

Report of the Consultation about a single Cumbria Circuit by the District Policy Group and the Cumbria Circuit Group for the Cumbria District Synod on 27 April 2024

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The possibility of a single Cumbria Circuit was first presented at the April 2022 Cumbria District Synod. On the recommendation of the District Policy Committee (or Group, as it is known in Cumbria – the ‘DPG’), a Cumbria Circuit Group was convened and appointed by the September 2002 Synod to explore possible options for reconfiguring the circuits in Cumbria. The Group reported to the April 2023 Synod and recommended that the model of a single Cumbria Circuit be pursued. Further exploration of a single circuit was endorsed by the Synod. An open and well attended ‘Gathering Day’ was held in July 2023, where ideas and concerns were shared, and initial views expressed through an indicative vote. In the light of that day, the DPG, whose responsibility it is under Standing Order 501 to oversee possible circuit mergers, recommended to the September 2023 Synod that the Synod should endorse the holding of a formal consultation with all the circuit meetings and church councils of the Cumbria District, as required by the Standing Order, to which the Synod agreed almost unanimously.
- 1.2 The consultation took place between September 2023 and the end of March 2024. Every church council and circuit meeting was asked to consider an introductory video that explained the proposal, together with the formal consultation document that explained the process and set out details of the proposal, including the responses to some Frequently Asked Questions (‘FAQs’), and requested that every such meeting vote on the following resolution:

The [x Circuit Meeting or y Methodist Church Council] resolves that, under Standing Order 501, the Cumbria District Policy Group and the Cumbria District Synod be asked to recommend to the Methodist Conference of 2024 that the existing Circuits in the Cumbria District amalgamate to form a single Cumbria Circuit from 1 September 2025, and that, if the Methodist Conference approves the amalgamation, all necessary steps be taken for its implementation.

- 1.3 During the consultation, the Cumbria Circuit Group continued to report to the DPG, and to provide support when requested by circuits. An open and well attended ‘Listening Day’ was held in February 2024, facilitated by Place for Hope, to help those with different perspectives or concerns to understand each other better. The FAQs were developed and reissued as further comments and questions were received: the updated FAQs capture the issues that have been raised and their potential response. A copy of the original Consultation Paper is included with this Report, without the original FAQs, since these have been replaced by the latest April 2024 updated version, now included as a separate document with this report. The rest of this paper reports the results of the consultation and the consequent recommendation.

2. Results of the Consultation

- 2.1 The results of the votes of each church council and the Circuit Meeting in the Cumbria District are set out in the Table in Appendix 1, and in the Diagrams in Appendix 2 (which will be more fully explained at the Synod), and which Synod members are invited to consider.

2.2 Findings:

- 2.2.1 Overall the consultation appeared to be effective in terms of the overall numbers of circuit meetings and church councils that considered the matter and reported their votes: there were only two possible meetings that failed to consider the proposal or to report a vote, one small

Methodist church that struggled to agree a meeting date, and one small Local Ecumenical Partnership ('LEP'). The consultation could therefore be said to have comprehensively tested the mind of the Methodist Churches and Circuits in Cumbria.

- 2.2.2 The relevant columns in the Table in Appendix 1 record, where reported, those present and able to vote, and those voting for, or against, the resolution. As is standard in the Methodist Church, abstentions or neutral votes are not recorded, although the number can sometimes be deduced by comparing columns. Generally, the numbers of those able to vote and choosing to express a vote in each meeting were high or included everyone present and entitled to vote.
- 2.2.3 Every circuit except one voted in favour of the resolution, generally with very high percentages voting in favour. The Kirkby Stephen Appleby & Tebay Circuit ('KSAT') voted against, reporting overall 35 votes or 25.55 % in favour, and 102 votes or 74.45% against, with all but two churches voting against, albeit with a closer vote in the circuit meeting.
- 2.2.4 Overall in the Cumbria District, of the 728 votes cast in circuit meetings and church councils, 597 or 82% were cast in in favour, and 131 or 18% against.
- 2.3 During the consultation, the Cumbria Circuit Group received verbal comments both in favour and against the proposal, some written questions requesting clarifications, and two written communications (from KSAT) expressing concern.
 - 2.3.1 The two written communications have been or will be responded to, but wherever there has been an issue or question raised, the group has endeavoured to include it with a possible response in the FAQs, as part of the process of listening to different perspectives, and to help develop the Cumbria Circuit, if approved, to address and mitigate the concerns expressed.
 - 2.3.2 Having noted that the relevant Standing Order 501(3) does not provide for or require the submission of written representations to express particular views, the DPG and the Cumbria Circuit Group intentionally did not seek any, recognising the challenges of interpretation and balance that might potentially arise. The Cumbria Circuit Group was concerned to ensure the principle of evenness, when there might be no proportionate or indeed effective mechanism for seeking such views that would still ensure equal representation. Rather than risking that any recommendation or decision might be inappropriately influenced by the number of communications received, by the arguments raised (not least given that most issues can have a contrary perspective), or by the strength of views expressed, whether for or against, it was agreed that the principle, of each meeting's voting members having one vote each, should be the only evidential basis for the views expressed through the consultation.
 - 2.3.3 For the reasons given, verbal or written expressions of view have not been sought or collated, and are not therefore conveyed or reported upon here in detail. Nonetheless, the Cumbria Circuit Group and the DPG want to emphasise their appreciation for all the concerns expressed, whether for or against the proposal, since, if approved, they can be taken into account in helping to develop a Cumbria Circuit that seeks to address those concerns and is more effective as a result.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Cumbria Circuit Group carefully considered the voting results in detail on two occasions.
 - 3.1.1 Aware that a considerable majority had strongly endorsed the proposal, the group was nevertheless concerned for those who had voted against it, especially in the KSAT circuit. As at earlier stages, the group have offered to meet with representatives and members of KSAT

