

Paper U1

Mission Council advisory group

The Greenbelt festival



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Basic information

Contact	Mr Alan Yates, immediate past Moderator of Assembly alan.yates@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Mission Council agrees to fund being an associate of Greenbelt for the next three years, with a total annual budget, covering fees and practical costs, of up to £24,000 p.a. The URC planning group for GB is asked to continue its excellent programme for the under 25s and to provide more content for the over 25s, to ensure that the original intention of URC participation in GB being intergenerational is achieved. The mission committee is asked to take responsibility for our involvement in GB through the established planning group; noting that the costs of our involvement in GB are not intended to come out of the existing mission committee budget.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The URC's involvement in the Greenbelt festival 2019 to 2021.
Main points	Involvement is recommended; a budget is indicated; and the mission committee is identified as the line of accountability.
Previous documents	Nothing very recent.
Consultation has taken place with...	Very widely indeed: see paper. Chief Finance Officer.

Summary of impact

Financial	See the second resolution.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	This is largely about external relationships and public witness.

The Greenbelt festival

Introduction

1. Legacy Fund money supported the Church's mission and communications committees in planning and delivering an active URC presence at the Greenbelt annual Christian arts and music festival in 2016 and 2017.
2. Many people who were aware in one way or another of the URC input in these two years were keen to see continued involvement, and some imaginative and effective work was planned and delivered in 2018.
3. However, the experience of planning activities and of gathering money a year at a time seemed unsatisfactory and somewhat unpredictable. If involvement were to continue, it would be important to look a few years ahead.
4. The Mission Council advisory group therefore asked that two people review what was being achieved in 2018 and bring a recommendation to Mission Council for the years 2019 to 2021. Mr Alan Yates was asked, as a senior figure in the Church who had not been involved in planning our input previously. He was joined by a nominee of the planning group, the Revd Anne Sardeson from Thames North Synod. The resulting paper was drafted by Alan and Anne. While their work on it was commissioned by MCAG, their conclusions have not been tested by MCAG, as MCAG believes this is a task for Mission Council.
5. The finance committee has included a sum of 30k for inter-committee projects in the draft 2019 budget. This paper clearly recommends that the bulk of that budget line be used on Greenbelt, and hopes for similar provision in 2020 and 2021.
6. The paper and recommendations prepared by Alan Yates and Anne Sardeson now follow. Alan Yates will speak to this at the Mission Council meeting.

The Yates-Sardeson review paper: Greenbelt 2019 to 21

Background

1. The URC has been a Greenbelt (GB) associate for the past three years. This provides us with a small (by Greenbelt standards) tent, permission to put on three 'Cake and Debate' sessions for youth, and access to the site to stage things such as contemplative walks, worship, discussions and art installations. A large planning group, under the leadership of Steve Summers, was established prior to the 2016 event, and has continued, with a few changes of personnel, for all of the three GBs.
2. Anne Sardeson (one of the GB Planning Group) and Alan Yates were asked by MCAG to review our involvement in GB and to provide a report to Mission Council (MC) to facilitate a decision on future investment in GB for the next three years.

3. The authors would like to thank all those who have taken the time to provide responses to this review.

Approach

4. Our aim with the data collection was to estimate the value our relationship with GB brings so that MC can assess value for money and affordability. Note that we were asked not to publish the cost of being a GB Associate as this data is 'commercial in confidence'. Therefore, the majority of people who provided us with feedback did not know how much the involvement in GB costs the URC. This is why MC is being asked to consider costs and benefits.
5. The following groups have been invited to contribute to the review:
 - Synod clerks and moderators
 - Mission Council members
 - Mission committee members
 - URC festival goers
 - Non-URC festival goers
 - URC GB planning group
 - URC tent visitors
 - Paul Northup, GB Creative Director
6. In addition, Anne and Alan have provided some insights based on their time at GB.

