

MAKING CHANGES TO YOUR CHURCH: INFORMAL PROPOSALS

This document is the third 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.

Before going to the extent of submitting the formal paperwork for a faculty, your parish might decide that it is worthwhile putting together an informal submission with which to gain views. There are a number of benefits in doing this, which include:

- Saving money. You can make sure your plans are going along the right lines before you go to the expense of having a professional draw up a full set of plans, details and specifications.
- Getting a better end result by incorporating the advice and feedback you receive.
- Saving time (in the long run). You are less likely to run into problems during your faculty application, if you have involved the DAC and other bodies earlier on in the process.
- Improving the likelihood of a successful outcome.

Putting together an informal proposal is not compulsory, and may not be necessary in all cases, but we would nevertheless encourage parishes considering more complex changes to get in touch with us as soon as possible. There is nothing more frustrating than the DAC being asked to provide feedback on a project which has been nurtured by a PCC for years, only for the parish to be told that there is a fundamental problem with it. Everyone can get very upset about the energy, time and sometimes money which has been wasted.

INFORMATION YOU NEED TO SUBMIT

To enable the DAC to consider your proposals properly at an informal stage, you will need to submit the following to us:

1. A statement of needs and statement of significance – See Guidance sheet 1 & Guidance sheet 4.
2. Sketch plans of the building as existing and as proposed – These do not have to be drawn by an architect/surveyor, but they do need to be reasonably accurate and make clear what it is you are proposing to change.
3. Relevant photographs – Illustrate the part(s) of the church to be changed and if necessary annotate the images.

This information can be submitted to us at Church House in either hard-copy or digital format (preferred). From autumn 2018, you will also be able to submit informal proposals via the Faculty Online portal by completing the 'summary description of proposed works', the 'Standard Information' and as much of the 'petition' form as is possible at the time. The more information you are able to provide at this stage, the clearer our advice can be.

INFORMAL PROCESS

Once you have submitted the information listed, we will check this through. If a site visit is needed, we will make the appropriate arrangements, meet with you and report back after the next available DAC meeting, when the committee view can be agreed. If a site visit is not needed, the proposals will feature on the next DAC meeting agenda, and you will receive a response following that meeting. DAC meeting dates for the year are published on our website.

With complex cases where proposals evolve over time, it may be useful for informal advice to be sought from the DAC on several occasions. This kind of on-going dialogue may seem time consuming, but can help to avoid costly last minute disagreements.

A response from the DAC will indicate whether your informal proposals are acceptable in principle, and give you some confidence to commission your architect/surveyor to draw-up a full set of plans and specifications to support a faculty application. In addition to an 'in principle' view, we will try to identify any particular issues or queries which need to be clarified and which will need to be addressed in a future faculty application. Provided that your subsequent faculty application acknowledges the informal advice you are offered, you are more likely to have a successful outcome. However, advice at an informal stage will always be based upon the information which is submitted to us, and cannot constitute a formal recommendation of the DAC.

ENGAGING PEOPLE

CONGREGATION AND GENERAL PUBLIC

Gaining the views of the people around you, is a vital part of any development project. Although the PCC may have been working on things for some time, how much do the wider congregation know about what you are proposing? They may have been involved in assessing the needs of the congregation but are they aware of the particular direction you are now hoping to take?

Undertaking some form of meaningful engagement, perhaps in the form of an exhibition of sketches, or a special meeting or open day will help you to gain people's views, and give them an opportunity to feel involved.

Involve your wider community in consultation as well as your congregation. There are many people who identify with a church or feel a sense of ownership towards it, even if they never take part in worship and their opinions are just as important as those of the regular congregation. If significant changes are proposed which enable your church to be used more widely, it is in your best interests to engage the community as much as possible so people can become enthused and eventually make use of your new facilities.

If you're planning a consultation event, consider having feedback forms or short and questionnaires for people to fill in, so that you can record their responses, comments and ideas. Also, try not to present your proposals as a finished product, even if they are at quite an advanced stage. People might feel like their responses are pointless if it looks like you're going to go ahead regardless of what they say, and our experience of past projects is that people are far more likely to object to proposals if they are not actively engaged with it.

ENGAGING PEOPLE CONTINUED...

EXTERNAL BODIES In addition to gaining advice from the DAC, we will use the information you submit to us to send out on your behalf informal consultation requests to the Church Buildings Council (CBC), Historic England (HE), your local authority (LPA) and the Amenity Societies (Ancient Monuments Society, Council for British Archaeology, Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, Georgian Group, Victorian Society, 20th Century Society) as appropriate. Unless you specifically request that we do not do this, consultation will be dealt with automatically and responses should take approximately 28 days to be received.

REVIEWING CONSULTATIONS

Once you have received feedback from the DAC, HE, Amenity Societies, your congregation and community, sit down as a group and review what has been said.

First of all, make sure your proposals are what people really need and want. Try not to dismiss alternative suggestions without justification, and be prepared to modify your proposals to meet the majority view. A change of direction at this stage might feel incredibly frustrating, but may well result in a much better end result which is appreciated by more people. It may be that after reviewing feedback, you feel that you should persevere with your current proposals, even though some of the advice recommended otherwise. If this is the case make sure you have good reasons for doing so, as you will need to justify this in a future faculty application. It is better to decide as a group where your priorities lie and then compromise wherever else you can, as this shows you have listened to what people have said.

For advice on how to develop your informal proposals to a full faculty application, please see 'Making changes to your church: Submitting a good faculty application' - Guidance sheet 4

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