

OXFORD DIOCESAN SYNOD

Church Buildings in the Diocese of Oxford

16th November 2024

National discussion of church buildings and their futures has been prevalent in the last two years, with some dioceses publishing controversial overarching strategies identifying dozens of buildings for 'release', a significant funding contribution by the Church Commissioners in multiple areas of work to support church buildings, and increased duties to protect the environment and tackle climate change.

In our own diocese, in the years following the pandemic, we have seen a sustained high number of churches looking to install new facilities and increase community use and outreach, alongside small but increased numbers of churches feeling their future is vulnerable. We have been working with parishes to navigate the new faculty rules for having 'due regard' to net zero guidance, balancing this and our own diocesan 2035 net zero target, with barriers of parish finance, people resource and local infrastructure.

Recent changes in our Church Buildings Team staffing will enable us further capacity to progress casework more swiftly, whilst recognising the additional work required by the team to support parishes in reaching net zero. This change also makes provision for us to shift an element of our work from a reactive stance to a proactive one and provides focus to the work of the team, outside of its role as secretariat to the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches (DAC).

The overview paper sets out the diocesan approach to a number of church building related topics, summarising policy matters and future development areas. It has been positively supported by the DAC, Bishop's Staff and Bishop's Council. It is hoped that it will be helpful in drawing together for the first time all our work relating to church buildings and prompt further consideration in helping parishes make best use of their church buildings taking account of both heritage and mission.

Synod will be invited to consider in groups the question 'how can we better realise the role of church buildings in mission and ministry?' and to approve the approach set out within the accompanying paper.

Liz Kitch

Head of Church Buildings

Church Buildings in the Diocese of Oxford

“Our church buildings are a precious gift from those who have gone before us in the Christian faith. They are places of prayer and contemplation, where we learn and practise compassion and where people find courage in every stage of their lives... When we fail to keep church buildings fit for purpose we fail to love our neighbours as ourselves.”

Bishop Steven

In Oxford Diocese, we are blessed with many historically significant and nationally important churches which stand across our Diocese to the glory of God but also as constant encouragement to their communities to engage with the God to whom they are built. Most of our communities include a church, often listed and often integral to the fabric of their villages, towns and cities. In New Testament times, dedicated church buildings did not yet exist as Christians met in people's homes, but as dedicated buildings began to be built for worship, the term 'church' was used to describe them, a term derived from the Greek word used to describe the gathering of people within them. Hence our buildings have always been integrally associated with the people who use them and in turn associated with the Mission of God.

Our church members have never been more engaged in ensuring our church buildings benefit the communities they serve and that they are engaged in the mission of God. Our churches are seeking to be more accessible, to leave smaller environmental footprints and to extend hospitality and the welcome of Christ to all. Our church buildings, whilst at times presenting challenges to us, are often a significant asset in proclaiming God's Kingdom and as Vice Chair of the DAC I am so proud of all as a Diocese that we do to steward them, to ensure they give glory to God and are significant in the Mission of God.

Foreword by Ven David Tyler, Archdeacon of Dorchester

Church Buildings and the Diocesan Vision

Church buildings which function well and provide necessary facilities for their congregations and communities are a vital tool to enable delivery of all five focus areas of the diocesan vision to enable us to become more Christ like for the sake of God's world. As the visible presence of God within every community they are missional in and of themselves. Church buildings are inherently, and intrinsically, the Church, just as the people within them are. The theology of place should not be undervalued.

Regardless of their age or architectural significance, buildings can often be felt to be a burden. If not fit for purpose, either due to ongoing maintenance issues, or because adaptations are needed, a building can seem limiting. The diocese recognises this and enabling each congregation to maximise the opportunities of their church buildings, and establish sustainable management for their care and use, is a fundamental aim. Inspiration for change, advice on fundraising, project management and explanation of the permissions process is available to every church in the diocese.

Our Churches in Context

There are 808 open churches in the Diocese of Oxford. 84% of them are listed as buildings of special historic or architectural interest, with 65% of these listed at Grade I or Grade II*, identifying them as of exceptional interest or national importance. Only 8% of listed buildings

across the country are within these highest gradings, and so our diocese has a particular wealth of significance within its church buildings.

