so if this can be recognised early, people can be helped into social activities, hopefully resulting in greater well-being for them and preventing a possible care referral.

- As in other parts of the economy, recruiting enough people with the right skills to support the service can be challenging. A well trained, stable and supported workforce is important to maintain good social care and pay (including paid travel time) and conditions have been improved under the new contract. DCC has also launched "Proud To Care"[38] – an initiative which promotes care as a career path, working alongside the NHS and private providers.

- There is a much greater emphasis on "Care in the Community", with family, friends and neighbours helping in a more primary rather than "back up" role.

- There is a high degree of integration across health and care with senior managers being appointed jointly between the NHS and Social Services. They manage North Devon's district nurses, therapists and social workers and some of the

Occupational Therapists. These are all delivering NHS or Social Services community services, including those for adult care and people with learning disabilities but not adult mental health for working age people, which is provided by the Devon Partnership NHS Trust (DPT). When an older person has mental health difficulties, the NHS and DCC's Health and Social Care Teams would provide the social care, but not the mental health nursing. These teams work very closely with the local GPs, who they refer to as "our doctors". They also hold the budget for placements in care homes, day opportunities and other forms of care. The team also manages urgent care, from both a social care and health perspective, and tries to avoid hospital admissions.

The team takes an "asset based" approach asking first what resources people already have to look after themselves, then, how family and friends, local communities, including churches and other organisations, can help. When all options are exhausted then social care will step in and provide – but it is now more of a backstop than a first line of approach.

This is not about the scale of budget - but the approach that reduces dependency and leads to most beneficial health outcomes for people.

The team also works very closely with the voluntary sector and wouldn't be able to manage without it.

- There is a much greater role for the Third Sector, including voluntary, community and faith based groups, social enterprise and Community Interest Companies. Real partnership working on the ground is needed for this approach to work.

Public sector agencies may contract with the community sector to achieve some outcomes. In this way some services can be brought closer to the communities who need them and there may be a greater involvement of service users. So there are advantages to this approach.

From the voluntary sector's point of view operating in a commercial way represents a cultural sea change and many community groups have to work in a completely new way in terms of administration, reporting, working out the costs of services and managing contracts which can be challenging.

Service commissioning can also be challenging for the statutory authorities. It can be time consuming for commissioning managers in the NHS and Social Services to work with many different groups. However, the mixed economy of service provision that is developing also presents opportunities for a much wider range

of types of service to be offered, from friendship and befriending to professional acute care, and enables innovative choices for budget allocation, perhaps through direct care provision, or perhaps through support of a voluntary organisation.

One contributor said *"many people and organisations are not used to working out costs for services provided"* but concluded *"Bringing partners together to help them to respect each other's histories and ways of doing things is very difficult but also really rewarding."*

The Health and Social Care Forum – run through NDVS - helps tackle these issues and brings all partners together.

Also, should any church or community group wish to develop and offer a befriending service for example, to enable referrals from social care in their area, they only need to work now with one body in northern Devon – Devon Cares (see above).

3.6.6   Devon County Council has also launched its Pinpoint service which enables one to search by service and/or area to find community and other services[39]. As not everyone is aware of the ways churches are already caring practically for members of the community it may be helpful to compile a directory of church based projects and activities to be shared with other agencies and via the DCC Pinpoint website.

3.6.7   In Ilfracombe the health and social care team referred to above work seamlessly with a voluntary befriending service set up by a local church – The Regen Project[40]. The social care team is able to refer someone to the befriending service who can help with shopping, trips out, gardening or just popping round for a cup of tea and a chat. This is care that could never be provided on a statutory basis, but it enables the person being befriended to remain independent with a much better quality of life for much longer.

If social care is to be confident in making referrals through any sort of voluntary organisation, church based or otherwise, it needs to be confident that all Safeguarding processes and procedures are in place, and the befrienders have been properly trained and are appropriately supported themselves.

The Regen project has been aided by a mutual understanding between the statutory and church teams and has exceptionally good governance and processes in place to care for and protect all concerned. This understanding has been invaluable in enabling this project to proceed as fruitfully as it has done. It also offers a blue print

for other churches and health groups to work together more closely for the benefit of their communities more easily.

3.6.8   New technology can be a vital aid to preventing and managing both emergency and ongoing care at home. For example – paramedics can use heart rate monitors which communicate with a cardiologist at the hospital, who can then make decisions about whether a person needs to be admitted to hospital or not.

DCC has just awarded a new contract for "Assistive Technology" and there are many products that people can source for themselves

A major study is underway whereby "wearable" technology is being used to monitor various bio-markers, such as how someone walks, as a way of picking up very early signs of Alzheimer's disease[41].

Apple are allowing medical schools free access to some of their technology to enable them to develop medical applications that will work on the Apple mobile operating system iOS to allow home monitoring of long term chronic health problems such as diabetes, heart problems and raised blood pressure, by enabling monitoring devices to send data direct to clinicians. This moves part of the onus for collecting data onto the patient, and allows a more continuous supply of data to the doctor, rather than the snapshot measurements taken at the surgery. This then enables more proactive management of the disease as trends can be predicted the more pre-existing data is available. This is a very positive change for patients, and a very positive move from Apple. It is hoped that other businesses may follow this model.

It is likely to be two to five years before the take-up of this technology becomes routine in the UK. Longer term, it may enable more people to live more independent lives at home.

3.7   Summary

3.7.1   Health and wider social inequalities are a matter of deep concern to all members of society, wherever they happen to sit on the social gradient and it is a matter of justice for us to do all we can to help reduce the inequalities that exist in our midst. The causes for such inequality are interconnected and some will be discussed more particularly in following sections of this report, where opportunities for helping to reduce them will be highlighted.

3.7.2   It is also clear that both nationally and in north Devon our health and social care services are under huge pressure and that with an ageing population, increasing

lifespans for people with serious physical and learning disabilities and an increasing number of people with mental health issues, the needs are very high.

3.7.3 The change towards people taking more responsibility for their own health and well-being seems to present opportunities for health improvements in the longer term, particularly when coupled with a focus on the question "what makes me well", and when the strategy can be used preventatively. For some, in the short term, the challenge is confusing and frightening. The more we can all understand new approaches, the more we will be able to support those people, particularly the elderly, with whom we have contact.

3.7.4 The move towards more care in the community, and the sharing of roles between the statutory and third sectors is well underway. This brings both challenges and opportunities for service. Connectivity and co-ordination between different parts of the system is vital and organisations such as the Health and Social Care Forum, DCC and Devon Cares are vital in this effort. Sharing of posts and resources between the NHS and Social Services also seems to be working well.

3.7.5 As churches, we are already offering much in terms of support and social activities for different age groups. It could be helpful to collate these so that knowledge of them may be more available for health and social care professionals to refer people to.

3.7.6 Physical, mental and spiritual health are very connected. The church can offer care in a similar way to secular community groups but perhaps its special gift is to be able to offer activities with a greater focus on the spiritual care of the person, as well as the other aspects of health, particularly in areas such as ageing and loss. It is quite possible to offer care in a practical and completely non-religious way to enable the service to be accessed by people of all faiths and none and in many cases this will be exactly what is needed. There may be other instances where an overt discussion of faith and spirituality may be helpful.

This means there will be particular considerations for faith-based organisations working with statutory and other secular agencies. A referrer clearly has a duty to ensure that someone they refer is not going to be subject to religious practice which may be unwelcome.

3.7.7 Church-based "Pastoral Care" is a broad term which varies in nature depending on the needs of the person. It may range from visiting when someone is sick, dying or bereaved, getting to know a new church member, keeping company if someone is lonely, offering practical help with shopping or cooking on an ad hoc basis, to more

formal visits to those unable to get to church for whatever reason, often to share Holy Communion. Thus it encompasses both spiritual and practical needs, depending upon the circumstance and the needs of the person being visited. Members of Pastoral Care Teams are trained in active listening, in safeguarding, visiting in particular circumstances and some in more specialised care such as bereavement counselling. All will be DBS checked. This kind of Pastoral Care is clearly wider than what may be termed "Befriending" though there is much overlap.

4 Business and the Economy

4.1 Overview

4.1.1 Though some small businesses run on the edge of financial viability, local business leaders are, in general, reasonably upbeat about the local economy and the future, even with the uncertainties of Brexit. The recession in 2008 saw the loss of some struggling businesses, but the economy generally showed good resilience. Many small and medium size firms (SMEs) are second or third generation family businesses and so have little borrowing and this, coupled with the somewhat risk averse culture of rural north Devon and Torridge, has possibly resulted in less exposure to difficult circumstances.

4.1.2 Our manufacturing sector has been described both as the "jewel in our crown" and a "hidden gem" – all agree on its high quality and value – though not its visibility! Many of our businesses, headquartered in northern Devon, compete on the world stage.

4.1.3 There is a national trend towards self-employment[42] and many of the new jobs created since the recession are categorised as such. In northern Devon we have a higher than average number of people running small or micro businesses. This has been a significant driver in the post-recession economy and is particularly important in rural areas as more people are setting up internet businesses which can be run from home. Agriculture remains the backbone of our rural economy, but this business sector could help to augment economic sustainability and growth with new jobs and supply chains in our very rural area. However, it is likely that start-up costs in rural areas may be more expensive than those in towns. For example the best telecoms deals may not be available, and better provision of broadband in general is vital for all rurally based businesses – agricultural and internet based alike.

4.1.4 The bald statistic of increasing numbers of self-employed people is not straightforward however as the nature of work is changing. Many people work in

the so called "gig economy", either responding to individual jobs arising through various internet apps (Uber and Deliveroo being two of the most well-known national examples), finding work through agencies or holding down a multiple number of small jobs to make ends meet. All this work can be classed as self-employed, but is not traditionally what may be considered so, and may not be advantageous to the person in terms of work entitlements.

4.1.5 Some of our small businesses can be categorised as "lifestyle" – perhaps being run for personal interest, or to supplement another income.

4.1.6 There are a growing number of business consultants offering mentoring and businesses advice to small businesses, rather like the Business Link organisation of old. However, some concern has been expressed that there are no quality standards for such consulting and care needs to be taken by those seeking advice.

4.1.7 Many self-employed and small businesses are also very happy with their way of life and the ability to live in such a beautiful part of the country without wishing to grow their business greatly. Earning enough to support a reasonable way of life and to have a good work life balance is more important to many. Such an attitude would be quite different from a typical London-based business where earning less than £150,000 from one's company can be seen as a failure. Part of people's "wealth" in northern Devon is not monetary but about the less tangible aspects of life here. However, as in all things we need a balance with at least some of our businesses willing to take greater risks, grow their businesses, and be able to grow good job opportunities (see also section 4.7 "Enoughness").

4.1.8 In the rural areas many people have multiple jobs just to make ends meet. For example one person works three nights a week in the pub, one day in the market at Holsworthy and does a cleaning job on other days. As well as "in work" entitlements this type of multiple working has a knock on effects on pensions. It can however sometimes lead to full-time work.

4.1.9 In rural areas also, transport to work is a serious issue, particularly for young people, and accessing work outside the immediate environs of one's home village is very difficult without personal transport. The Devon Wheels to Work scheme[43] provides rental mopeds and scooters for young people to access work and training, but there is no similar scheme for adults. This partly explains the need for multiple local jobs, often paying low wages.

4.1.10 Fishing is an industry under severe threat in Torridge. This year has seen the last trawler lost from Bideford and bans on certain types of fishing have also had a major

effect[44]. It is possible that post EU fishing policy may help our local fishing industry, but far it is too soon to know.

4.1.11 Appledore Shipyard is one of the major employers in Torridge and won a new £43.1million contract to build a fourth Irish naval ship in June 2016. This was very welcome news as many workers had been transferred to Devonport due to a previously forecasted gap in work. The skilled jobs at the shipyard are vital in our often low skill/low wage economy.

4.1.12 Along with agriculture, tourism continues as a major economic driver for our area. The North Devon Marketing Bureau was recently reformed[45] to promote northern Devon as a tourist destination. Though it is general policy to encourage more tourism, one question asked by some is how many tourists are sustainable in terms of traffic levels, car parking, bed spaces and managing our environment sustainably?

4.1.13 One of the major regeneration funding strands available to our communities in northern Devon at present is the Coastal Communities Fund[46]. Coastal Communities Teams (partnerships of local bodies) have so far been set up in Barnstaple, Bideford, Fremington, Ilfracombe and Lynton and Lynmouth and new towns are being encouraged to apply. Money is available to improve transport links, signage, heritage areas and tourism attractions. Several other regeneration schemes are being undertaken directly through our district councils, for example, ideas focusing on growth potential are currently being developed for Seven Brethren in Barnstaple and Brunswick Wharf in Bideford. Private developments are also contributing.

4.1.14 Northern Devon is also rich in craft workers, especially glassmakers and potters, following in the tradition of these crafts in our area. The Burton Art Gallery[47] in Bideford offers a good showcase, especially for ceramic art, and has permanent collections of north Devon slipware.

More detailed economic information and reports will be available in Appendix 3.

4.2   Infrastructure

4.2.1 The major areas of physical infrastructure that need addressing are our transport and broadband links. The North Devon link road, as we know, can become very slow and congested at times, and is seen as having insufficient capacity to support the needs of business, tourism and local people. This is being addressed at present. Rural transport links are also an issue. Many rural roads are falling into serious disrepair, while bus routes can be few and far between.

4.2.2   Broadband is important for a huge number of businesses. Farmers in particular have to complete their Single Farm Payment applications on line as well as registering their animal movement data. By definition farms are in some of the most remote areas and therefore have some of the most difficulty in this area.

4.2.3   Despite poor broadband links, the trend towards home working and new internet-based business is booming. New entrepreneurs are enabled to connect with people anywhere via the internet – though of course better logistic routes would aid the physical transfer of goods.

4.2.4   Many people have observed during the course of this research that people have to do much more for themselves in northern Devon than in other parts of the country, or even county. In more urban areas where there is a greater concentration of people there is a concomitant concentration of services on offer – both public and private. Here services are harder for people to access, less funding is available for any services that rely on a funding per capita basis because of relatively low populations, yet the demands imposed by our rural terrain and communities mean we need more. As a result, our communities are used to relying on themselves to a significant extent to meet needs. This is evident in community life, in business networks, and social life.

4.3   Skills Gaps, recruitment, aspiration

4.3.1   The skills shortage is particularly pronounced in northern Devon and in some cases is holding business back. This is a national as well as a local problem as the "UK commission for employment and skills" report for 2016 demonstrates[48]. The mismatch between available skilled people and the jobs that need filling means that some businesses are unable to recruit sufficient staff locally, particularly for skilled work, yet families are struggling to make ends meet on low wages while better paid work is available. This affects both our wider local economy and that of individual households.

4.3.2   North Devon and Torridge tend to be known as low wage, low skill economies, and much of the work available is seasonal, and in industries such as hospitality, care and agriculture where wages are traditionally quite low. The skills shortages are particularly acute in the manufacturing sector where as one contributor said *"manufacturing is not just about making things – we also need people in finance, marketing, HR and so on."* There can also be difficulties recruiting to the "professions" including teachers, clergy and the care and nursing sector.

4.3.3   It seems the relative isolation of northern Devon can be a disincentive for people. However, there is also generally a very low staff turnover, again across many different sectors, which perhaps suggests that once people do arrive they enjoy living here and want to stay. Low staff turnover encourages the development of good relationships, but new people and ideas bring new life to organisations and encouraging more highly skilled people to our area is good for our local economy. Overall we need sufficient, appropriately skilled people to allow our businesses to fulfil their potential and to be able to attract, retain and grow local businesses which can provide opportunities for good and fulfilling work for our young people of all levels of skills and ability.

4.3.4   Once again, this is a multifaceted problem and needs a multifaceted solution. A senior manager said to me *"we need new businesses growing, a rising population, better housing stock, with good quality apartments and starter homes for new workers and better infrastructure and communications."* We also need to do all we can to raise the level of aspiration in our school children, help people to reach their full potential, and develop appropriate training opportunities.