or to attend such meetings as may be helpful, and have wanted there to be pastoral understanding regarding the concerns held.

- 3.1.2 The group considered several possible options for recommendation to the DPG. These included not proceeding; delaying proceeding; proceeding without seeking to include KSAT (but this raised not only potential sadness but also many concerns both for that circuit, and for the project overall, with possible detriment resulting from not being a single circuit within the Cumbria Ecumenical County or within the Cumbria Mission Area of the new North West England District); or proceeding with the proposal on the timetable envisaged.
- 3.1.3 Wanting to respect that more than four fifths had voted in favour of the proposal and the reasons for it, and given their significant concerns about all the other options in response to the consultation results, the Cumbria Circuit Group recommended to the DPG that it should recommend acceptance of the proposal to the Synod.
- 3.2 The DPG also considered at length the consultation results, the possible options, and the recommendation of the Cumbria Circuit Group. The DPG resolved to make its own substantive recommendation under Standing Order 501(3) that the Synod be invited to pass the following resolution (by ballot, recording the number of those eligible to vote, and those voting for or against):

The Cumbria District Synod, voting on 27 April 2024, resolves under Standing Order 501(3) to recommend to the Methodist Conference of 2024 that the existing Circuits in the Cumbria District amalgamate to form a single Cumbria Circuit from 1 September 2025, and that, if the Methodist Conference approves the amalgamation, all necessary steps be taken for its implementation.

- 3.3 If the Synod does not pass this resolution, it may choose to consider or pass any consequential resolution. If the Synod passes the resolution, the DPG recommends that the Synod should also pass this second resolution (which can be by show of hands):

The Cumbria District Synod authorises the Cumbria Circuit Group to continue to meet to develop a provisional implementation plan for a Cumbria Circuit, pending and subject to a decision of the Conference, taking into account and seeking to meet those concerns and reservations that have been expressed regarding a single Circuit, and presenting an implementation plan to the Cumbria District Policy Group (DPG), co-opting others and other groups as necessary, who shall have the power to review and appoint others to the Cumbria Circuit Group as necessary, pending the replacement of the DPG by and subject to future decisions of the North West England District (NWED) Policy Committee and the NWED Synod.

Report prepared by the Cumbria District Policy Group and the Cumbria Circuit Group, 19.4.24.

ADDENDUM FOLLOWING THE SYNOD HELD ON 27TH APRIL 2024

In respect of the **First Resolution set out in paragraph 3.2** above, the Synod voted 66 in favour and 7 against.

In respect of the **Second Resolution set out in paragraph 3.3**, the Synod agreed to amend the resolution by the addition of the words (which have now been included in the resolution above): “taking into account and seeking to meet those concerns and reservations that have been expressed regarding a single Circuit”. The Synod voted unanimously in favour the amended Second Resolution.

APPENDIX 1 – Consultation Voting figures for Circuit Meetings and Church Councils

