

Paper B4

Future of URC presence at Greenbelt

Faith in Action Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Roo Stewart roo.stewart@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 10 General Assembly: a) Welcomes a continuing presence at, and partnership with, Greenbelt Festival for three more years, recognising the positive impact of the URC presence at Greenbelt on festivalgoers and URC volunteers. b) Instructs the Faith in Action and Resources Committees to facilitate this engagement through an appropriate allocation of funds and staff time in keeping with 2026 costs, adjusted for inflation. c) Instructs the Faith in Action Committee to measure and report on the impact of this engagement annually, using qualitative and quantitative data.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To decide if the URC's engagement at Greenbelt Festival should continue for three more years, with appropriate funding.
Main points	<p>The URC's presence at Greenbelt enables the United Reformed Church to be seen, explored and better understood beyond the walls of our buildings in spaces.</p> <p>Our work has a transformative, discipling impact on a large group of URC volunteers and hundreds of people who participate in our festival activities.</p> <p>Our reputation as a trusted, innovative, welcoming space has grown over eight festivals; continuing this work requires ongoing investment to cover partnership fees and volunteer support.</p>
Previous relevant documents	Paper I3, Mission Council March 2016

Consultation has taken place with...	Resources Committee
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Summary of impact

Financial	Requires a new allocation of funding of up to £100,000 in total, spread over three years.
External (eg ecumenical)	Potential audience of 10,000-12,000 festivalgoers per year; ongoing collaboration with other festival partners (incl. Trussell, Methodist Church, Iona Community)

Where have we come from?

The URC has had a presence at Greenbelt Festival since 2016, seeking to:

- 1) generously invest in, join with and contribute to a festival which has an outstanding and unique track record of encouraging and equipping Christians with their discipleship and ministry for over 50 years;
- 2) accompany Greenbelt as we collectively explore God's mission for today, envision how we may be and do Church more imaginatively and discover how disciples of Christ might live out their faith more effectively;
- 3) encourage, gather together and strengthen the sense of community for the numerous URC members who have been part of the Greenbelt movement for many years, and to provide a recognisable presence for URC members new to Greenbelt.



Themes such as 'Treasure Hunt', 'Scrap the Church' and 'Revoltng Christians' have left a lasting impression on festivalgoers. We have all been challenged to re-examine our attitudes and rethink how we might live our lives in the light of Jesus' call to us today.

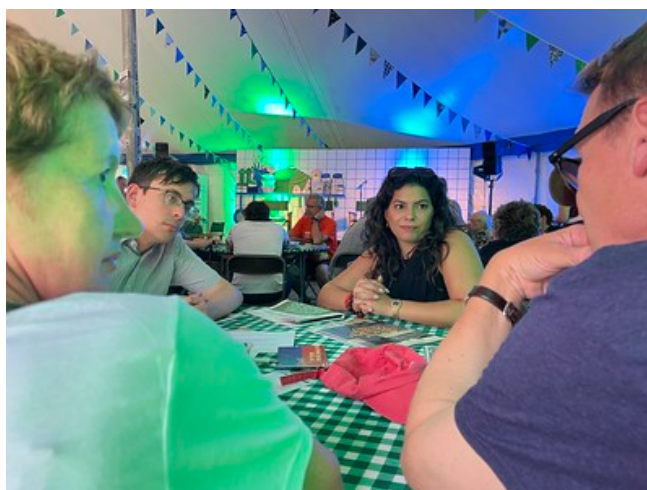
Our current level of associate partnership with Greenbelt Festival affords us a large hospitality venue where we can effectively engage with people of all ages. Through face-painting, storytelling, crafts, interviews,

discussions, music, testimony, URC worship services, reflections, prayers, alongside teas, coffees, cakes and thousands of high-quality meals (using food rescued from going to landfill), the URC has told a different story to false and tired narratives of churches' decline and irrelevance.

With justice-seeking and welcome high on the agenda, the URC has developed a prized reputation at Greenbelt and on social media after the event as an excellent place to meet, dine (especially for families on a budget since other food outlets can be very expensive), relax, be creative or grow in faith. We occupy a prime location on site, and have earned the trust of Greenbelt staff, who rely on us to provide a low-cost family café and discussion-based venue to explore justice issues.

In addition, the URC CYDO+ team ran the youth venues at Greenbelt for three years. These were very popular and impactful, a testament to the time and talent that went into planning and delivering these remarkable experiences for young people.

