



Undertaking Church Building Projects

Starting a Building Project

This document is not intended to give full details on how to start a project, as there are much more detailed resources available on the Church of England Website. It is simply a guide to help churchwardens, clergy and PCC members identify the key things that need to be discussed and agreed at the start. Not all of the sections below will be relevant to every project, but that will become clear as you develop your project.

Starting any project can seem quite daunting if you have not done anything like this before, but with the right team and a clear vision, things will soon drop into place.

Vision

Having a clear vision is the most important part of any project. It is very easy to start with an idea rather than a vision and then end up heading off in completely the wrong direction.

For example, you could have an idea to remove some pews to create an open multi-use space, however without the vision as to why you are doing this it is unlikely to serve the purpose that it perhaps could and you may find it difficult to enthuse other members of the church and the community.

The vision needs to be focussed on the mission of the church and once you have got a clear vision, then ideas of how you can fulfil that vision will follow. It is always best to think big and perhaps “outside the box” at the start, as God may lead you in directions that you had perhaps not considered.

Prayer

Establish a pray group or meeting that specifically focusses on the vision and pray into that vision.

Create a project team

It is important that you have a team to lead the project. Even the smallest projects work best when you have someone to discuss any decisions with.

One of the most important parts of any major project is the establishment of a project team who will manage the project on behalf of the PCC. Whilst the PCC will have overall responsibility for the project, trying to manage the whole project during PCC meetings would be very difficult and prevent the PCC focussing on other aspects of church life.

Formation of the project team

The project team needs to have the skills and experience necessary to be able to drive the project forward. It is important that you decide what skills you need for the project and then find people that have those skills. Projects can be a good way of engaging some people who are perhaps on the fringes of your church community.

It is not necessary that every member needs to know lots about building work as you will probably have an architect who will have responsibility for that aspect, there are lots of other skills that a project team will need to have. Whilst having the people with the right skills is the most important, you do need to have people who have the capacity to actually be part of a team as they will need to meet / communicate with each other on a regular basis.

Below are some examples of the types of skills that you may be looking for

- Chair – someone who is able to co-ordinate the project
- Finance – someone who has a good understanding of the finances/grants etc.
- Administrator – someone who can keep documents, notes, etc. organised
- Communication – whatever the project you will need to keep the church aware of what is going on.
- Technical – someone who will be able to engage in technical conversations
- Community – someone who will be able to engage with the wider community.
- Fundraising – someone who has a passion for raising funds and can motivate others.

- Local History – someone who understands the history of the church and the local community
- Practical – someone who can plan the logistics required e.g. moving furniture, cleaning up.

The size of the project team will depend on the size of the project and may vary in size as the project develops. It may also delegate some tasks to a smaller group from time to time during the project. In general, a team of at least 5 people tends to work well and an odd number allows you to hopefully always make a decision. A team of 3 is too small to not be swayed by one strong individual. Whilst it is not essential, it is useful to have at least 2 PCC members, perhaps one of who is a churchwarden, so that you always have someone who can feedback directly to PCC meetings.

Delegation to the project team

It is difficult to outline what should be delegated to the project team as every project is different and will require different tasks to be carried out. In some projects much of the project will be delegated to your architect.

Below are some things that the PCC are likely to delegate to the project team:

- Drafting a specification for the architect / designer
- Initial meeting with the architect / designer
- Review of initial proposals for presentation to PCC
- Gathering quotes / tenders
- Review of quotes and preparation of a summary document
- Gathering funding information.
- Applying for grants
- Agreeing contracts with suppliers – within the agreed delegated budget.
- On site decisions required by the contractor

The project team may of course also want to delegate some tasks to a smaller group. Fundraising is often something that is delegated and may not require as regular feedback in the earlier stages of the project.

Frequency of meetings

The frequency of meetings of the project team will be determined by the type of project and may vary as the project develops. It is useful however to plan meetings at least monthly and at a suitable time before the PCC meeting to allow notes to be shared. Whilst many discussions may take place between meetings via email or phone it is important to summarise these at the meeting so that all members are aware of them and a record can be kept. Whilst emails can provide an effective trail of communication it is important to have written notes (not necessarily detailed minutes) from the meetings so that effective accountability can be maintained. The notes are also a way in which the PCC can be kept informed without a huge amount of meeting time being taken up simply receiving information.