4.3.5   From the beginning of this project, people were coupling the skills shortages with a lack of aspiration in our school children. Schools and businesses are working hard to address this issue.

- Local businesses are visiting schools to talk about their industries in all their depth and breadth, such as engineering or logistics, and helping young people understand the sort of work that is available.

- The North Devon Manufacturing Association (NDMA)[49] has produced an innovative booklet for schools detailing case studies of real people showcasing different career paths in manufacturing. They are also offering sponsorship for some degree students to encourage a return to northern Devon after university.

- Bideford Chamber of Commerce is working with Bideford College with invitations to the school to attend the Chamber AGM, holding some of its meetings in the school and involving "school champions" with the chamber.

- In July 2016, the Heart of the South West Local Economic Partnership launched its Enterprise Adviser Network which is designed to encourage links between schools and businesses[50] to support young people in making choices about their future career.

- This link will show you a video of the north Devon Pupil Employer Engagement Programme (PEEP) being run by North Devon Plus[51] and supported by North Devon Council.

- Petroc launched a series of extra-curricular workshops in autumn 2015 to help students experience skills associated with particular careers under their "Petroc Ambitions" programme[52]. The college is also in constant contact with employers working to address skills shortages with appropriate training and developing work placements. They also have a particular programme for helping people with learning difficulties into employment.

4.3.6   Encouraging young people into "STEM" (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) courses and careers is seen as really important for our economy nationally, and particularly in northern Devon, with our manufacturing sector playing such a significant role. There are various ways businesses and educative partners are coming together to encourage this. One such way is through the Big Bang Fair South West[53] where young people enter a competition with inventions that have market potential. The winners are offered assistance in taking the idea further. They also have access to a range of activities and companies present where they can find out about careers in STEM. Big Bang events are also being held locally – notably at Great Torrington School and the NDMA includes awards for schools in their annual awards programme – in 2016 there were 44 entries from 10 schools. Another of the NDMA awards relates to businesses promoting STEM in schools.

4.3.7   Whilst all these efforts to help young people understand the range of employment opportunities, to become excited by them and encouraged to study and train in the necessary subjects is vital, the low aspiration encountered in our locality runs very deep in some cases. It can be related to lack of confidence, generational poverty and the boundedness of some of our communities. These aspects will be discussed further in section 5 of this report.

4.3.8   Discerning our vocation means to discover what role(s) in life we may be best suited for depending on our gifts, talents and interests such that we may find ourselves both personally fulfilled in our occupation and fulfilling our role within our wider society. It is important both for the individual and our communities to discover our vocations as truly as possible. It is also important to explore what phrases such as "reaching our full potential" mean to us and our young people, in the round.

The church has various tools to help in our searching. It may be appropriate, alongside the diocesan vocations network, to work with our young people, particularly in our churches, schools and youth clubs to help them discern their

vocation – whether to engineering, construction, healthcare – or the church!

Stop press! St Mary's church in Bideford is facilitating a "vocations" event at Bideford College as part of the 2017 "Bishops in Mission" visits, for the students to explore their possible vocations in the world of work. The outcome and feedback will be very interesting.

4.4   Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships were much in the news around A-Level time, partly due to heavy government promotion but also because university fees are causing many young people to think about the route they wish to follow. Apprenticeships enable someone to earn (albeit at a fairly low level, dependent upon age and the offering of the employer) whilst studying for a qualification. They are being offered by public and private sectors, and by all sizes of business, including micro, SMEs and larger companies. A very high percentage of apprentices go on to full employment with their apprenticeship employer. Apprenticeships can last for between 1 and 5 years depending on the level of qualification undertaken. The government offers financial support at different levels for the costs of the formal qualifications. Gains are made both by employer and apprentice as the employer gains new blood and new ideas, is able to see a young person grow and develop, and can train their own staff for the future. Training an apprentice requires dedication, time and energy from the employer but support is available. The website "GetinGoFar"[54] gives all the information needed about apprenticeships – what types are on offer and what training is possible.

4.5   New Technology and Business

4.5.1   Northern Devon may be considered to be slightly "behind the curve" in adopting "new technology", but it is catching up, and the advantage of waiting is that many bugs will have been ironed out of the systems.

4.5.2   Much business administration is being forced on-line including monitoring cattle movements, tax and accounts reporting.

Integrating systems such as accounting, banking, invoices, bookings, credit card payments and payroll in one system is very beneficial as each piece of information only needs to be entered once. Standard accounting packages are available for which there are hundreds of bespoke add-ons available for different industries. Such new technology is also designed to be app based and so can be accessed via smart phones and tablets. For example, someone can buy petrol, scan the receipt on their

phone and enter it directly into their accounting software. Everything works very fast in real time freeing up more time for actual business and enabling people to be more productive and efficient.

4.5.3   The technology is however changing the job opportunities available. Administrative and technical work may be reduced with more jobs appearing in the application of the new technologies. An article in The Guardian newspaper[55] discusses the possibility of new "smart" technology rendering even some highly skilled work redundant and thus the need to increase lifelong learning and a focus on flexible transferable skills such as complex problem solving and multicultural team working.

People are also engaging with services such as banks in a different way reducing the need for branches (see section 2). Now that all documents can be scanned and stored electronically, clients can interact with such service providers such as accountants and solicitors who are based geographically further away. This may be a bonus for some, but will necessarily involve less face to face encounters where relationships are formed and where business advice, for example, can be offered. And already there are companies promoting offshore work such as completion of tax returns in India!

Data analysis is another area of changing employment. "Big Data" was initially about supermarkets gathering data on their customers such as Tesco through their Tesco Clubcard. The emphasis has now shifted to analysing data from merely gathering it. A new system called "Power BI" (Business information) now allows businesses to ask questions of their data in normal language. Previously a large number of data analysts were needed as the information was only available in code form and needed to be extracted differently. Being a data analyst may have seemed like a fairly modern occupation, but is now becoming obsolete as a result of the new software.

4.5.4   We need greater investment in our young people because so much of business in the future will be underpinned by IT, and if our young people are not adequately trained in this area their employability will be reduced.

4.5.5   Another change to working life as a result of new technology is that people are doing a lot more for themselves, whereas in the past they may have needed the assistance of a PA or secretary. One architect friend explained how he was recently able to hold a "virtual site meeting". He, as the project manager, was in north Devon, the client was in Newcastle, the main investor was in Spain and the site was in Eastbourne. Using Google Maps street view and documents located "in the cloud" and thus

viewable by all, at least one overnight stay was avoided and much less travelling was required, in this case including air miles. Now, the office is in the phone.

4.5.6 In businesses and the public sector, people tend to be more publicly available. Often a web site will list email addresses for particular people, and sometimes phone numbers. This makes them much more accessible to the general public, which while aiding customer service, is another change in working practice which could bring pressures for some people.

4.5.7 Marketing of local businesses – especially those who cater for our holiday makers such as restaurants and attractions – is changing. Much more reliance is now placed on social media and review sites to attract people – and less on the tourism infrastructure bodies. However, websites such as the Visit North Devon and Exmoor (North Devon Marketing Bureau)[56] and Visit Devon[57] are packed with information to help visitors get started. Many organisations such as Exmoor National Park and Visit North Devon also have Twitter accounts which promote both the area and their business through sharing beautiful photos of the area.

4.5.8 The availability of so much information on tap can be a mixed blessing. A very positive example is that of a north Devon sheep farmer who was changing from a multiple to single breed flock. When choosing the new breed he was able to take advice from all over the world and have access to information that would have been impossible a few years ago. However, information can quickly result in an "overload" situation, as one contributor working in internet services said *"when there is so much information, how do you make the important heard above the white noise?"* She went on *"Perhaps the most positive and exciting opportunity presented by new technology for businesses is that is allows people to live anywhere and still do really exciting business. We have world class businesses in northern Devon, and people's perceptions don't always match up to the realities of what is here. Tech-enabled, or tech-based businesses have the possibility to really boost the rural economy – so very important for an area such as ours. New technology is a tool and not a master. It takes time, as with all things new, to find the right balance"*.

4.5.9 Cyber security and keeping up with fast changing technology is important for individuals, governments and businesses. Gartner predicts that in 2017 a quarter of all businesses will be losing market share because of "digital incompetence" – in that they are unable to make the best use of the technology that is available to them whilst their competitors can. The need to keep moving forward to even keep pace with competitors and criminals adds pressure to people's working lives and to running a business.

4.6 Business Networks and Work Hubs - Town and Rural

4.6.1   Our business landscape is very well connected. We have numerous business networks – both formally constituted such as the various Chambers of Commerce[58], [59] and other locally based business networks[60], the Federation of Small Businesses[61] and less formal business breakfasts or special networking events. Perhaps the most obvious point to make is that much co-operation is possible because members' businesses are mostly not operating in direct competition with each other, but do have many issues in common to share and seek for solutions.

4.6.2   Business networking is used to:

- Share best practice and innovative ways of working
- Provide social connections and inspiration - especially helpful where people are working alone
- Share wider business and community information
- Keep up to date with legislation, for example employment law
- Lobby and campaign
- Effect joint initiatives - for example in regeneration projects, town-wide retail events, townscape improvements
- Work with schools (see above)
- Gain exposure to potential customers
- Represent local businesses on wider partnerships
- Run Awards programmes e.g. the North Devon Manufacturing Awards with various categories highlighting, for example, innovative working, work with schools, environmental projects
- Link with regional and national networks, and with related local providers e.g. the Manufacturing Advisory Service has a seat on the NDMA board as does Petroc to help liaise with skills and training and Bideford College and Bideford Chamber have very close links.

4.6.3   The people who organise our business networks and events are effectively volunteers, working hours over and above the time needed for the "day job". They are people who care passionately about their communities and in doing the best they can to boost our local economy.

4.6.4   Information from Devon Work Hubs[62] (run by DCC) gives a figure of 85,000 people working from home across Devon. Figures for northern Devon specifically are not available.

4.6.5 Three villages – East and West Buckland and Filleigh - wanted superfast broadband. In order to expedite this, a group of people investigated how many people were running businesses from home. They expected to find around 12 – in fact they found 70 registered businesses located within the three villages (data source unavailable). Around Chulmleigh it is believed there are about 20 home based businesses operating and that Lynmouth has the highest proportion of people running businesses from their homes.

4.6.6 There are many co-working spaces being developed alongside the trend for people to work from home. Some of these are based around a particular theme – such as those working in arts and crafts, or perhaps for those in the "tech" industry. Most will offer some form of office space and meeting rooms, rentable by the hour, day, week, or longer, depending on need. Particularly good broadband may enable people to carry out some operations they don't have the bandwidth for at home, and there may be access to other office equipment. Perhaps one of the most important ideas behind this trend is that it offers people the possibility of engaging with fellow sole business people to share ideas, frustrations and solutions. Devon Work Hubs is a growing network of shared workspaces across the county. To date their only work hub in northern Devon is located in Barnstaple on the Pottington Industrial Estate[63].

4.6.7 I have not come across any rural shared work spaces in northern Devon, though Devon Young Farmers have established, within their new centre at Cheriton Bishop, a business facility which will "*support the farming and rural communities by providing hot desking, meeting spaces and the opportunity for other rural organisations, thereby encouraging co-operation and collaboration between them.* [64]

There are precedents for the church to host a work hub[65] (see attached example from Clerkenwell). The church may be able to play a part in supporting their local economies, especially in the rural areas, through contacting local business people and finding out whether they would indeed benefit from some form of shared work or networking facilities, perhaps based in a village hall, or a church if suitable space were available. It may be a shared office space, a meeting room, or a monthly "business breakfast" or coffee morning to enable mutual support and networking. It may also be possible to work with the chambers and other business networking organisations to offer venues for "outreach" meetings for them, so that, for example, Bideford chamber could hold a village event to support members living locally and perhaps encourage those who are not currently members to join in for mutual support.

4.6.8   Networking events require a lot of organisation and administrative back up. They also require venues. It may be possible that churches could offer assistance with both, in conjunction with local business networks, especially in the more rural areas. Depending on the nature of the event, they could also be used to connect different networks, for example business and community groups could explore how they may be able to offer mutual support to each other.

4.6.9   Should shared office space be considered, good broadband would be required. This may provide an opportunity for communities to come together to investigate a village wireless broadband solution, a facility that could be useful for the whole community.

4.7   Enoughness

4.7.1   In our culture it tends to be an accepted mantra that we need continual growth in the economy to support fuller employment, increases in earnings, income tax-funded public services and generally enable people to have a better standard of living. However, a number of people I have interviewed during this project have raised the question as to whether unlimited growth is a good thing.

4.7.2   I suspect this concept of "enoughness" is more prevalent in northern Devon than in some other parts of the county. It comes about largely because of desires to protect, respect and enjoy our environment and to enjoy a better work life balance than is experienced by some others.

For example, heavy industry is not necessarily high on the agenda for those promoting business in our area because of potential environmental impact. Similarly, some business people, even those whose business is heavily dependent on the tourist trade, do not want to see tourist numbers increase too much because of the impact on traffic levels and the environment generally - they do not want to spoil the reason people come in the first place. We have seen (section 4.1) that many self-employed people get to the stage where they could grow their business by employing another person. However often this does not happen, both because of the administration and HR management involved in employing another person, but also because of work life balance. Once a person earns enough to give themselves and their family a reasonable standard of living, they do not need more, and would rather have free time to enjoy the quality of life made possible by our beautiful coast and countryside and all that it offers by way of recreation.

4.7.3   Whilst "not enough" can be a cause of mental distress, so can the pressure to work ever longer hours and achieve and earn ever more. Enoughness represents a balance

between the two.

4.7.4   From an environmental point of view, enoughness is also a good concept – over consumption generally requires the use of more material and energy resources and can result in waste.

4.7.5   North Devon Biosphere has working for a sustainable economy as one of its main aims – it says *"The Biosphere ethos is that a healthy economy and social cohesion rest on a healthy environment, not the other way around. It is working with nature and not against it. The Biosphere Reserve is continually looking at ways that it can help businesses maximise the benefit they receive from the environment and things it can do to preserve and sustain that environment for future generations."*

4.7.6   I am personally glad to live in a part of the world where people recognise the concept of "enough" and are not constantly striving for more of everything. However, as we discuss above and in section 5, growing businesses and a vibrant economy, in both rural areas and our towns, are vital to provide good employment opportunities and to help reduce the social and economic inequality that causes such harm and distress to people.

"Enough" does what it says on the tin. It is the right amount – of a service, of money, of growth – not too much – and not too little. It applies in every area of life. If not already, perhaps the concept of "enoughness" could be applied more widely.

4.8   Models of Church Engagement with Business

4.8.1   People may be used to seeing churches involved with social issues such as poverty, homelessness and supporting those in debt. However, as Christians we believe that God is involved in all of life, and therefore, as churches, we should be too. Helping to support a vibrant economy, where more people can achieve their potential, which reduces the social inequality gradients discussed in the last section, thus reducing some of the health and social wellbeing inequalities we see, is directly related to social action and justice. The word "Regeneration" in itself has so much overlap with the language of the church as we think of words such as renewal, re-creation and resurrection.

4.8.2   As well as opportunities to support businesses identified above, there are some well-established models for the church to engage with business.

- Industrial chaplaincy is sometimes considered the province of very large factories, but comes in all shapes and sizes[66]. There are town centre chaplains

supporting people (shoppers and shop-keepers) in the retail environment, traditional manufacturing chaplains supporting workers pastorally, and rural chaplains. Kent diocese has recently appointed a rural chaplain whose remit includes chaplaincy to all rural businesses, both farming and non-farming[67]. Given the increasing amount and variety of rural businesses in our area, this may be a route to explore.

- Another model is that of "ministry in secular employment" (MSE) where a person, lay or ordained, sees the focus of their ministry in their workplace. The difference between this approach and chaplaincy is that in the MSE model, the person is doing exactly the same job as their colleagues, subject to the same pressures, joys and struggles. They are not separate. We are reminded of this each Christmas as we think about Jesus being born as a human being and living life among us – understanding us – sharing our joys and sorrows – not looking on from afar. In this approach MSEs can support colleagues pastorally, bring new insight and perspective to the nature of work and bring back to the church a personal understanding of the working environment, which helps inform the church and thus its response to working issues.

