

# **Linlithgow and Avon Valley Church of Scotland**

## **Review of the Parish Properties for Mission**

### **Setting the Context**

As Trustees of the Linlithgow and Avon Valley Church of Scotland charity, we have a legal responsibility for its governance, strategic direction and careful management of its assets. With the creation of the new parish in November 2024, the Kirk Session inherited responsibility for a total of fourteen properties. During 2025, the St Ninian's Craigmallen manse was sold following the decision to make improvements to the manse in Torphichen which would be used by the second full-time Minister of Word and Sacrament when appointed. Over the last 18 months, it has become evident that all of the remaining properties require varying levels of investment – both for the basic requirements of ensuring that they are maintained to an acceptable standard but also, in some cases, the need to make improvements which would facilitate the church's worship, mission and outreach commitments within the parish.

In 2025, almost £178,000 was spent on the day-to-day operation and maintenance of the properties within the parish. Within this figure, £37,000 was spent on annual property and grounds maintenance. With a Property budget of around £120,000 for 2026, that would suggest that between £80-90,000 will be required for one-off repairs and maintenance.

The Parish's budgeted income for 2026 is £574,000 but with budgeted expenditure of £663,000, the projected deficit could be around £90,000 for 2026. With around £140,000<sup>1</sup> available within General Funds, it is evident that our financial situation is very challenging. Continuing to maintain all of the existing properties is not a realistic option, never mind investing in improvements to enhance the facilities for wider use. The latter would have to be dependent on successful fundraising for specific projects. However, achieving this must be recognised as being increasingly difficult in a very competitive funding environment. In addition, the fact that we are now a single charity restricts our eligibility for grant applications to major funders such as the General Trustees, Historic Environment Scotland and the National Lottery Heritage Fund

At the special Kirk Session meeting held on 7 May which was devoted to the review of our properties and at a dedicated session of the Elders' Plenary Conference at the end of June, an overview of our financial situation and the likely level of investment required for

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<sup>1</sup> This includes around £70,000 of legacy funds for St Michael's which could be re-allocated by the Trustees

the various properties was followed by small group discussions. Those in attendance were asked to consider the following question:

*“We must now turn our attention to the demands which have to be addressed in relation to our worship, mission and outreach activities and priorities.*

*Having considered the financial information which has been provided alongside the estimates of the investment which would be required for each of the properties within the parish, which of our properties should we prioritise – both in terms of allocating financial resources and/or seeking future investment to support these activities?”*

Inputs from these events plus a number of conversations with relevant people and organisations over the summer months has helped to frame the content of this paper for consideration by the Kirk Session at its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> September.

## **Avonbridge Church and Hall**

Phase 1 £270,000. Phase 2 £140,000. **Total £410,000**

The church itself is currently not being used because of safety issues relating to the electrical installation and so worship services are held in the adjoining hall. In addition, there is some use of the hall for community activities. The dampness in the hall is a long-standing problem that would need to be addressed as a priority. Actual figures in 2025 for the day-to-day running costs were around £10,000. Also, around £1,300 of income was received from rental of the hall.

In the absence of a significant level of funding from external sources, there was a general opinion that Avonbridge Church and Hall should be closed due to the ongoing overall financial viability of the site exacerbated by dwindling numbers attending services. However, there was some recognition of the need to maintain a parish presence in the village for missional purposes if at all possible.

The Deployment Committee of Presbytery has indicated that it would not change the designation of the church from a ‘B’ to an ‘A’ which means that the recommendation to Presbytery would be that the church should be closed. The implementation of this recommendation has been placed on hold due to the fact that there are separate discussions taking place with Foundation Scotland, CVS Falkirk and the UK Government Pride in Place initiative about the possibility of the church becoming a community-based facility, reflecting the fact that the local community centre has closed. Meetings have been held to establish the likelihood of the church and hall being the subject of a community asset transfer with ownership of the building passing to a community group which would be established to own and operate the facility. If such an asset transfer was to be successful then the parish would rent space in the building for worship services and any other church-based activities. The parish would no longer have responsibility for the ongoing costs of maintaining the property.