Financial Delegation

It is important that the PCC make it clear about any financial commitment that they are happy to delegate to the project team. Whilst the key financial decisions will be made by the PCC, it may be necessary for some decisions to be made quickly, especially during the construction phase. For example, the contractor might discover that an existing pipe needs to be replaced that was not part of the contract. You probably wouldn't want to have to wait for the PCC just to make a minor change that may only be perhaps £50. However, if the change was going to be £5000 then you would want that agreed by the PCC. If you have a Standing Committee that meets between meetings then some smaller decisions could be passed via them, but again that would depend on what delegated spending powers have been given to the Standing Committee by the PCC. One other way forward is to allocate the project team a budget from the overall project contingency and allow them to authorise spending within that budget. Obviously, every project is different and it is not possible to have a model that fits every project, the important thing however is that this is agreed in advance so that everyone understands what they are permitted to commit to.

Research

It is important to understand what is actually needed and depending on the vision you have this may involve engaging with the wider community. Getting as much information together at the start will hopefully avoid too many delays as the project develops.

Project Structure

If the project will involve running activities and events or perhaps trading as a business. E.g. a café, gift shop; you may want to consider establishing a separate registered charity. This won't be relevant for most projects but if you think it might be it is worth investigating this early on, so you can make that decision as the project develops.

Understand your building

It is important that you understand your building and the history of it. Unless you have a modern building, it is likely that the building will have changed many times since it was first built. In most cases you will need a statement of significance for any faculty applications that may be required, so it is good to make a start on this now if you don't already have one in place.

Developing your ideas

Now that you hopefully have a clear vision of what you want to achieve and an understanding of the building and community needs, you can start to develop a brief for your architect. It is important to think about the sustainability of your project and this includes 3 areas.

Financial sustainability – what impact will this have on the finances of the church in the longer term, will there be an ongoing financial commitment for the project? You may be able to get a grant that will cover the running costs for a number of years but how will you cover those costs when those funds run out. This will form part of your business plan.

Environmental sustainability – how will your project have a positive impact on the environment? This could involve the physical environment around the church building or it could involve the reduction of carbon into the environment. With the ambitious target of reaching Net Zero Carbon by 2030, all projects need to have this a key element of the project in a relevant way.

Capacity – what capacity does the church have to sustain the project in the long term? Will it require lots of volunteers to support the activities that the project will facilitate? This is something that needs careful consideration.

Appointing an Architect

Most building projects are likely to require the services of an architect or designer and it is important that you choose the right person for the job. You can find other information on the process of tendering for an architect, but we are just going to consider some of the key points here.

In general terms it is usually good to get your Quinquennial Inspector involved early on in any project and they may be the right person to develop the project as they know the building well and understand what may be possible with the building. However, they may not have the capacity to take this on or you may want someone who has undertaken similar projects elsewhere.

Whoever you appoint, it is important that you give them a clear brief as to what you want them to do. This brief will have arisen from the vision, your initial research and how your thoughts have developed so far. Try not to keep the brief so narrow that they are unable to demonstrate their creativity.

At this stage it is also very important to understand and agree the fees that they are going to charge you for each part of the design process. Are you definitely appointing them to do the whole project now or do you just want to agree fees to get you to a certain stage in the process. Again, there is lots of information available online to help you make these decisions.

Next step... [Developing a Project](#)

Developing a Building Project

By now you will hopefully have a very clear vision for the project, an established project team and a project architect appointed.

Plan your building project

You now need to start on the more detailed planning of the project and this will be done in conjunction with your architect. At this point you will begin to establish specific deadlines for when certain aspects need to be in place such as drawings, fundraising, faculty and other permissions. It is tempting to think that everything can be done really quickly but the reality is that things often take longer than you expect, so when setting deadlines, be realistic as to what can actually be achieved with the team that you have.

What form the actual plan takes will depend on the type of project, but the important thing is that it is in a format that everyone who is involved with the project can understand. It may be appropriate to produce simplified plans for a wider audience.

