

CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE SHAPE OF THE BLACKHEATH AND CRYSTAL PALACE CIRCUIT

This document sets out some of the options for the future shape of the circuit. Everyone in the circuit is invited to feed in their views. This can be done by completing the attached questionnaire (available online and in paper copy) by 6th September and by attending the 'Our Circuit, Our Future' event at Burnt Ash Methodist Church on 14th September.

Circuit Way Forward Group

26 July 2024

Consultation on the future shape of the Blackheath and Crystal Palace circuit

The circuit is going through significant changes. When Rev. Richard Grocott leaves (August 2025), we will continue with three ministers (previously four). The remaining ministers will adopt changed roles with Rev. Craig Gaffney becoming superintendent.

This paper outlines four options for the circuit's reorganization which will be discussed at a circuit-wide 'Our Circuit, Our Future' event (on 14.09.24 at Burnt Ash). The Circuit Meeting (held 25.09.24) will decide which option to proceed with.

The key decision surrounds which churches ministers have pastoral responsibility for. We may then consider what additional support they might need.

1 Ministers Stations

The Circuit Leadership Team (CLT) proposed a plan for how the circuit could be organised. It sought to help the Circuit think through the implications of a reduced ministerial team.

While the CLT believe the original plan is a good way forward, it recognizes that it was not perfect and welcomed other suggestions. Views from around the circuit have been considered and four options will now be presented, listed below:

Option 1 (Original CLT Plan) Current membership

Rev Craig Gaffney:	Burnt Ash	Forest Hill	Hither Green	142
Rev Willian Davis:	Anerley	Upper Norwood	Wesley Hall	151
Rev Charles ILunga:	Eltham Park	Lewisham	Sunfields	145

Option 2

Rev Craig Gaffney:	Burnt Ash	Eltham Park	Sunfields	116
Rev Willian Davis:	Anerley	Upper Norwood	Wesley Hall	151
Rev Charles ILunga:	Forest Hill	Hither Green	Lewisham	171

Option 3

Rev Craig Gaffney:	Burnt Ash	Eltham Park	Hither Green	119
Rev Willian Davis:	Anerley	Upper Norwood	Wesley Hall	151
Rev Charles ILunga:	Forest Hill	Lewisham	Sunfields	168

Option 4

Rev Craig Gaffney:	Burnt Ash	Hither Green	Sunfields	111
Rev Willian Davis:	Anerley	Lewisham	Upper Norwood	165
Rev Charles ILunga:	Eltham Park	Forest Hill	Wesley Hall	162

Option 1 *The Circuit Leadership Team's Original Plan*

Rev Craig Gaffney (Blue on map):	Burnt Ash	Forest Hill	Hither Green	142
Rev William Davis (Orange on map):	Anerley	Upper Norwood	Wesley Hall	151
Rev Charles Ilunga (Pink on map):	Eltham Park	Lewisham	Sunfields	145

