

STATEMENTS OF
SIGNIFICANCE
AND NEEDS



STATEMENTS OF SIGNIFICANCE AND NEEDS

CHURCH BUILDINGS COUNCIL

2025



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

CATHEDRAL AND CHURCH BUILDINGS

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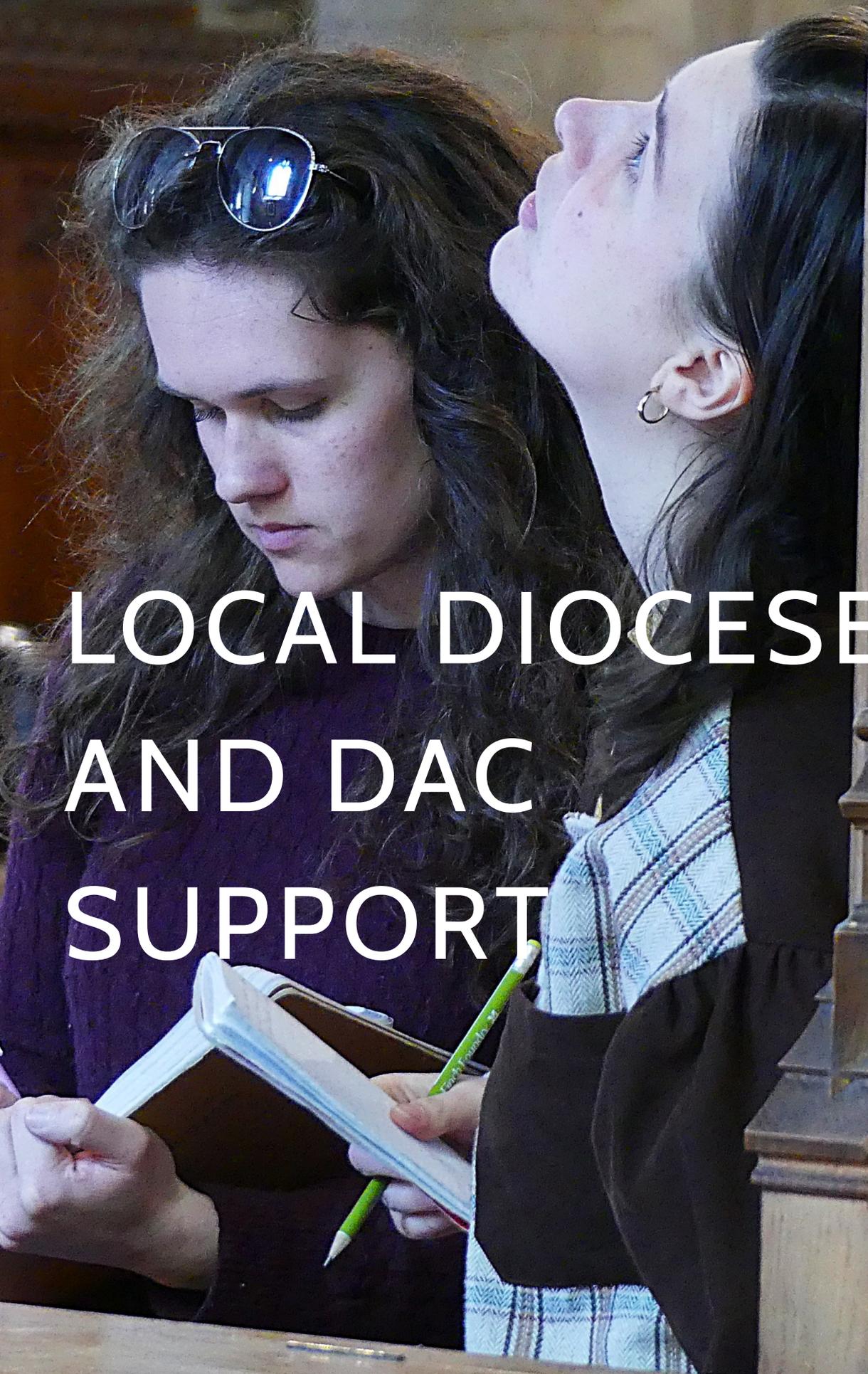
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INTRODUCTION

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LOCAL DIOCESE
AND DAC
SUPPORT

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Introduction

Thinking of making changes to a listed church, its setting, or contents? Or preparing for that possibility in the future? Statements of significance and needs help to develop successful projects for change, and help with understanding your building. Both statements are required when making a faculty application for a listed building.