Results

7. Synod clerks and moderators – eight responses
 - All are aware of our involvement and all but one (who wanted more data) wanted to continue our involvement
8. Mission Council members, Mission committee members and URC festival goers – 149 responses
 - 94% want to continue our involvement, 62% say our involvement encourages them to go, 91% agrees it gives a positive view of the URC, 76% say their GB experience is enhanced by our involvement and 49% say our involvement has a positive effect on our local churches.
 - Note that we had URCers from all synods except Northern and Scotland ... not surprising given the location of GB.
 - A few people felt our activities did not offer much for those beyond 25; recognising that 84% of the URC festival goers are over 39. Also note that those under 26 were the most positive about our involvement in GB.
 - We have added a few comments from our URC festival goers. There were many more positive than negative comments:
 - 'Our 'table installation' was so out of the way, that it was not visible and many of the volunteer stewards did not know of its presence and mis-directed folks to 'The Table' cookery demonstration tent.'
 - 'The URC has some good quality, publicly known folk and good contacts elsewhere – it would be relatively easy for a different URC planning group to emulate that Methodist success, style and partnership [a part-share in a main avenue, named marquee venue] – this would also fit more easily with our

current demographic. But this might be a stronger value for money partnership than what was evidenced in 2017 and 2018 – but it might have demanded more £££.'

- 'I wanted to reinforce that I feel that involvement with Greenbelt has been beneficial for raising the profile of the URC. I spoke to many people who loved what was done and said that the children's activities were great.'
- 'I have found the input of the URC to be valuable at Greenbelt. It provides a space for people to come and talk and it raises the profile of the church. The past two years have been great interactive events at GB and pulled people in and then allowed for conversations. My only comment would be that if someone did not have children I wonder if they would as easily come into the space?'
- 'It is hard to think that the URC being at Greenbelt adds much to our URC numbers – as I think most people at Greenbelt are already involved in some kind of church and aren't looking for a new one.'
- 'The carefully planned and prepared items and activities in the URC tent at Greenbelt, and the thoughtful 'treasure hunts' around the grounds, have been valuable contributions for people of all ages to share in exploration and conversations on topics of faith and Christian life. The way these have been prepared has involved individuals and groups from many churches throughout Britain making things to be used in the festivals. This has spread the sense of belonging and sharing in a large-scale enterprise of the URC in Christian celebration and witness.'

9. Non-URC festival goers

We interviewed 83 non-URC GB festival goers, asking three simple questions:
Were you aware of the URC before GB?

- **Yes:** Do you know more about the URC now?
if yes: Does our presence put the URC in a favourable light?
No: Are you aware of the URC now?
if yes: Does our presence put the URC in a favourable light?
- 90% said they were aware of the URC, 35% said they now knew more about the URC because of our involvement and 30% said it put the URC in a good light.

10. URC GB planning group

- The members of the planning group were, in addition to contributing to the survey, asked to provide estimates of the effort that went into planning and delivering our GB activities, but we did not get enough responses to estimate total resource. We suspect that the total effort exceeds 120 person-days. Note that most of this time is given free-of-charge and is given because the people have a passion for GB (in other words we cannot assume that this effort would be available for other initiatives).

11. URC tent visitors

- The work in the Take Away tent is a focus for our time at Greenbelt and much of the feedback shines a light on the place this tent is coming to play in the life of many Greenbelters and the way this is undoubtedly affecting the perception of the URC. Many who came in spoke of how much they had enjoyed previous years and

commented on the longer-term effect our contribution has had. One summed up what many have said about the creativity and energy of the URC: 'Brilliant stuff URC. Thank you. Very thoughtful activities, especially the silhouettes – beautifully written and engaging. Incredible asset to Greenbelt', with one person declaring 'this is a jewel in the URC crown'