Strengths

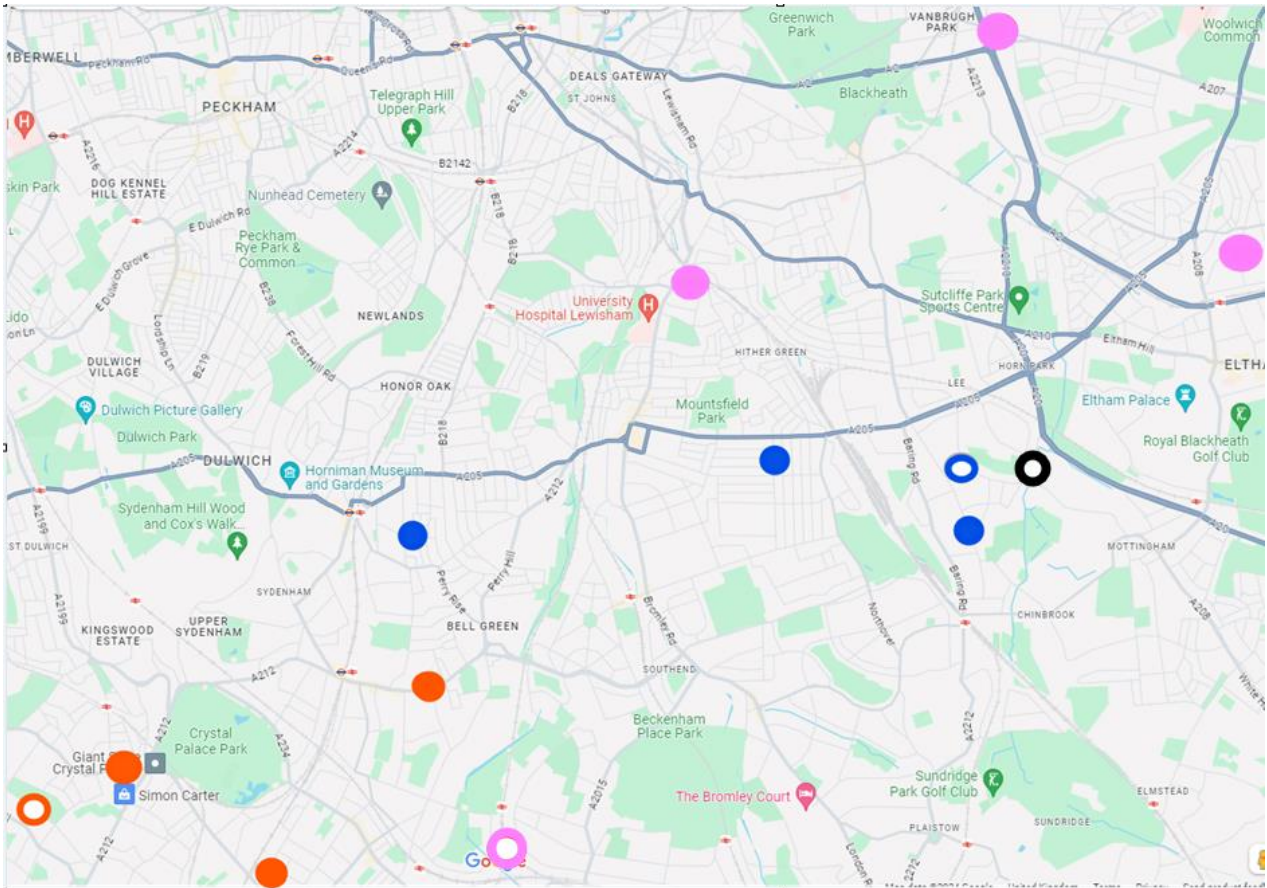
Option 1 proposes three circuit stations: the North (Eltham Park, Lewisham and Sunfields), Middle (Burnt Ash, Forest Hill and Hither Green), and South (Anerley, Upper Norwood and Wesley Hall). The churches in each station are geographically close to each other making it easy for ministers to move between them. They also all had roughly 150 members in 2023, thereby meeting the Connexional guidelines on the membership required to justify a minister (150/160 members). Each station, with its present membership, therefore, has a good chance of being allocated a minister in future stationing.

On this plan Charles would have pastoral responsibility for the North, Craig for the Middle, and William for the South. Both William and Charles are due to 'sit down' in 2027.

Craig, as superintendent, would be based in the middle of the circuit. There are symbolic and travel-time benefits to the superintendent being based centrally. Additionally, there are temporary benefits associated with the building works due to start before long in Forest Hill. This work will require some Superintendent oversight, adding to his workload, whether he is based at Forest Hill or not. The Forest Hill congregation is expected to move temporarily to Wesley Hall, thereby reducing the workload on the minister with pastoral charge for Forest Hill due to the single worshipping congregation being at Wesley Hall. This would make the Superintendent's workload lower only if based at Forest Hill.

Travel

Our ministers wish to remain in their current manses. While William and Craig are located close to the churches where they would have pastoral charge (combined walking distance to each of their proposed three churches is 5.1 miles and 5 miles respectively) for Charles the combined walking distance to Eltham Park, Lewisham and Sunfields is 16.7 miles from his manse (it would be 8.1 miles from Mottingham Lane (black dot on map)). The circuit map below illustrates the journeys from manses (white centered dots) to churches (block colour dots).



Weaknesses

Charles would be spending significant time travelling for services, meetings and pastoral visits. This weakness could be mitigated by using Zoom for some meetings, establishing an office for Charles in each church as a base, and the use of taxis paid for by the circuit. Charles is happy to travel to these churches using public transport. In the longer term it is expected that the minister with pastoral charge of the North section will live at Mottingham Lane. Given Charles is 'sitting down' in 2027, the disruption and cost of moving him to Mottingham Lane would be prohibitive.

