

**BUYING & SELLING MANSES****Introduction**

These guidelines are to assist those in local churches and district councils who share with the Synod Officer (Properties) the responsibility for ensuring that the synod manse policy is implemented in the situation where a new manse is to be purchased. They do not address any other aspect of the synod manse policy.

The purchase of a new manse will normally be associated with the disposal of an existing one. If there is currently no manse, the section 'Replacing an Existing Manse' should be ignored.

It must be appreciated that the process of selling and buying houses is rarely straightforward. It is not unusual to look at the sale particulars of up to fifty properties and to visit more than twenty. Sometimes, the first choice of property cannot be purchased for one reason or another. This is likely to prove frustrating and even stressful to those most closely involved, so patience and care for those concerned is important. At times when swift action is essential, it will be important that those responsible for decision making are readily available. The process will be assisted if there is only one point of contact for the local church and one for the district council.

Replacing an Existing Manse

The decision to replace an existing manse will arise from the recognition that it fails to meet the criteria for manses set down in the synod manse policy (> 063) and that it is not prudent to extend the property in order to do so. If the local church, and its minister if it has one, believe that the manse should be replaced, an approach should be made to the District Secretary. An appointed representative of the District Council will then make a visit to the manse, accompanied by the local church's representative(s) and the Synod Officer (Properties), if he so wishes, with a view to deciding whether replacement of the manse is the most appropriate course of action. If all are agreed that it is, the Church Meeting will need to pass a resolution that:

under the provisions of the synod manse policy, the manse at [address] be sold and a replacement property purchased in accordance with paragraph 2(c) of Part II of Schedule 2 to the URC Act 1981

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A certified minute of the resolution should be forwarded to the District Secretary for consideration by the District Council. If the request is endorsed by the District Council, the Synod Finance Committee will be invited to authorise the trustees to proceed with the replacement of the manse, following the procedure set out below. The Synod Finance Committee may set limits on the price of the replacement property

The timing of the sale of the manse will be agreed with the local church and its minister and will allow for any necessary internal works to be carried out on the new property before the minister moves into it. It will be helpful if prospective purchasers of the existing manse could view the property prior to it becoming unoccupied. The responsibility for the sale of the manse rests solely with the URC Wessex Trust, although its Executive Officer will be grateful for the assistance of the local church in dealing with insurance, queries about the recent history of the property, final meter readings and matters of that kind.

Under no circumstances may the local church enter into any discussion concerning the sale which could be construed as a contract.

Buying a New Manse

The URC Wessex Trust will make the purchase in response to the decision of the Synod Finance Committee. Although it is likely that the Executive Officer of the URC Wessex Trust will already have been alerted to the impending purchase, it is wise for the those responsible in the local church to make contact with the Executive Officer at the earliest stage. Once the local church, in consultation with the minister who will occupy it, has identified the property they wish to purchase, the District Secretary should be advised. An appointed representative of the District Council will then make a visit to the property, accompanied by the local church's representative(s) and the Synod Officer (Properties), if he so wishes, with a view to deciding whether it meets the synod criteria or could be made to do so. If all are agreed that it does, the Executive Officer of the URC Wessex Trust will then conduct all negotiations on behalf of the trustees, consulting with the local church representative as appropriate. The Executive Officer will ask for just one point of contact.

Under no circumstances may the local church make an offer for a property or enter into any discussion which could be construed as a contract.

The trustees are required by charity law to act prudently in the purchase of property. The Executive Officer will therefore arrange for a survey and valuation of the prospective manse before entering a contract based on the price he has negotiated. It is sometimes the case that this independent

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professional valuation falls significantly below the negotiated price, in which case, re-negotiation or even withdrawal from the purchase may ensue.

The local church should investigate insurance options and be ready to insure the property fully, including public liability cover of at least £5M, from the day on which contracts are exchanged.

It is very likely that some work will be required to be carried out on the property, possibly including internal decoration, minor works or the provision or replacement of carpets, curtains and cooker. These should be completed prior to occupation by the minister. Some of this can be identified prior to legal completion of the purchase. Some cannot. A district Manse Officer, in consultation with the Synod Officer (Properties) will draw up a schedule of such work and will agree with the local church how it might be carried out. Normally, the local church will be required to obtain three quotations for any such work and to oversee it. The Manse Officer will be able to offer guidance in this process. The synod will meet all costs involved. On behalf of the Wessex Trust, the Executive Officer will either reimburse the local church when provided with evidence for the expenditure or he will settle invoices in sums exceeding £1,000 on the church's instruction.