

Duke Street United Reformed Church, Leith

Initiated by:	Congregation and Port of Leith Housing Association
Completed:	April 2007
Type:	Church – demolition and use of site for affordable housing
Size and tenure:	18 flats, 4 houses for affordable rent
Builder:	Hart Builders (Edinburgh) Ltd
Housing association:	Port of Leith Housing Association
Capital investment:	£2.919M
Original owner:	Scottish Synod, United Reformed Church



The new church centre entrance and sanctuary; the street front with flats above and the family homes at the rear

Duke Street United Reformed Church in Leith (URC - formerly the Congregational Church) was founded in 1829, 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.

A feasibility study was carried out to determine other potential uses for the building and the costs of bring the building up to date. A minimum of £250,000 was 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 decided to find a developer who would develop the site while allowing the congregation to continue to worship there.

Given substantial congregational involvement in homelessness, it was felt that a development that included social housing would be most appropriate. There is agreement in the URC in Scotland that, if appropriate, redundant church buildings should be sold for social housing.

The congregation identified Port of Leith Housing Association as a possible partner. Following negotiations, the church was demolished. New buildings include: a new, modern church centre on the ground floor; 18 flats of 2 and 3 bedrooms for rent above the church and 4 family houses at the rear of the building. The properties were let in April 2007 and provide high quality, affordable homes for 70 people.

Port of Leith bought the site from the congregation and the church bought back its portion of the new building and now has a welcoming church, better quality and much lower heating and maintenance costs.

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 areas of Scotland.



Duke St before demolition