Local diocese and DAC support

Look at the church buildings section of your diocesan website at an early stage. It will provide guidance and contact information. If you're unsure which diocese your church is in, check the Diocesan Advisory Committees (DAC) map <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/church-buildings-council/how-we-manage-our-buildings/diocesan-advisory-map>

Diocesan teams may be able to provide support by advising on your proposals and aiding understanding of significance. For faculty applications, statements of significance and needs will be submitted to your DAC, usually through the online faculty system.

WHAT ARE STATEMENTS OF SIGNIFICANCE AND NEEDS?



What are statements of significance and needs?

A statement of significance sets out 'what matters and why' in heritage terms. It describes what is special about a church building, its setting and contents in terms of architectural/aesthetic, historical, archaeological or social interest. It is recommended that the first section of a statement of significance is a longstanding document, written independently of any proposals for change. The second section must assess the impact of proposed changes on the significance: an important part of decision-making for faculty petitions.

'Needs' in this context means the reasons why the parish is seeking to make changes to the building. The focus is on the needs of people. The statement of needs sets out what the parish is seeking to address, and then outlines the proposal, explaining why that is the best solution of the options considered. Altogether, it forms a justification for the proposals.

Legal definition: Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2015 as amended 2024

- 4.4.—(1) Where proposals involve making changes to a listed church or other listed building intending applicants must provide the Diocesan Advisory Committee with—
- (a) a document which describes—
 - (i) the significance of the church or other building in terms of its special architectural and historic interest (including any contribution made by its setting) and
 - (ii) any significant features of artistic or archaeological interest that the church or other building has; and
 - (b) a document setting out the justification for the proposals (a "statement of needs")

PURPOSE

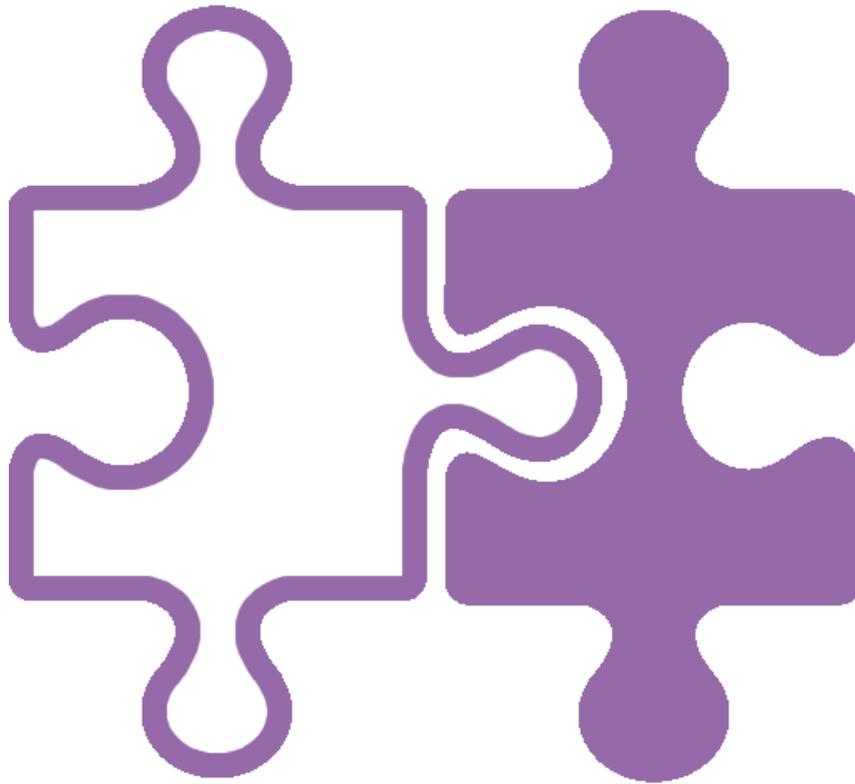
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Purpose

For your congregation

It is a good idea to write statements of significance and needs before you have decided on a project. Then, when you are looking to form proposals, the two sets of information can be fitted together to find the right solution.