However, it's not only architectural or historical significance which make our church buildings special. They are uniquely placed within communities as collective banks of social memory, a place for gathering, sharing and support at celebrations, and in times of need.

In 2017 the church buildings team contacted every churchwarden and incumbent in the diocese and asked for feedback on the church buildings support we provide. In response, the team has produced guidance and resources, held regular training events and made structural changes to internal processes. Seven years on, this document serves to summarise present areas of work around church buildings, and to invite continued consideration of the strategic and day to day importance of church buildings.

Open, accessible and welcoming Churches

Wherever possible, church buildings in Oxford Diocese are encouraged to open their doors during the day for visitors or tourists, which can also mean that a church building is more secure. Ecclesiastical Insurance Group provides advice on its [website](#), covering helpful things like door time locks.

We are committed to safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults to worship and grow in Christ safely and as a diocese are fully attentive to safeguarding best practice within our church buildings.

Everyone should be able to use church buildings, and be a part of a church community, whether visiting or as a member of clergy. Each church should ask itself, via an accessibility audit, what the experience of others using their church building might be, and how anything which prevents or makes it unreasonably difficult for a disabled person to get involved, could be addressed. The Church Buildings Council provides helpful advice on its [website](#), and our own diocesan Disability Advisor can also provide guidance on appropriate changes. When considering proposals for alterations to church buildings the church buildings team and Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) will identify any possible improvements which can be made to improve accessibility, and the Committee is fortunate to draw on the lived experience of at least one of its members to inform its advice.

Infrastructure for Mission

Some congregations are doing incredible things in their buildings, despite a lack of basic facilities. However, it is generally accepted, that in the majority of church buildings, there will be a need for these facilities, such as toilets, a servery, and heating. These alterations are now commonplace, and a faculty application to install them is likely to focus on establishing the most appropriate way of doing so, rather than the principle of introducing them. Where a parish wishes to make changes to its church building to enable mission and community the DAC makes every effort to assist a parish in doing so, working through the available options in each case.

A building project can be missional, but on its own will not necessarily bring about growth. Facilities may enable more people to use a church building more comfortably, but they need to be invited and welcomed. Any project to make changes to a church building must begin with a strong vision, not just on where the loo is going to go! The Parish Development Advisers are able to give assistance on developing this missional project vision.

Where a church building is well placed and equipped to do so, it should be the first consideration for a meeting space for new congregations.

Notwithstanding already containing the largest number of church buildings of any diocese, there will be times when it is appropriate for us to consider a new church building, usually because of massive population growth in some parts of the diocese.

The power of preventative maintenance and the value of Quinquennial Inspections

The economic benefits of preventative maintenance are [well documented](#) and the diocese encourages all those responsible for church buildings to tend to the small jobs in good time, stopping them from becoming much larger, more expensive projects.

PCC engagement in the Quinquennial Inspection (QI) process, and compliance with all necessary gas and electricity testing is crucial to well maintained and safe church buildings. These five yearly inspections are a legal requirement, and an extremely useful tool for planning upcoming church building repair and maintenance. Fostering good relationships with the Quinquennial Inspector will be invaluable.

The diocese provides advice about every stage of the QI process, including appointment, the inspection itself, and what to expect from the report, on the [webpage](#). Parishes are required to send a copy of the QI to the Church Buildings Team. Upon receipt, the report is reviewed and the condition of various elements of the church are recorded, so that should funding opportunities arise, such as the Net Zero Carbon Demonstrator fund, we can identify potentially eligible churches. Where a report indicates a particularly concerning situation, the Church Buildings Team will contact the parish to offer support.

Minor Repairs Fund

The diocese has successfully bid to the [Buildings for Mission Minor Repairs Fund](#) and recently been awarded £177,750 to provide grants for small repairs to church buildings. This will be awarded from the summer of 2024, over the next two years. Churches applying for permission for works which would be eligible for the funding will be notified by the Church Buildings Team, and guidance on eligibility will be provided on the website.

The Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches (DAC) and the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules

The [Ecclesiastical Exemption](#) removes the requirement for Church of England churches to obtain Listed Building Consent, so long as there is a suitable rigorous alternative system of control in place. In the Church of England, this system is set out by the [Faculty Jurisdiction Rules](#).

The faculty system itself has been around for some time: one of the earliest surviving faculty applications in the Oxford diocese is a request by Jane Harris to erect a gallery at Woodstock St Mary Magdalene in 1676. 340 years later the parish once again embarked on a reordering to meet the needs of its 21st century congregation.

These pieces of legislation are important tools to enable churches, even highly historically or architecturally significant ones, to fulfil their primary role. Unlike secular legislation, decision makers are required to have due regard to the role of a church as a local centre of worship and mission. It is therefore important that we protect the privilege provided to churches by the Ecclesiastical Exemption. We do this by upholding the legislative requirements for parishes to obtain permission prior to carrying out works to their churches and churchyards, and by ensuring that review of these applications is as rigorous and independent as that of a secular planning authority.

The Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches (usually shortened to DAC) is a body of volunteers, a mix of ordained and lay, with relevant expertise in specialisms such as architecture, theology, stained glass, bells, clocks, timber, structural engineering and many more, who provide advice to the Chancellor of the diocese on each application for works. The Oxford DAC was the first in the country, set up in 1916, before it became a legal requirement in 1938 for all dioceses to have a DAC. Oxford DAC has been fortunate enough to name within its membership some exceptional artistic and architectural minds, including John Betjeman, John Piper, and Sir Cecil Harcourt-Smith, and continues to benefit from exceptionally talented and experienced members and advisors who volunteer their time to assist parishes in caring for their buildings. The Committee has even been immortalised in the novel *Murder at the College* by Rev Victor Whitchurch (a previous incumbent of Blewbury) which tells the story of a murder at a meeting of the (thinly disguised!) Oxford DAC, centred around a rejected stained glass window design.

The DAC currently has 28 members and 21 advisors, each of whom are on hand to offer advice on applications for works, either in person at the 6 meetings per year for schemes which affect the character or significance of the church, or via online subcommittees for more minor works. In addition to ensuring the proposed methodology and proposals are not harmful to the building or churchyard, the DAC seeks to add value to projects by deeply considering each application, exploring the needs of the parish and identifying any unforeseen drawbacks or opportunities for improvements.

In 2018 we made significant changes to our case management systems and the way applications for works are processed through the DAC, by utilising online sub committees and authority delegated to Church Buildings Team staff to process most applications. In this way simple applications can be progressed far more quickly, and larger, more complicated schemes receive the time and consideration necessary for good decision making. At least one site visit is made to all major schemes, enabling parishes to speak directly to DAC members, and for the DAC members to understand each unique context and proposal.

The Church Buildings Team is the secretariat to the DAC, but importantly is also there to provide advice on the permission process as well as all aspects of planning and delivering a project. Support can be provided over the phone, via email and on site. Each member of the team is a conservation professional in their own right, holding qualifications in disciplines such as Architectural Technology and Building Surveying and accredited as members of the Institute of Historic Buildings Conservation and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. This enables not only professional in house advice, but also the most extensive use of delegated authority powers

to any Church Buildings Team in the country, streamlining the permissions process as far as the law will allow. Receiving an average of 1500 applications and enquiries each year, the team encourages all parishes to get in touch at the earliest possible stage of a project. This is very much a collaborative process, designed to remove obstacles to use of church buildings, and to respond to each parish's tradition and desire to use their building.

This support goes far beyond that of Local Planning Authorities who may not have sufficient budget to employ a Conservation Officer, are unable to provide this level of support if they do, and to whom applicants must pay a fee for advice or a site visit.

These legislative processes, which the diocese has no power to change, are undeniably complicated and can be onerous for parish teams. The diocese is committed to taking every opportunity to demystify this process. The DAC aims to provide open and transparent feedback, and to become a partner with parishes during their projects. Consistency of approach and policy is important.