Keep everyone informed

It is important for every project to make sure that the wider church are kept informed of how the project is developing. People can sometimes become negative towards a project if they feel that only a small number of people know what is going on. This can also then lead to fewer people wishing to engage in fundraising activities.

How you keep everyone informed will depend on the type and size of the project but some ways this can be done are:

- Regular update meetings
- Project noticeboard in the church hall
- Article in a church newsletter
- Updates on the church website or possibly a separate website if it is a wider community project.
- Updates on social media or during regular services.

Make sure that all parties within the wider church community are kept informed as you may need their support.

Write a business plan

We are not going to go into detail about writing a business plan as the detail required will depend on the nature of the project. In its simplest terms the business plan may take the form of a project budget but for larger projects you will need to consider capital costs, revenue costs, predicted income, staffing, marketing, etc.

Raise the funds

As part of your business plan you will have hopefully identified the total cost of the project both in terms of capital costs and possibly ongoing running costs.

You may be fortunate enough to have some reserves that you can use to kick start the project but this isn't essential. The important thing is to have a realistic plan as to where the funding will come from. Possible sources include the following:

- Reserves
- Bequests – someone may have left the parish a legacy that can be used for the project
- Donations from the congregation – how much can you realistically expect to receive?
- Fundraising activities – these can be a good way of engaging the community as well as income.
- Small loans from the congregation – these can sometimes be very useful to get you over the line.
- External loans – these should be considered with caution and how they will be repaid will need to form part of the business plan.
- Grants – these may be able to provide you with a significant part of the total cost.

Apply for grants

Most grant funders will expect detailed proposals of the work before they will consider an application and some grants will only support certain types of work. e.g. community focussed projects. This is why it is often difficult to do the grant applications earlier in a project as you will probably not have all the information that is required. Grant applications vary in their format from a simple letter explaining what is proposed to a large online application with multiple supporting documents.

You will also find that some grant funders will not consider an application until a certain percentage of the costs have already been raised and therefore you may want to consider which grants you apply for first. Some grants also have specific application windows each year so it is important that you consider this when planning which grants you will apply for.

Depending on the nature of the project you may want to establish a small fundraising/grant team to go bring this all together.

Finalise your plans

As the project has developed and discussions have taken place with various stakeholders, it is likely that the design will have been modified a number of times. It is important that everyone understands the proposals and that these are communicated clearly to all members of the church and if appropriate the wider community. Whilst small changes can be made beyond this point it can become time consuming to make amendments to planning permission and faculties if significant changes are required. This is also a good point to check that the proposal actually meets the vision that you started with.

Get any permissions in place

For virtually every project certain permissions need to be in place before the work starts and it is important that these are planned in the project plan to make sure that they do not delay the project.

If the work is on to the church building or hall linked to the church building it will generally require a faculty from the Chancellor before the work can commence. The length of the faculty process may be dependent on the complexity of the proposal and the impact that it will have on the historic fabric of the building. For most projects you need to allow for at least 3 months from submission to the faculty being issued but this can take significantly longer. The DAC Secretary will be able offered more detailed advice on individual projects but it is always good to engage the DAC (Diocesan Advisory Committee) at an early stage. If the work is to a listed building and is not reversible then it may well require external consultation with statutory bodies before the DAC can give their formal advice to the Chancellor. This will add at least two months onto the process. Normally faculty applications are made by the parish but in some cases, parishes engage their architect in the faculty submission.

If the work is going to change the external appearance of the building it is likely that planning permission will be required. This can also take quite a few months to obtain, so it is worth clarifying this with the planning department early in the project. The submission of a planning application may form part of your agreement with your architect.

Most building work will require compliance with relevant building regulations and you may need to appoint a building inspector or apply to the local authority to have the work inspected at relevant stages in the construction. Again, this is likely to be something that you would want you architect to organise.

Next Step... [Completing a Project](#)

Completing a Building Project

Whilst getting funding and permissions in place are a significant part of the project, there is still lots of work to be done before the project is complete.

Appointing a contractor

The appointment of the contractor may be part of your agreement with your architect and they may manage the whole tendering process for you. If that is not what has been agreed, then you may need to put the work out to tender yourself. This can be quite a detailed process and we are not going to describe it fully here but below are some of the key things to consider.