- Members of a church can also become involved with their local business network, either as a business person themselves, or as an associate member to gain understanding of the business landscape and identify possible opportunities for the church to support – e.g. facilitating networking events.

- Germinate, an organisation which supports both rural churches and communities has launched a rural business start-up course entitled "Germinate Enterprise"[68] which can be run by churches and other local groups. We are likely soon to have trained facilitators locally to assist churches if any are interested in exploring this concept.

4.9 Summary

4.9.1 Though our economy is, at least in part, characterised by low-paid and seasonal work, it is showing resilience in continuing slow economic times. There are high quality job opportunities and growth, particularly in small and micro businesses. Business is held back by skills shortages, difficulty in recruitment, transport and internet infrastructure and these issues are being addressed.

4.9.2   Some of the social causes of low aspiration are addressed in section 5 of this report, and practical measures by employers and educators need to be coupled with early support for our young people and families.

4.9.3   We need economic growth and appropriate housing to attract people to come and live in our area bringing much needed skills in both business and other professions. However, this will always need to be balanced with retaining the "goods" of our environment and community life. "Enoughness" can be a helpful concept.

4.9.4   The whole nature of work is changing fast, with new technology and changing types of contracts. Some jobs are disappearing altogether; others are transferring geographically with contact made via the internet rather than face to face. People are doing much more for themselves administratively which changes much of the dynamic of a day's work. There is evidence that people on zero hour contracts earn substantially less in a year than those on permanent contracts. The rise in the so-called "gig economy" with people finding work through apps and agencies whilst being classified as self-employed, impacts on employment rights as well as national government revenue through tax and national insurance.

4.9.5   We have strong business networks which offer wonderful models of co-operation, shared learning and support, collective action and contribution to regeneration work in all its forms. By joining in with some of these networks, perhaps as associate members, the church could keep abreast of local business matters affecting our communities, see where we might be able to support our local businesses with provision of spaces and help with organisation for networking events (for example), and be able to use our own networks and advocacy to help promote and campaign for business and economic matters in our area.

4.9.6   The rural economy is undergoing change with many new businesses being run from home. Supporting local businesses is possible in a number of ways, particularly in the rural areas. Exploring rural business chaplaincy along the "Kent" model may also be a possibility.

5   Education, Aspiration and Poverty, Family and Youth Support

5.1   Education Overview

5.1.1   Funding is a continuing source of concern for all our schools. Nationally, Devon is the third poorest funded county for education and money per child is significantly lower than in other parts of the country. It was hoped that the new "Fairer Funding Formula" would address this issues, but although some schools will benefit, many

across the county will be significantly worse off! The situation was the subject of a debate in parliament in January 2017[69].

5.1.2   Some of our children are ranked as having similarly high needs to those in the inner city areas – but are not given the same additional funds for educational intervention purposes.

5.1.3   Education has become a competitive business. With budgets dependent on per capita pupil funding, each school needs to maximise its pupil intake in order to be able to offer the widest possible range of curriculum, activities and support. This formula can have unintended consequences in that it can (not always and especially not in the cases of schools working in formal partnerships) be difficult for heads in a local area to support each other when they may need to attract the same pupils and there can be concerns about the role of independent schools, and new entries such as "Free Schools" (see below).

5.1.4   Having said this, some schools work very closely together for mutual support and to share resources and experience. For example, several schools have formed together the "Atlantic Coast Co-operative Trust"[70] which has brought many benefits both to staff and pupils. Children come together for some festivals, there are workshops for some of the "gifted and talented" children, the head teachers all work very closely, and there is some moderation work done together. Training can be shared across the schools, and also staff can be seconded from one to another to widen experience without having to leave their posts. Teachers are also now working on their PGCE qualifications in the school setting, allowing schools to develop their own staff.

5.1.5   Some new children moving into our area may be more likely to go to independent schools, reducing the potential funding for schools based on population size. Those children remaining can be disadvantaged by low expectations and aspirations that a more representative population could help alleviate.

5.1.6   Austerity has created particular challenges for further education, which is funded differently from primary and secondary stages. Since 2010 funding has been cut substantially, and particularly for adults in education, where much funding has now switched to loans.

5.1.7   Turnarounds in school results are very encouraging. For example, Ilfracombe Academy at one point had the lowest possible Ofsted rating but for the last four years results have been increasing year on year and the school is now sending students to Oxbridge and other Russell Group universities.

5.1.8   Our teachers are under severe pressure, exemplified by an open letter from 50 Devon schools sent to the Education secretary in February 2016, calling on the government to act in response to the loss of so many teachers from the profession, and the difficulty in recruiting new teachers, especially in areas such as northern Devon[71]. Having said that, many teachers in northern Devon stay in post a long time (as with others areas of the economy and professions) and opportunities for new teachers often only arise upon someone's retirement. All the head teachers, teachers and support staff I have met during the course of this project have been full of enthusiasm and dedicated well beyond the "call of duty", even though many are frustrated by the funding and testing regimes.

5.1.9   Teachers are working really hard to sustain improvements, which can be made rapidly with particular initiatives, but the expectation to keep improving is very high and it is impossible to constantly produce such large steps forward. The impacts of ongoing "continuous improvement" going forward may appear less noticeable but are still very real.

5.1.10 Some of the schools in rural north Devon are very small. For example Parracombe has a roll of just 20 children. Clinton and Dolton have a combined roll of about 45 pupils and Northlew has 30. Many are now federated and are looking at expanding partnerships. Keeping standards high can be an issue - with a very small cohort of year 6 pupils it is possible to move into a different Ofsted category very quickly. There can be concerns that small schools are not able to offer the range of curriculum and activities, but relationships and the feeling of community and belonging can be very strong.

5.1.11 Outside learning is a concept gaining in popularity and has been shown to encourage better attendance, reduce bullying and improve pupil motivation for learning[72].

5.2   Route 39 – An example of a Free School

5.2.1   Free Schools are a relatively recent entry to our increasingly mixed economy of education provision. "Route 39 Academy" is a free school in Torridge[73] and has a particular focus on agriculture and land based studies working in partnership with Duchy College.

5.2.2   The school doesn't have to follow the national curriculum but does so that students have a full range of GCSEs available to them. It is currently based in Clovelly with 120 pupils. The new build at Steart Farm on the A39 will be able to take up to 700 pupils. Children come from a wide area and enjoy a longer school day than normal as they do their homework at school, working together and getting help as needed, and

when they get home the evening is their own to enjoy, work on the farm etc.

5.2.3 As well as offering academic A-levels, it also offers horticultural, agricultural and land science qualifications which can then lead on to a degree level qualification with Duchy College. The hope is that at least some students will be encouraged to remain and work in Torridge after their education.

5.2.4 Route 39 works in "stage not age" with ability groups so that children can work at their right level and pace. They deliver the curriculum through projects rather than in separate subjects. As with all our schools, there is a real community feel with people knowing each other well and caring for each other. There is high emphasis on overall wellbeing and the school takes a restorative approach to poor behaviour and is now becoming known as one where children with challenging behaviour can do well.

5.2.5 Route 39 is a different choice – the school believes that every child is different and there should be choices available. There has been significant opposition to the school in planning terms (the new build will be in the AONB) and over concerns that the school will draw more aspirational families away from the main community colleges and weaken them. The placement of the school within the AONB is considered important by the school as, given the emphasis on land based study, it is envisaged that the children will be brought up to experience and understand the landscape, to work with it and to become its caretakers in the future.

5.2.6 The school would like to work more closely with the local community, and welcomes anyone who would like to come and find out what they are doing first hand. There is much more information available on their website, referenced above.

5.3 Petroc - Our College of Further Education

5.3.1 Students usually attend Petroc[74] from age 16 but the college also plays a large role in supporting adults 19+ with further education, offering Higher National Certificates (equivalent to a Foundation degree), and Foundation degrees with Honours top-up. Apprenticeships can also be offered to degree level, for example in cyber-security and software engineering. Around 3000 part and full time students currently attend Petroc.

5.3.2 The college was rated good with some outstanding features in November 2015 and had a 99.7% A-level pass rate in summer 2016.

5.3.3 Petroc draws students from Somerset to Bude and from all the rural outlying areas. As part of its work, it connects with all the primary and secondary schools that will

eventually be sending students on to them. It also connects well with local employers and businesses in developing some of the initiatives referred to in section 4.

5.3.4   It also works within the community, promoting social responsibility as well as learning.

One community partnership project has been Project FLAG, which has been helped with funding from North Devon Plus, and has worked with the fishing industry and primary schools to make a fish based recipe book. Children have illustrated the book in arts projects and it has been a real partnership between local industry, schools and the college.

Petroc is also a partner of The National Citizenship Service[75]. This is a programme for 15 to 17 year olds and involves team building, social responsibility, residential and outward bound activities. Young people work with a facilitator to decide what social enterprises or project they should do. Examples include clearing waterways around Whiddon Valley in Barnstaple, repainting and decorating play areas and working in Soup Kitchens. 150 students graduated from the NCS programme from Petroc in September 2016. Parents and carers speak about what a difference it has made and how it has helped the young people see things from a new perspective.

5.3.5   Petroc delivers most of its learning on one of its campuses in Barnstaple and Tiverton, but does offer some courses out in the community. We could explore the possibility of using church facilities in particularly rural areas – Petroc is keen to help raise aspiration and help create opportunities where people feel doors have been closed to them. There is a great need for Maths and English GCSEs – it is possible that if people felt they could access these locally they may be encouraged, with significant effects on future employability.

It is possible churches could also work with Petroc in devising placements or projects in conjunction with the National Citizenship Service programme.

5.4   Aspiration and Poverty

5.4.1   In Section 4 we discussed the skills shortage and relationship to the apparent low levels of aspiration affecting some young people in our schools and how educators and businesses are working together to overcome some of the issues. Upon deeper investigation it is clear that low aspiration is a deep-rooted phenomenon that manifests itself in the skills shortage our businesses experience, but also in ways that pervade the whole of life for some of our families.

5.4.2 Clearly some sense of low expectation is fairly entrenched in our culture. One person spoke of talking about possible careers to school children with the response *"how can I do that? I'm from Torrington – or I'm from Bideford".* The comment *"what can you expect; this is Ilfracombe, Bideford, Torrington …. (insert the name of the community as you will)"* has also been in the past a common refrain and perhaps represents a collective depression with years of poverty and hardship behind people, particularly in the rural areas.

5.4.3 Two types of poverty have been described to me: socio-economic and generational.

Socio-economic poverty can be caused by low pay, redundancy or unemployment. Many people are employed in minimum wage occupations, or are working on zero hours or short term contracts without job security. As a result, it is difficult for many to afford extra opportunities for their children, such as sports clubs, holidays or bicycles. Low pay can also lead to significant stress for the parents resulting in children growing up in stressed families.

Generational poverty is where children are born into a culture of poverty. For example, a couple may live in rented accommodation, with four children. The children are loved but both mum and dad were born to unemployed parents and they are also both unemployed – their whole experience is one of worklessness, low income and precarious housing. Sometimes, if people in this situation do get a job, it can become another source of stress in itself – with little understanding of managing life with work, of getting up on time, lack of routines, handling responsibility and this in itself can lead to feelings of anxiety and panic attacks.

5.4.4 Families living in severe poverty are likely to have a range of issues to deal with. Lack of independent transport, housing that is shared, sub-standard or over-crowded, debt concerns, and difficulty making ends meet. All these can also lead to mental health problems. There may be drug or alcohol issues. There may be relationship issues within the household or even abuse, and children may develop developmental and emotional disorders. Even if a mother no longer uses drugs, for example, it is hard for a child to move on from the experience of feeling unsafe and not looked after. The same applies to experiences of domestic abuse in the home.

5.4.5 It was also said to me *"Families in socio-economic poverty may well be aspirational for their children, wanting them to get back on the ladder, wanting their children to experience what they have not been able to. But families in generational poverty, where unemployment has perhaps been the norm for three generations, may not even recognise the ladder".*

5.4.6   We spoke of a sense of boundedness that can become the shadow side of the rootedness many enjoy in our communities in section 2. Lives can also be bounded by limited experiences. When some five year olds were asked by their head teacher *"Where is far away?"* the response was "Tesco" or "Asda", places on the bus route, and often supermarkets. It's not affordable for a family to go to the Big Sheep for a day out. Without a car, and without good bus links, even though we live in one of the most beautiful areas of the country, it's not even that easy to get out into the countryside for a day.

5.4.7   It was also said to me that children growing up in an inner city, say in London, may be poor, but will still be exposed to big architecture, different clothes and different people. Indeed, some local schools take children to London once a year just to see such things – a different way of life.

5.4.8   It can be difficult to put ourselves in the position of not knowing something – but how can children growing up in "bounded" poverty, with all the lack of access to experience, learning and activities grow up wanting something they have no knowledge or experience of? A highly skilled job in a great organisation?

5.4.9   The Bishop of Derby spoke about tackling poverty and powerlessness in the House of Lords[76] and conversely the power that building confidence and a feeling of belonging can generate. In poverty a lack of money makes it very difficult to get out and partake in social activities and society in general and low self-esteem, anxiety, lack of confidence in ability, due to an interrupted education for example, can further result in feelings of powerlessness.

So, whilst the work of businesses and schools coming together to raise awareness of different career paths and the different job opportunities that are available to them is absolutely vital, we need also to be doing whatever we can to support whole families, to help children access and make the most of their education, to help develop their confidence, and that of their parents, and broaden everybody's horizons and boundaries from as early an age as possible.

5.5   Child and Family Support at School and College

5.5.1   All schools and colleges offer pastoral support to children and parents. For example:

- At St Mary's school in Bideford teachers act in a supporting role to both children and families, depending on the circumstances of the child. Pastoral Care and Learning mentors are provided for those particularly vulnerable children who may have been abused, bereaved, are suffering family breakup, or who have

behavioural issues for whatever reason. This service is confidential for the children and offered by trained counsellors.

- East the Water Community School has a Pastoral Support team which offers support for the whole family and aims to narrow the gap between where the children are and where they should be – helping them to catch up. The Pastoral Care Team are all paid and qualified people, but there are also volunteers attached to the school who may read with children or be a play companion. This one-to-one time can be very beneficial in itself, helping the child to form a good relationship with the volunteer, which may also lead on to a good relationship with the whole family.

- At Petroc, young people can self-refer with mental health or counselling needs. There is also a tutorial system, with every 16 to 19 year old attached to a tutor who has overall care of their time in college and a college "Respect and Behaviour" officer who picks up any emerging issues early on.

5.5.2   Even though a child spends all day in school, the impact of the home environment will always be greater and can undermine the best work that happens in school. Therefore support for the whole family is very important. It is also important to be able to offer support from as young an age as possible.

One school which takes children from age 2 to 11 is finding that some 2 year olds are already a year behind in development. To help tackle this the school is running workshops to model conversation for parents with children so that the learning and language skills the child is gaining in school can continue to be supported at home. The hope is that if a child can be brought back on track at this early age there is a good chance they may continue. Such workshops are also enjoyed by the parents who then also enjoy being at the school.

Another example is mental health. Children as young as six are exhibiting the early signs of depression, which can be spotted by trained teachers, but not all schools have this resource. Children need to be taught how to manage stress, sadness and anger. Once the children have these skills the parent may recognise that the child is doing something different and the skills can be shared in the home. But this work is expensive, deep and time consuming and there are no short cuts.

5.5.3   34% of East the Water School's parents are registered at the local Children's Centre but it is a very long walk and if there is bad weather or the parent is anxious they may not leave the house. The school in some ways is acting as a children's centre as well as a school, with for example a weigh-in clinic once a fortnight with health visitors.

There is also much practical support – for example if a child doesn't bring their PE kit to school they are not allowed to participate in PE and they may become unfit and hate PE. So the school provides spare kit which is kept and washed at school. This takes the tension out of the situation and saves embarrassment.