One piece of the puzzle is the significance of the building. Writing the statement of significance helps to understand the building. It also tells the story of the building through history. The statement helps inform proposals by identifying the areas most sensitive to change and those with greater potential for adaptation.

A statement of needs will identify a problem and the possible solutions to it. It is always focused on the needs of the community (worshipping and wider) rather than the building itself. For instance, the community might need the church to be warmer and more comfortable. A statement of needs can be developed into a brief for an architect who can suggest changes to the building to achieve the aims. As a statement of needs is always evidence-based, it can also form a good basis for writing funding bids or building a business case.

The two pieces fit together: the significance of the church building, its setting and contents and the needs of the parish.

In the faculty system

The decision on a faculty application is made by a Chancellor (or the Commissary General in Canterbury). It is an independent decision made by a judge of a court. The judge receives advice from the DAC and consultees. The statements play a crucial role in the decision: they are your opportunity to make your case.

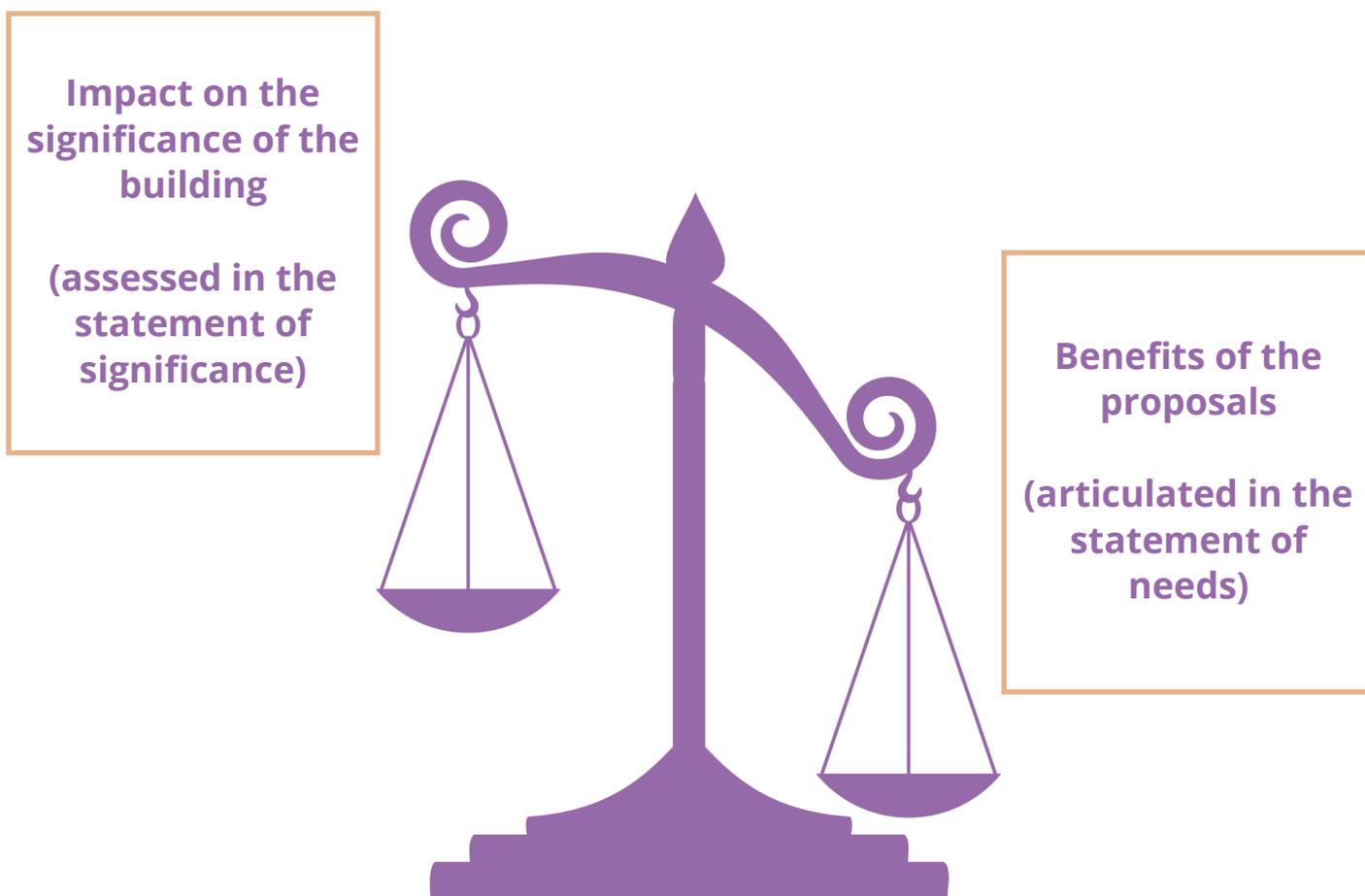
The decision is made using a framework known as the Duffield questions. The Chancellor needs to know:

- 1) What is significant about the building?
- 2) How significant is the particular area affected by the proposal?
- 3) What is the impact of the proposal on the significance of the building?

This information goes into the statement of significance.

Next, the Chancellor considers the benefits of the proposal. Benefits can be associated with worship, mission, environment, and community uses of the building. This information goes into the statement of needs.

The benefits (articulated in the statement of needs) are weighed against the impact of the proposal on the significance of the building (assessed in the statement of significance). These two documents are therefore important in the decision-making process. This is the place to make your case, in an evidence-based and objective manner which the legal process can take into account.



A word of caution: do not be tempted to underplay or be dismissive of significance. Try to be factual, informative and impartial. This will provide the most convincing evidence to consultees and decision-makers.

The aim of the process is to allow change where the significance of the building is conserved, or where the benefits of the proposal outweigh harm to significance.

'Harm' is a term that comes from the secular planning system and is used in the policy governing decision-making. The phrase 'harm to significance' is one you may repeatedly encounter. In this context, it means that the proposal will have an impact on the building, reducing its architectural or historical significance. Relating specifically to heritage, it does not imply that you are purposefully damaging a building in pursuit of change, and it does not mean that overall the project would not bring improvements or benefits – such as helping to keep the building in use. The opposite of harm, a proposed solution can also enhance significance by revealing heritage, making it more accessible, or improving the setting.

Statutory consultees

Depending on the extent of your proposals, certain organisations, known as statutory consultees, may be asked to comment as part of the faculty process. The statutory consultees are: the Church Buildings Council, Historic England and the National Amenity Societies (Council for British Archaeology, Georgian Group, Historic Buildings and Places, Society for Protection of Ancient Buildings, Twentieth Century Society, Victorian Society). The statements will also explain the proposals and your rationale to these organisations.

Other documents

In a faculty application, statements of significance and needs must be accompanied by the Standard Information form 1A which will contain the basic facts about the project and church building.

The inclusion of other documents produced while developing the proposals is welcome. They might include a liturgical plan, design statement, options appraisal, activity plan, QI report or documents to support heating approaches. The DAC may advise you to produce such documents if it would help to support your proposal.

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Statements of significance

Template for statement of significance



Statement of significance

There are two sections to a statement of significance.

Section 1 provides an overview of the church and site. It tells the story of the building and what is special about it. It is a valuable document to write at any time, even before there is a desire to change the building. Once written, it can be a long-standing document held by the parish to be used for future faculty applications and updated with any changes to the building. It can also be written in preparation for a project, giving the overall context. If it is written for a project, make sure the assessment is impartial, not skewed towards the proposals.

