

Advice of Gloucester DAC, Archdeacons and Church Buildings Team regarding the recently updated national advice on work affecting church buildings and their interiors during the Covid-19 pandemic. Issued: 22nd May 2020.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with:

1. Guidance for PCCs, incumbents and cathedral Chapters: opening church buildings for works to the building and interior, issued by The House of Bishops Covid-19 Recovery Group, 12th May 2020. Available: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Guidance_on_using_professional_contractors_v1.3_1.pdf
2. Guidance for churches and cathedrals on access to their buildings for construction work during lockdown issued by The House of Bishops Covid-19 Recovery Group, 12th May 2020. Available: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Guidance_for_churches_and_cathedrals_on_construction_work_v.1.3.pdf

The national guidance

In line with the latest Government advice, issued 11th May, The Recovery Group of the Church of England has published revised guidance in respect of its church buildings. The restrictions on access have been eased, to allow contractors to carry out work in your church and churchyard, but **only** if it is safe for them to do so. Please note that churches remain closed for worship and visitors, and this is not expected to change for some time to come. This guidance is intended to:

- i. help PCCs assess whether it is safe and appropriate to allow construction work to begin or re-start;
- ii. provide advice on access to church buildings for professional contractors for the purposes of:
 - Routine inspection and maintenance, including testing and servicing of installations, equipment etc.,
 - Emergency and pre-planned repair and conservation work,
 - Carrying out surveys, inspections and investigations required as part of planning for a project.

This will come as welcome news to those who have had programmes of work postponed or interrupted by Covid-19. However, we cannot stress clearly enough that access to church buildings for repair, maintenance, inspections or surveys must only be provided where this can be achieved safely, with adequate social distancing. Wherever possible, **non-essential works should be deferred until a later date.**

Please note that providing access for contractors need not necessitate the presence of clergy, volunteers or lay staff, other than to provide access to the building. Contractor/client meetings should be conducted remotely.

Quinquennial inspections

Planned quinquennial inspections can now take place, where they are carried out by the appointed architect/surveyor, unaccompanied by church officers. However, all inspections that were due in

2020 can now be carried over into 2021, unless urgent issues have been flagged up, which need investigating as soon as practicable.

Work affecting churchyards and building exterior

Although the national guidance does not make specific reference to work in churchyards or external work that can be undertaken without the need to access the building, the general tests still apply. It is acknowledged that some external work can be carried out safely, by contractors, in line with the construction sector's guidance.ⁱ Therefore, planned work - that cannot be postponed - can be carried out where:

- contractors follow the national guidance and can demonstrate that their insurance policy covers them during the Covid-19 outbreak;
- the work does not involve volunteer labour.

No access should be provided to the church building for works in this category; this includes access to mains water or electricity, unless it is already provided externally.

External work to be carried out by others (i.e. planned maintenance in closed churchyards by local authorities or the erection of churchyard memorials by monumental masons), which has been authorised by an incumbent in the usual way, can be carried out providing it is in accordance with the national guidance and the diocesan advice above, and the relevant PCC is given notice.

Stay vigilant!

During this time, when many of the activities and services we take for granted have become a rare sight or ceased altogether, and with the warmer weather and longer days, metal theft, vandalism and other forms of criminal activity affecting churches and churchyards can increase. PCCs are strongly encouraged to use their trusted local networks and social media to inform residents whether any work to their church or churchyard is planned. You should also advise them if no work is planned, so that the community can stay vigilant and help prevent heritage crime to churches and churchyards. This is of crucial importance for churches with significant metal features, such as lead and copper roofs.

Faculty Jurisdiction Rules and Churchyard Regulations

Please be advised that the requirement for Faculties and other permissions remains in place.

Please contact the Church Buildings Team, if you have any queries about this guidance.

ⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/construction-and-other-outdoor-work>

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/working-safely-during-coronavirus-outbreak.htm>