**Possible futures for 100 Crown St; ideas from Aberdeen meeting**

A small group of Aberdeen Friends, together with Zoe Prosser via Zoom, met in December 2023 to consider possible future uses for 100 Crown Street, to be presented to Trustees and Area Meeting. Their report was accepted by Aberdeen local business meeting on February 25, 2024. Minor changes were made following a further meeting of the group on March 10.

We note that, if AMs in Scotland accept the proposed amalgamation of charities, there will likely be a committee dealing with the properties of all those AMs, and so surely we should hesitate about making any irreversible changes to 100 Crown St beforehand. The merger may take place as early as this year. This consideration applies especially to the option of selling the building; a protracted sale that started under one administration and continued under the new organisation would be particularly problematic.

Harry Horsley (Premises Committee) noted that, contrary to some impressions, the building is generally in good condition, inside and out. It should not necessarily be seen as a burden, but rather as an asset. Selling it in the present state of the market would, we believe, be foolish and might not meet the need as a charity to look after investments. Any sale would need to accommodate our continuing use of the basement as a children’s room, and might entail somehow dividing or sharing the car park. Sale to an organisation or individual, with a covenant restricting the use of the building (ensuring that we have a good neighbour, e.g. not a betting shop or public house), might be difficult.

Zoe pointed out that here are two alternative ways to proceed: either to look for the simplest solution, which is probably to continue letting the ground floor more or less as at present; or to be more adventurous – to find a cause, and a use for the building, that unite us. We favour ‘living adventurously’. So in response to the trustees’ request for our opinion on whether to extend the current tenancy beyond September, we would rather a solution were found to make use of the whole building, with an extension of the current tenancy a less favourable (but perhaps necessary) option.

The ideas below are for the trustees to consider, not for any hasty action.

**1. Multiple Occupancy**: This option has already been explored by Premises Committee, and a feasibility study could be commissioned for £6000; we suggest that this might be a worthwhile step to take. The conversion to living accommodation would be a long-term commitment involving considerable expense (of the order of £100,000?), and a suitable organisation or company would need to be found, to take on a long-term lease.

In preference to purely commercial letting, possible uses (in line with Quaker principles) might include housing homeless people; or it could be a half-way house – for people with mental health issues; asylum seekers; refugees; released prisoners, for example – waiting for more permanent accommodation. It could provide particularly appropriate accommodation for families. We would need to link up with a partner organisation to manage the property. We have consulted with Shelter Scotland, who stress the urgent need for accommodation for the homeless and recommend consulting the local authority Private Sector Housing team, and other social housing providers including Langstane Housing, Grampian Housing, Castlehill Housing.

**2. Office accommodation**: The only rooms currently in use (apart from the basement) are on the ground floor and rear second floor and the present tenant has a renewable 1-year lease, so we could be left with an empty building if/when he decides to retire. Rooms on the upper two floors (at present storing furniture) would be suitable as offices; internet services would need to be updated, plus locks on doors, at minimal expense. The offices would be suitable for small companies, organisations or charities, sharing kitchen and toilet facilities – and the car park during the week. We would favour letting to charities or other organisations whose principles coincide with ours, but we need to find out whether there is a demand for this sort of office space.

**3.** Another possibility is **Serviced Office Accommodation**, i.e. office space rented on a very short-term basis (by the hour, day, week….) This would require day-to-day management (by a partner organisation/company), and again it is not clear whether there would be sufficient demand.

**4.** Thinking ‘outside the box’, how about a **café**? This could be on the ground floor with offices above. It could have a theme – Fairtrade (with items for sale), or with ethically sourced ingredients, in conjunction with an art gallery or arts space or some children’s activity for instance. The possible themes are legion and deserve further thought. We would need to find a partner to run it. A new kitchen (meeting food safety requirements) would be essential. It could employ staff with learning disabilities, for example. Disabled access could be a problem. Perhaps 100 Crown St is too remote from commercial or shopping areas for this to be viable. In fact there are already several cafés in the area.

There is a general lack of information, and many questions to be answered. Members of the Premises Committee have already visited Dundee to see how the revamped meeting house is operating. Other possible contacts are listed below. Could we somehow (somewhere) advertise the building, asking for suggestions as to how it could be used?

**Possible organisations and contacts for collaboration or advice:**

Shelter, Langstane Housing, Grampian Housing, Castlehill Housing

Private Sector Housing Unit (Aberdeen City Council)

Aberdeen Third Sector Interface

ACVO (Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organisations)

CAF: Stuart Nevin, Regional Director and his colleagues in CAF Bank who are the Area Managers for Scotland

Citizens’ Advice Bureau

Quaker Meeting Houses Network

Friends in Glasgow (Michael Mansell), Dundee

John Dash, Property Management Advisor, Quaker Life

**Group members, Aberdeen Meeting**: Marion Strachan, Helen Stephens, Anthea Mason, Harry Horsley, Peter Heald, Nigel Dower, Andrew Collins. Plus: Zoe Prosser, Local Development Worker for Scotland.