

## Edinburgh Presbytery Mission Plan – Initial Response

We write to express our disappointment with the EPMP Consultation document which we received last week. It has generated considerable frustration, for a variety of reasons not least of which are a lack consistency in the application of principles to the 'Border' MD and a lack of clarity as to what is envisaged. While we shall be writing more fully in due course our preliminary view is that as a draft Plan it is unsatisfactory.

Elements in the Plan as proposed, including the introduction of Mission Districts, make considerable sense. The underlying philosophy appears to be to identify Mission Districts on a radial basis surrounding a Central District. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with such an approach. However, the identification of a Border Mission District is anomalous, and suggests a serious flaw in the thinking behind the Plan. Border Mission District clearly does not fit the radial pattern. It would, on the other hand, have been simplicity itself to have extended the radial concept to cover the entire City area. It is significant that no explanation is offered in the Plan for this anomaly.

The Border Mission District proposal is eccentric for a number of reasons.

**First;** A Border Mission District suggests an internal border will exist within the shortly to be unified Edinburgh and West Lothian Presbytery; it will effectively split that new Presbytery in two. Such a division does not suggest that the Strategy Committee is vigorously pursuing the success of the union. Rather it suggests that work to develop the new Presbytery is uniquely a 'Border' issue.

**Second:** Border Mission District is not practical. It comprises 3 enlarged parishes formed along a north-south axis which are not linked by any public transport routes. While the 63 bus between Balerno and Queensferry starts and ends within Border Mission District the track the 63 follows lies for a considerable portion of its length outside of the area of the new Mission District. The Strategy Committee may not have looked closely at the geographical and transport issues of the area.

**Third;** Border Mission District despite being geographically the largest Mission District has, at 3, the lowest allocated complement of ministers. Yet it is also the only Mission District expressly charged with undertaking work into West Lothian. Again, this suggests that the Strategy Committee may have taken the view that development of linkages with West Lothian was simply a border issue with which they did not need to concern themselves.

It is clear that the Strategy Committee envisages union between the Border parishes and West Lothian congregations. They will be aware that there are no public transport links to the west from Balerno, and that the next proximate settlement to Balerno on the A70 is Carnwath. There is something troublingly unworldly, almost amounting to a loss of grip on reality in the Strategy Committee's bland admonition to Balerno and Currie to seek possible union to the West. That 'commission' suggests to us that the Border Mission District has not been designed by the Strategy Committee to be stable or sustainable.

**Fourth;** Looking now more closely at the Currie / Balerno area with which we are familiar but of which the Strategy Committee appear to have an incomplete appreciation, we would hope that the Committee might wish to take some steps to consider the effect of the projected separation of Juniper Green Parish Church from the Water of Leith Cluster Group.

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The Strategy Committee will know that there are two High Schools in the Upper Water of Leith Valley, at Currie and at Balerno. They will be aware, however unpalatable the realisation, that schools now occupy the position once occupied by Churches as the hubs around which communities are built. It seems strange to us then that the Committee seem to wish to separate a church from the school which its young people, and those of its Cluster Group partners, attend.

The Strategy Committee will have noted that that Cluster Group had agreed a way forward for the three parishes along the Upper Water of Leith Valley. This is an area in which community and societal links are strong. We had understood that the Strategy Committee's preference in designing this plan was, as set out in the Committee's Report of June 2019 that

‘this future plan for presbytery must not be imposed from on high but rise collectively from the grassroots, from the local congregations working within the local communities.’

Amongst all the cluster groups across the Edinburgh Presbytery there are only seven cases in which any group has lost a member parish in what is otherwise a fairly universal pattern of transfer of cluster groups in their entirety into new Mission Districts.

Ordinarily one would have expected that a Plan advocating dismemberment of any Cluster Group would have set out the reasons for that. In the absence of any such explanation such a decision appears simply whimsical or worse.

It is also the case that removing Juniper Green from Water of Leith Cluster Group cannot on any analysis be presented as an essential pre-requisite for the formation of a Border Mission District.

It may be that the Strategy Committee had reasons but if so they have evidently decided not to reach out and communicate them.

In summary; our preliminary view is that this Plan may be viable in parts. It is not viable however in relation to Balerno or the Upper Water of Leith Valley.

Yours Sincerely

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