- Detailed specification / schedule of works – it is important that you have a very clear outline of the work required for the project as you want to make sure that you are getting tender prices that refer to exactly the same work.
- Contingency - you need to make sure that you have an adequate contingency in the tender price as projects rarely go ahead without some additional work being required as part to the project. The size of the contingency will depend on the nature of the work and your architect will be able to advise you on the amount that is appropriate.
- References – it is important to check that the contractor has actually done similar work before and therefore it is important to follow up any references that are provided to check that they are genuine.
- Availability – when can the contractor actually do the work? You may not want to wait for months for the work to start just to save a few pounds.

It is important that the PCC are happy with the proposed contractor as the contract will be between the PCC and the contractor.

Agreeing a start date

Once you have appointed a contractor the next stage is to agree a start date, although this could have been part of the appointment process. The start date may be dependent on the availability of the contractor but other factors may influence when the work starts. If the work will involve the need to worship elsewhere you will need to seek advice from the Archdeacon who may ask you to make a request to the Bishop. You may also need the building ready for a particular date such as Christmas, Easter or perhaps a wedding which may dictate when the work must start and finish. It is always a strong possibility that work will take longer than planned so it is important that you allow for this and do not start a “12 week” project 12 weeks before Christmas for example.

Finalising grant funding

Some grant providers may not confirm the grant until you are able to give a start date for the work and some may only pay out the grant once certain stages of the work are completed. It is important to understand any specific requirements for grant payments before you start the work as this can have a significant impact on cashflow if payments need to be made before grants are received.

Signing the Contract

The contract is a legal agreement between the PCC and the contractor and it is important that the PCC are fully aware of what they are committing to. For most larger projects the contract will be arranged by the architect who is managing the contract. The contract should include details of the payment schedule, any contingencies included in the contract, details of the retention amount and the period of retention. If you are managing the contract yourself, you should seek legal advice to ensure that you understand the wording of the contract and your commitments under it.

Managing the construction

In most larger projects this is likely to be done to a large extent by the project architect. Despite the architect being the main contact for the contractor throughout the project, it is useful to have a member of the project team who will be the link person and is able to respond to questions that arise during the work. It is very unlikely that a project will go ahead without the need for some decisions along the way, as things are often uncovered when the work begins. The project team and PCC need to agree what decisions the link person can make and who they need to contact to make decisions above their remit.

Completing the work

It is important that you are clear what work needs to be completed at various stages in the project. This is especially important if the project requires different parts of the building to be out of use at different times. If you are using an architect then they should confirm this with the contractor and manage this on your behalf.

Payment

It is important that the work is checked at regular points during the work and in most cases your architect will issue interim and final payment certificates. It is important that invoices are paid promptly and within the payment terms that were agreed. Contractors will have had to pay out for materials, staff costs, etc. and even the larger contractors may not have the reserves to cover these for a longer than they have planned.

If you are not using an architect to manage the contract you will need to meet with the contractor at the relevant point in the project to confirm that you are happy with where the work is up to and agree the amount that is payable at that point.

Snagging

The purpose for retaining part of the total payment for a period of time after the completion of the work is to make sure that you are happy with all aspects of the work that has been completed. At an agreed time after the completion of the project a meeting should be held on site with the contractor and usually the architect to look at any parts of the work that you are not happy with or perhaps parts of the work that have not been completed. The contractor will then have time to complete the outstanding work before the end of retention period.

Reviewing the project

This is part of a project that is often missed as everyone is usually pleased to have completed the work that they forget to review how the project has gone. Whilst you will not undertake major projects every year it is likely that you will undertake some form of building project on a regular basis and it is important to review the project so that you can learn from the experience. Hopefully lots of things will have gone well, but it is likely that some parts of the project will have caused you problems. Perhaps you have spent more than you planned or it took longer than you expected. It is important that you understand the causes of any problems so that you can make sure that you plan around those issues on the next project.

In summary

The information in these documents is not intended to be a full guide on running a building project as plenty of books have been written on this topic over the years. It has hopefully however identified some of the key points that need to be considered when undertaking a building project on your church building.

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