As well as significant discipleship opportunities for URC people who volunteer or attend, Greenbelt Festival is the largest event that the URC as a denomination is involved in. It exposes us to more people in a single weekend than any other single event, with positive engagement with Christians, seekers, agnostics and atheist activists who find a warm welcome at the festival.



How have we grown?

All of this activity and engagement can only happen with a great team of URC volunteers. Many return from year to year, but we prioritise new volunteers so that many different people can experience the festival.



We began with 27 volunteers and a small 'take-away tent', but as we have expanded our reach, it now takes 60 volunteers each year to make our 'big top' venue a success. With some training and support from Offices of General Assembly staff, these volunteers run the café, the programme and craft activities. As a thank you, they receive access to the festival (when they're not on a shift), food vouchers for one meal per day and a T-shirt to wear in the URC's venue, emblazoned with the URC logo and our festival theme.

Since 2022, when we began running 'yoURCafe' at the festival, we have served **7,196 meals**, alongside drinks, cakes and other snacks. Our ingredients are sourced as ethically as possible, with much of the food saved from landfill through supermarket

schemes, and prepared by our kitchen team volunteers. REfUSE Durham, a zero food waste charity, has been an important partner for us in delivering this, and we have also welcomed a growing team from **Lodge Road URC** in Winson Green, Birmingham, to serve alongside them.

In 2025, we began partnering with Trussell, the anti-poverty charity, known for its coordination of many foodbanks in the UK, sharing our space and programme with them. This relationship strengthens our offering and shares the considerable cost of erecting a large tent with a kitchen and equipment in a green-field site.

What have we done?

In the last few years, we've explored:

- Action for the climate
- Creating safer sacred spaces for LGBTQIA+ people
- Destigmatising poverty
- Disability in the Church
- Engaging well with MPs or people you disagree with
- Israel and Palestine
- Responding to far-right protests
- Surviving climate crisis in Bangladesh
- Welcoming refugees

“Meeting other URC members and Christians and observing and listening to how their faith impacts on their actions and life is inspiring.” – URC volunteer

We've stimulated discussion and debate and platformed voices often marginalised by society. People have learned about Commitment for Life and the Joint Public Issues Team. Through themed craft activities we have engaged with people of all ages both across the festival site and in our churches (who post their craft to us to display in the venue).



And we have invited the whole of the URC to join us for our Sunday evening service at Greenbelt, in association with yourchurch, welcoming keynote speakers such as Graham Adams, Tim Meadows, Lola Brown and Anthony Reddie.

What impact has it had?

The most measurable impact we have is on the volunteers who make our presence at Greenbelt possible.

Discipleship impact (URC Volunteers, 2025)	Frequency
I feel more comfortable/confident/positive being associated with the URC or being called a Christian	23
My perspective on faith or society has broadened	18
I was exposed to different ways of believing or being	13
Not sure/I am still processing the experience	2

“Lots of opportunities to learn stuff and hear different points of view. It feels reassuring to be a part of a bigger group – I'm not alone thinking like I do.”
– URC volunteer

“I believe that what we do at Greenbelt is part of the best of the URC – caring for people, for the world, for each other and providing an open, welcoming, accessible space. I love it.”
– URC volunteer

How might your Greenbelt experience contribute to the life of your local church or your neighbourhood? (URC Volunteers, 2025)	Frequency
I have fresh ideas or energy to help others	20
I am more aware of the barriers to faith and inclusion that people outside my local church might experience, and want to help remove these barriers	17
I want my church to be more connected to Commitment for Life, Trussell or other programmes	10
I want to use my gifts more	10
I have a renewed sense of hope for my congregation	9
I want to learn more about serving the community/my congregation	9
I want to be more involved	8
I feel more connected to/appreciative of my local church	6

How might your Greenbelt experience contribute to the life of your local church or your neighbourhood? (URC Volunteers, 2025) Frequency

Other responses

I am more aware and informed about being more involved in local partnerships with statutory agencies for the benefit of the local areas

It really makes me want to get involved in the wider URC

Our presence may encourage other URC folk to attend GB and be challenged, changed and refreshed in their own faith and discipleship, which they then take back to their own churches – and so it continues

Some frustration that my local church is not engaged in the community

“This is what the URC does so well: create safe space and sanctuary for vulnerable and marginalised communities. Stepping into the URC café felt like a home coming.” – URC volunteer

Volunteering at Greenbelt energises and inspires URC folk who return to their churches with fresh vigour and motivation to make a difference in their congregation and neighbourhood.