The school also provides bikes for children to ride on the Tarka Trail, which when they are a few years old are sold at very affordable prices to the families who need them. They have 15 tents and take children camping in groups. They also have a forest area for outdoor environmental learning. This means that when the children are older, they will have confidence to take their own families camping, cycling and surfing, because as the head teacher said – aspiration is about having confidence to do things.

5.5.4   The job of the school is to educate, and as one head teacher said to me *"everything - including bikes, trainers, support – is to allow the child to be educated. The side benefits include increased self-esteem, better mental health, and a feeling that they can achieve."*

5.5.5   For many, the teenage years are a character forming time, and there are many experiences open to Petroc students that help to widen experience and understanding. As part of academic studies, overseas trips may be arranged. Recently, fitness students have travelled to Amsterdam and biologists to London. Young people who have never travelled widely are immediately immersed in a different culture.

5.5.6   Petroc also offer a major programme of support to help young people aged 16 to 24 with learning difficulties into employment. As well as gaining academic qualifications, the students learn life and employment skills. The college arranges workplace internships with work coaches on hand to help deal with any work issues. Petroc is in its third year of working with NDDH in this programme, and also works with local businesses including Brend Hotels and The Calvert Trust in developing skills. From an aspirational point of view, many of these young people may have thought they would not be able to enter the world of employment, but many do go on to find good work with this support.

5.6   Family Support Agencies

5.6.1   The North Devon and Torridge "Troubled Family Support Programme" has merged with Devon's "Early Help" initiative which provides all sorts of support for children[77]. This includes safeguarding, but is also about helping all children to fulfil their true

potential. Early Help is a multi-agency partnership and "early" means when the problem first starts to be seen and in the early years of a child's life.

The Early Help team looks at the needs of the child and also the whole family holistically. If any practitioner (doctor, teacher, classroom assistant, youth service, vicar) notices external signs of a problem or need - whether physical, economic, social or emotional - they can phone the Early Help Team and ask for help. All strategic partners including the voluntary sector are signed up as part of this partnership and in North Devon and Torridge practitioner forums are held once a month to which any practitioner can come, listen to what's happening and highlight any community resources. The church could be involved in this if it is not already.

Some families may hold back from accepting support for fear that it may lead to children being taken away – or may have had a bad experience in the past. Admitting help is needed can be difficult for many and sometimes people don't feel they can ask or don't know what is available. The idea of Early Help is to "build a team around the child" and it is very important to say that any help is offered consensually and all contact is with permission.

5.6.2   To be classified as a "Troubled Family" and qualify for extra support, two out of six difficult behaviours need to be present. Further information on the programme can be found here[78]. Families in Early Help generally meet at least two of the criteria and so are eligible for troubled families support as well.

5.6.3   My contributor in this area said *"Small positives are really important. A lot of the success is down to the relationships the practitioner has with the particular family. If one offer of help is turned down we need to keep trying perhaps through a different person."*

5.6.4   Financial support of various kinds is also needed. Lower benefits are a reality and the Benefit Cap has a huge impact on families, but help and support is available. Christians Against Poverty[79] (CAP) offer good debt support and also run CAP money courses. Citizens Advice[80] can offer a whole range of advice and support.

5.6.5   I have been told that there is much less support available generally for primary school children aged between five and eleven. For children up to five years there is "Early Help" and the Children's Centres. For "Eleven Plus" there is a family intervention team. Homestart is primarily for younger children. For primary children it is usually the schools that have to provide the support but this is a variable provision due to the availability of budgets and the resources of the individual schools. There are so many calls on the limited funding and hard decisions have to

be made as to how to spend it for best overall support of the children.

A child may be flagged as having a need at home but is "ok" at school at the moment. Family support at home is not usual for 5 to 11 year olds, but left untended the problem may become worse and eventually have a negative impact educationally as well. The "Family Intervention Team" can offer some support but mostly at the upper end of the age range. In some areas, but not all, there are "Parent Support Advisors" who offer floating support which can be especially important during the holiday times when schools are closed. Where this provision does not exist, this is a possible area for church support – see section 5.8 below.

5.7   Youth Service Support

5.7.1   Austerity has caused reductions in the Devon Youth Service – there used to be more than one hundred youth centres in Devon, but now there are only eight.

5.7.2   The Youth Service has been "spun out" from Devon County Council and the tender to provide services has been granted to a "staff mutual" formed by the staff of the existing youth service who bid for the work. From January 2017 the Devon Youth Service became DYS Space Ltd[81]. The preparation and tender process was a time of great uncertainty for the staff, but also a time of real passion and enthusiasm and really helped to focus people's minds on what they want to offer. A strong desire was to save the ongoing voluntary engagement with the young people rather than becoming an agency that intervenes only when something has gone wrong.

5.7.3   The new service will be funded for 3 years by DCC but in this time it will also need to work out other funding streams. However, becoming a separate organisation raises the possibility of alternative sources of funding from grants and other charitable means. There may need to be a charge for some referrals from other agencies, for example.

One danger of the "Mutual" that has been identified is that it could become funding led – an issue for many third sector organisations. However, as was said to me *"we are aiming to hold close to what we really believe in in terms of care for the young people – that is developing relationships and the uniqueness of our training – no-one works with young people like youth workers – working with young people long term and becoming part of their daily lives"*.

As a "Mutual" the service also hopes to be able to offer new services – for example school holidays can be particular pressure points for families. At present there is no

funding for the youth service to offer additional holiday activities, but as a "Mutual" they may be able to find new sources of funding.

5.7.4   We have youth hubs in Bideford and Barnstaple. Each hub offers three evenings of generic youth work and 1:1 referrals. These referrals are free at the point of need.

The youth service works with all and any young people and not only those who fall into a particular group or category of need. "Generic" youth work is important because young people are already in a place of support should a problem occur and find they need more specialist support. Often issues can be dealt with before they become too serious. Generic youth work includes information and discussion on sexual health, cooking, life skills, sports, education, jobs, developing a healthy lifestyle, information and help with housing, homelessness, child sexual exploitation, drugs and legal highs – in fact all issues affecting our young people.

1:1 work can include in depth work with individual young people in particular problem areas such as relationships or education difficulties.

The youth services offers specific support for young care leavers, young people in care and young LGBT people and some outreach work with mobile units meeting young people on their own terms. It also acts as an advocate for young people's services across the county, for example in the provision of specialist mental health services.

The young people are also trained to run sessions and activities for themselves.

5.7.5   The Youth Service also supports voluntary youth groups and activities in our villages, providing help with training, grants, health and safety, governance and safeguarding processes and procedures.

5.7.6   The service works with many partners through formal hubs, such as Early Years, and the police, social care and housing to offer co-ordinated support for young people. It also works closely with VOYC Devon which is a well-respected specialist infrastructure network that exists to champion and strengthen children and young people organisations in Devon[82].

5.7.7   In conclusion, the following heartfelt words were offered *"It is really inspiring to see the progress of the young people. And they have such resilience - to bereavement, family breakdown, poverty, being young carers, school difficulties – many things that adults couldn't cope with. If people knew what many young people were dealing with they would be amazed".*

For a full range of services offered please see the DYS Space Ltd website referenced above.

5.8   Church Support for Schools, Families and Children

5.8.1   The provision of education has been a core Church of England activity since the early 19th century, [83] initially through the formation of "National Schools" for the poor in England and Wales. Other denominations, notably Methodists and Roman Catholics, have also seen education as vital and have a long history of provision[84] [85].

5.8.2   For many people, education is the key to opening the door leading out from long standing poverty and low aspiration, to wider experience, better paid and more fulfilling job opportunities and increased well-being in so many ways. But if children are not able to access their education, for whatever reason, and are not able to benefit from what dedicated teachers and support staff are able to provide, this route to greater wellbeing remains out of reach.

Education, and doing all that we can to support families and help children to enjoy and access their education freely, is one of the most important activities we, as churches, could engage in.

5.8.3   We need to stress how much is already being done in this area.

- Many churches have good links with their local schools, both church based and community schools, and provide assemblies and involvement in general RE, volunteers who read with children, serve on the governing body and offer after school or breakfast clubs.

- There are also examples of school uniform "swap shops", holiday clubs, the provision of meals during school holidays, support for the PTA and other joint activities. For pre-school age children there are parent and toddler groups, music and play groups with space for the parents to relax and find someone to listen to any concerns they may have.

- Many churches are also actively involved in poverty alleviation, including the provision of food banks, financial and budgetary support, cooking and other basic household skills and making available white goods and furniture at affordable prices. There are also still some charitable funds that can provide for crisis needs and basic items to support a child in education.

- In Ilfracombe the "Street Pastor" scheme has been expanded to include "School Pastors" with support for students with particular problems[86]. The "school" or "college" pastor scheme is becoming quite well known with benefits for overall behaviour as well as one-to-one support.

- Some activities, such as Messy church, combine a meal, craft and music activities around a particular theme, with a short act of worship or bible story. One of my contributors said *"Messy church is great – but is there also a need for the "messy" without the "church"? Somewhere for families to come together for activities and a shared meal but without any "church" – just providing what is needed as a service".*

  There is room for all approaches as appropriate to the situation – it is always the people's needs that we need to be cognisant of.

5.8.4 Though many activities may be available, there are many reasons why the poorest in our communities may not participate in them. These may include lack of confidence in meeting new people, what to say, what to wear, how to behave, general anxiety and other mental health issues, not being used to being present at particular times and places, not having transport – or a long walk in the rain. And sometimes, no matter how warm and welcoming we try to be, the cultural gap in understanding what life is like for each other in our different circumstances seems too wide to bridge.

Putting on an activity, even in the right place and at a good time, may not attract people unless a relationship is already in existence.

5.8.5 In Devon, the (C of E) Diocesan Board of Education is focused on raising standards, especially within church schools, but also on looking critically at the wider issues involved in education. The question is being asked *"is there more we could do to actively engage with the wider context in which the school is based, with the aim of improving our children's access to learning?"*

5.8.6 The obvious place to begin is to ask our schools, where we haven't already, what support they might value from their community. One person suggested *"A whole texture of links can be built at different levels – perhaps there is expertise with music, art or sports that could be shared, there may be practical support with reading or playing, with help on school trips and outside learning opportunities – for example".*

Some examples and opportunities for involvement with our schools include:

- Church members volunteering in schools, to read or play with children, can free up the time of a teaching assistant, and over time can perhaps develop into a trusting relationship between the child, the volunteer and the whole family.

- Volunteering with organisations such as Homestart and Children's Centres as well as in school is an excellent way of offering support to whole families.

- School holiday times may represent some of the most challenging for those on low incomes. Knowing how to entertain children on a budget, providing extra food, especially for those in receipt of free school meals during term time, and child care, are all potential pinch points. One contributor told me that a school they were involved with experienced considerable anger from pupils after school holidays – why? *"Because you abandoned us"* was the answer. Children can often be left in awful situations without school.

- The provision of family support workers, employed by the school, able to visit and support families in their own homes, offers many benefits. Relationships of trust are built over time and many, sometimes small, issues can be dealt with that may help keep a family afloat and avoid particular danger points for the children.

  However, school budgets are very tight and thus the availability of such posts is variable. Also, smaller schools with small cohorts are unlikely to have the number of pupils with such needs to warrant a post.

  Churches often employ youth workers, sometimes across a group of churches to share the cost. In the same vein, it could be worth exploring, with schools, the DBE, and churches working together across an area, for example in a deanery or a district, the possibility of church(es) partnering with their local school(s) to at least part fund a family support worker, who could perhaps work across a number of schools.

- All schools have PTAs and raise funds for extra activities and support – we can all support our local school fete, quiz nights and so on.

- In many small communities it is not just the school that is threatened but also the church – a wider question is to ask how we can work together to sustain a presence in those communities?

5.9   Summary

5.9.1   As we have seen throughout this report, so many areas of life are connected – and education is at the very heart of this network. Education is cited as the main way out of poverty and the greatest reducer of health and social inequalities. It enables children to learn, to widen their horizons, to develop as rounded people, to make good and lasting relationships, to learn life skills, and to move into higher education, or other forms of training, and into secure, purposeful employment. Education and business are intimately connected in helping to develop the skills needed for our economy. And in order to access education well, people need stable housing, an appropriate level of income, transport and well parents.

5.9.2   In section 4 we discussed how businesses and education are working together to help raise the aspiration levels in our school children, to showcase careers on offer and participate in work experience and apprentice schemes.

At a deeper level, those families who are struggling need to be supported to raise their eyes above their sometimes low horizon. There are many organisations and services already very active in this area – the Early Years Partnership, the Children's Centres, Homestart, the Youth Service, Social Care – to name but a very few.

There is much the church is also doing by way of work with children and families - volunteers working in schools to help with reading, after school and holiday clubs, poverty alleviation work and debt advice, for example. Through the Diocesan Board of Education the Church of England in Devon is also a major provider of education and churches offer spiritual and pastoral support. By working with and listening to the needs of our schools and our families, it is likely that we could identify additional areas of support, which may help in the overall efforts to raise children's horizons, help them to fulfil their potential and to break some of the cycles of poverty and deprivation some of our people find themselves in. It would be good to explore the possibility of at least part funding a family support worker to work with schools across a group of communities.

5.9.3   It is known that the best outcomes are when support can be offered at the youngest possible age and also that it is the family situation that will have the most impact on a child's education, even though the child spends many hours in school.

5.9.4   There are no fast answers – and like most things, change hinges on the development of trusting, consistent and supportive relationships.

6 Housing, Community Safety, Devolution

6.1 Housing

6.1.1 Housing, as everywhere, is a major and complex issue in north Devon. One of our MPs told me that around 30% of his constituents' queries relate to planning and housing. We have also seen how much impact housing has on health outcomes (both physical and mental), educational attainment, people's finances and their ability to build a stable home, "belong" and put down roots in a community.

The Bishop of St Albans summed this up in a debate in the House of Lords[87]. He said *"Without the security of an established base, the chances of holding down sustainable employment, of developing a stable family life or of people establishing themselves within the support networks of a local community are greatly diminished. A stable home creates the platform from which other causes of poverty can be properly tackled, but this stability is on the decline. House prices are rising faster than average income, partly due to the fact that we are simply not building enough new housing. The amount of new social housing is falling, just as private rents are rising well beyond the reach of many low-income families. Short-term, insecure tenancies are fast becoming the norm, while local authorities are finding it increasingly difficult to provide stable housing for vulnerable families."*

6.1.2 Nationally, insufficient housing stock is the result of people living longer, a higher birth rate, immigration, and with family shapes changing and many more people living alone there is also a need for different types of housing than may be available. In the past, the "Regional Spatial Strategy" specified how many houses would be built in each region of the country. This approach was revoked in 2010 and replaced with the Local Plan system. The Local Plan must be able to demonstrate a five year land supply sufficient to satisfy local area housing needs. Thus, instead of national government, the local council decides how many houses should be built, but the planning inspectorate can challenge this if they don't think it is enough.

6.1.3 The joint North Devon and Torridge Local Plan has been somewhat delayed, but is in the final stages of examination and due for adoption in summer 2017. Further information about the Local Plan can be found here[88] (the Plan offers a wealth of background information on the economy, our demographics - now and projected - sustainable development, our environment, rural strategies as well as all the background to our housing needs). It is vital that the Local Plan is completed because though at the present time councils can refuse planning permission, without a local

plan in place this can often be overturned on appeal to the planning inspectorate.

6.1.4   As with most things, balancing the need for new housing, without spoiling our beautiful environment and negatively affecting quality of life is one of the key questions. New housing means more traffic and more pressure on existing infrastructure including hospitals and schools – though in rural areas new housing can be the catalyst for more children attending a local school. But, as we know, our economy does need to grow and we need affordable housing for our younger people in rural areas particularly, so at least some new housing is needed. The challenge is where to put the new houses as new developments are always objected to, even when existing residents understand the need for them. Some people have specifically moved to our area to get away from built-up areas.