Section 2 is project-specific and helps you and those looking at the application assess the impact of the proposals on the significance of the building, setting and contents. It plays an important role in the decision-making process for faculty petitions.

Statements for the majority of projects are usually best written by people in the parish. You could ask your QI architect or another consultant to look at your draft. For the most complex projects or buildings, you may want to ask a heritage professional to write the statement. In some cases, a Conservation Management Plan may be required; there is separate guidance available for this at <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/conservation-management-plans>

How to assess significance

'Significance' in a heritage context means what is important or special about the building. It is not about how useful something is currently or its monetary value. Assessing significance can be difficult – but give it a go! It is not expected that you will become an expert. Sources listed later in this guidance can help you understand the significance of your church building.

Including photographs is an easy way to help others assess the significance of the building, its setting, and contents. Make sure to label them. Photographs work well in the body of the text but if it is easier for you to upload them separately, that is absolutely fine.

Key tips for writing a statement of significance

Write the statement for someone who has not been to your church and does not know the building

Use photographs

**Try not to underplay significance.
Aim to assess it accurately and impartially**

You could ask your QI architect to help or review your draft

**Do not simply copy the list descriptions
or a description from a book**

Use the template starting on page 22 which has lots of questions to help you

Significance can be broken down into strands or categories:

Aesthetic/architectural

The ways people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place. The way the building, its site and contents are visually appealing or designed to be appreciated.

Many things might make a place aesthetically and architecturally interesting. It might have a purposeful design or incidental beauty. It might remain as it was originally intended, or it might have acquired aesthetic and architectural interest through the cumulative impact of centuries of work.

Examples: a magnificent stained glass window; views through the churchyard; an elaborately carved wooden lectern

Historical

The connections that a building, its setting and contents have to the past. Its associations with historical people, events, or aspects of life.

Historical significance does not solely depend upon age. The structure might be a good

example of a particular style, or illustrate past technological innovation, craft skills or vernacular techniques. It might be associated with a known architect, gardener, or craftsman, or be a historic example from nature.

Examples: a traditionally constructed hammer-beam roof truss; a twentieth-century parabolic arch; an ancient yew tree; a monument to a celebrated person; a medieval font; a historic bell with inscription

Archaeological/evidential

This is the potential of the place to yield evidence of the way people lived in the past. It is usually connected with physical evidence such as buried archaeology or the historical fabric of the building.

The potential for archaeological or evidential interest can be estimated by historical and archaeological records on the area, such as information on the Historic Environment Record.

Examples: an infilled window; buried remains of a previous church within the building footprint; medieval artefacts buried in the churchyard

Social

This is the meaning of the building, site and its contents to people in the community both in the past and today. It could be valued for religious or non-religious reasons. It could be linked to communal activities, traditions, or memories.

Examples: the area around a font where baptisms are held; war memorials at the centre of remembrance services; long worn paths through the churchyard

When assessing significance, think about the value of each aspect of the building, site or contents on its own and its contribution to the church site overall.

You may want to assign a grading using a scale of high to low.

High - Makes a strong contribution to the overall value of the building or site and/or is of strong significance in its own right, perhaps being nationally or internationally significant

Moderate to high - Makes a very good contribution to the significance of the building or site and/or is of substantial significance in its own right

Moderate - Makes a good contribution to the significance of the building or site and/or is of significance in its own right

Low to moderate - Makes some contribution to the church building, site or contents but is not of significance in its own right

Low - Adds little or nothing to the significance of the building or site, or even detracts from it, and is not of significance in its own right

Proportionality

Your statement of significance must set out enough detail for the impact of the proposals to be understood and assessed. It should be proportionate to the significance of the building and the scale of proposed change. For example, a statement of significance for introducing a servery into a Grade II listed building can be shorter than a statement for a major reordering of a Grade I listed building.