The membership of the DAC has recently been increased, to enable swifter review of schemes by reducing the workload of each volunteer (many of whom work full time) and to provide a wider spectrum of knowledge for parishes to draw from. Additionally, capacity within the Church Buildings Team has recently been increased, with the post of Senior Church Buildings Officer created, to increase both case officer provision, and capacity for work on strategic initiatives.

Area(s) for future development - Any future external funding opportunities such as the Buildings for Mission funding, will be considered and utilised where appropriate. Further membership appointments to be made to the DAC will increase capacity for review of mechanical and electrical proposals, and to provide expertise on environmental sustainability and ecology. Publication of further guidance and policy documents to assist applicants are intended.

Net Zero Carbon_Church Buildings

Diocesan Synod declared a climate emergency in March 2020, and we've set an ambitious goal of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2035, including in our church buildings. In the baseline 2019 data for the diocese, churches accounted for 37% of the diocese's total carbon emissions. By 2022 this had gone down to 34%, and churches had reduced their overall carbon emissions by 11%. Based on information provided in the Articles of Enquiry, we know that 53% of churches reduced their heating hours in 2023 and 55% have changed old lightbulbs over to LEDs.

As part of becoming a Bronze Eco Diocese in July 2022, we created an environmental policy that commits us to delivering on our net zero carbon target, alongside a wide range of other principles to support creation care. We also support the ambition of the national Routemap to Net Zero Carbon, passed by General Synod in July 2022, which sets out the ambition for the Church of England to achieve net zero carbon by 2030.

In aspiring to reach net zero carbon, we are seeking to make a genuine and true difference to the world around us, rather than to tick boxes or achieve a target for its own sake. This will mean difficult financial decisions and trade-offs that need to be asked of those within our diocese. We seek to become more Christ-like *for the sake of God's world*. A joint statement has been signed by all our Bishops, affirming our position on achieving net zero carbon, and explaining that the installation or replacement of fossil fuel heating systems is truly as a last resort only.

This puts many church buildings, especially rural ones, in a challenging position, and one the diocese is realistic about. Amendments to the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules which came into force in July 2022 also require parishes to demonstrate that all other options have been considered before proceeding with a fossil fuel installation. Additionally, this legislation requires the DAC to consider whether parishes have had due regard for national guidance and have deeply considered all options. The diocese recognises that this places a burden on parish teams. Where it is technologically or financially unviable for a parish to decarbonise their heating system, a hybrid approach should be considered wherever possible. While some may not be able to invest now, where investment is possible it should be done, so that we can progress on our journey, learn from the lessons, and play our part in mitigating the catastrophic impacts of climate change.

It's a difficult time, as the sector realises the challenge ahead. The technologies and measures being installed are largely untested in historic churches, and in order to be effective, often require substantial additional works, such as the introduction of insulation, secondary glazing, or an upgrade to the electrical supply. For most churches, the focus should be on consumption reduction, keeping on top of maintenance (heating a wet church takes considerably more energy than heating a dry one), and quick wins, such as LED lighting and draught proofing. The diocese has published an extensive suite of guidance notes on these subjects.

The approach to renewable technologies, and their use at historically and architecturally sensitive sites, is beginning to change, as reduced carbon emissions are added to the weight of the 'public benefit' side of the balancing act when applications for permission are considered. Harm to historic fabric is still an important part of the equation, but where this can be mitigated or minimised, the diocese supports parishes exploring the installation of technologies such as solar panels and Air Source Heat Pumps where this will have a demonstrable effect on a church building's carbon footprint, will suit its unique use pattern and construction, and is part of a suite of measures considered when all consumption reduction actions have already been taken.

In April 2024 £155,000 from National Funding, and £30,000 from diocesan funding was granted to eligible churches in the diocese to enable them to develop decarbonisation projects. The diocese has also secured £58,850 from the Buildings for Mission fund to assist churches with 'quick wins' and a further £15K from the national church funded production of a range of guidance notes and heating surgeries for churches facing imminent boiler failure or who are going through a re-ordering project with implications for heating.