6.1.5   As well as the major development sites, smaller, community based projects are also possible. Devon Communities Together has done much work in the past around a small number of rural exception sites where affordable housing can be developed for local people.

The High Bickington Community Property Trust *"is interesting because it goes beyond affordable housing. Work spaces, health and recreation facilities, community woodland and a new Community Centre are all included in the project"*[89].

An article in The Telegraph[90] in December 2016 suggested *"small church-led projects could make a significant impact on the need for homes in rural areas".* The church does own land in Devon, though most is used for agricultural purposes, but this may be an avenue worth exploring in some specific instances.

6.1.6   For social housing, Devon Home Choice[91] has replaced the housing register for both North Devon and Torridge districts. Rather than the old system of a housing waiting list, people applying for social housing are placed in one of five bands, A to E, according to need.

Band A need would signify someone had a housing need because of a risk to their life. This may be because they are currently in hospital and are unable to return to their previous accommodation. In the past they may have been looked after by a community hospital, but now there are fewer bed spaces available. Housing and/or Social Care need to find accommodation and there is often a debate between these two agencies as to the most appropriate route forward.

Someone in Band B would be at risk of becoming homeless or being severely overcrowded in their current accommodation. Band C would mean a family were

lacking one bedroom. The full criteria for the different bands can be found here[92].

Once one's application to Devon Home Choice has been accepted, and the person has been placed in a Band, they are eligible to "bid" for properties that meet the criteria they have been assessed for. Anyone in Band C bidding for a home is only likely to be successful perhaps in a rural area where there are many less bidders. For example, on August 22nd 2016 there were 5 properties available for bidding in North Devon, and the lowest number of bids was 35 for a two bedroom property in South Molton. In Torridge there were 8 properties available with the lowest number bids at 18 – for a two bed house in Petersmarland or a two bed flat in Bideford.

6.1.6   With the demand for social housing in northern Devon so far exceeding supply people are advised to look for private sector housing but this is generally more expensive and less secure than social rented housing. Tenancies are usually shorthold for six months after which they move onto a rolling agreement, but people can be evicted usually with two months' notice. Private rented housing can also be difficult to access for people who rely on benefits, as some landlords will specify "no benefit tenants".

The demand for housing is highest in our towns and therefore landlords can ask for higher rent. Private rented houses are sometimes available in our villages but lack of public transport and access to other networks including health care and schools is off-putting for many, especially those without a car.

This referenced BBC article[93] offers a very good analysis of the subject and includes a useful "lookup" tool to find rental costs as a multiple of local average earnings by district. The figures for our area are:

- *In Torridge the median annual gross salary is £23,561, leaving £1,599 a month after tax and National Insurance contributions. Experts recommend spending no more than 30% of this on housing, which would be £480. An average studio flat costs £332 a month. There was no average rent available for a room in a house or flat share. A one-bedroom property costs about £421 a month while a two-bedroom home is about £528.*

- *In North Devon the median annual gross salary is £23,234, leaving £1,581 a month after tax and National Insurance contributions. Experts recommend spending no more than 30% of this on housing, which would be £474. An average studio flat costs £366 a month. Renting a room in a shared property costs on average £342 a month. A one-bedroom property costs about £443 a month while a two-bedroom home is about £573.*

6.1.7 Both North Devon[94] and Torridge[95] District Councils offer housing support. The information below is based on discussions with TDC personnel. The issues would be broadly similar in both districts and the two departments also work closely together.

- TDC housing staff generally see people face to face to offer advice and explore housing options, but they are increasingly able to provide help and advice via the telephone so that people do not need to come into Bideford unnecessarily. Though this approach was originally intended as a cost saving for TDC it has been beneficial to customers and it is hoped that more people in rural areas will be able to be contacted in this way.

- The biggest barrier for people accessing private rented housing is the need to provide the deposit and rent in advance, especially as increasingly landlords are asking up to 2 months' rent in advance rather than the previous norm of one month. Subject to affordability, the rental level and the suitability of the property, TDC are now able to make loans available for this purpose and often then act as the deposit bond holder and check the tenant in and out of the property on behalf of the landlord. However, if people need to borrow large sums, and perhaps have not been able to pay off the first loan before moving to another property, then the debt can build up.

- There is considerable emphasis on the prevention of homelessness by working with people to help them avoid eviction wherever possible.

   Torridge has two homeless hostels – Barton House and Cromlech House which can act as temporary accommodation. Here a household would have one room, where all would need to sleep, with shared kitchen, bathroom and toilet facilities, so this option is far from ideal. TDC also have some private rented properties on long leases that can be used as temporary accommodation – but finding even temporary accommodation for a family of, say, 9 people, would prove very challenging.

   The temporary accommodation is nearly always full – at the time of my meeting with the TDC housing officer, only one room was available. An eighty percent occupancy rate is considered ideal, to enable running costs to be covered, but also to have room available for emergencies.

   The Streetwise Project[96] hosted by Encompass Southwest[97] (formerly Barnstaple Poverty Action Group) and funded jointly by TDC and NDC aims to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping among young people aged 16 or 17, or 18 to

21 if they have been 'in care'. The project is targeted at young people who are either at risk of becoming homeless or who are homeless or sleeping rough.

Churches have also offered support for many years to those who are homeless or find themselves in similar need. The Harbour Project in Bideford[98], The Freedom Centre[99] in Barnstaple and the Salvation Army[100] in Barnstaple, who have, with North Devon Council, been providing the cold weather provision for homeless people this past winter, are current examples.

6.1.9 The New Homes Bonus[101] is money paid by central government to local authorities to reflect and incentivise housing growth in their areas. In Torridge this has been converted into grants[102] for local communities. These amount to £10,000 per council ward, with a further pot of £200,000 available for communities to bid into for larger projects.

6.1.10 The 2016 Housing and Planning Act has been controversial not least in extending the "right to buy" policy to tenants of housing associations, though this is voluntary on the part of the housing association, depending on sufficient sales of higher value properties to cover the costs of discounts. The concern is that the policy will result in even less social housing being available for families to live in. Housing sold is expected to be replaced, but according to the NHF (National Housing Federation) this has not been happening, and since 2012 only 46% of houses sold have been replaced, not least because councils cannot make available sufficient land.[103]

6.2   Policing and Community Safety

6.2.1 In general we are fortunate to live in a low crime area. Detailed crime statistics for 2016 can be found on the Devon and Cornwall Police website[104] with further interactive maps and neighbourhood information available via the Police UK site[105]. The website of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall[106] gives access to the Police and Crime Plan. These sites also contain much useful information on local policing priorities and advice on avoiding crime.

6.2.2 Like all our statutory agencies, policing is struggling to meet demand.

- Mental health is growing as an area of work. People who go missing with mental health problems, including dementia, can find themselves in dangerous situations and the police may need to help return the person to safety. The police also receive many repeat telephone calls from people with psychological problems or who are lonely. Place of Safety provision for people with mental health issues coming into police care is available 9 to 5 Monday to Friday – but

new people cannot be admitted after 2 pm at NDDH. If local provision is not available then people have to be taken to either Exeter or Torbay, which uses a lot of police time.

- There has been a great reduction in dwelling burglaries and car break-ins because of better management of offenders and preventative work. But, there is much more online fraud and sexualisation of children. The police have been working closely with schools and antisocial behaviour is reducing.

- Domestic abuse is higher in north Devon than other parts of the county and the police believe only the tip of the iceberg is actually reported. Further information on what constitutes domestic abuse and how to report it can be found here[107],[108].

- The key word for the police is "demand reduction" and that means prevention and appropriate support for those with mental health and other "non-police" needs, so that they can concentrate on work only they are able to do.

6.2.3   I was particularly interested to find out about levels of modern slavery and human trafficking in northern Devon. It is by nature extremely difficult to have any true understanding of these crimes as, like domestic abuse, they are largely hidden and the people concerned are kept under tight control.

However, the police did tell me that while most victims' lives are controlled for almost all their time, they are often allowed to attend churches on Sundays. This means that it would be helpful for churches to have an awareness of the forms that human trafficking can take, and the possible signs to look out for. If someone were able to come to church, they would then be met not only with a safe place for a couple of hours, but the possibility of appropriate support also.

There are some areas of work where trafficked people may be more likely to be employed. For women these include nail bars and for men hand car washes, both of which present opportunities for low pay and cash based work. Increased awareness and an understanding of appropriate supportive questions that can be asked may be helpful, but need care.

The Second Estates Church Commissioner Caroline Spelman outlines in a parliamentary answer what the Church of England is doing in response to this issue[109]. The church could easily organise an awareness raising workshop for anyone who wanted to attend in northern Devon and there are many web based resources

available on this subject. This is the link for the relevant Church of England resources page[110].

6.2.4 There are various ways the church and police may join forces, especially in the countryside:

- Community engagement, especially in rural areas, can be challenging for the police. Attendance at council meetings has been withdrawn in many cases as such work is more about public reassurance than crime reduction and the police need to concentrate on essential activities. It may be helpful for churches to get to know their local PCSOs to see where there may be opportunities for engagement. For example, where a parish has a coffee morning or lunch club, there could be a standing invitation to the PCSO which may help them to identify people who might be vulnerable and offer support.

- With funding from the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Devon and Cornwall Police have appointed two people to work as Faith Volunteer Co-ordinators, linking the work of police and faith communities.

- The Police are major supporters of "Redeeming our Communities" (ROC)[111] a Christian charity focusing on partnership working between churches and the statutory agencies helping to provide community-based services often not available due to cuts in services.

- Some discussion focusing on the challenges and opportunities of churches and statutory agencies working together in a rural setting has taken place through this project and it is hoped we can follow this up through the socio-economic issues and community engagement group of the Devon Churches Rural Forum (to be convened shortly).

- The pastoral care of those working and living in rural areas is significant in terms of lessening the likelihood of people coming to harm through mental ill health, criminality or going missing.

- It is also vital to keep raising awareness of online and telephone fraud, which can devastate lives, especially for older people, and as churches we may be well placed to help with this.

- Street Pastors are much appreciated by police as their presence is proven to reduce tension and anti-social behaviour in the night-time economy, and also to keep people safe. Work is underway to identify even closer links.

- There are opportunities to come alongside people in recovery from addiction or perhaps in support groups for sex offenders to help them not to re-offend. These and mental health support, are very specialist areas for volunteers to work in, so if the churches were to explore how they could offer support in this area, professional and specialist training would definitely be needed.

- Community Chaplaincy is also very important – people from the Christian community walking alongside people – perhaps being involved with children and young people in trouble, ex-offenders, family mentoring or people in recovery. Police and social services bring expertise to help people learn appropriate mentoring skills. The website of South West Community Chaplaincy gives further details[112].

- The police, like other public sector agencies, would like a better point of contact between the churches and statutory services. It is believed that in Dawlish all social action engaged in by the churches has come together under one umbrella organisation which includes Christians against Poverty, Street Pastors, but which also acts as a point of contact for the police in the town.

  In Barnstaple and Bideford we have Christians Together organisations which could act as single points of contact. The websites listed in Appendix 2 offer directories of contacts for individual parishes and churches. One of the great strengths of the church is that it is locally based and locally run – but this doesn't make it the easiest organisation to communicate with! Further thought needed!

6.3 Devolution

A proposal for a devolved authority covering Devon and Somerset has been ongoing throughout this project. This is a process that is developing and changing all the time, so it is not possible to give a definitive statement on the subject – however, updates can be found on here[113]. There have been some benefits of the process already, through developing closer working between Torridge and North Devon districts and the Exmoor National Park Authority. A strong voice for northern Devon has been made possible through this alliance.

It is hoped that devolution may bring greater resources to northern Devon. It will not be an extra tier of government but a combined authority where all areas will come together to agree fairer funding for the different parts of the region.

7 Farming and the Environment

7.1 Farming Overview

7.1.1 Farming provides the background to life in north Devon. Its importance cannot be overestimated. It has shaped our landscape and our communities for centuries. In our more rural areas, but also in our towns, extended families provide a network of belonging and mutual support that underpins our culture. Farming also supports a network of suppliers including builders, various contractors, vehicle repair shops and so on.

7.1.2 Farmers are at the forefront of practical care in our village communities – as well as producing our food – from cutting village hedges, to pulling cars out of snow, transporting people in flood or bad weather, applying their heavy machinery to jobs that need doing in our parks and churchyards and allowing their farms to be used for village and church events. They also care for our countryside with formal environmental schemes, and in caring sustainably for the land in food production.

7.1.3 Farming, as a business, is affected by the weather, animal diseases, national and international politics and subsidy regimes, currency fluctuations, world-wide supply and demand for food and dairy products, cost and availability of inputs such as feed, machinery and fertiliser, new technology and the availability of broadband and mobile infrastructure, and changing working methods leading to more isolated working.

We might think of farms as being the epitome of the "local" – based on the solidity of the land and with generations living in the same locality - yet they are connected intimately to, and are affected by, people and events the world over, most of which are completely outside their control. Business forecasting skills are as important as good husbandry.

7.1.4 The Bishop of St Albans gave a speech in The Lords in July 2016[114] highlighting some of the issues relating to farming and the rural economy, especially in a post Brexit situation. He said *"A thriving domestic food industry is a common public good and provides the bedrock from which we can secure affordable and nutritious food for everyone in our society. Farming of course plays a central role in the rural economy, providing jobs and bringing money and services into rural areas".* He also spoke about various needs: to deliver food security, to encourage and support younger

people into agriculture, to continue to have access to high quality agricultural research and maintain sufficient access to labour.

7.1.5   Broadband and mobile coverage is especially important for the farming community, who are by definition in rural areas often with limited coverage. Farmers need to complete complex government information forms online, and also need to be able to communicate via mobile when on their farm. The NFU has produced a very useful report detailing the issues and solutions[115].

7.1.6   As a country, we produce about 66% of the food we need. How much we need to produce, and at what price - in money, environmental and animal welfare terms - is at the heart of the debate about farming in our country, especially post Brexit.

7.2   2016 Harvest

7.2.1   Details of the 2016 harvest illustrate some of the challenges of farming:

- The silage yield was excellent, but slightly below average energy content due to dry weather in early May after a wet and cold April, meaning the sugars were not able to fully develop in the grass.
- The dry May, followed by wet June and dry July, led to patchy yields of wheat and barley – but with good quality as the grain was harvested dry and the need for on-farm grain drying has been small.
- The winter rain affected the sheep farmers with the sheep treading the grass into the fields leaving none to eat so pasture needed to be supplemented with hay and corn and in some cases the sheep had to be brought in – all of which increases the cost of production.
- As farmers have had to diversify their businesses in order to support their income, the harvest has also diversified. Many farms now offer accommodation for holiday makers to supplement income while others have turned to alternative crops.
- The use of the land for the production of renewable energy, with wind and solar power being the most popular, has offered some farms a financial lifeline. Mobile digesters are also now available for farmers to turn slurry into electricity. It is now possible for a farm's slurry to supply all the farm's electricity and heat the home and often supply back into the grid as well.

7.2.2   In financial terms:

- The price for cereals is low at present due to global over supply and is effectively the same price in real terms as it was in 1986. By the autumn of 2016, the sheep price had improved around 10% since the Brexit referendum largely due to the weaker pound, as a great deal of our lamb is exported.
- Beef prices are up and down but improved due to currency movements in autumn 2016.
- Store cattle prices generally increase in early December, but didn't in 2016 – possibly indicative of further tightening cash flow.
- Prices for organic meat are doing better – one farmer had received the best price ever for a lamb in 2016.
- The milk price has caused extremely significant hardship for many of our dairy farmers this past year, both here in northern Devon – a high dairy farming area – and across the country.

7.3   Some Farming Issues

7.3.1   1 in 4 of all farmers are living below the poverty line – and though we often focus on dairy farmers because of the price of milk, three quarters of upland farmers have made a loss on lamb production, for example.

7.3.2   The price of milk varies dairy by dairy and with each particular contract. Some milk which is used in more specialist ways is paid a small premium per litre and organic milk prices can be much higher. But overall, the price obtained by farmers for milk is generally below the cost of production. Prices dropped from a high of around 32 to 33 pence per litre to around 17 to 20 pence per litre at their lowest for our area.

