

The Church Buildings Review. A Salisbury Diocesan Response

Our churches are an essential part of our witness to the gospel of Christ, and our mission to his world. We wish to celebrate our inheritance of church buildings throughout the diocese, and encourage their continued use as witnesses to Christ in his world.

Our **Diocesan Policy** can be summarised as

1. It is not the Diocesan Policy to close churches unless in exceptional circumstances and normally at the request of the parish.
2. Church buildings shall be treated as a valued part of our mission strategy of renewing hope: pray, serve, grow.
3. Decisions on the future and use of churches (such as for example as chapel of ease) will continue to be taken at the local level, with local needs in mind. Benefices and Deaneries are asked to think positively about church buildings in their mission plans, reflecting pray, serve and grow.
4. The central offices of the Diocese will continue to look at ways to support parishes, benefices and deaneries in their plans for their churches, to improve processes for faculties to share information and good practice on such things as fundraising and community use.

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There is an impressive church on the Mount of Transfiguration in the Holy Land. At the traditional site, where Jesus dismissed Peter's immediate response to build some tents to preserve that moment of glory, there is a solid stone church building. There has long been a tension between the Jesus movement and the gathering of his disciples in human structures whether tents or listed medieval stone churches. The *Church Buildings review* addresses this issue head on.

The Report raises significant issues for us all as the Diocese of Salisbury. **Church buildings are an essential part of our mission strategy of renewing hope: of praying, serving and growing.**

This paper leads on from the 'Renewing Hope – Vision and Priorities' document. It outlines the Diocesan response to the Church buildings report which was unanimously welcomed at the February 2016 Synod. The Diocesan policy is outlined and examples of good practice and diocesan resources are given.

1. The Report.

The Church of England's mission is "a flourishing Christian presence in every community". The *Report of the Church Building' Review Group* (henceforward CBR) argues that church buildings are central to this mission. The "mood music" should be to see the potential of church buildings to proclaim the Gospel, rather than seeing them as a burden.

There are 15700 Anglican churches in England. Of these, 78% are listed and 57% are in rural areas. 45% of all Grade 1 listed buildings in England belong to the Church of England.

CBR begins by saying that it wants to avoid an 'idolatrous attitude to buildings". However, "...churches have significance much deeper than being just places to meet. They stand as a witness to the fact that this world is not a system closed upon itself and can help those who feel rootless to find their true identity, as children

of God. Our churches ...assist in proclaiming the Gospel just by being there.” They are of particular importance therefore to those outside the church and must be part of our mission.

CBR has a strong emphasis on the theology of place. It sees this as a strongly Biblical and sacramental concept: God is incarnated in a time and a place.

Churches speak of prayer and holiness. They are places of pilgrimage and hospitality. They encourage community, and service to the community. Churches are holders of a community’s identity and history, as well as of individual joys and sorrows.

The report’s authors are particularly strong on emphasising that a closed church speaks of the withdrawal of the church, and of the failure of the Gospel. “A building in poor condition which appears to be closed may give the impression of decline, retreat and failure.”

CBR makes a number of practical proposals which the Diocese of Salisbury should consider.

First, the report argues that church buildings should be seen as a part of the mission and ministry of the church, and that they should be part of deanery mission audits and action plans.

Alongside this, whilst the report asks for each diocese to draw up its own policy for church buildings, it emphasises that decisions on the future of churches should still be taken at the local level, with local needs in mind.

On the use of churches, CBR emphasises creative and imaginative use: “imaginative adaptation” is the phrase used. They praise examples where churches have been given facilities which can serve the community.

CBR recognises that there are churches which have very small congregations, or which serve places where the habitation has moved away. It considers “festival churches” as one possibility: where buildings are used only a few times each year, although it is not particularly positive about this possibility.

The report’s authors do conclude that there will remain some buildings which will have to be closed. They encourage diocesan assistance there this is the case.

2. The Salisbury Context

This report deals with a significant issue in our diocese as we have 574 church buildings. Of these 202 are listed grade 1, 201 II*, and a further 124 are listed grade II. There are therefore only 50 which are not listed. Of the total, 492 are parish churches, 27 licensed buildings, and 45 are chapels of ease. In a diocese with such a large rural component such as ours, this is a major issue.

