

MAKING CHANGES TO YOUR CHURCH: WHERE TO START

This document is the second in a series which goes through the four main stages of a development project; from understanding your church building and needs, the initial pulling together of ideas, to drafting informal proposals and finally submitting a formal faculty. Taken together they help to guide parishes through what can be a long and complex process, in a positive and constructive way.

The Diocese of Gloucester is fortunate in having some of the most important and ancient churches in the country. Some have beautiful settings and act as landmarks in our rural landscape, whilst others are tucked away in urban areas, offering a quiet retreat from the busy street. But their beauty, character and age does not always lend itself well to modern worship, and the expectations of today's congregations are different from those of previous generations.

Relatively few church buildings are making the most of their full potential, and many parishes worry that their listed status means they won't be able to change a thing, and that they will need to spend huge amounts of money to make a real difference. In fact, every church has some capacity for change, and relatively small modifications can make an enormous difference. Like people, churches need a little love and understanding, and perhaps the best place to start is to get your congregation and the wider community to appreciate what they have.

ASSESSING YOUR BUILDING AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Starting to write a statement of significance can help you to gain some enthusiasm for your church building and its history. In addition to bringing together a summary of what your church is and why it looks the way it does, it can identify the areas of the church which are the most precious, and those where there may be more scope for change. It is rare for a building in its entirety to be sacrosanct and a statement of significance should clearly identify what specifically is important about your church.

ASSESSING YOUR NEEDS

As a PCC, make a list of all the things the church currently does, and all the things it currently struggles with or can't currently do but would like to in future. Try to be as realistic as you can and don't jump directly to solutions. It is much better to write 'we want to be able to offer coffee after church on Sunday to our congregation of 30', than 'we need a kitchen'. Starting with the solution and working back can lead to muddled thinking and preconceived ideas, and doesn't give you any room to come up with a range of possible solutions. 'We need a kitchen' could lead anyone examining your proposals to ask 'Why do they need a kitchen? How many people would use it? What do they want it to do?'

We have produced a guidance sheet on **How to write a good statement of significance and statement of need - Guidance sheet 1**. This can be downloaded from our website or contact us to request a copy.

BRAINSTORMING SOLUTIONS

Try to come up with as broad a range of solutions as you can. There is rarely a single solution to a problem and being open-minded might throw up options you would have previously not thought of. Ask the people who would be most directly affected by changes for their views. For example, if planning some provision for children, see if you can engage your local Sunday school or primary school. It might be worthwhile using your list of needs as the basis for a first round of general public consultation, and asking members of your congregation and/or local community to come up with initial suggestions.

Keep your options open for as long as possible and remember that whatever work you go on to plan, it will need to do suitable justice to your church building in the long-term. Quick and cheap options might be desirable in the short-term but they tend to age badly and look depressingly tired surprisingly quickly. Our churches are the result of many changes over the course of their history; but for these changes to have stood the test of time they have needed (for the most part) to be good quality and well designed, as well as practical. We want 21st century changes to be looked upon in the same way in years to come.

USEFUL RESOURCES:

- Church Building & Heritage Review magazine (bi-monthly publication, old copies available to view in Church House or subscribe via their website)
- Historic England website <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/advice/caring-for-heritage/places-of-worship/making-changes-to-your-place-of-worship/>
- Church Extensions and Adaptations (Church House Publishing, ISBN 0715175971)
- Making Church Buildings Work, Maggie Durran (Canterbury Press Norwich, ISBN 978-1853115974)
- Buildings for Mission, Nigel Walter and Andrew Mottram, (Canterbury Press, ISBN 9781848257603)
- Churches for Communities – Adapting churches for wider use, Becky Payne (Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust, ISBN 9780992769307)

LOOKING AT OPTIONS

OTHER PROJECTS

Once you have identified a range of options you might find it useful to visit some other churches who have undertaken similar types of project. Whilst it is worthwhile going to see some good examples (ask for the DAC for recent examples), it can be just as useful to visit some bad ones too. Speak to people in the parishes and find out how their change has worked. Has it done what they wanted? Has it been better or worse than expected? Use site visits as a way of critically appraising what it is you want to achieve and try not to get into the trap of wanting to copy exactly what another church has done.

GETTING THE DAC INVOLVED

At this early stage it might be worthwhile asking for some initial input from the DAC or one of its officers. DAC members and officers regularly come to site to advise parishes in the early stages of proposals and can help to steer you in the right direction long before you start committing money to architects or contractors. Our advice is always intended to help you and provided the parish remains open minded and receptive, this can significantly reduce the risk of you experiencing problems with any subsequent faculty applications

GETTING AN ARCHITECT INVOLVED

Your PCC may wish to involve an architect/surveyor in early discussions about proposals for change. You are under no obligation to obtain professional advice at this stage but if you choose to do so it would be worthwhile finding out about any initial costs which may be incurred. How much might your professional advisor charge you to attend a meeting and offer any verbal suggestions, or to draw up sketch proposals? Is it worthwhile spending money at this early stage? Make sure before you bring in any professional help that the PCC are clear about what they want to achieve and why. Huge amounts of time and money can be wasted if there is no clear brief, and people can get carried away with persuasive computer images of dramatic changes. These can be both misleading and fail to address your needs if you haven't been clear from the start.

For advice on how to develop your ideas further by drafting an informal set of proposals please see **Making changes to your church: informal proposals – Guidance sheet 3**

If you need any help in planning changes to your church, please contact Natalie Fenner or Adam Klups at Church House on 01452 410022 or by email dac@glosdioc.org.uk