The low price is due to a global over-production of milk but prices are beginning to creep up. The spot price of milk rose in autumn 2016 to twice that of the wholesale prices – and though farmers are contracted at these wholesale prices – hopefully if this trend continues contract prices will increase. But the market remains very volatile indeed.

A significant drop in the production of milk is needed, even though there has already been a decrease of around 10% in the past year. Production is likely to drop further – but it will not be easy to get back should the situation change and more milk be needed. There is also the continual question of food security and whether we want home grown or imported produce.

The dairy farms that are surviving include:

- The larger farms where unit costs of production can be lower.
- Those who produce milk to a particular quality – for example a high buttermilk, high protein content, or to a more exacting cleanliness level for longer shelf life.
- Organic farms.
- Those farms that are smaller but have been in the family for several generations and which employ no-one and have lower overheads – but there will not be high profits and families may be dependent upon tax credits.

In some cases, vouchers for Food Banks have even been needed.

7.3.3   With ongoing good biosecurity, and in areas where the wildlife TB reservoir is reduced, the number of farm reactors is reducing, but TB remains another massive issue for our dairy farmers.

Once a farm has a reactor there is an immediate movement restriction placed on the farm. Although farmers receive compensation for animals killed as a result of TB, the movement restrictions mean that milk production is severely interrupted, as re-stocking of the herd cannot begin again until sixty days after all animals in the herd have tested clear. This can put an intolerable strain on farms' cash flow – with no milk produced there is no income. The distress of losing animals in a carefully developed herd is also heartbreaking. There remains considerable controversy about the methods that will best address the situation, which has been highlighted again recently as part of our area has been designated a badger cull area.

7.3.4   In 2016, as well as the milk price and continuing hardship caused by TB, there were serious delays in the single farm payment systems resulting in interruptions to cash flows with knock on effects to creditors and suppliers.

Banks are tiding people over whose payments are late or wrong – but, as one contributor put it *"they do not charge 0% interest! Also as banks have changed, a personal relationship with the local bank manager is a thing of the past which makes it less easy to explain problems"*.

On the positive side, the 2017 farm payment has been increased some 16% as it is set in euros and the drop in the value of the pound post Brexit has increased its value in £ terms.

7.3.5   The drop in the value of the pound has been good for exports, and for the single farm payment, but also means that imported feed, machinery and fertilizer costs are

increasing. However, a great deal of food – and milk – is imported. If the pound stays high, the demand for more locally sourced food may increase, and prices may rise.

7.3.6 Many farmers are surviving by reducing their incomes and working alone – but this can lead to increased working isolation. More farmers or their family members are working off-farm just to retain a viable income – sometimes working in full-time day occupations and running the farm by evening and night. Sometimes the farm house itself is sold as it can be expensive to keep up – but this can be heartbreaking for farmers for whom it may have been a family home for several generations.

7.4 Support for Farmers

7.4.1 It is, so sadly, known that suicide has a higher prevalence among farmers than many other occupations. There are many reasons for this – isolation, financial struggles, loss of stock to disease, and all the difficulties that afflict any other family in terms of relationship issues and so on.

7.4.2 Farmers are much more likely to be working on their own than in the past, and isolation at work is a real issue. Devon's Young Farmers Clubs[116] are marvellously supportive, but membership ceases once a person is over the age of 26. Farmers are thus encouraged to develop good networks both of farming and non-farming friends to help militate against the isolation.

7.4.3 As well as Young Farmers, support for farmers is available through the NFU[117], [118], the Farming Community Network[119], [120] (FCN) and the Rural Chaplaincy Service[121].

Professor John Wibberley of the FCN says *"The FCN consists of a team of Christian farming people who offer to 'walk with' farming people in trouble, of any faith or none, seeking to bring practical relief. FCN also has a presence with its chaplaincy team at livestock markets and agricultural shows. As well as helping to address family and farm business crises, FCN also facilitates longer-term issues such as youth in farming (and has its local office now at Devon YFC's new HQ in Cheriton Bishop), succession planning and issues such as retirement and rural dementia. FCN quite simply seeks to 'be there to care' for farming folks' well-being."*

The FCN provides visits and support through specially trained volunteers. It would be helpful for our local FCN co-ordinator (see endnote 116 above) to be aware of contacts for parish based Pastoral Care Teams who could work with the FCN to support local farmers. The FCN can also work with parish teams to increase awareness of farming issues, arrange farm visits for new clergy and those who want to find out more about farming, and also visits to the Exeter livestock market.

Working closely with the FCN, Andy Jerrard of the Methodist church is the livestock market chaplaincy co-ordinator and rural chaplain across Devon and wider, making farm visits, supporting farmers confidentially, and also helping to keep farming issues to the fore in our churches. Market chaplaincy is described by Andy as *"Holy hanging around!"* and it is a great way to get to know and build relationships with farmers. He also comments that farmers react differently to clergy, for example, when in their own farm-based workplace, which adds a new dimension for the clergy also. New people are needed to help support market chaplaincy on a rota basis. See endnote "117" above for contact details.

7.4.4   Even though we live in a predominantly rural area, in some cases, we as shoppers, have become disconnected from how and by whom our food is produced. If we become disconnected from where our food comes from, we cannot contribute meaningfully to debate about its production, nor support those who produce it for us. It has been my experience that people are really interested in a proper "farming report" at harvest festivals in some of our less rural churches, because not many people know the farmers directly. Issues such as that of milk pricing are well known, because of national campaigning, but knowledge of wider farming issues is sometimes sparse. Through the Devon Churches Rural Forum[122] (website under construction) we are hoping to be able to disseminate quarterly bulletins on our farming life. Farm visits, as discussed above, can also be arranged for churches.

7.5   Environmental Overview

7.5.1   Devon's natural environment is beautiful, our great asset and something never to be taken for granted. It provides us with food, fuel, pollination, flood control, recreation, business and tourism opportunities, and even a "Natural Health Service".

7.5.2   There are a large number of groups and organisations working to protect and enhance our environment at all levels. There are local branches of national charities, regional trusts, county and sub county wide partnerships and of course, very local village groups. Natural Devon[123] brings together those interested in protecting and enhancing our environment for the benefit of people, wildlife and businesses. A helpful list of these can be found on the "Forum" page of the Natural Devon website – the range of interests is very wide[124]. Partnership working in the environmental sector is well established and works very well.

7.5.3   One of the five aims of the Anglican Communion (the Church of England for our purposes) is *"To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew*

the life of the earth". The churches in Devon are active in environmental matters, notably through Devon Churches Green Action (DCGA)[125], and Eco-church South West and the Shrinking the Footprint campaign[126]. For the Church of England in Devon environmental matters are co-ordinated by the Church and Society team in Exeter[127] .

The churches also work in partnership with other groups – for example DCGA and the Devon Wildlife Trust are hosting a joint conference on "Living Churchyards" in May 2017. It may be appropriate to seek formal membership of the Natural Devon Partnership to work even more closely with other organisations.

7.5.4   The aims of the major environmental partnerships tend to be threefold, focusing not only on the environment per se, but also on developing sustainable businesses and on the wellbeing of people, particularly through connecting people with nature. This fits well with the churches' concerns.

7.6   The North Devon Biosphere and the Devon Wildlife Trust

7.6.1   There are so many environmental organisations it would have been impossible to cover them all. These two organisations were kind enough to contribute to this project. I know others would have also, had time allowed.

7.6.2   The North Devon Biosphere Reserve is itself a partnership[128]. Our Biosphere Reserve is one of 669 UNESCO Biosphere Reserves[129] located in 120 different countries and was the first of six designated in the UK – it's official - we can truly say we have a world class environment to live in, enjoy and care for.

The Biosphere Reserve is very much concerned with the well-being of both people and the natural environment, and its mission is to be a model for sustainable living in the 21st century. It operates through a board which provides strategy and overall direction and a series of formal working groups to tackle particular work areas in more detail. These working groups will include people from the different partner organisations and projects may be carried out by partners working individually or together, supported by the small core team of Biosphere staff. The wide range of inspiring projects they are involved in can be found on their website.

It would be interesting to explore, what, as churches in northern Devon, we may be able to offer to the partnership. This may include a presence in every parish (buildings and people) with a depth of knowledge of our rural communities, existing

and potential small scale church environmental projects and our networks for gathering and sharing information.

7.6.3   The Devon Wildlife Trust[130] (DWT) manages wildlife nature reserves across the whole county, including several in northern Devon, as well as several projects.

One project of particular note is the Greater Horseshoe Bat project. As well as being important in its own right, the DWT uses this project as a vehicle for increasing awareness and care for our environment with children through to those in older age. For example, children at school learn about bats, make bat masks and engage in other bat related activities. Local groups organise bat walks and bat detecting exercises as well as making much information available. Such "citizen science" work can be a gateway into more detailed scientific and surveying work.

The northern Devon centre for this project is in Braunton where there is a maternal bat roost. As a species, the bats need all the things that make up the AONB including hedges and steep fields. The DWT is working with farmers in relation to hedgerow management and reintroducing grazing to some fields as habitat management is really important. The DWT is thus working with whole communities to celebrate and protect the landscape that is so special.

There are many sites of equal importance to those designated under special conventions, such as the SSSIs, and care for them can only be influenced by voluntary measures. As the DWT says *"we need people on board because they want to be".* Increasing interest and awareness is one of the routes taken to achieve this.

7.6.4   We mentioned "30 days wild" in section 3. For the 30 days of June 2016 people were encouraged to do something which connected them with nature every day – it may have been just walking outside barefoot, going camping, paying particular attention to a bird or a wild flower, for example.

As well as being beneficial to our wellbeing and overall health, connecting people with nature is a key part of the wildlife groups' strategy to safeguard our wildlife going forward. One of the measures used is how far away from home children roam. This used to cover a circle with a radius of around 2-3 km but has now shrunk to the immediate environs of the home. The question asked is *"If people are disconnected from nature, how will this affect wildlife in the future?"* So, the DWT, and other organisations, are working hard to increase access to the countryside recognising that people's needs and wants are different: older people need different practical access from that of children, for example.

Social media is once again a helpful tool in this endeavour. As one contributor put it *"it is helpful in triggering people's imagination. It can be ephemeral and shallow but the enthusiasm and contact can be built upon. It is a good first stage – ideally people will move from engagement on social media to becoming a member. This means more involvement".* 30 days wild triggered ten thousand social media contacts in Devon. It also triggered at least one new member – me!

7.6.5 The Upstream Water management project is an excellent example of farmers and environmental groups working together. As The Biosphere Reserve says *"Agriculture is a key land use in the Biosphere and crucial to catchment management. Supporting farmers to manage the land in ways that help improve water quality, lessen run off and improve biodiversity is an effective management intervention in rural catchments like ours."*

The North Devon Biosphere is working with farmers to build up connections and trust. Following an initial invitation to all farmers to become involved (with around 10% response) they are now working to set up peer to peer farming support groups, facilitating groups of farmers to meet together and share information on how the water management schemes work, and offer mutual support in other areas.

7.7   Brexit considerations in Farming and the Environment

7.7.1 Farming as an industry was quite split on the pros and cons of remaining in the EU. A major reason for voting to leave was based on the hope that some of the European "regulation and red tape" would reduce the administrative burden on farmers, and help to reduce costs. On the "reasons to remain" side was concern about the future of agricultural subsidies, which are the only thing keeping some farmers afloat.

7.7.2 The NFU moved very swiftly to prepare a paper of Brexit options for British Farming, and engaged with ministers responsible both for Brexit negotiations and farming in general. With great speed they also embarked on "the largest consultation of members in 108 years". All members were invited to consultation events up and down the country. Getting the right outcome (whatever that may be) will have a far reaching effect on farmers' lives and livelihoods over the next decades.

7.7.3 There is also much concern in environmental circles regarding Brexit outcomes. These include the future of designated sites of environmental importance, the future of grant funding for scientific research, environmental projects and organisations, and the future shape of farming subsidies and their link to environmental requirements. The EU also provides the international connections we need so that

people across a wide area are working to common goals – as was said to me *"wildlife doesn't recognise boundaries".* All of our environmental groups and partnerships have been feeding into this debate both locally and nationally.

7.7.4   It is clear that there is some divergence of priorities and goals between the farming and environmental lobbies.

As in all things we have to find a balance. There is so much love for nature and the land from all concerned, and many "environmental" schemes are of benefit to both farming and the wider environment. There are differences in culture and different understandings of the pressures on people and land which need to be bridged. But in general, building relationships of trust, of mutual benefit and support through local and more formal partnership working is happening.

The church, with a special focus on care for creation, and deep understanding of rural life, and being involved both in environmental activities and support for farming, may be able help foster conversation.

8   Concluding Reflections

8.1   Common Aims

In the 1980s, the Anglican Communion (the Church of England for our purposes) developed "The Five Marks of Mission", which have found broad acceptance with other denominations:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

The call to care for the weak, the poor, the vulnerable, to seek justice for all people, fight oppression in any form and safeguard and protect our environment is shared by people in all walks of life. Together our agencies – public and private, faith based and secular, paid and voluntary – share the care of our people and land. And just as different people have different gifts and talents, so do organisations, and all are needed for the proper functioning of the whole.

In Marks 3, 4 and 5 particularly, it is clear that the church and other agencies working in our communities have many common aims, which give us much to build upon.

8.2   Partnership Working - Better Together

8.2.1   Bishop Michael Langrish once quoted in a talk *"None of us are ever the whole of a part, we are always a part of the whole"* – it was one of those ideas that has become basic in all my thinking. It applies to individuals and to our common life in society.

Where we share the same goals – be they helping the elderly in our communities to enjoy life with other people, supporting our families so that the children can access their education more fully, providing hospitality for local businesses to get together and connect to grow our rural economy in a sustainable way, or working for justice in a society where inequality reduces people's health and wellbeing – working in partnership with others is so often the right way forward.

8.2.2   The concept of working together, sharing ideas, resources, enthusiasm, energy – and frustration! – is alive and well in northern Devon.

Formal Partnerships have changed since the early days. Some centre around a particular theme such as The Community Safety Partnership and the Early Years Board, others aim to bring together all sectors working across a particular locality (place-based) such as One Ilfracombe. The North Devon Biosphere Partnership straddles both, being geographically located and centred around environmental, sustainability and well-being themes.

Ad hoc partnerships may also be formed to bring the right people together to address a particular issue or specific project.

In our communities, especially our villages, there is also much informal partnership working. Many of the same people serve on parish councils, church committees, village hall committees, fete committees, youth clubs, arts and sports groups and so on. Sometimes there will be formal "village calendars", but less formally diaries and events will be shared because the same people are present in different settings, and each are able to take the needs of another back into their own organisation.

The church can be involved in all types of partnership, and at different levels – i.e. county, archdeaconry or district, town or village.

8.2.3   Sometimes a church might want to explore something new and want to join local and wider resources. Then a network of relationships and contacts is clearly helpful.

Networking events are often arranged around a conference, a talk, an exhibition – but we all know the conversations over coffee and shared meals are as creative and innovative as those coming from the formal speakers. As mentioned earlier in this report, one of our local business leaders spoke of the value of networking events – but also said they often lack suitable venues and the resources to organise them. This is something easy and real the church can help with by offering venues (church buildings and halls are great spaces) and people to help with hospitality and event organisation.

8.2.4   Another phenomenon I have noticed this past year is that there is now a "day", "week" or "month" to highlight almost anything you can think of. These cover a huge range of subjects and include National Countryside week, Naturally Healthy Month, Bogtastic Day (Exmoor), World Aids Day, Mental Health Awareness week and so on. There are many opportunities where the church could join in to help raise awareness of a particular concern or provide an enjoyable event for the community, building on the momentum created by an existing campaign.