Make sure you include every aspect where the character or appearance will be altered. For example, if you are proposing a servery at the west end of an aisle, the interior should be included to show the impact on the space and views through the nave. If your project would not in any way impact an area listed in the template below, that area does not have to be included. Alternatively, you could complete that section in a more basic way: context is often helpful.

Whatever the proposed change, you will probably need to write more than a couple of paragraphs but certainly not a book in order to explain the significance fully. The length should not be the aim.

Sources of information

Possible sources of information for your building and churchyard include:

[National Heritage List for England](#) on the Historic England website

Good to Know: The National Heritage List for England

Entries on the National Heritage List for England are helpful but do not provide a full description of the significance. The legal function of the list description is to identify the building. Although some newer entries contain much more information, do not rely on the description to cover all the important aspects of the building, setting and contents.

For all grades of listed building, the legal protection covers the whole structure, inside and out. This includes features not mentioned in the list description.

[Church Heritage Record](#)

Historic Environment Record (HER), maintained by your local authority. Many are available through the [Heritage Gateway](#)

The latest edition (revisions took place between 1983 and 2024) of the local volume of the 'Buildings of England' series by Pevsner

Reports by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME), some of which are available on [British History Online](#)

Victoria County History (VCH), some of which are available on [British History Online](#)

Local planning authority for conservation areas, tree preservation orders, local lists, planning policies and more

A local history or civic society

A local museum

The National Amenity Societies ([Council for British Archaeology](#), [Georgian Group](#), [Historic Buildings and Places](#), [Society for Protection of Ancient Buildings](#), [Twentieth Century Society](#), [Victorian Society](#))

[The Gardens Trust](#)

Diocesan Record Centre

County Record Centre

County Biological Records Centre

Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside: [MAGIC](#)

Template for a statement of significance

A blank template can be downloaded from the Church of England website for you to fill in, or, answer the questions below in your own document.

Section 1. Your building and churchyard: its significance

Location and setting

- Is it a rural, urban or suburban area?
- Is it in a historic settlement, or one that has more recently developed?
- How do the architecture and history of the church and the place relate?
- Are there distant or near views of the church and its setting?
- How do the trees or green spaces contribute to the setting?

Churchyard: memorials, natural environment, biodiversity and archaeology

- What is known about the history of the churchyard? Has it had extensions or a change of boundary?
- How are boundaries and entrances marked?
- Are there any significant gravestones, memorials or war memorials?
- Is the church or churchyard used by protected species such as bats, dormice, badgers, or barn owls?
- Is the church or churchyard a habitat for wildlife and plants?
- Are there any ancient, large or rare trees?
- Is the churchyard managed to encourage wildlife, and if so, how?
- Are there archaeological remains?

Social history and value to the community

- What does the community think of the building?
- Is the building a source of identity, distinctiveness or social interaction?
- Are there any historical events or people associated with the church?
- Is the church or churchyard used for special events during the year, aside from regular activities?
- Are there important memories associated with the church or churchyard?

Church building: exterior

You could use sections of the building e.g. nave, chancel, tower if that is helpful.

- Is this building listed? If so, what grade?
- When was a church first established on the site and how has it changed over time?
- Are there phases of building or alterations?
- Does the style link to architectural and artistic trends?
- Who are the architects, artists, craftspeople or benefactors who have been involved?
- What are the building materials?
- What is aesthetically, historically, archaeologically or socially special about each area of the church?

Church building: interior

You could use sections of the building e.g. nave, chancel, tower if that is helpful.

- What shape is the footprint, and what are the different sections of the building?
- What is it like inside the church? Is the interior large, small, tall, light, dark?
- What are the floors, roofs and walls like?
- Who are the architects, artists, craftspeople and/or benefactors involved?
- How it is lit and heated?
- What is aesthetically, historically, archaeologically or socially special about each area of the church?

Contents

Items to include: altar; reredos; pulpit; lectern; font; communion rails; stained glass; wall paintings; bells and bell frame; monuments; organ; communion plate; registers; pews and other woodwork; metalwork; floor finishes.