On social media, café users responded positively to their experience. Here’s a short selection:



Steve Thackray
Great craft activities for kids and a lovely friendly team .
12w Like Reply 5



Gail McMillan
I loved the revolting Christians theme: the posters were fabulous and brought about conversations.
12w Like Reply 6



Steve Kings
A fab venue, thank you URC ❤️
12w Like Reply 3



Wendy Tucker
Lovely people, lovely food.
12w Like Reply 1



Vivienne Thomas
And the cakes were terrific.



Diane Barnard
I stopped off to pick up a drink and stayed on for a chat because of the lovely background music.
12w Like Reply 2



India Farrow
Super duper place, really well done to the team!
12w Like Reply 2



Pippa Marie
And decaf tea and coffee ❤️❤️



Frances Stanfield
Our fave snacking venu which showed the way – just got to love non-conformists!
12w Like Reply 3

And in our final session in 2025, we asked participants to write on paper tablecloths what their experience had been.



Previous funding

Since 2016, a Legacy Fund grant and Offices of General Assembly resources have been carefully used to enable this work. For 2026, mindful of the uncertainty brought by structural changes within the URC, the Faith in Action Committee supported an application to the **Disciple and Development Fund**, which was kindly granted, to continue the URC's presence at Greenbelt Festival.

item	2023 [actual]	2024 [actual]	2025 [actual]	2026 [estimated]
Associate partner fee, tent hire, kitchen equipment, volunteer passes	£21,800	£22,800	£27,600	£27,600
Craft materials	£490	£427	£600	£600
Programming costs	£228	£435	£175	£875
Printing & T-shirts	£1,193	£2,265	£2,300	£1,600
Volunteer meal vouchers & shower passes	£1,434	£1,894	£1,900	£1,800
TOTAL	£25,145	£27,821	£32,575	£32,475

This level of activity, access and engagement requires a significant amount of money. The totals in the table are large, viewed as a **cost**. It might be helpful to view it in terms of the **investment** for each volunteer, or the congregations they represent, of up to **£541.24 per person**.

This costing doesn't factor in the value of greater visibility, raising the profile of the URC, where the 'audience' is a great fit, and the impact it has on people beyond the URC. One Faith in Action Committee member commented:

"YoURCafe is the **beating heart of the festival**. It is a space where people with no home church find a place to belong."

Note: the income from the sale of food in the café is shared between the URC and the kitchen teams to offset food and other café costs, transporting team and equipment. It is not included in the costings above since these incomes and outgoings balance out.

Future plans

Greenbelt Festival has been at Boughton House, near Kettering in Northamptonshire, in 2014, but **will be moving to a new site in 2027** that will be cheaper to run. The greenfield site at Boughton House has been a wonderful, relaxing oasis, but increasing costs of hire, transport, etc. have made this luxury unsustainable. A new (but hopefully still beautiful and inspiring) site will allow for significant reductions in operating costs, but **it is as yet unclear** how these changing circumstance might impact on the associate partner fee and hire of equipment for the URC, should we maintain our current level of associate partnership which opens all of the above opportunities to us.

This major change within Greenbelt gives us an opportunity to reassess how we engage with the festival. Due to this uncertainty of costs and location at time of writing (April 2026), we have not included a costed proposal, but are proposing a direction of travel based on:

1. Providing a family café at Greenbelt in 2027, 2028 and 2029
2. Continuing to fund around 60 volunteers to enable this, with an appropriate level of staff time in preparing for the event and providing leadership at the event
3. Recognising this level of engagement with Greenbelt is only possible with an Associate Partner fee
4. To cost a similar amount to 2026, adjusted for inflation. Any unused monies would be returned.

Should another opportunity arise with the move to a new Greenbelt site, in discussion with Greenbelt Festival staff we would negotiate for an arrangement which allows for a similar impact on festivalgoers. However, the URC at Greenbelt planning team believes that the current format is very effective for us, and we wish to hold on to this if possible.

This word cloud captures responses from our volunteers, who were asked, 'How would you describe your experience at Greenbelt in a few words?' The larger words show more frequent responses.



affirming, awesome, beautiful diversity, brilliant at always, encouraging, energising, **enjoyable**, excellent witness, exhausting, exhilarating, fabulous, fantastic, full, fully amazing, good fun, great, great weekend, **inspiring**, joyful, life-changing, loved it, motivating, new challenges, revoltingly enjoyable [referring to our theme 'Revolting Christians!'], tiring, uplifting, worthwhile