Since 2019, the diocesan funded energy audit programme has provided over 250 churches with heavily subsidised energy saving and decarbonization recommendations, through our external auditors Inspired Efficiency. These audits will soon be offered to our 20% highest emitters for free, as part of the national Parish Buying scheme. In addition to helping individual churches, the programme has also been integral to the development of our net zero carbon action plan for churches, providing us with much-needed data, costs, evidence and information about the options available for different types of churches. An implementation grant scheme has also been offered by the diocese to parishes wishing to make changes following their energy audit.

All this is gearing up towards a hoped for release of money for capital expenditure from the national church in 2026, alongside different fundraising initiatives we are exploring.

Area(s) for further development:

The Diocesan Net Zero Carbon Action Plan, produced by our diocesan environment programme manager and supported by [Diocesan Synod in March 2023](#) sets out next steps. All PCCs are strongly encouraged to:

- Complete the Energy Footprint Tool in the parish returns
- Switch to a renewable energy tariff
- Undertake an energy audit of its church and associated buildings
- To register as an Eco-Church
- Assess decarbonisation and energy efficiency options available to the church
- Identify how long the existing church heating has left and begin planning and fundraising for a non-fossil fuel solution.

The diocese commits to:

- Recruiting sustainability and ecology experts to the DAC
- To explore consultancy support by independent professionals to assist PCCs.
- To continue to look for opportunities for gathering data, including using secured national funding to commission external evaluations of net zero carbon projects.
- Prepare for making bids to the second triennium of Buildings for Mission funding and explore opportunities for central procurement of services.
- Keep capacity of diocesan teams to support this work under review and seek to address gaps where identified.
- Upscale learning from current funding pilots and support peer networks to facilitate shared learning and gather information about available professionals.

Learning, Collaboration and Partnership

The Church Buildings Team are available to provide early and whole project support for all queries relating to the care, development and management of church buildings, their contents, and churchyards.

Sharing learning and expertise in all areas is important to avoid duplication of effort, and to build good practice. The diocese has recently commissioned trials to better understand the impacts on medieval church fabric of turning off conservation heating, and to establish the effectiveness and impact of chandelier heaters. More trials are currently being planned, assisted by funding from national church (outside of the Buildings for Mission funding streams) and other organisations such as Historic England.

Many churches across the diocese have successfully delivered projects to introduce new facilities, enable shared use, or better cater to worship styles and the Church Buildings Team and the DAC take the opportunity to visit these parishes following completion of the works, in order to hear how the changes they've made are transforming their ministry, and to learn about what worked and what they might do differently next time.

Realising the full potential of a project, or finding the solution to a problem, often requires a multi-disciplinary, bespoke approach. Collaboration across teams at Church House enables more holistic solutions for parishes, and a greater understanding of specific parish needs. The Church Buildings Team regularly work with colleagues in the Finance, Mission and Ministry, and Environment Teams, and of course a strong line of communication with the Archdeacons is vital.

Great work is being done by other organisations across the sector, and the diocese has built strong working relationships with these bodies such as Historic England and other amenity societies, the National Churches Trust, the Association of Festival Churches, The Churches Conservation Trust. Where other dioceses have produced resources or initiatives we will signpost to them, rather than seeking to replicate them. Likewise, we regularly share work we have done with other dioceses.

More recently, changes to the departmental structure, moving the Church Buildings Team to the Secretariat department and bringing the Pastoral Secretary within the team, has brought a more holistic and strategic approach to church building discussions.

Area(s) for future development - Assisting networking and sharing of good practice amongst parishes.

Heritage at Risk

The diocese has developed close working relationships with partner organisations within the heritage sector, including Historic England, who each year, publishes the [Heritage at Risk Register](#). Recognition of a place of worship being 'at risk' can seem inherently negative, however we believe it is a good impetus for change, and often acts as a catalyst for funding and support from external agencies. The Church Buildings Team co-ordinate with Historic England to identify churches which may benefit from being added to the register and work alongside parishes to deliver repair projects to provide a stable future for the church, and therefore its removal from the register.