## **Torphichen Kirk**

Phase 1 £429,000. Phase 2 £290,000. Phase 3 £155,000. **Total £874,000**

The phasing outlined above is intended to set more reasonable staged funding targets however, all the work is becoming urgent. The roof needs urgent attention to address longstanding water ingress issues. The repairs involve substantial re-slating and will require expensive scaffolding. The next proposed phases – the lower level external fabric repairs, and then the internal fabric repairs, are also becoming urgent. Actual figures in 2025 for the day-to-day running costs were around £13,000. Over the summer, a fundraising group has been established, consisting of both Elders from the church and other individuals from the wider community.

Due to the adjacent location of the Preceptory, Historic Environment Scotland (HES) as owners of the Preceptory have been approached, unsuccessfully, to establish whether they would assume ownership of the church. In a similar vein, the Order of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem have been approached for financial assistance based on the Preceptory being historically significant for the Order and their use of the church for services – to date, any contribution from this source is unlikely.

HES would consider an application for financial assistance for work on the church but, if successful, its contribution would not exceed £350,000 (40% of total cost) and would be dependent on other sources of funding being available as well as through local fundraising efforts. As has been discovered for the Cross House project in Linlithgow, the support of the General Trustees as owners of the church for the proposed works would be critical – both in principle and also financially.

As a B-listed building which has a significant historical legacy, the church retains an important position within the village, even for those who are not regular worshippers. However, due to the fact that a number of the pews have a heritage listing, the ability to develop the internal space for wider use by the community is likely to be limited.

## **St John's Hall, Torphichen**

*Estimated costs £100,000*

In terms of the condition of the building, both the stonework and windows require significant attention. Detailed costs have to be finalised but these are estimated to be around £100,000. Actual figures in 2025 for the day-to-day running costs were around £10,000. Also, around £300 of income was received from rental of the hall in 2025 but this figure is likely to increase significantly in 2026 due to the increased use of the building by community groups who previously utilised the local community centre which has significantly raised its rental fees.

From the Elders' meetings, there was a general opinion that St John's Hall would be the most suitable single space for meeting the worship, mission and outreach needs of the village, primarily because of its recent renovation following water damage and also the significantly lower investment required to undertake the necessary improvements. However, it should be recognised that the community audit, which was conducted in the last 2-3 years, identified a preference for retaining the Kirk because of its central location in the village and its historical significance. However, this expressed preference was before the likely costs required for the work on the Kirk were identified.

The proximity to the manse was considered to be a positive feature for St John's Hall. On the other hand, the restricted car parking was regarded as an issue and the perception that it was located away from the centre of the village. One suggestion that some of the Manse garden could be taken to provide extra car parking would have to be assessed in light of its location within a conservation area.

## **St Michael's Church, Linlithgow**

Phase 1 £480,000. Phase 2 £240,000. Phase 3 £300,000 **Total £1,020,000**

There was unanimous support from the various consultations that St Michael's Church should be retained. It was described as the 'flagship' for the parish and a symbol within the wider community of God's presence. As an 'A' listed building, it is more likely to attract external funding for the necessary work required for repair and maintenance. Indeed, the General Trustees have already offered a grant of £125,000 as well as a loan offer for the Phase 1 work to deal with the high-level dampness, roof structure repairs, ceiling support renewal and repairs to the Apse window. In addition, just over £100,000 has already been raised locally via the efforts of the Fundraising Team under the banner of Project 600. An application to Historic Environment Scotland (HES) for a Heritage Repair Grant of £200,000 has been submitted and a decision is likely to be forthcoming in October. If successful with this application, it would secure a significant share of the funding required for Phase 1. The recent stone fall in the Apse area has highlighted the need for some degree of urgency with progress on this initial phase of work.

Actual figures in 2025 for the day-to-day running costs for the church were around £76,000. Around £8,000 of income was received from rental of the church for events, excluding weddings which generated a similar level of income.

## **Cross House, Linlithgow**

Phase 1 £632,000

Opinions were divided on the issue of retaining Cross House, especially in light of the unsuccessful application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the 'A House for the Town' project. There was some support for selling Cross House but retaining the more recently built Kirk Hall area. There was also a body of opinion suggesting that Cross House be retained but, if that was the case, Phase 2 of the project would have to be scaled back significantly and no cost estimates can be prepared until decisions are taken on this revised specification.