Despite the large number of buildings the churches are in remarkably good condition and well cared for. A recent English heritage report on one Deanery (Heytesbury) commented particularly on how well the buildings are maintained. Many churches are in a better condition now than they have been for centuries.

The Diocese of Salisbury has at its heart a commitment to a “flourishing Christian presence in every community”. Jesus told us that we are the salt of the earth. Church buildings must play a central role in this. Church buildings should be a symbol of renewed hope.

1. **Prayer and pilgrimage.** In a recent survey 85% of the UK population said they had visited a church in the last twelve months. Churches are places of prayer where people come for quiet reflection. Many

churches have places which are clearly marked out to help with prayer, and invite prayer requests. Some churches have encouraged their use as part of pilgrimage routes on foot or cycle. It is sometimes the smallest and remotest churches which can be most effective in being used this way. Large numbers of church use their buildings in contact with schools for worship and teaching. The history of the church continues to fascinate, and should be seen as part of Christian presence and identity rather than simply a documentation of past events.

2. **Community Use.** One of the major changes in recent years has been a return to using churches for purposes other than worship. This could be said to be a return to an earlier form. Churches have been re-ordered, kitchens and toilets installed. In some villages the church is the only community building. This movement further emphasises the centrality of the church to community. The Appendix given here provides some encouraging examples. As a further part of our “serve” agenda, Churches have a great opportunity to show concern for the environment, whether through lighting and heating schemes, or the management of the churchyard. Churches present the hospitality and generosity of God.
3. **Grow.** It might seem too obvious to mention, but churches are there for worship. The Saltley Trust’s recent report, *What helps disciples grow*, unsurprisingly, but nevertheless significantly, identified worship as the main way disciples grow. Church are now used for a wide variety of worship events through the year as well as regular Sundays, such as carol services, remembrance, Mothering Sunday and so on, as well as for occasional offices, providing a space for important community celebrations and thanksgiving.
4. **Local Planning.** The *Church Buildings Review* proposes that decisions about the future of the church should begin with the local community at parish and deanery level. Church buildings should be part of parish, benefice and deanery mission planning. The diocese will continue to give support to such planning. Some dioceses have established central bodies to deal with church buildings. This may have some advantages but it has to be recognised it would add to parish share, and this is therefore not a route we plan to follow.
5. **Ecumenical.** The parish church is often the remaining ecclesiastical building as chapels have closed. We should welcome ecumenical co-operation.
6. **Fundraising.** The Diocese will continue to point parishes towards sources of funding through trusts as well as government schemes. A particular emphasis is being placed on diocesan encouragement of legacies: those preparing wills may often wish to leave money to something substantial such as the building rather than to unrestricted church funds. Many parishes have found Friends groups have provided valuable financial support. The Diocesan registry has a draft constitution for such bodies. There are many other sources, such as the Historic Churches’ trusts, Erskine Muton (in Dorset) HLF, Landfill Tax, and more recently the government grants set aside for church roofs. There are numerous other trusts which have supported church conservation, some in significant amounts.
7. **Festival Churches** have been mentioned. The idea is that churches would only be used a few times a year, yet otherwise kept open. There are several multi parish benefices where this happens informally. Here are other benefices in which one church may offer a particular style of worship, such as the Book of Common Prayer, which attracts from a wider base. There is some legislative question about festival

churches (Canon B 14a) here about regularity of worship in parish churches. Churches also need to be used six times a year in order to be eligible for HLF funding and to be VAT exempt. The discussion of church buildings is part of a wider simplification agenda. It would be possible to overcome the legal difficulties. However, Festival Churches do not solve the issue of maintenance and insurance, nor do they address the issue of mission, or of a flourishing Christian presence in every community. In one such church, the Vicar has found a particular difficulty, as the parishioners emphasise that as a *Festival* church they would like services at festivals such as Christmas morning, precisely the time when there is most pressure. Diocesan initiatives to seek more vocations to the priesthood and LLM's, as well as the training of large numbers of Lay Worship Leaders are an important here.

8. **Closure** Where there is a local desire to close a church, then the diocese will continue to assist and advise. It must be recognised that this is not an easy path. And, as the Report says, a closed church will forever stand and speak of withdrawal.

