

## INTRODUCTION TO CHURCH REORDERING PROJECTS: Guidance for Parochial Church Councils (PCCs)

Many church congregations and their PCCs are now considering how they can reorder their churches to offer increased flexibility of worship patterns or additional facilities. This is in order to respond to changing needs and expectations in relation to the mission and outreach of their churches within their local communities.

Church buildings have been adapted internally, as well as externally on an almost continuous basis ever since they were first built. However, many church buildings today are essentially the same as they were in the Victorian period, when features such as fixed pews, heating systems with big pipes and cast iron radiators, elaborate screens and dark patterned encaustic tiled floors were introduced. While some of these features are examples of high quality craftsmanship and worthy of retention, they can also restrict modern liturgical needs or may simply have reached the end of their useful life.

As a PCC representing your congregation you may feel that now is the time to act and it is important to contact your Archdeacon as soon as the PCC has an idea that they wish to explore regarding possible reordering. This can range from stand-alone type projects such as installing glazed entrance doors, a tea station or toilet facilities, to a complete reordering including building an extension, removal of pews, new floors and new lighting or heating installations. The Church Buildings Council (CBC) has an excellent website ([www.churchcare.co.uk](http://www.churchcare.co.uk)) with guidance notes for a wide range of projects and how to tackle the whole process from design to completion.

Your Archdeacon will recommend that you consult with the DAC (Diocesan Advisory Committee) at an early stage as their guidance is invaluable in terms of exploring possible solutions to what often appear to be challenging problems. A site visit will probably be suggested to start the discussion about the constraints and options for change in relation to the building itself.

You will need to contact your inspecting architect, or other recommended architect with experience of churches and historic buildings, as early as possible because their initial feasibility study will be able to convert the PCC's wish list into a range of design options for consideration by the parish and they will then be able to guide you through the whole Faculty process.



Do also consult everyone in the community, not just the congregation, because even though many people in the parish will not be regular churchgoers, they usually still consider the church building as a special sacred place and an essential feature of the community. There is always apprehension about change especially about the loss of ‘atmosphere’ within the church building. However, it is also important to remember that the PCCs and their incumbents are responsible for looking after their buildings and making them fit to serve their local community.

The PCC will be asked by the DAC to set out their thoughts in a Statement of Need which should explain clearly what they want to achieve in terms of liturgy, mission and facilities and why the present building does not accommodate these adequately. This will demonstrate to the DAC why you want to make changes to your church. It will also form the basis of your brief to your architect and is very important to get right as the design solutions which emerge will be a direct response to this brief.

Usually church buildings are significant ‘heritage assets’ and are often Grade I or II\* listed as well as being set within local conservation areas, so are particularly sensitive to change. In these instances the DAC will request a Statement of Significance which sets out the reasons why the building as a whole and specific parts of it are important and assesses the impact that the changes will have. It is not impossible to alter listed buildings, but it is certainly more complex so you will need to make sure that you have an architect or surveyor who is specifically qualified to work with listed buildings.

You may be required to consult with other advisory bodies as well as the DAC, such as the Church Buildings Council, Historic England, the local authority conservation officer, SPAB (Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings) and possibly, depending on the age of the building, also the Victorian Society, Georgian Group or Twentieth Century Society.

You will find that not only your PCC and congregation have many different views, but also the DAC, architect and other consultees. So whilst it can be very frustrating and time consuming, it is important and necessary that these views are considered in order to achieve the most appropriate solution for your church. This solution will need to respect the value of the sacred space whilst creating a new environment to reflect contemporary needs.

It is also recommended that members of the PCC visit other churches to see what they have done before finalising your brief. Even though your church will be unique, with its own set of challenges and parish needs, it is worth seeing how similar projects have been realised in different contexts. The use of surveys,



exhibitions, open meetings, newsletters and joint fund-raising initiatives will all help to engage the congregation and local community in the design process to gain their trust and support for the proposals.

Many large reordering projects take several years to complete and so you will need a dedicated and enthusiastic team with a strong leader to keep up the momentum, both with decision-making as well as the all-important fund raising. Even smaller scale projects need to be carefully thought out and managed. The DAC and also the CBC will be able to provide names of organisations that can be approached for grant aid. Whilst costs are important, they should not be a major constraint in deciding on the overall scope of the brief and long term vision.

Depending on the scale and complexity of the project, other consultants may be needed, such as specialist conservation engineers, archaeologists, services engineers, specialist conservators, and so on. Your appointed architect will usually undertake the role of coordinating the project both before and during the construction phase.

Once the DAC is happy that your proposals are sufficiently well described and thought out, they will issue a Notification of Advice which will then allow the PCC to apply for Faculty from the Chancellor (or Commissary General for Canterbury). Please also be aware that no work can be started until you have received your Faculty notice. The exception to this is any very minor works, mostly related to repairs, under Schedule A & B and you should seek guidance from your Archdeacon on this matter.

Most larger reordering schemes will need to be carried out under a formal building contract which will usually be administered by your appointed architect. This will set out the timetable for the contract works as well as monitoring payments due and adjustments to the scope of works. It is likely that if the church is a historic building, unexpected works will be encountered, especially below ground level, which can add delays and costs to the project.

Once the project has been completed, there will usually be a period of adjustment to new patterns of use including management and maintenance issues as well as long term funding to ensure that the church building is sustainable. It is also worth bearing in mind that facilities will need updating in the future too.

The examples provided represent a wide range of solutions to contemporary needs and will be supplemented by new projects as these are completed. Contact details are also provided on the information sheets, together with feedback from the PCCs involved in the projects.



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