Actual figures in 2025 for the day-to-day running costs were around £29,000. Around £18,000 of income was received from rental of the Kirk Hall and rooms.

A few years ago, the possibility of selling Cross House was considered and architects and cost consultants were appointed to produce a costed feasibility study. Recognising that we would need to provide toilets for the Kirk Hall, a church office, and at least some meeting rooms to allow the church to function, they produced a scheme to extend the Kirk Hall. It proved to be extremely difficult and expensive given the restricted Conservation Area site and no guarantee of getting planning permission as it would almost certainly be considered to be over-development. Various options were investigated, discussed with the Council and displayed in the Kirk Hall. The proposals were unanimously rejected by the Kirk Session on the basis that they did not 'stack up' financially, would be extremely difficult to fund, and Cross House was considered to be the church's 'shop window on the High Street'.

The General Trustees have recently confirmed a package of financial assistance for Cross House – a grant of £150,000 and a loan offer of £50,000. This award is conditional on the basis "that the building is retained for the Mission and benefit of the congregation". In addition to the financial assistance, this award from the ultimate 'owners' of the building is critical in supporting applications to other funding bodies.

## **St Ninian's Craigmalen Church, Linlithgow**

Actual costs £33,350; *Estimated costs £100,000 +*

The church is currently closed while work is being undertaken to deal with the discovery of dry rot in the wall lining and plaster of an area on the south side of the church. However, the rot may well have spread to other areas of the church and further intrusive investigations are required to determine the full extent of the problems and the causes of the underlying dampness. Until the extent of the problem is established, the insurers insist that the church remains closed until remedial proposals can be agreed. In

addition, the investigations which have already been undertaken have identified that the building does not have a damp course and also that there is poor sub-floor ventilation – both factors which have undoubtedly contributed to the presence of dry rot. The review by the Presbytery Building Officer confirmed the need for the building to remain closed and any expenditure in the meantime restricted to maintaining the building from rain ingress.

To date, costs have been received from the contractor for the remedial work on the initial problem with dry rot which amounts to £17,850 plus VAT. Added to this would be the costs involved in the further investigation which would be required to identify the extent of the dry rot elsewhere in the church and bell tower – an estimate of around £15,500 plus VAT. No definitive estimates of the cost of repairs which would involve the insertion of a damp course and improving the sub-floor ventilation plus any additional issues arising from a detailed investigation are currently available but this is likely to be well into six figures.

Actual figures in 2025 for the day-to-day running costs of the church were around £20,000.

## **Longcroft Hall, Linlithgow**

### *Estimated costs around £50,000*

There was overall support for the retention of Longcroft Hall. Indeed, there was some suggestion that with the land adjoining the current building, there was potential for further development as a community facility. In addition, it was recognised as being suitable for worship services as is indeed the case while the church building is closed.

It was recognised that there was limited knowledge of the condition of the building and so the Presbytery Building Officer was asked to conduct a review and provide a report on the condition of the building and to detail issues which might require attention. This inspection has now taken place and the written report has now been received. He commented that the building had no major issues but outlined some recommendations for routine roof maintenance and some minor observations on disabled access. In addition to these particular issues, it was accepted that there was a need to improve the A/V provision within the building. In total, it is estimated that the costs of this maintenance and identified improvements would be unlikely to exceed £50,000.

Actual figures in 2025 for the day-to-day running costs were around £20,000. Around £13,000 of income was received from rental of the hall.

## **A Plan for the Future – Proposals to be Considered**

The Kirk Session discussions have been based on the available financial information and the current overview of the condition of the various properties and the related estimates for repair and maintenance. In addition, the investment required to provide suitable facilities for the worship, mission and outreach needs and demands across the parish has also been taken into consideration plus the ongoing costs of keeping the buildings open, both in terms of running costs and repairs and maintenance. Over the summer months, a number of discussions have been undertaken in relation to some of the parish properties. As a result, the following proposals are presented for further consideration by the Kirk Session:

1. There was clear support for the retention of Longcroft Hall. The recent inspection by the Presbytery Buildings Officer has confirmed that there are no major issues which need to be addressed with an estimated level of expenditure of around £50,000 likely to be required to deal with the identified minor issues and the installation of improved A/V facilities.