For example, holding a meadow picnic in "Meadows Week" would provide an opportunity to appreciate the wildlife rich meadow habitat and connect people with nature. And if a church was planning an awareness raising event about, for example, human trafficking and modern slavery, it would make sense to do so on or close to "national anti-trafficking day". Joining in with existing activities and campaigns enables the church to connect with people of all faiths and none in areas that are dear to all our hearts (such as social justice and care for the environment), thereby strengthening the overall voice of the campaign and adding to the whole.

8.2.5   Working together within our churches is also vital, both ecumenically and within groups of churches in a local area. Christians or Churches Together groups in towns are particularly helpful in enabling single points of contact for potential partners wishing to work with the church, and in raising the critical mass of people needed to pursue a project or concern. In rural areas, working together on the ground often involves sharing of buildings and facilities. There is more we can do together.

8.2.6   Mutually beneficial relationships can develop from getting to know people, going along to meetings and conferences, joining existing partnerships where appropriate, asking what people do, what challenges and opportunities they face and finding out where there are links with our own lives and work. From such dialogue, opportunities to work together emerge as it becomes clear that there is a common

concern and that the gifts each can bring to the table can enable something to happen that otherwise might not otherwise be possible – or even imagined.

8.2.7   There has probably never been such a good time to explore this approach. Both public and voluntary sectors have experienced budgetary cuts on an unprecedented scale. Whilst the crisis in some of our services is severe, the need has already resulted in innovative solutions. Communities have taken a much larger role in the provision of services, in some cases providing a more locally responsive and wider service than before.

8.2.8   Devon County Council has a policy of "Better Together"[131] – it knows that it cannot provide everything in the way that it used to and is putting much more emphasis on developing shared community solutions for community issues. Perhaps we begin to see the outworking of "when we are weak we are strong"!

8.3   The Gifts of the church

8.3.1   Any organisation working in partnership with others needs to be clear, not only about what it hopes to achieve, but also what its particular gifts and talents are – what it can bring to the whole – and what it needs from others to help it fulfil its hopes and aspirations.

At the beginning of this project, one contributor said to me "*Every organisation needs to understand their value in the widest sense. What is it they are offering? What else comes along with the headline service that is perhaps even more valuable, for example friendship, support, relationship?*"

This is an important question for the church as a whole, and each church in its own context, to reflect upon.

8.3.2   My conclusion to this question is that the offering of the church can be considered in three broad areas which we might term – "Practical", "Spiritual" and "Gospel" – though like multi-coloured silks, strands of each are shot through the other.

- The practical gifts we can offer to the whole include the spaces and facilities of our buildings, having a local organisation on the ground and local contacts, and practical services of lunch clubs, children's activities, food banks and so on. The article in the Church Times[132] gives a very helpful account of the range of work churches are offering in response to the social needs they see.

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- Spirituality is the extra gift the church is able to offer over and above basic practical care. It can be offered both with and without the explicit language and imagery of faith - it crosses boundaries.

One contributor said to me *"There is a great spiritual need in our country – in Torridge we realise that there is a world beyond the material and the egotistical – a world of extraordinary beauty. The material world is not all there is. The church should talk about spiritual needs of people – not just social and economic – others can do this. Social programmes abound – but what is going wrong is spiritual."*

We are familiar with thinking of our physical health. We are becoming better at thinking about our mental health. But rarely is spiritual health considered alongside as a third factor in our lives, though all aspects of our life are connected and one will affect another.

Churches should not cease their social action – it is a core calling – but thinking more widely about how we can help people engage with their spiritual selves, in whatever ways are right for them, would be helpful.

Spirituality is a notoriously difficult concept to pin down – but perhaps it encompasses such ideas as our meaning and purpose as human beings, the symbolic rather than the physical meaning of things to us, our sense of belonging, the light of hope in dark times and being able to access peace and stillness in the midst of the maelstrom of whatever life throws at us. Perhaps it's about having a deeper connection with life, with each other, with nature, than we can easily express with words.

We can see that there is a spiritual component to so many aspects of our lives, for example:

  - in the process of ageing and our changing purpose and role in life, of losing physical faculties, but perhaps gaining in wisdom
  - in loss and bereavement, in feeling bereft, cut off, disconnected from our loved one, and parts of our lives that are no longer open to us
  - in love and marriage and family life, when we might feel particularly connected to another with an overspill of love that benefits our other relationships
  - in belonging within our communities, and also in poverty and struggle, when we may start to feel disconnected from our community and from the ability to live life in the same way as others

- in periods of stress when we might be searching for discernment for the best way forward, a new direction, or seeking to find a deeper peace.

Practices such as "mindfulness", which is very popular as a method of relaxation, reducing stress, and generally improving mental health, is incredibly similar to some practices of contemplation and awareness that have been a central part of the Christian (and other faith) traditions for millennia. It offers a language and practice that people of all faiths and none can participate in without concern.

In appropriate circumstances we may also offer what we might term "Care with Prayer" whether spoken or unspoken. And prayer implicitly underpins all the work of the church.

The church has a deep understanding and rich historical tradition to draw upon in spiritual matters – but when people think of spirituality, paradoxically the church is often not necessarily the first place they come for help! If we are present "at the table" we can help to raise the spiritual aspects of life in decision making and planning, and help to provide resources in this area, and we can be alert to the wider spiritual needs and contexts of people in our communities and opportunities to explore and express spirituality we can make available.

- Finally there is what I have called "Gospel". Of course Christians want to share the blessings of the Gospel - the good news of God's love shown for us in Jesus - because we believe that knowledge has transformed our lives and we want it to be transformational for others and for society. However, though this is clearly a core activity of the church, its outworking is not the focus of this report.

8.3.3 Throughout this report there are examples and suggestions of how the church may work with others to serve our communities in relation to specific socio-economic issues. In this section I have summarised some of the general and / or less tangible gifts the church brings to the whole.

Buildings

- There are 154 Church of England buildings (churches and halls), plus all those belonging to Methodist, Baptist, URC, Roman Catholic, Friends and Free Churches, across 125 parishes in North Devon and Torridge.

- Church buildings offer public spaces which can be used for a variety of activities. Some are more adaptable than others, but re-ordering to meet community need is a real possibility. There are examples of church buildings being used to house rural post offices, to offer a base for a PCSO, a Citizen's Advice outreach surgery, coffee mornings, computer clubs, community shops, concerts, art exhibitions, plant sales, cream teas, children's activities, various clubs and drop-ins and so on, depending on facilities and need.

  Growing the Rural Church[133] is a new project launched by the Church of England in Devon in February 2017. Bishop Sarah Mulally says *"Church buildings are at the heart of our rural communities and they can be both a blessing and a burden. The Growing the Rural Church project works alongside local communities to help them find sustainable ways in which our rural church buildings can enable the church to grow in prayer, make new disciples and serve the people of Devon with joy."* Amongst other support, the project can offer help with community engagement and advice and guidance on changes to the use and fabric of church buildings.

- For any agency with town based offices, wanting a rural presence for a surgery or session once a week or fortnight, the local church could make an ideal partner. For arts activities, churches can sometimes offer wonderful acoustic spaces and the historic art and architecture already present in a church building can work well with exhibitions and educational projects.

- Church buildings also offer a place of refuge – or to use the historical word "sanctuary". Open churches provide a place to sit – to be quiet – to reflect. They offer a time apart – even if only for a few minutes.

  Provision can also be made for anyone visiting the church to leave a note of concern that the church can take into prayer for them.

- Some churches remain closed to the public unless specific activities are going on. This is usually due to reasonable fears of vandalism or theft and the safety of personnel who may be working inside on their own. Yet I always remember a lecture I once heard about church tourism where we were challenged to somehow find a way to keep our churches open for as much time as possible. The speaker said that Jesus made himself ultimately vulnerable and if we wanted our church buildings to represent Jesus to people then they too had to be open and vulnerable. We need creative solutions to balance safety and openness.

People and Networks

- We can offer a community contact point within each parish. In North Devon and Torridge, just including Church of England ministers, there are 44 parish clergy and 25 lay ministers with 3,424 active members (2014 figure). There are also Methodist, Baptist, URC, Roman Catholic, Friends and Free Church ministers and congregations and though ministers are often looking after several parishes, they are still very locally based. Churches can also be good repositories of knowledge of the culture and history of a community, and of current gifts and talents amongst the population, which can help when beginning new work.

- At a corporate level, through our Church and Society team, we have a depth of expertise and experience to call upon and to offer in partnership working. Areas of work include refugees in Devon, modern slavery, dementia awareness, just finance, food justice, environmental projects, green energy, trade justice, equality and diversity, disability, marriage preparation and enrichment, inter-faith activity and much more. Details and contacts can be found here[134] - click on the "faith in action" tab to see the list of work areas.

- One contributor to this project felt that the church using its networks across the country and beyond to promote northern Devon could be helpful. They were envisaging using all avenues to tell people about our world beating businesses, environment and people, thus helping both to build confidence and to attract people and resources to our area. Another person said that sometimes in national politics there was an idea that the biggest problem faced in Devon and Cornwall was whether to add the cream or the jam first to the scone. We have seen how poorly funded Devon is in education and other areas compared with other parts of the country. Through the church's national networks we can play our part in raising awareness of some of the real problems we face and the resources and support we need.

Hospitality, Time and Compassion

- A great deal of church life revolves around food and hospitality, mirroring daily life as friends and families meet to cement and grow relationships over shared meals.

- The church can offer the hospitality of our buildings as discussed above, through warmth and welcome in numerous activities, and in the quiet hospitality of listening, of being alongside someone in pain or sorrow and sharing a heavy load.

- In befriending and visiting, over coffee or after parent and toddler groups, volunteers have time to listen or share a story.

- Feeling compassion can move us to act – such as when we see pictures of great suffering on the television and are moved to respond in whatever ways we can. Yet sometimes, compassion, in the sense of "suffering with", is the gift in itself.

  We live in a very "solution" focused world – and I include myself in that! But sometimes there isn't a solution to someone's problem or situation. At this point, though they would wish to, some agencies will be unable to offer further tangible help. Then, as a wise friend said to me recently, we are called to be with people in such a way that their burden is somehow lightened, even if it cannot be changed.

  It's often easier for us to offer someone a solution because not being able to can make us feel powerless. We all have a friend who has said "why don't you …?" or "try this, it will really help …" when all we really need is a bit of loving kindness or someone to listen.

  When I look back on my parish ministry, the times when I sat with people shocked with a terminal diagnosis, in bereavement, loss or despair, not able to offer anything except a silent compassion, were the times when I felt I had been most use. Perhaps it is simply saying in language not of words "you are not alone".

  This hospitality of listening and "being with" people is available to anyone in any parish – they don't need to be a church member, no religious language needs to be used and anyone can be referred – with their permission of course.

Supporting each other

- Support groups can help prevent and reduce mental health problems. It is possible that a member of the clergy could facilitate a multi-professional group within a specific geographical area, which could reflect both on community concerns and offer mutual support. People in different professions face similar work-based stresses and could be helped through such confidential reflective practice, but being from different backgrounds, without any element of competition.

Reconciliation

- The church has a particular understanding of the human condition. In South Africa at the end of apartheid Bishop Desmond Tutu was at the heart of the process referred to as "truth and reconciliation" – a terrifically painful process that was necessary for the healing of the nation. Sadly, few of us possess the grace of Desmond Tutu, but the church can assist where there is a need for reconciliation, peace, and forgiveness, where relationships have broken and where new life is needed to go forward.

- This is open to anyone in our community – whether the matter is personal or public. Assistance can be offered confidentially and privately as well as openly, and if more specialist help is needed it can be accessed.

Story and Reflection

- We all know the power of "story". A dry presentation can always be made real with the judicious insertion of a real life story. Story helps us to understand things in a sideways way, it can make things personal and help us to empathise and connect.

- Stories can be translated into many different languages – the best are always those that the hearer hears in their own.

- The church has a wealth of "story" which can be used to help us reflect on issues of today. There are stories of individual lives, biblical and modern day parables that can be used to inspire, encourage, challenge, shed new light on old problems – and there are stories from our communities that help us to understand the meaning and application of the Bible in our own times and context.

- Many of the sayings and proverbs in the Bible are counter-cultural in today's world (as they were then) – but even purely in terms of a "creative thinking" tool, they can offer us windows through which to view the world in a different light.

  Discussions such as this do not need to be "religious" to bring a new dimension to some of the issues we have to consider and the decisions we collectively have to make in our society today.

Silence and Awareness

- Offering structured space for silence, mindfulness and awareness improves people's physical, mental and spiritual health. This can be through space in open churches, led meditation and contemplation, or helping to connect people with nature, perhaps working with one of the wildlife organisations and facilitating "awareness" or "mindfulness" walks.

- Christians believe that God is present in the silence and that people can become more aware of him through these practices. It doesn't matter if this is explicit or not. What is important is for the person to be able to access any benefits in a way that suits them.

8.4   Never discuss politics or religion! (especially not in the same breath)

8.4.1   In terms of practical areas of care, the churches are perhaps best known for their work in poverty alleviation, homelessness, food banks, debt and financial advice, children and family support, care for the sick, the elderly and the otherwise vulnerable members of society and of course in education, particularly through our church schools.

Of course we also know that some services, such as providing food via food-banks, are a response to symptoms of deeper problems of social inequality and poverty. We need to understand more about the root causes of such suffering, and to do what we can to help alleviate them.

8.4.2   Active involvement in the worlds of local politics and business is perhaps seen to be less usual for the church, and there are church members, and others, who would say that the church has no business in either.

And yet – all of life is wrapped up in "politics" with a small "p". Politics is about how we organise our society, how we share our resources, how we provide for each other's needs, how we balance the need for housing (for example) with the need to protect and nurture our environment – just about every area of our common life that we can imagine. Business is about providing goods and services that we all need, leisure opportunities for ourselves and our many visitors, and the employment opportunities that enable people to live fulfilling lives and sustain our local economy.

8.4.3   Christians believe that God is active in all things, and all of these matters are vital to the wellbeing of the people and creation – so it is right that the church should take

an active interest in them.

8.3.4   Senior faith leaders have a platform from which to speak and do so on many and various issues, including the economy, Brexit, refugees, inequality, diversity and so on. They often also lead by example: Lambeth Palace was at the forefront in welcoming a refugee family under the government's community sponsored settlement plan; and the Archbishop of Canterbury has been instrumental in setting up the "Just Finance Foundation" to offer practical support to his campaign to combat and provide an alternative to the punitive interest rates of payday loans.

There are bishops in the House of Lords – some may question their right to be there in our more secular age – but, as this report shows, they are able to speak on many issues with knowledge and authority, and contribute helpfully to the debate.

8.3.5   If we are to "seek to transform unjust structures of society" (section 8.1.1) we need to understand both the circumstances of our parishioners, and any injustices they face, and to be in a position to influence those structures.

We can do this with practical action to support those in need, with petitions and protests, but also from the inside, by getting to know our partners and political representatives, being present within the structures, standing for election and being part of the debate. We can offer opportunities for shared conversation, which can bring together people from different backgrounds and understandings, and open up different perspectives so that together we can come closer to the whole truth. We don't all have a seat in the Lords, but we can speak up for our communities at the local level.

8.4   Life on the boundary

8.4.1   Having discussed our common aims, and the ways in which we can work together in and with our wider communities, we also need to acknowledge the disconnections that exist for a number of reasons.

- Firstly, the church, as a single body, is not always easy for other agencies to work with. Formal partnerships often want one only representative from a sector or organisation but the church has a very dispersed organisation and authority.

  The church's diffuse set up is one of its greatest strengths. It offers freedom to local congregations to respond to their local communities in the best way they can. They can be supported with overall direction and resources by a diocese or

district, but not hampered by a one size fits all approach. But it does make single point contact quite difficult.

To help with this, many towns and larger villages have "Churches Together" groups, which can be a conduit to the wider church community. It is hoped that the "Church Contacts" given in Appendix 2 will enable agencies to contact the church at whatever level they feel best suits the shared work they want to explore.

- Secondly, disconnections can occur through differing assumptions, expectations, misunderstandings and sometimes historic poor experiences, from both "sides". It can also be caused by a difference in language – we all have our "jargons" – and differences in working culture. We need to address these concerns.