Bishop of Ramsbury

September 2016

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Appendix 1: Four Stories

The following are examples from around the diocese of what can be achieved in very different settings. What makes each one significant is that they all speak of three key aspects of the Christian life spoken of above, namely generosity, prayer, and pilgrimage. They also illustrate that these things are not dependent on churches being large or small, rural or urban, catholic or evangelical. The hope is that these examples may remind us of the profundity and significance of what is already going on, as well stimulating our imagination and resolve to do more. As the following examples show, our buildings are significant in helping people know God.

Beaminster (A rural town church)

Reordering enabled the church to be a place of welcome and hospitality throughout the week.

Thanks to some very sympathetic reordering twenty or so years ago St Mary's Beaminster has chairs rather than pews. It also has a simple kitchen in the back, which enables the congregation to run a community drop-in every Wednesday, simply called Walk-in-Wednesdays. The body of the church is turned into a café style space and hosts around 60-80 guests each week for coffee, lunch, knitting, music, art, current affairs discussion and chat. The flexibility of the space enables God's house to be put to a wide variety of uses at the same time.

The sanctuary and side chapel remain set aside for worship and prayer and the regular 10am communion service takes place within the context of Walk-in-Wednesdays. So whilst bread and wine are being shared at the communion table, other guests share coffee and cake round another table. By changing the church into a café style space people are welcomed who might otherwise not be prepared to walk through the door on a Sunday. The priority is to welcome all. The results are: new relationships; pastoral care opportunities; some transfer to Sunday and midweek attendance; and a place of sanctuary. The success of Walk in Wednesday in terms of numbers has forced the church to look at reordering stage two, namely to upgrade the kitchens and drainage and to build a disabled access toilet.

Bincombe (A hamlet church)

Situated at the end of a no-through road in the hills north of Weymouth, Bincombe is a tiny mediaeval church serving a small agricultural community. The interior of the church has remained largely unchanged for over a hundred years and there are no plans for alteration. Although it is well off the beaten track the Bincombe congregation have clear understanding that their church is a place of hospitality and prayer, not only for those who live in there but for those passing by. There are inevitably few people driving to Bincombe but there are frequent walkers, as it is surrounded by footpaths, including the South West Coast Path. By the doorway, in the cool of the porch, visitors will find a wicker basket containing fresh squash, water and plastic cups, with a notice inviting them (many of whom will be on a long walk) to help themselves. There is no receptacle for money as none is expected. There is also a dog bowl by the wicker basket. The water, squash, and cups are renewed each day. A very simple act of kindness that speaks volumes about God's hospitality and welcome to the stranger. Inside everything is simple and uncluttered. A holy place. What is sometimes described as a 'thin place', in which there is clearly a palpable sense of prayer being offered. Bincombe church demonstrates that generosity, prayer, and pilgrimage do not depend on reordering schemes or the expenditure of large sums of money.

Christ Church Creekmoor (An urban church)

Located within an estate in north Poole, Christ Church Creekmoor has grown to be one of the key centres for community life in an area that has many needs and challenges. The priest and people of the congregation are clear that their life together is not primarily about their own needs but the needs of those around them. Christ Church is 'outward facing' in recognising that discipleship and mission are essentially about generous giving and service. The building is modern with the advantage of the facilities that comes with this. The worship area also serves as the main gathering area for all other activities and therefore has moveable furniture. Each day of the week the church is buzzing with activity, each week they run: a mums and tots, which is run in partnership with the local Health Centre;

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Play Zone (for preschool children); Chatterbox (for mums with babies); a Cafe, providing a cooked meal for older people, helping combat loneliness and isolation; a holiday club for children; a weekly club for teenagers; and the traditional unformed organizations. The PCC state, 'Responding to the generous love that we experience from God we use our Church building to reach out and bless children of all ages, their families, young people, older people and those with special needs from the local community, providing facilities and welcoming them to many activities where they can find friendship, love, acceptance and support.' The building is now too small for the number of activities and people therefore a project to enlarge the church called 'Room to Grow', has been launched (see the virtual walk through on the website www.christchurchcreekmoor.org)

Holt (A large village church)

St Katharine's Holt in north Wiltshire is a Victorian rebuild of a medieval church set in a village of approximately 2000 adults. The motivation for a recent project is contained in the statement which opens the parish website - *'Understanding the extraordinary welcome home God offers to everyone who comes close to Him is the key to extending the kind of welcome we want to offer to all'*. That welcome already exists through the people of the church, but the congregation wanted it to be reflected in the buildings too.

