

Scottish Churches Housing Action



no room for homelessness!

HOMES FROM CHURCH PROPERTY

Duke Street United Reformed Church in Leith (formerly the Congregational Church) was founded in 1829; the present building in Duke Street dates from 1847. It is a large Victorian building with seating for 450 people. In 1997, the congregation realised that the cost of maintaining the building was becoming prohibitive and that the congregation's needs were not being met by occupancy and use of it.

A feasibility study was carried out to determine other potential uses for the building and costings to bring the building up to date. A minimum of £250,000 would be needed simply to maintain the building and put right immediate defects. The church did not have the funds to carry out such extensive repairs and questioned the morality of doing so in the light of local social needs.

The congregation has a long history of community social involvement and it was decided to find [a developer who would develop the site and at the same time allow the congregation to continue on the site.](#)



As there is congregational involvement in homelessness (it is involved with Scottish Churches Housing Action; Fresh Start; Bethany Christian Trust and Homestart) it was felt that a development that included social housing would be most appropriate. Indeed there is agreement within the United Reformed Church in Scotland that, if appropriate, redundant church buildings should be sold for social housing purposes.



Through the good offices of Stuart McKay of Communities Scotland, the congregation was put in touch with Port of Leith Housing Association and its Development Manager, Willie Drysdale.

After long negotiations the projected development by Port of Leith HA includes [18 flats of 2 & 3 bedrooms for rent, four office/workshops with living accommodation above, and a new church centre.](#) This will meet local housing and business needs as well as those of the congregation: an important community facility. Port of Leith has bought the site from the congregation and the church will buy back its portion of the redeveloped building.

The congregation is pleased that it has been able to help in this important development and allow affordable housing to be made available to the community in an area that is prohibitive financially for many local residents. It commends the project to others in the hope that it may be a template for future projects in other area in Scotland.

The project is due to commence imminently and is expected to be [completed in the latter part of 2006.](#)

With financial support from the Scottish Executive, Communities Scotland and the Robertson Trust, Scottish Churches Housing Action has established a programme to encourage other churches to think like Duke Street. For more information, contact the Chief Executive, Alastair Cameron