- Describe the contents of the church
- What is their age?
- Are they part of a suite of furnishings or a group of items of similar date?
- Are any of the artists or craftspeople recognised locally, regionally, nationally or internationally?

Section 2. The proposals: the impact on significance

If you prefer, you could provide this information in the form of a table. Whatever format you choose, make sure you assess the significance and impact of your project.

Identify the parts of the church, its setting and/or contents that would be impacted by the proposals

This can be a list. First, include the parts that would be directly impacted by the proposals, and then describe how the changes might have a broader impact on the character of the church. E.g. for pew removal, the pews will be impacted, but so too will the character of the nave/aisles, the flooring and the spatial quality of the church.

Set out significance of those parts

If you have already described the significance of the parts in Section 1, you can simply refer back to the description.

If not, assess significance by writing about what is architecturally/aesthetically, historically, archaeologically or socially valuable.

Describe the impact of your proposal on these parts and the building and/or setting

Impacts could include loss, alteration, obscuring, change of context, change of use or environmental harm.

You can also include positive impacts such as bringing back into use, conserving, revealing, improving setting, reducing energy consumption and increasing biodiversity.

Explain how you intend to mitigate the impact

- Are the proposals reversible?
- Are examples of historic furnishings retained in situ?
- Is any interpretation proposed?
- Will the building be recorded prior to change?

Statement of needs

The statement of needs should always put people first, rather than the building. Any proposed changes should improve the experience for people involved, enhancing worship and mission. The statement describes why improvements are sought, outlines the proposals and provides a justification for them.

You should begin by describing people's needs. There may be more than one way to address these. The proposal is the chosen solution. It should not only respond to people's needs but respect or enhance the significance of the building.

The needs should be described specifically. Here are some starting points:

We need a warmer space in the nave, aisles and chancel for our community activities outlined in our activity plan (rather than 'we need a new heating system')

We need to provide refreshments for around 40 people for fellowship after the weekly service (rather than 'we need a servery')

We need to set out five tables for the weekly Knit and Natter group at the west end of the nave (rather than 'we need flexible space')

Being specific helps to justify your proposals. A proposal for a kitchen that serves weekly tea, coffee and biscuits for 20 people will be different from one that is in daily use for a community café or a three-course catering venue. Articulating the needs in detail will provide evidence for the proposals. It helps to distinguish 'wants' from 'needs'.

Improving accessibility is always desirable. The Church Buildings Council's guidance on accessibility advocates thinking about accessibility in the round: physical access to spaces, circulation space, suitable facilities, sound, lighting and removing any other barrier for accessing the church as a local centre for worship, mission and community activity.

Evidencing need

The decision on a faculty petition is a legal one, and must be made based on evidence. Good evidence is factual and specific. It should convince even those who do not know your church that your proposal is necessary and the proposed changes will benefit worship, mission, the community or the conservation of the building or items within it. Evidence can be found through the activities that the space is currently used for, by whom and for how long. Describe the successes and the obstacles that mean change is wanted.

Some changes are simpler to provide evidence for than others. For example, it is understood that churches often need toilets. Describing the current access (or lack of) is helpful. Evidence for the number of WCs required and their proposed location is then the

focus of the statement. The QI report may provide evidence for repair work to a building. If your proposals are to facilitate new activities that are not yet taking place, you will need to demonstrate that they are not just aspirational but are likely to come to fruition. There are a number of ways to provide evidence for this: has the congregation or style of worship has changed, or is it expected to? Is there a lack of facilities in the area? Are you moving activities from elsewhere into the church? Are spaces at maximum capacity? Could you present letters from local people stating they will move activities into the space once complete? If you have trialled activities or worship in a temporary arrangement, describe this too.

Including photographs is an easy way to show how the space is currently used and any problems you are hoping to address. Photographs can be included in your statement or uploaded separately.