The availability of some land surrounding the existing building was recognised as a potential opportunity for expansion of the facility, if required, to provide a better space for wider use by the local community. However, this should not be regarded as an immediate priority but one to be considered in the future.

2. There is little doubt that the level of support for the retention of Longcroft Hall was influenced by the current closure of the church and the likely level of investment which would appear to be required to deal with the various problems. As is currently happening, Longcroft Hall could be used for weekly worship services. Where there is a need for a larger venue for school services, funerals etc, St Michael's would be a suitable alternative.
3. As the Presbytery Buildings Officer was involved in the decision to close the church until remedial action was undertaken, Presbytery approval would be required for the remedial work which has already been identified as well as the costs involved in conducting the more detailed investigation which would be required to establish the scale and extent of the dry rot within the church. Following discussions with the Convenor of the Presbytery Property Committee, the required approval for this expenditure would be very unlikely to be granted based on the size of the congregation and the availability of alternative venue(s) for worship services – Longcroft Hall and St Michael's Church.
4. There was clear support for the retention of St Michael's as the primary worship centre within the parish reflecting its iconic status within Linlithgow and the size

of the congregation which regularly attends this worship site. In addition, on the assumption that Historic Environment Scotland are willing to provide a significant level of financial assistance, along with the support both in principle and financially from the General Trustees, the funding for Phase 1 of Project 600 should be achievable.

5. Cross House, including the Kirk Hall, is currently a major asset to the parish because of the space available and its central location within Linlithgow. The extent to which the necessary work on the external fabric of Cross House can be undertaken plus any improvements to the existing facilities will be determined by the success, or otherwise, of the discussions with the General Trustees and the related efforts to secure the level of funds required for Phase 1.
6. The recommendation from the Deployment Committee to Presbytery not to amend the 'B' designation for Avonbridge Church, allied with the current situation where the church is closed because of the issues relating to the electrical installation, points to the closure of the church and hall and the sale of the property. Over the summer, there was a recognition that, due to the size of the congregation, the Parish could not justify the level of expenditure required to re-open the church for worship services and to undertake the necessary improvements which would facilitate increased use of the building by local community groups.

Meetings are being held during September involving various interested parties to discuss the process by which the transfer of the church and hall to a local community organisation could be undertaken.

A clearer picture will emerge over the next month or so with regard to establishing the actual level of support within the local community for this acquisition and the likelihood of adequate funding being available. Consequently, it is proposed that the Parish should actively engage with the various interested parties who are seeking to acquire the building for development as a community facility. A reasonable timetable would be established with the community organisation which is formed to lead on the acquisition by which this asset transfer could be confirmed.

As Kirk Session had been made aware, the title deeds for Avonbridge Church had not been transferred to the General Trustees. We had initiated the process for doing so but have placed a temporary hold on progressing this matter until we have a clearer picture on the possibility of a community asset transfer.

7. The clear conclusion to be derived from the various discussions with Elders was that retention of a single property in Torphichen would be sufficient to meet the worship, mission and outreach needs and demands for this part of the parish. In particular, with the possible closure of the community centre in the near future, the property to be retained would have a valuable role to play in accommodating those activities which are currently held within the community centre. Indeed, there is evidence to this effect in the increased number of regular bookings for St John's Hall.

Establishing which of the two properties is best suited for a variety of community-based activities as well as worship services would be an important factor. It is evident that St John's Hall could offer this range of uses but that is not the case currently for the Kirk. Any redevelopment of the internal space within the Kirk would face the challenge of dealing with those pews which, as we know, HES consider to be of historic importance and would resist any attempt to remove them from the building. Some work on the external fabric of St John's Hall is required but, in comparison to the phased programme of work on the Kirk, the cost differential is clearly significant. It is considered that finding the funds to undertake the work on St John's Hall would not be a particularly challenging task.