- 'When we use the basket from last year it always reminds us of the URC at Greenbelt'. 'I've never said this before, but I am so proud to say I am from the URC'. The Take Away tent adds a focal point for URC people at Greenbelt and seems to have been a great encouragement and sense of connection. This above quote is an overheard reply given to a question about where someone was from; it makes me giggle and fills me with joy
- The tent is a crucial connection point beyond the URC, and beyond Greenbelt itself, as many who come through and take away ideas and flowers are not URC, and of course, many of those who contribute to the tent do not (as many cannot) come to Greenbelt. Those who worked in the tent had a number of significant conversations enabled by the flowers. The stories of how people will use their flowers in so many ways in so many churches around the country are a reminder of what we are giving to the wider Christian community, as is what a chaplain from a school in Glastonbury shared when he told us he has taken a set of the labels from the pilgrimage to hide around the school for the pupils to find. 'We really appreciated what the URC have provided over the last couple of years for Greenbelt. There is clearly so much thought, creativity and love that goes into the preparation and execution of the event.
It is made even more special knowing the work has been done by people all over the country. Thank you!'
- To sum up: 'well done for coming to Greenbelt'.

12. Paul Northup, GB Creative Director

- Very complimentary about our planning group ... 'creative and diligent ... they're easy to work with'
- 'GB can be free floating [i.e. only operates for four days a year] so it is important to have relationships with mainstream denominations [Quakers and URC]'
- GB values the year-round coverage they get from *Reform* ... although independent from us being an Associate, but very much seen as part of the broader relationship. Note that in conversation with Steve Tomkins it is clear that *Reform* [and the URC] benefit from access to high profile speakers during GB and beyond.

13. Anne and Alan's insights

- The tent was in a good position, looked attractive, was always busy, and had a 'buzz' about it
- It came across as a place for the young: welcoming for the young, less so for adults without children
- The Cake and Debate sessions were well received (note that 'oldies' were not allowed in)
- For some who come to GB there is a sense of falling off the edge of church: so, the value in us being there and saying there are churches that connect in these places is crucial
- Greenbelt gives a sense of connection with others both in the URC and beyond

- Greenbelt offers a way of being church that is a place of exploration and openness; a safe place to ask questions and explore ideas that might be shut down in other settings; a place to be creative and find connection. Something I call 'being church in a field' – not all polished, but exciting and challenging and wet and warm and open and supportive. Being there for the world. Being Christ in a messy world'.
- Only two denominations were present in their own right: The Quakers and us ... not surprising given our shared heritage of social action and inclusiveness.

Assessment

14. We did not specifically ask a question that had been raised at MCAG – whether the URC would do better to sponsor a different festival. In conversation, and from some comments, it was clear that Greenbelt was better aligned to the URC than festivals such as Spring Harvest. One of the issues is that GB does not really serve our Northern and Scottish synods: it's worth noting that Greenbelt are well aware of their lack of involvement of people from Scotland, not least because it happens after Scottish Schools have gone back. There is another sister festival in Scotland, Solas, earlier in the summer that fits better with the school holidays there.
15. In all the data we have gathered the overwhelming response is that we value and wish to continue our involvement in GB, particularly by those under 26. We recognise that the URC respondents are self-selecting (not unusual in such exercises) and therefore may be naturally favourable to GB. However, opportunity was given for anyone to provide negative comments.
16. The impact on non-URC folk was positive. Although only about a third of those interviewed expressed a positive impact from our presence this could translate into about 4,000 people, if the statistics work!
17. A significant, but as yet unquantified, effort goes into the planning and delivery of our GB activities.
18. The simple summary of the data is that our involvement in GB does add significant value, but the question remains that should we better meet the needs of our core festival goers (40 to 65) or focus on our missing generations?

Governance

19. At present our GB planning group has a loose connection to the mission committee. The mission committee receives and reviews a report from the GB planning group. One of the resolutions aims to formalise this arrangement.

Towards a decision

20. Two key decisions are needed: financial and strategic:
 - Our involvement in GB undeniably delivers significant value, but is it value for money, and can we afford it?



- If we are to continue should we modify its focus and how should we govern it?

Resolutions

21. **Three draft resolutions are therefore offered to Mission Council, as shown in the table on page 152.**