



New housing areas - Top ten tips for local church leaders

- **a resource paper for discussion**



Rev Simon Ellis is a member of the Churches Group for New Housing Areas at Churches Together in England. He is a URC minister with years of experience in churches and new housing networks.

Here, Simon reflects on that experience and offers his personal 'top ten tips' for other church leaders concerned with the challenge and opportunity of new housing in their own local areas.

1. Ecumenical Co-operation is key

Shared resources are frankly going to be a practical necessity most of the time, complimentary approaches reflecting different ecclesiologies and traditions can unlock opportunities, an ecumenical partnership brings greater acceptability in the political/planning framework.



2. A Clear Vision with realistic expectations for the project

Especially 'time' (things will take longer than you expect & critically the timeline of delivery will often appear chaotic)
& 'numbers' (a brutally honest acceptance of current churchgoing figures has to be the basis of church planting)

3. Get there at the beginning

Literally, if at all possible but at every stage of the planning process be aware & pro-active. If buying a house, or building, on site, negotiate for the earliest possible date.



4. Real Job description with excellent support

A Pioneer does not have to be a maverick; flexibility does not mean a blank cheque. The project will be stronger the more involved the existing churches are. A team approach is crucial, and all the above applies to a volunteer as well as a paid post.

5. Compliment the current church "offer" creating a truly "fresh" expression

While the new church can be totally traditional, it should still be different from what already exists in the area otherwise it will inevitably struggle against competition. It needs to grow and reflect the new community.

6. Talk to everyone, learn the language, speak with one voice

Developers, local authorities, other 3rd Sector organisations are all involved. They have different agendas and ways of operating but will typically not be used to dealing with churches. Agree a common agenda and if possible have a single point of contact.



7. **Actively seek partners, but do not chase the money**

A "pure" church building is the most unlikely outcome in a new development 106 so partners can offer complimentary use of a shared space and create a sustainable joint project. Even a building that is clearly a Church will be enhanced by frequent use by partners. As with all community work it is critical to hold firm to your core values especially when "tempted" to be involved in a well funded project.

8. **Work to create a new Community**

Restricting mission to church planting misses a wonderful opportunity for the church to be integral to the development of a new community. We still possess a unique profile in the UK of a trusted "neutral" meeting place.

9. **Hope not Hype as the basis for the new community**

From Government policy documents to Builders sales leaflets a lot is claimed which is ephemeral or a veneer. No-one buys a slice of heaven with a mortgage but it is equally important that we work for and champion the best outcomes possible.

10. **Offer a real welcome.**

We may be the only people to knock on a door who will not be selling something, moving can be lonely. The existing local churches will have access to a wealth of useful information, give it away and make friends. Very simple church run activities, a BBQ or a play session for toddlers, may be the only social events on site and a rare opportunity for people to meet each other.

Rev Simon Ellis

URC Minister and member of the Churches Group for New Housing Areas



Contact:

Jim Currin, Secretary for the Churches Group for New Housing Areas
Jim.currin(AT)cte.org.uk

This is a resource paper from www.cte.org.uk/newhousingareas