  Perhaps the best way is in working together as much as we can, openly sharing concerns as well as celebrating achievements. In this way we can build more robust and trusting relationships that will underpin the work we do together.

- It is also very important, to allay concern, that everyone is clear when, and in what circumstances, faith may be discussed, or prayer offered, and when not.

  The following quote from Martin Lewis (of Moneysaving Expert fame), is helpful. He says of the charity Christians Against Poverty *"Debt counselling agency, which specialises in helping those who are emotionally struggling too. The religious focus is why they do it, not how they do it".*

  If it can be recognised – that a religious focus is *why* a church does something – not *how* it does it, then many of the barriers between the church and secular agencies could be bridged. It is the caring that unites and is important, and no-one has a monopoly on this.

8.4.2   There can also sadly be disconnections between the church and the wider community it serves. In some villages one cannot see where church ends and community begins, and vice versa. "Village" people who may not be members of "Sunday" church are still involved in church history, art and wildlife projects, fund-raising, concerts and clubs, and "church" people share community life in the skittles team, on the cricket pitch and the parish council and village hall committee. But this isn't the case in every community. Sometimes the church seems remote to people, and sometimes people in churches don't always understand or connect with the community they live in. Sometimes it seems to people that the church tends to ask

people to "come in", rather than the church "coming out".

8.4.3   Christians believe that Jesus, in himself, holds together the seemingly impossible – the human and divine in one being. The church has a model!

Part of the church's job is to hold itself and the "world" together: to live in the boundary space where the land and sea flow into each other and it's impossible to see which is which. It's about:

- helping our congregations move "inside out" being an incarnate presence in our communities, places of work, clubs and societies
- dying to live – serving the needs of our communities before the needs of the church
- helping our congregations to understand more about the issues – political, social, economic – that affect our communities and coming to know those directly affected by them and together sharing the load
- helping people who might never think of the church as being relevant to their lives, to access its resources in whatever ways are most helpful for them
- reducing barriers between church and other agencies so that we can, together, work for the common good.

Life does not fall into separate compartments called "church" and "world" and members of our churches all live in the world, have jobs, families, friends, interests, health and education needs and so on. Sometimes the church speaks of "outreach", yet we could equally well think of "reaching in" for sustenance and nurture, and to bring in the concerns of our communities and the world for prayer, reflection, action and a fresh perspective.

The church also has a tradition of discerning vocation among its members and calling people out for specific roles. Sometimes we concentrate on discerning vocation to licensed ministry and for specific service in church, but we also need to be discerning people's vocation for building relationships and working alongside others in the community as salt and light, encouragers and enablers.

Judith Hill, The Church Urban Fund's volunteering director writes *"In a 2015 survey, 95% of Anglican parish clergy identified a lack of volunteers as the main barrier to increasing their social action and 95% of them believed that such action was a vital activity for a healthy church. Alongside those statistics, a small survey that I completed last year among predominantly Anglican churches seemed to indicate that a high percentage of churchgoers were involved in a large number of what might be*

called inward-facing roles. 25% of the sample were involved in more than five roles within their church."[135]

Sometimes keeping up with all the internal church matters seems daunting enough, but opportunities built in to church life to share information on aspects of community life, perhaps through inviting others to come and speak – for example asking the Mayor or Parish Council chair to a PCC meeting – can be both practical and helpful.

And sometimes we need to trust that in "seeking first the kingdom of God" wherever that might be, all else that we need will be given to us.

8.4.4   Life on the edge can be uncomfortable. It brings feelings of disconnection, powerlessness and not belonging. Yet, as my wise friend said, as a church we are called to identify with those living at the margins of society – people on the edge of managing financially, with their mental health or their housing situation. And in many ways, as we have discussed, our whole area of northern Devon is somewhat "on the edge" geographically, culturally and financially. So it is not strange that we should find ourselves on the edge and it is important that we understand the feelings that this brings.

Similarly, boundaries can be places of friction, where ideas and cultures rub up against each other. Boundary disputes can be the cause of wars, but they can also be places of great creativity where something new is forged from the desire to reach common understanding and reconciliation. So it is important that we don't shy away from real dialogue with partners, even when it may be uncomfortable.

To engage in dialogue we need a common language - a language that unites and holds together and that everyone hears as their own. And we need the deep underlying truth that has no words at all, yet that holds us all together. I would suggest that word and truth is Love. Love for each other, love for neighbour, love for our community, love for justice, love for our environment.

8.5   And finally, the Good News …

" Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you".

These are the words with which St Paul ended his letter to the Philippians. Gospel means "Good News", and, just as we are called to serve the poorest and most marginalised in society, so are we equally called to proclaim and celebrate the Good News.

We may use different languages, but we can all recognise "Good News" when we see it, and in a world where there is so much "Bad News" and people becoming ever more fearful about services in crisis, financial struggles, the changing state of international relations, the conflicts between countries and creeds, and emerging cyber warfare, it is so important for all of us to highlight, nurture, encourage and celebrate the "Good News" wherever we find it.

Our local newspaper survey, completed over three months from February to May 2016, showed some amazing good news stories – celebrations of family and business life, people raising money for charities (often as a moving response to a personal or family situation), the fantastic work of our voluntary groups, new shops, facilities and services being opened, and old ones being restored to use, new schools opening, crime figures dropping, new wildlife projects and so many examples of people thanking others for personal acts of kindness.

I began most interviews for this project by asking people what they felt was most encouraging and inspiring about life in northern Devon. By far the majority mentioned the strength of our communities and voluntary service, a significant number mentioned our wonderful environment and the strength of our businesses.

For me, the greatest good news has been humbly seeing the amazing goodness, commitment, care, love and service well beyond the call of duty, in everyone I have spoken with. I don't think there was one person, group or organisation I met with that I didn't want to support in any way I could.

Even in the midst of the direst of situations we can find examples of selfless care and kindness. We are called to look for signs of goodness wherever we find it and when we do, to celebrate it as a thing of great value.

Celebrating the good in our midst brings people together, builds confidence and belonging, inspires others, encourages the sharing of ideas, raises eyes above the horizon and bounds of struggle and fearfulness, shifts our focus from troubling thoughts to good, shines a light in the dark and nurtures hope. It must surely be good for our physical, spiritual and mental health! In fact, it contributes positively to most of the issues discussed in this report – and the more goodness we can see, the less difficult it will be to bridge the gaps that exist. No wonder St Paul recommends it so eloquently – no wonder it brings peace.

Supporting and celebrating begins with noticing – and we all know that the more we look for something, the more we see it all around us. Then it can be as simple as sending a letter of appreciation to someone in an organisation that might be more used to letters of complaint, holding a "Thank You" evening for all those who serve on all the village committees or an exhibition to highlight available services and enable networking.

Perhaps there can be no better place to end this report than by thinking about the creative ways we can celebrate all that is so good in our communities, and to do all that we can to support those who serve us so well.

Thank you for reading!

Appendix 1 – Summary of Opportunities for Churches

Many suggestions and opportunities for churches to serve their communities have arisen in the course of this research. Many churches will already be engaged in many of them, but some may be new. Some may be appropriate for individual churches, some for groups, and some for action on a wider geographical scale.

If anyone would like more information, to discuss any of these or other ideas further please contact me on penelopedobbin@outlook.com

In the approximate order in which they appear in the report, perhaps the project team's top ten are:

1. **Community Life:**
   To seek to address some of the issues and explore what the church can do to support the sustainability of our rural communities, both in practical projects on the ground in individual communities, through further research and working strategically with partners. This could happen, at least in part, through the socio-economic group of the Devon Churches Rural Forum (to be convened).

2. **Spiritual Health:**
   To model a welcoming, loving Christian community at the heart of every human community and to nurture the spiritual health of local communities in the widest sense of the word spiritual. This could include, for example, exploring the spirituality of ageing, the sense of belonging and how the church might help where this is breaking down, and offering the hospitality of listening, compassion and places to be still.

3. **Pastoral Care:**
   To continue, and perhaps expand, formal and informal pastoral care in all our communities, focusing particularly on those who may be lonely, isolated, or frail, through visiting, befriending and group activities including shared meals or craft afternoons. To create a directory of such activities that can be shared with others involved in caring for the elderly, lonely or otherwise vulnerable people.

4. **Rural Business:**
   To explore how we can support our rural businesses pastorally and practically, reducing isolation and helping to grow our rural economy and provide good quality local employment and supply chains.

5. **Education and families:**
   To explore every avenue to support our schools, children and families. For many reasons, too many of our children are unable to fully access their education, yet education is the key to improving health and social inequality. Closely allied to this would be to help all our young people to experience life as widely as possible, to reflect on their vocation in the world of work and what it means for them to achieve their full potential.

6. **Church Assets - buildings, people, networks, knowledge:**
   To use the assets of our buildings, people, networks and community knowledge, to work with partners in the public and community sector to make the best use of our combined resources for the care of our communities. To explore imaginative uses for our buildings such as work hubs and locally based surgeries. To make the most of the church's role in being able to offer local knowledge of how each community 'works' to those wishing to develop locally based community/social care projects in northern Devon. To use the church's community contacts to draw people together and work with other agencies to build bridges and forge new connections, working in partnership in our shared concern to meet human needs. To explore the opportunities which the "Growing the Rural Church" project offers for community engagement and the use of our buildings.

7. **Farming:**
   To do everything possible to get to know and understand the working lives and concerns of our farming community, and to offer support especially through working with the Farming Community Network and market chaplaincy teams, perhaps with training for additional church based pastoral care.

8. **Environment:**
   To continue to be alert to the opportunities for joining in with church based environmental initiatives promoted and supported by the Church and Society team and to one-off opportunities that may arise locally, working with our local communities. To join with the nature based organisations in developing activities that promote "connecting people and nature" looking especially at benefits to mental and spiritual health.

9. **Local Partnerships and community service:**
   To develop our networks of contacts and relationships with people working in the private, public and community sectors serving our communities, exploring our common aims and what we may be able to do together. Through networking and local "ears to the ground" to be alert to, and well informed, of both national and local socio-economic, environmental and community issues affecting people in our communities and to share this understanding within our congregations. To reflect on the gifts each particular church can offer in its own place and time, how they can be best used as part of the whole community of care with partners in other churches and secular groups and agencies, to support people in their communities. To serve in such a way that we are "doing with", "not doing to" or "doing for" thus honouring the gifts and contributions of all and so that all serve and all are served.

10. **Trust and Celebration:**
    To "seek first the kingdom of God", trusting that all the things we need will follow, and, to **Celebrate the Good News** – wherever it may be found.

Appendix 2 – Church Contacts

Below are listed the websites for the Churches Together groups and the websites/directories for some of the main denominations should you want to find a church contact in a specific place.

Please also feel free to contact me - Rev'd Penny Dobbin at penelopedobbin@outlook.com if you can't find the name or contact you are looking for and I will do my best to help.

Churches Together in Devon – Home Page - http://together.ourchurchweb.org.uk/devon/

Churches Together in Devon – List of local "Churches Together" Groups with their website links where available - http://together.ourchurchweb.org.uk/devon/churches/churches/

Bideford Churches Together - http://www.bidefordchurches.org.uk/

Barnstaple Churches Together - http://together.ourchurchweb.org.uk/barnstaple/

Church of England in Devon – Home page - http://exeter.anglican.org/

Church of England Church and Society Team - http://exeter.anglican.org/resources/faith-action/ - under the heading Faith in Action, this link gives details of the all the areas of work, much of it ecumenical, the church is engaged in corporately, on a variety of social, environmental, economic and international issues including work with refugees, money, food justice, many aspects of social justice, environmental matters, disability, trade justice and much more. The page gives access to contacts for all members of the team, which is led by Martyn Goss.

Church of England in Devon Directory - http://exeter.anglican.org/who-we-are/diocesan-directory/ type in the name of the parish you are interested, search, click on the parish name and you will be directed to a page with all the contact details for the local Vicar

A Church Near You – an alternative way to find a Church of England Church especially if you only have a postcode - https://www.achurchnearyou.com/

Find a Church will give you contact details of many of the churches in a particular place covering all denominations – though the listings are not complete – helpful especially if you are looking for the details of one of the Free Churches http://www.findachurch.co.uk/

Methodist Church Circuit Information – gives the names of the circuits, with ministers and local addresses - http://www.pemd.org.uk/index.php/

Roman Catholic Church – gives details of all RC churches in Devon - http://www.plymouth-diocese.org.uk/index.php/churches/plymouth-deanery

Information for the United Reform Church in the Southwest - http://www.urcsouthwest.org.uk/

Information on Quakers in Devon and Cornwall - http://swquakers.org.uk/

Baptist Church – please search for whichever town you are interested in – no county wide website.

Appendix 3 – Resources, Links, Further Reading (to be published separately)

Endnotes

[1] https://www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk/

[2] https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/07/160713102955.htm?utm_source=social_media&utm_medium=hootsuite&utm_campaign=standard

[3] https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/uploads/documents/0715140132.pdf

[4] https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2016/1-july/comment/opinion/northern-foodbank-britain-finds-its-voice

[5] http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5745/archbishop-speaks-in-lords-debate-on-eu-referendum

[6] http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5747/synod-archbishop-opens-debate-on-eu-referendum

[7] https://www.churchofengland.org/media/41161/tsagyear.pdf

[8] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-30278806

[9] http://www.theguardian.com/small-business-network/2016/jul/29/funerals-failed-startups-entrepreneurs-rise-ashes

[10] http://constantinecommunitylandtrust.co.uk/portfolio-posts/high-bickington-community-property-trust/

[11] https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/affordable-housing

[12] http://www.gonorthdevon.co.uk/

[13] http://www.devonwheels2work.co.uk/

[14] http://www.rsnonline.org.uk/20-toolkit-for-sustainable-rural-communities

[15] http://ndvs.org.uk/

[16] http://www.torridgecvs.org.uk/

[17] https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/Default.aspx

[18] http://www.northdevonplus.com/

[19] http://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/

[20] http://www.torridgecvs.org.uk/services/sril-supported-independent-rural-living/

[21] www.**oneilfracombe**.org.uk

22 http://www.abcdinstitute.org/docs/ABCD_Theological_Reflection_2013.pdf

24 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-37338995

25 http://www.newdevonccg.nhs.uk/

26 http://www.devonhealthandwellbeing.org.uk/aphr/2015-16/

27 http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/projects/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review

28 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-38092146

29 http://www2.cuf.org.uk/poverty-lookup-tool

30 https://www.cuf.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=1fc3ab4e-7506-40fb-866c-9e4acd955b77

31

http://www.northdevongazette.co.uk/news/consultant_says_north_devon_mental_health_wards_are_almost_at_their_limit_1_4660181

32 https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/news/rural-dementia-nil-we-need-to-talk

33 new research by the University of Derby
34 http://www.devonwildlifetrust.org/news/2016/06/14/smartphone-addicts-more-anxious-nature-lovers-research-shows

35 http://www.nhs.uk/news/2013/03March/Pages/social-isolation-increases-death-risk-in-older-people.aspx

36 http://devoncares.co.uk/

37 https://new.devon.gov.uk/adultsocialcareandhealth/policies-and-procedures/

38 https://www.proudtocaredevon.org.uk/

39 https://www.pinpointdevon.co.uk/

40 http://www.oneilfracombe.org.uk/regen-befrienders-scheme/

41 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-37131836

42

https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/trendsinselfemploymentintheuk/2001to2015

43 http://www.devonwheels2work.co.uk/

44 http://www.torridge.gov.uk/article/16175/Fishermen-and-Torridge-Councillor-win-consultation-exten

45 http://www.northdevon.com/North-Devon-Marketing-Bureau

46

http://www.northdevongazette.co.uk/news/north_devon_invited_to_draw_up_new_seaside_wish_lists_1_46
09563

47 http://www.burtonartgallery.co.uk/

48

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/525444/UKCESS_2015_Rep
ort_for_web__May_.pdf

49 www.ndma.org.uk

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