Key tips for writing a statement of needs

Write the statement for someone who has not been to your church and does not know your congregation, the building or how it is used

Articulate the needs of the parish and the benefits of your project based on evidence

Set out the problem for people before the proposed changes to the building, your proposals re the chose solution to the problem

Use photographs

Use the template starting on page 27 which has lots of questions to help you

Template for a statement of needs

A blank template can be downloaded from the Church of England website for you to fill in, or, answer the questions below in your own document.

What are the needs?

Here, talk about the reasons for seeking improvement, not the proposal.

- Why are people seeking improvement?
- What problems would be addressed by the proposals?
- Remember to be specific and people-based.

Make sure this includes information for someone who does not know your parish. For example:

- How is your building currently used for worship or community purposes?
- How many people live in the parish/ village/ town?
- How many people are on the electoral roll?
- What different types of services take place in the church each week/ month and how many people attend each of the different services on average?
- What is the age profile of the congregation? What provision for children is there? How many children attend these activities?
- Are there any plans for the development of housing in the parish or nearby?
- Is the church normally left open during daylight hours?

You can find a one page summary of attendance, census and deprivation information for your parish via the online parish returns system. These are useful facts that can support your application.

What is the evidence for the need?

- How can you demonstrate to the decision maker that there is a strong rationale for this change?
- Is the work recommended in the Quinquennial Inspection report?
- Has change in the congregation or community created a new need?
- Are facilities lacking in the church or community?
- Does this give you an opportunity to expand current activities or worship styles held in the church?
- Have you done an accessibility audit?

- Have you completed or undertaken any of the following to support the proposal:
 - the Energy Footprint Tool (on the Online Parish Returns system)
 - the Practical Path to Net-Zero
 - a heating checklist
 - an energy audit / decarbonisation action plan
 - registration, an award, or working toward an award with Eco Church (an A Rocha UK project)?
- Have you done any consultation or surveys? Have you spoken to people in the church and community? Have you received any letters of support?

Describe the proposals

Include enough detail so that, alongside any drawings, your proposals are clear to someone who does not know the building.

- What are the changes?
- Where are the changes?
- How do the changes impact accessibility, including lighting, sound, circulation spaces and locations for activities?
- Is there any professional supervision?

What other options have been considered? Why have you chosen the proposed option and discounted others?

- What is the evidence that this is the best solution to meet the needs?
- Were alternative locations considered?
- Were alternative materials or designs considered?
- Is this the best option for accessibility, including consideration of lighting, sound, circulation spaces and locations for activities? If not, why has it been chosen?
- You can upload a separate options appraisal for more complex projects

Why should the proposed changes be made now?

- Are there urgent issues with the condition of the building or contents?
- Is there financial or human resource available?

How would your proposal help the worship and mission of your church?

- Would it have liturgical benefit?
- Would it allow a different style of worship?
- Would it improve welcome?
- Would it support outreach or invite more people into the church?
- Would it improve accessibility – including lighting, sound, circulation spaces or location for activities?

How does your project contribute to environmental sustainability?

- Does the proposal increase biodiversity?
- Does the proposal safeguard wildlife or protected species?
- Does the proposal improve the energy efficiency of the building?
- Does the proposal reduce the carbon footprint of the church?
- How will the proposal minimise waste?
- Can any of materials be reused or recycled within the project or by others?



FINAL
COMMENTS

7

Final comments

Statements of significance are valuable documents showing what is special about your church building, its setting and contents. Part 1 as described in this guidance can be written at any time and kept for the future. It can then be used to inform any thoughts about change, and be added to when required.

Statements of significance and needs are important documents for decision-making in the faculty system. It can be daunting that they are part of the legal process. But they are also a great opportunity for you to set out your case. The people who go to a church know a lot about their building and understand the needs of the community. We encourage you to write your own statements and hope this guidance will support you in articulating your knowledge in a way that will suit the faculty system. If you're finding it difficult, you can ask the DAC or a professional for help.

The guidance is designed to help you understand and articulate the significance of the church building, its setting and contents; assess the impact of the proposals on that significance; provide the evidence for your proposals, and explain why they are the best solution for the building. Achieve those four elements and your statements should serve you well.



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