Contested Heritage

Some churches within the diocese will contain objects, such as memorials or stained glass, which may be symbols of injustice or sources of pain, known as Contested Heritage. The Diocese of Oxford supports and follows the [Church of England guidance on Contested Heritage](#), and parishes are required by the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules to have 'due regard' to this guidance in

assessing and addressing items of Contested Heritage. Where appropriate, proposals may be referred by the diocesan Church Buildings Team to the Church Buildings Council's subcommittee on Contested Heritage.

Churchyard management

The Church Heritage Record provides a digital map and database of every burial ground in England. The national initiative, the to scan and record each burial ground to provide a useful tool for interpretation and management by PCCs who wish to opt into it, [National Burial Ground Survey](#), will not be progressed in the diocese until national church consultations with the archival sector have been concluded, and a revised Memorandum of Understanding issued to the diocese for consideration.

Where churchyards have been closed for burial maintenance responsibilities often transfer to a local or district council. The Church Buildings Team works to build relationships with these external stakeholders and provides training for their staff on appropriate care of these special places, and the legal framework for permissions.

Churches are encouraged to explore simple ways to use their churchyard to create a haven for wildlife, for heritage, and for people.

Complementary and Alternative Uses for Church Buildings

It is increasingly common for church buildings to support their communities, and their finances, by hosting complementary uses.

In occasional circumstances it may be appropriate for an agreement to be entered into which provides the entire church building to another group or organisation. Where relevant, a lease or licence under faculty can enable this for a set period.

'Festival churches' and 'Fallow Time'

The concept of a '[festival](#)' church, where the building is not used for regular worship but is valued by the community for events and other functions, is supported by the diocese and whilst it does not alleviate any financial or legal responsibilities from the PCC unless the responsibility is taken over by a separate trust, it can enable some breathing space and continued use of the church building.

Given the change to Canon Law has now switched the requirement for regular public worship to take place from parish level to benefice level, smaller parish churches within a multi-parish setting no longer need to pursue this option to benefit from reducing the level of worship provision they offer. Festival Church does not require a change in legal status and will not therefore impact the legal requirement for the number of Churchwardens. The benefit of Festival Church as a concept, therefore, is more a branding exercise, signalling a broader partnership with community users, uses, and hands on supporters.

This model usually requires a well funded local trust to already exist, or to be created, and each proposal for a building to be considered a festival church must be considered by the Area Mission

and Pastoral Committee and approved by the Diocesan Bishop after conversations at both benefice and deanery level to consider financial and ministerial implications.

The [Association of Festival Churches](#) is a valued partner in guiding parishes through considering this option.

Possible suggested amendments to the [Mission and Pastoral Measure 2018 \(GS2314\)](#) include the concept of a 'fallow period', in which church buildings are left empty for long periods of time to enable changing local demographics to evolve prior to a decision to close the building being made. This concept is presently under developed, in regards to management, governance and financing, and is not something which the diocese is currently able to support.

Our desire is always to support churches to remain open as active centres of mission in their communities.

Closed and Closing Churches

The Diocese of Oxford is committed to encouraging and enabling churches to thrive, rather than itself pursue closure. The diocese urges parishes who consider themselves to be struggling with ensuring their sustainability to contact the Church Buildings Team at an early stage. This enables the relevant diocesan teams to provide support, whether that is through practical building management and repairs, pastoral re-organisation, or developing the missional vision for the parish and its community.

However, it is also recognised that on rare occasions closure is appropriate. Despite what we might read in the press, Church of England closures are very rare, just 200 have been closed across the country since 2010. In our diocese, the rate is less than one a year.

The closure of a consecrated church has a set legal process under Part 6 of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011. Formal closure of a consecrated church can only be pursued in one of two ways:

1. The PCC petition the diocese for closure. This is taken to the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee for agreement, following discussion at the relevant Area Mission and Pastoral Committee.
2. The diocesan bishop informs the PCC that the building is to be closed.