Recognising the historical importance of Torphichen Kirk and its symbolic status within the village, it is proposed that the local community becomes centrally involved in the efforts to raise the significant level of funds required to undertake the urgent repairs to the Kirk. In this context, the establishment of a separate charity such as the 'Friends of Torphichen Kirk' would have a number of advantages in terms of seeking financial support from several potential funders. To this end, it is proposed that a timetable is agreed with the Fundraising Group which has been established within which the viability of establishing this separate charity and the likelihood of raising the necessary funds would become clearer. On the basis of experience from elsewhere within Presbytery, a period of 12 months is considered to be reasonable. During this period, it would also be important to establish whether the General Trustees would retain ownership of the building or whether it could be acquired by the local community charity.

8. The two manses have been excluded from this review of the parish properties. The decision to sell the St Ninian's Craigmalen manse and to renovate the Torphichen manse has resulted in considerable investment in that property to provide accommodation for the second Minister. It remains the preferred option that this individual would be based in the village to provide a clear missional presence. Obviously, if this position continues to be vacant for a longer period of time, further consideration will have to be given to what should happen with the manse.

The Kirkgate manse in Linlithgow has also had some work undertaken over the last 12 months. Obviously, with the clear intention to retain St Michael's as the primary place of worship in the parish, continuing to maintain this manse would be necessary.

## **Outcomes for Approval**

The following outcomes from this detailed Property Review were fully supported and approved by Kirk Session at its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> September:

- a) Avonbridge Church and Hall** – actively support those involved in the process of completing a community asset transfer and engage with Presbytery and the General Trustees on this issue. A timeline of six months to the end of March 2027 will be set within which a final decision will be taken on the viability of the transfer of ownership of the church building to the local community.
- b) Torphichen Kirk** – provide the Fundraising Group with all necessary support as they seek to establish the likelihood of raising the necessary funds for the repairs which have been identified under the auspices of a separate charity established for that specific purpose. A period of 12 months, to September 2027, will be set within which a final decision will be taken on the viability of establishing this separate charity to assume ownership of the church building.
- c) St John's Hall** – undertake ongoing maintenance of the building until the future of the church building is determined, including the extent to which the Kirk could be adapted to meet the needs of the community for non-worship activities. If the decision is taken to move forward with St John's Hall as the parish presence within the village, appropriate investment would be directed towards the external fabric and for improvements to the internal facilities.
- d) St Ninian's Craigmailen Church** – Presbytery approval would not be forthcoming for the remedial works which have been identified and for the further investigations necessary to establish the extent of the existing problems within the church. Consequently, we would consult with Presbytery on the process for the permanent closure of the church and the sale of the building.
- e) Longcroft Hall** – with the closure of the church, investment would be directed to this building to address the relatively minor issues identified by the Presbytery Building Officer and to progress improvements to the facilities available, such as the installation of an effective A/V system. In addition, further investment would be considered, including increasing the space available for worship services as well as for use by the local community, which could be funded by some of the proceeds of the sale of the church building.

- f) **St Michael's Church** – the retention of the church as the main worship presence within the parish will require progressing the initial phase of Project 600. Seeking further financial assistance to supplement monies already committed by funders and via local fundraising will be required.
- g) **Cross House, including the Kirk Hall** – recent confirmation of the package of financial assistance from the General Trustees will be a very important factor in the bid to HES for financial assistance in October 2026. The outcome of that submission will determine what repairs and improvements will be possible for this building. Failure to secure the necessary funds will require further consideration of the future of Cross House.

## **Communications**

Following the decisions taken by Kirk Session on the various properties within the parish, it will be very important to communicate this information as effectively as possible. It is critical that the reasoning behind the various decisions is clearly outlined to reassure the various audiences – members, Elders, the local community as well as Presbytery – that the proposed actions represent the optimum solution, balancing the worship, mission and outreach needs of all parts of the parish with the available financial resources. A sensitive approach will be required as for many people this will be a very emotional issue.

In addition to the general circulation of this paper to Elders and members of the parish, a series of open meetings will be held in Avonbridge, Torphichen, Longcroft Hall and Cross House. These meetings will provide those attending with further insight on the process by which the decisions were taken and how the approved outcomes will be progressed and managed. It will also offer them an opportunity to contribute to the discussion on how can we best deliver our worship, mission and outreach priorities within the buildings we will continue to use.

**Tom Costley, Clerk**

***On behalf of the Kirk Session of Linlithgow and Avon Valley Church of Scotland***

***16 September 2026***