Circuit	Church Name	Date	Voting members attending	For	Against	Total votes	For %	Against %
09/01 N Cumbria	Circuit Meeting		38	37	0			
09/01 N Cumbria	Brampton	19.3.24	12	12	0			
09/01 N Cumbria	Carlisle		12	12	0			
09/01 N Cumbria	Cornerstone, Wigton		11	9	0			
09/01 N Cumbria	Dalston	19.3.24	8	8	0			
09/01 N Cumbria	Gilsland	11.3.24	5	4	0			
09/01 N Cumbria	Longtown Community	6.3.24	10	7	1			
09/01 N Cumbria	Monkhill		7	7	0			
09/01 N Cumbria	Thurstonfield		11	10	0			
09/01 N Cumbria	Wetheral	18.3.24	11	11	0			
09/01 N Cumbria	Totals			117	1	118	99.15	0.85
09/04 Wn Fells	Circuit Meeting	19.3.24		23	2			
09/04 Wn Fells	Bassenthwaite			5	1			
09/04 Wn Fells	Brigham			5	2			
09/04 Wn Fells	Cleator Moor			11	0			
09/04 Wn Fells	Cockermouth			6	0			
09/04 Wn Fells	(Dearham - Class of Maryport)							
09/04 Wn Fells	Egremont			11	0			
09/04 Wn Fells	Frizington			6	0			
09/04 Wn Fells	(Gosforth - Class of Seascale)							
09/04 Wn Fells	Great Clifton	27.2.24	6	6	0			
09/04 Wn Fells	Harrington			1	3			
09/04 Wn Fells	Hensingham			9	0			
09/04 Wn Fells	Keswick			11	0			
09/04 Wn Fells	Kirkland LEP			8	0			
09/04 Wn Fells	Maryport	26.2.24	13	13	0			
09/04 Wn Fells	Seascale			11	0			
09/04 Wn Fells	Workington United			3	1			
09/04 Wn Fells	Totals			129	9	138	93.48	6.52
09/07 KSAT	Circuit Meeting	21.3.24	32	13	17			
09/07 KSAT	Appleby		10	8	0			
09/07 KSAT	Brough		8	1	6			
09/07 KSAT	Brough Sowerby		8	0	7			
09/07 KSAT	Crosby Garrett LEP		8	1	6			
09/07 KSAT	Dufton with Knock		9	1	6			
09/07 KSAT	Kings Meaburn	18.3.24	7	0	2			
09/07 KSAT	Kirkby Stephen		9	1	7			
09/07 KSAT	Newbiggin on Lune		16	0	16			
09/07 KSAT	Orton		9	0	9			
09/07 KSAT	Ravenstonedale		11	1	7			
09/07 KSAT	Soulby		9	0	7			
09/07 KSAT	Tebay		12	7	4			
09/07 KSAT	(Shap - Class of Tebay)							
09/07 KSAT	Warcop		8	2	2			
09/07 KSAT	Winton LP		16	0	6			
09/07 KSAT	Totals			35	102	137	25.55	74.45
09/08 Sedbergh	Circuit Meeting	21.2.24	14	13	0			
09/08 Sedbergh	Meth Ch in Western Dales	21.2.24	18	16	0			
09/08 Sedbergh	Totals			29	0	29	100	0

09/09 E Cumbria	Circuit Meeting	13.3.24	21	13	2			
09/09 E Cumbria	Alston	18.2.24	8	8	0			
09/09 E Cumbria	Gamblesby	4.4.24	10	10	0			
09/09 E Cumbria	Kirkoswald	25.2.24	10	10	0			
09/09 E Cumbria	Langwathby	15.1.24	9	0	9			
09/09 E Cumbria	Patterdale LEP							
09/09 E Cumbria	Penrith	29.2.24	18	8	0			
09/09 E Cumbria	Salkeld Dykes							
09/09 E Cumbria	Skelton	4.3.24	10	8	0			
09/09 E Cumbria	Stainton	26.3.24	10	8	0			
09/09 E Cumbria	The Cottage Wood Centre	17.9.23	9	9	0			
09/09 E Cumbria	Totals			74	11	85	87.06	12.94
09/13 Kendal	Circuit Meeting	21.2.24	16	16	0			
09/13 Kendal	Arnside	5.2.24	6	6	0			
09/13 Kendal	Kirkby Lonsdale	27.2.24	15	15	0			
09/13 Kendal	Levens	19.2.24	6	6	0			
09/13 Kendal	Sandylands, Kendal	1.2.24	14	8	2			
09/13 Kendal	Storth	20.2.24	14	13	1			
09/13 Kendal	Stricklandgate, Kendal	???.2.24	12	9	3			
09/13 Kendal	Totals			73	6	79	92.4	7.6
09/14 S Lakes	Circuit Meeting	30.10.23	18	12	2			
09/14 S Lakes	Ambleside	???.10.23	8	8	0			
09/14 S Lakes	Cartmel	10.11.23	13	12	0			
09/14 S Lakes	Carver Uniting LEP	6.12.23	7	7	0			
09/14 S Lakes	Coniston	17.10.23	6	6	0			
09/14 S Lakes	Grange over Sands	24.1.24	13	9	0			
09/14 S Lakes	(Grasmere - Class of Ambleside)							
09/14 S Lakes	(Hawkshead - Class of Ambleside)							
09/14 S Lakes	Ulverston	27.11.23	13	13	0			
09/14 S Lakes	(Windermere - Class of Ambleside)							
09/14 S Lakes	Totals			67	2	69	97.1	2.9
09/16 SWCUA	Area Meeting	13.3.24	20	17	0			
09/16 SWCUA	(Askam & Ireleth – Class of Dalton							
09/16 SWCUA	Beacon Hill, Barrow	22.2.24	11	11	0			
09/16 SWCUA	Dalton Community Church (LEP)	26.2.24	11	7	0			
09/16 SWCUA	Hartington Street, Barrow	5.2.24	7	2	0			
09/16 SWCUA	Kirkby in Furness	1.11.23	6	6	0			
09/16 SWCUA	Millom	7.1.24	9	9	0			
09/16 SWCUA	(Ramsden Street, Barrow - URC)							
09/16 SWCUA	Trinity Centre, Barrow	21.2.24	13	13	0			
09/16 SWCUA	Vickerstown, Barrow	21.2.24	8	8	0			
09/16 SWCUA	Totals			73	0	73	100	0
Overall TOTALS				597	131	728	82	18

APPENDIX 2 – Diagrams of Circuit Voting figures (to be explained at Synod)