The initial aim of the project was to make the church building a multi-user space, by removal of pews, introduction of stackable seating, provision of full AV, sound system, second toilet, kitchen, new lighting whilst at the same time building a suite of church rooms as an annex on the North side of the church. The Church currently has a small set of rooms which are too small to house the current Sunday school and we have no hall. This project was in response to steady adult growth over the last 10 years, a Youth Group of 30-40, and Children 25, and a Mother and Toddler group of 40 Carers and 40 toddlers. An annex extension to the church was originally planned, which would enable a new Healing Centre to be set up and more extended general facility, but opposition from heritage bodies met that plans had to be shelved and a property next to the church purchased.

However, the reordering of the church has continued. When the pews are taken out the congregation will be able to be more creative in worship, setting up the chairs in different configurations and using the space more imaginatively. The building will be used more in the week as space can be cleared for the youth group, and the mother and toddler group which we have wanted for some time to relocate to the church. The interplay between the re-ordered church and the new Coach House annex facility will also be important in further plans for mission.

Appendix 2. Central Diocesan/National Resources

1. **Your archdeacon** Talk to your archdeacon on future plans for re-ordering or improving facilities.
2. **The Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC)** The DAC provides advice in relation to church buildings and other places of worship, their contents and churchyards. They can offer informal advice on proposals which may lead to applications for Faculty at a later stage or seek formal advice on Faculty applications from the Diocesan Chancellor or Archdeacon. The initial costs of Faculty applications are shared across the Diocese through Fairer Share rather than by individual parishes.
3. **Friends Organisations** The Trust officer and Diocesan Accountant can advise on setting up and running “Friends of St” who support the church as a building (but may not attend church). A draft constitution for Friends of Churches is available on the National Parish resources web-site.
4. **Fundraising** The Mission and Stewardship advisors will work with and support churches as they develop their funding plans, also offering advice on grant applications, training on fundraising for capital projects, legacy campaigns and other stewardship matters.
5. **Project Management** The Diocesan Property Team can help with design and/or project management of church building projects.
6. **Diocesan Grants or Loans** Loans of up to £50K to be repaid over up to 10 years are available through the Pastoral and Development fund via the Pastoral Secretary. Grants for repairs to church buildings in Dorset are available through the Erskine Muton Trust Fund via the Trust Officer. The Diocesan Web-site also has a list of other grant making bodies.
7. **Parish Trust Funds** Trust Officer is an invaluable source of advice on existing trusts or on setting up new/proposed/potential trust funds for churches, or on releasing capital from parish trusts. The Diocesan Board of Finance acts as a custodian trustee of these capital funds in order to ensure good governance.
8. **Quinquennial Church Inspections** The costs of the quinquennial church buildings inspections are shared across the Diocese through Fairer Share rather than by individual parishes. The DAC maintains the Diocesan List of Architects and Surveyors approved to carry out quinquennial inspections and will notify parishes when an inspection is due.
9. **Community Audit/Ministry for Mission** A toolkit for carrying out community audits is available on the social justice pages of the web-site and those for Messy church and other fresh expressions are on the M4M pages. Social Justice Champions and Ministry for Mission resource officer can provide advice on projects that may help you use your church more imaginatively.
10. **The Registry** Provide a range of advice on matters such as the use of church yards, and legal aspects of managing church buildings such as leases, alterations: consultation with the Diocesan Chancellor for Out of Court Advice Contact them or visit the registry pages on the diocesan web-site.
11. **Churchwarden Training** Training events are run every year by the Sherborne and Ramsbury Offices to cover areas such as church buildings and new faculty legislation.
12. **National bodies** Web-sites such as Church Care, Church Watch, Parish Resources and EIG offer advice on the care and development of church buildings, health and safety and risk assessments, savings on purchases as well as details of other national grant schemes.