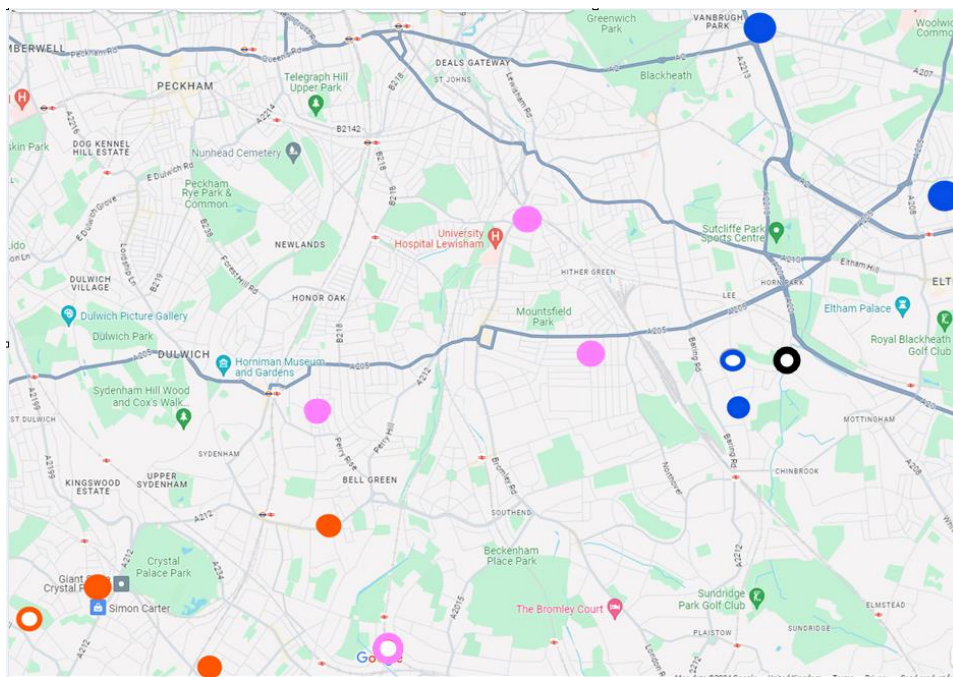
Option 1 also involves significant change with five of the nine circuit churches having a new minister in 2025 whereas other options involve less change. This could be perceived as a disadvantage (relationships that have been built up gradually over time are not maintained); however, change can be beneficial (a new minister brings different gifts and graces, and change can be a blessing to both church and minister alike). This option should, consequently, not necessarily be seen as being worse than options with less change. What matters is that the minister is a good match for the local church where they exercise pastoral charge. A change of churches could benefit Craig, as superintendent, as this would help him to get to know more of the circuit.

Option 2

Rev Craig Gaffney (Blue):	Burnt Ash	Eltham Park	Sunfields	116
Rev William Davis (Orange):	Anerley	Upper Norwood	Wesley Hall	151
Rev Charles Ilunga (Pink):	Forest Hill	Hither Green	Lewisham	171

Strengths

The main benefit of Option 2 is that all churches would have ministers that live reasonably close to them, and no minister would have to travel too far. Charles's distance, for example, would drop from 16.7 miles (option 1) to 9.3 miles with this arrangement. See circuit map below.



This option also involves less change than in Option 1: four churches rather than five would have a new minister.

Weaknesses

Firstly, as it stands, this option does not appear to be a sustainable long-term arrangement as the stations are unbalanced in size (William having 151 members, Charles 171 members, and Craig 116 members). Unless membership grows substantially in the eastern station (Burnt Ash, Eltham Park, Sunfields) it will be difficult to make a future case that it justifies a ministerial appointment. Further restructuring may therefore be required ahead of this station becoming vacant.