In either case the request for closure is subject to final approval by the Church Commissioners, following statutory consultation both with those most closely affected, as well as with the wider public. Importantly all closures must meet the legislative requirement of the building no longer being pastorally required primarily as a place of worship. To pursue closure primarily to alleviate financial issues relating to the building would not meet this legislative threshold. It should also be noted that the process of closure is time-consuming and does not relieve the PCC of financial or legal responsibility until formal closure is completed.

Unlike some other dioceses, Oxford has not, and does not intend to, publish lists of buildings it intends to close. In fact, it does not have a list of buildings it intends to close. The diocese sees closure as the last resort. In a very small number of cases, it may be that a proactive decision of a PCC to close a church building is appropriate for the site and circumstances, to further the ministry in that community.

A process of step by step support and consultation, led by the Archdeaconry teams and with support from the Pastoral Secretary, Church Buildings Team and the Parish Development Advisors, has been developed to enable discernment. Substantial steps have been taken to improve the experience of parishes when this is felt the only realistic option. A 'good' closure is possible, alleviating the stress of an unavoidably long and complicated legal process which usually takes years to complete. The diocese's Closed Churches Committee will normally be involved before closure to give oversight to the process of finding the optimal alternative use for a closed church (sale, conservation or demolition).

Insurance

PCCs are strongly encouraged to insurance all church buildings in use for their full replacement value unless the PCC makes a minuted (and regularly reviewed) decision only to insure for part of its value. Whilst most churches are insured with Ecclesiastical Insurance Group, there are a number of providers available.

Church Buildings Management Partnerships

National church devised the concept of Church Buildings Management Partnerships (CBMPs) as a mechanism for utilising potential savings on multi building insurance policies to fund regular maintenance contract for member churches. Whilst the diocese is supportive of the aim of providing regular preventative maintenance on a cyclical basis with a reduced administrative burden for parishes, the finance model is, as yet, untested, and the diocese awaits the results of pilots being undertaken in two other dioceses before exploring this within the Oxford diocese.

A National Voice

Taking part in, and contributing to, national discussions on issues such as policy, strategy, funding and legislation, which affect church buildings is a powerful way in which the diocese supports our parish teams. Liz Kitch, Head of Church Buildings, and Abigail Lloyd, Chair of the DAC, are both members of the [Church Buildings Council](#). Abigail is also a member of the Rules Committee, which determines changes to the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules. Liz is also a member of the national working group considering the buildings element of the [Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 Review](#), the [Buildings for Mission Digital Provisions Project Board](#) planning the redesign of the Online Faculty System, and the working group revising the national Statement of Need and Significance guidance produced by the Church Buildings Council.

Fundraising

The National Lottery Heritage Fund gave only £11m last year to churches across the country. The National Churches Trust recognised the importance of substantially increased, and regular, funding for churches from the UK government in its recently published report '[Every Church Counts](#)'.

Local giving is as important as ever, and every church is encouraged to install a [contactless donation point](#). Not all types of these machines require internet access, and for those that do, we have made an [Additional Matters Order](#) to make it easier and quicker to get an internet connection in your church building.

Parishes, benefices and deaneries can bid for grants from the [Development Fund](#) to enable missional creativity and support local Christ-like Church projects. Across 82 applications nearly £1million has been granted to parishes to assist with building related projects and the first two rounds of 2024 saw a record number of requests for funding for this type of project.

The [Berkshire, Buckinghamshire](#) and [Oxfordshire](#) Historic Churches trusts which provide grants to church buildings in the diocese are a crucial partner in their care, and every church in the diocese is encouraged to support them in raising funds by opening its doors and welcoming visitors for [Ride and Stride](#).

Information and support is available from the [Generous Giving Team](#).

Conclusion

The Diocese of Oxford endeavours to support its congregations and communities in caring for and embracing their church buildings with realistic, pragmatic and vision led solutions, which recognise church buildings as key missional opportunities in every place.

Liz Kitch

Head of Church Buildings

October 2024