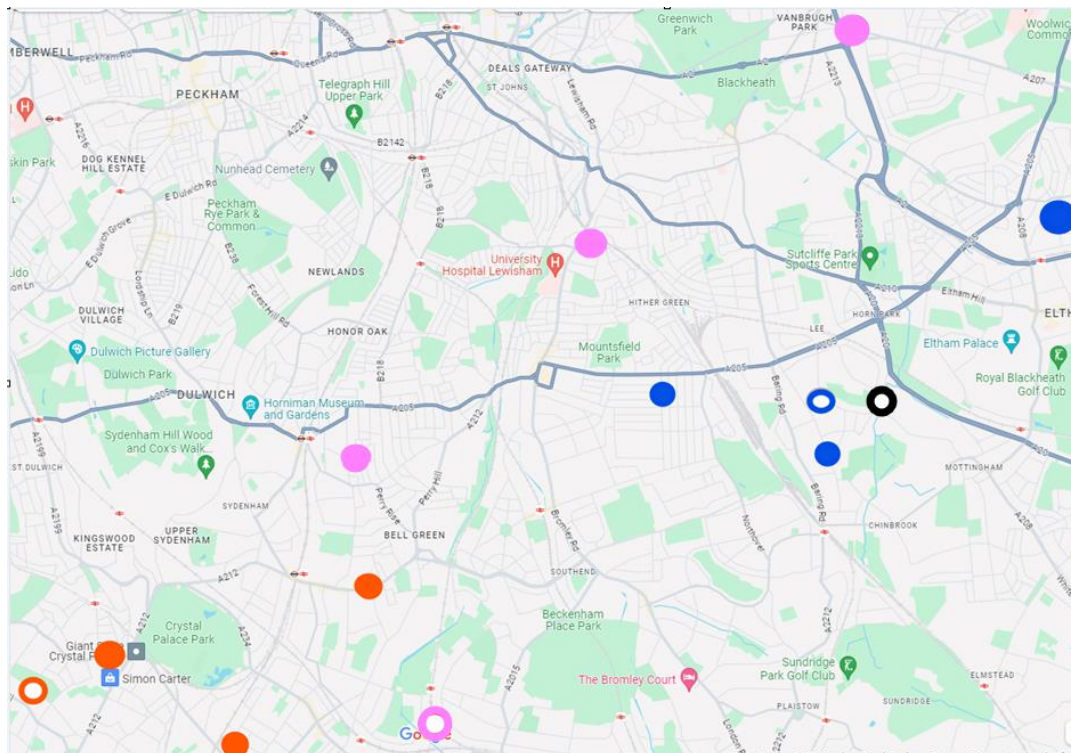
Secondly, Craig's workload would be larger than in Option 1 as there would not be any benefit to him from there being any reduction in workload from Forest Hill and Wesley Hall worshipping together and he could have the expectation of overseeing Forest Hill's legal process/building works as an additional church.

Option 3

Rev Craig Gaffney (Blue):	Burnt Ash	Eltham Park	Hither Green	119
Rev William Davis (Orange):	Anerley	Upper Norwood	Wesley Hall	151
Rev Charles Ilunga (Pink):	Forest Hill	Lewisham	Sunfields	168

Strengths

Like Option 2, most of the churches would have ministers that live reasonably close to them (Sunfields being the exception). Charles's distance, for example, (16.7 miles in option 1 and 9.3 miles in option 2) would be 12.3 miles with this arrangement.



Like Option 2, this arrangement involves less change than Option 1: four churches rather than five would have a new minister.

Unlike option 2, this arrangement enables Craig to remain at Hither Green, where the circuit youth ministry has been centred, utilising his prior experience in, and passion for, youth work.

Weaknesses

As with Option 2, this arrangement may not be sustainable as the stations would be unbalanced (William having pastoral charge of 151 members, Charles 168, and Craig 119), so further restructuring could be required.

Another weakness, as with Option 2, is that Craig's workload would be increased as superintendent without there being any reduction in workload from Forest Hill and Wesley Hall worshipping together. He could have the expectation of overseeing Forest Hill's legal process/building works as an additional church.

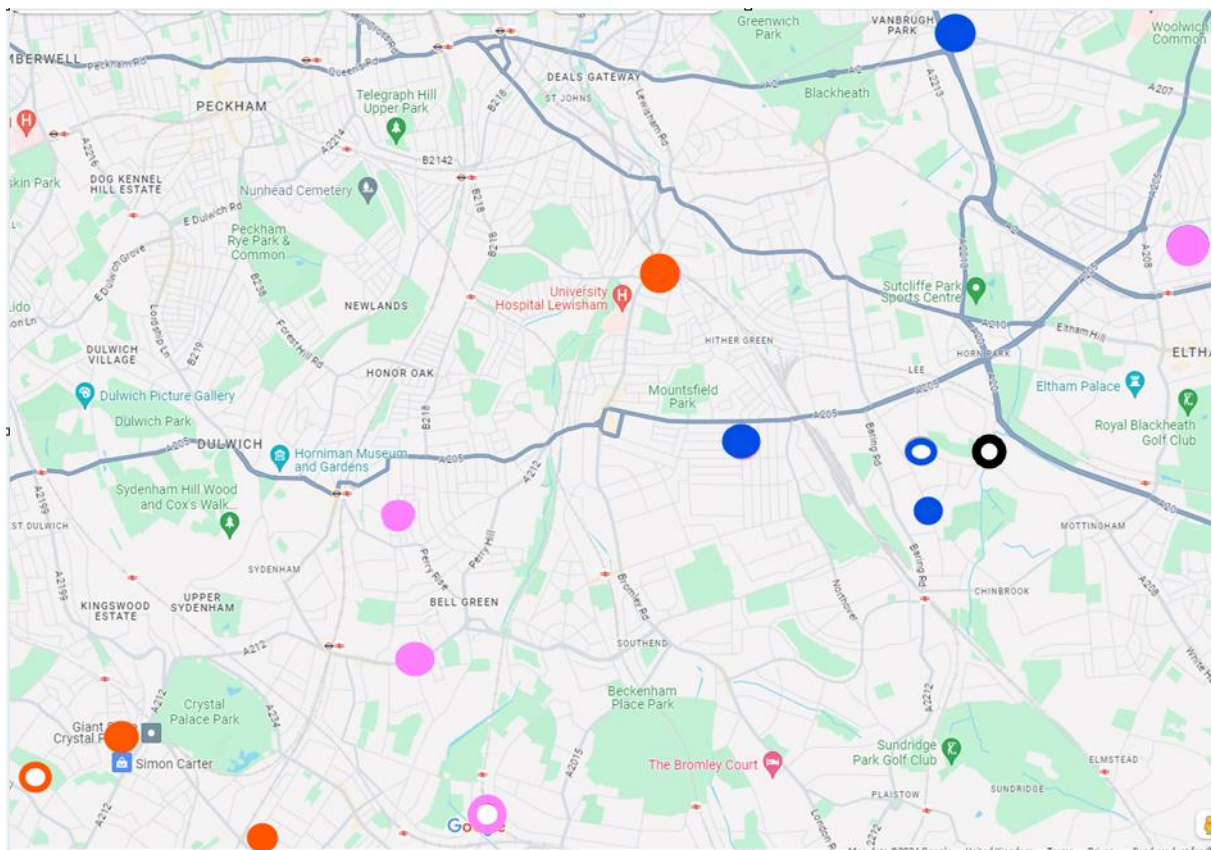
Option 4

Rev Craig Gaffney (Blue):	Burnt Ash	Hither Green	Sunfields	111
Rev William Davis (Orange):	Anerley	Lewisham	Upper Norwood	165
Rev Charles Ilunga (Pink):	Eltham Park	Forest Hill	Wesley Hall	162

Strengths

Option 4 proposes the least-change: only two churches would have a new minister in 2025.

Although Option 4 involves less travel for Charles than under Option 1, William would have to travel further. See circuit map.



Weaknesses

As with Options 2 and 3, this option may not be sustainable as the stations would be unbalanced in size (William having pastoral charge of 165 members, Charles 162, and Craig 111), so further restructuring could be required.

Ministerial workloads could become unbalanced with the potential that Charles's workload (as minister to both Forest Hill and Wesley Hall during a temporary amalgamation) would significantly drop in comparison to his colleagues, especially if the superintendent is expected to oversee Forest Hill's legal processes/rebuilding as an additional church to the three Craig has pastoral responsibility for.

2 Additional Support

As Methodists we know from our Covenant Service that ‘Christ has many services to be done’. Some of these services are typically carried out by ministers and others by lay people. Within their areas of pastoral charge, the key responsibilities of ministers are to preach and lead worship, to be responsible for the pastoral care of church members, to encourage congregations in their faith journeys, and to guide the churches in their acts of mission. Ministers also get involved in the running of churches and the circuit by chairing church councils and overseeing property, finance, safeguarding and various other activities, but these are not the main roles of ministers.

The superintendent minister has a special responsibility for leading, enthusing and supporting ministry in the circuit as a whole. In practice, a disproportionate share of the administrative burden of the circuit also falls to the superintendent. The superintendent also has to help resolve issues that emerge in churches where they do not have pastoral charge.

When we move to having three rather than four ministers, we must ensure that our ministers do not become overworked and can focus on being ministers. One way of doing that is to look for additional support. While the Circuit Administrator will continue to give administrative support to the Superintendent, we will also need to consider whether our ministers need additional support and whether the circuit should employ one or more lay workers to help with specific areas of mission, for example in youth ministry. This will be considered in the light of church mission plans.