

Developing a strategy for church buildings



An options proposal

In 2023 the Diocese of Truro committed £22 million taken from Diocesan reserves over the next ten years to support parish and deanery plans; investing in the life and mission of the church in Cornwall. £2 million of this is to be used to support parishes in their stewardship of historic church buildings.

This paper is to provide an update to Diocesan Synod on this work and to give an opportunity for feedback on the goals and key delivery options to be included in the strategy.

There will be time on this item at the February meeting to consult on the proposals with the members of Diocesan Synod, so you are asked to consider the information that follows to enable you to respond to these questions:

1. Do the proposals align enough with our wider strategy and vision (fruitfulness and sustainability).
2. Do proposals address the most important challenges and opportunities facing us around church buildings?
3. What is missing?
4. What would you do differently or not do?
5. What questions do you have?

Please feel free to discuss this with others in your church prior to the meeting.

A reminder of the context

In our diocese we have 305 churches (298 open). The responsibility for each of these rests with the respective PCC and clergy - with a significant reliance upon the goodwill of volunteers to support both fundraising and maintenance. In 2023 PCCs spent an estimated £3 million on repairing and maintaining these buildings, a figure taken from parish accounts, so this does not begin to reflect the actual time and resources expended by parishes. Anecdotal evidence is that, whilst loved, these buildings consume much of the energy and funding available which might also serve for mission and ministry. And the fundamental challenge is that these wonderful buildings are mostly very old and often in need of significant repairs just to stand still, let alone adapt for the future of its community.

Recently, thanks to grants from the national Church of England, the Diocese has been able to fund a Church Buildings Development Officer, a role which directly supports parishes to plan, fund and implement works to the fabric of their buildings; and a Cut Carbon Support Officer for churches, who helps churches get warmer and cheaper to run whilst cutting emissions. In addition, funding has

meant that the Diocese could give out £136k in minor repairs and improvement grants in the past year; and another £35k in quick wins for carbon cutting and energy saving measures. It is hoped that we will be able to access more external funding to continue these, and we know, from take up and feedback, that these measures are really helping parishes.

The challenge is that £2 million of Diocese of Truro funds will not go far if it is all given out in grants, it might cover 5 roofs, which would be great for 5 churches, but not the other 300. It is hoped that with this money, we can use it to do things that will be a lasting change which will directly benefit as many churches as possible. Things that are based on what is working in other dioceses.

What we have been doing

Formed a buildings strategy advisory group

We have drawn together a steering group made up of representatives of different stakeholders in our diocese: churchwardens, stipendiary and retired clergy, architects, funders, historic advisors and the DAC. This group is advising on the development of the strategy and support the goals and priorities.

Asked people in parishes what they need for church buildings

We have carried out a stakeholder survey consulting on what support would be most useful for churches across our diocese (Appendix 1 shows a summary of the responses and who responded - 121 responses to date).

Evaluated the data

We already hold a lot of data about finances, giving, energy use, attendance, building condition, engagement, volunteering and demographics. All of which is being used to consider how priorities are set; where the gaps are; and what we don't know (and might need to find out).

Researched what is and isn't working elsewhere

We have spoken to a wide range of organisations and individuals across the country including other dioceses, other denominations, heritage groups, churches trusts, heritage charities such as the National Trust and Historic England, national church advisors, DAC members, heritage architects and surveyors and the Heritage Lottery. We have used reports, books and online resources to learn from what has gone before.

All of the above is reflected in the list of strategic goals and priorities below. At this point they are not finalised. This is still a consultation phase.

On the next pages you will find the overview of the proposed strategic priorities, objectives and actions.

Protect the future of our church buildings <i>Preserve and invest in Cornwall's historic churches so that as many as possible remain open and sustainable</i>			
What we will aim for by [date] (intended impact)	Percentage of church buildings assessed as sustainable (or improving in sustainability) across condition, financial, and missional criteria.	Increase in the number of buildings moving from 'poor/at risk' to 'fair or good'.	Churches have greater access to predictable, suitable, timely funding that reflects the needs of their buildings.
	Percentage of churches able to remain open for worship and community use due to repair and sustainability interventions.	Increase in the number of parishes with funded, active maintenance plans for their historic buildings.	
How we'll measure success	QI reports and strategic review data. Parish income vs expenditure. % parish expenditure on repairs & maintenance. Engagement figures. PCC member capacity.	QI reports. Maintenance plans.	Total value of investment secured annually for repair, conservation, and improvement of historic church buildings
What we'll do	Give grants for up to £10k for repairs, maintenance & improvements intended to make safe, usable and prevent deterioration.	Provide a Church Buildings Support Officer to give tailored support focussed on fabric, including advice, training and project management. (0.8 FTE)	Give match funding grants of up to £20k for larger repairs and improvements works.
	Give grants for up to £10k for repairs, maintenance & improvements that will cut carbon emissions.	Subsidise the cost of quinquennial surveys for churches unable to pay for them.	Improve our use of data, particularly from QI inspections, to know more about the condition of church buildings to inform decision making, proactive work and prioritisation.
	Develop policy and practice to support churches with water management, for places that don't have any and those that have too much. Inclusive of adapting to respond to climate change.	Development partnerships with relevant training providers & heritage organisations to grow the pool of tradespeople with the necessary skills.	Resource Generosity through teaching, practical tools and guidance in order to grow financial sustainability.

Create safe, welcoming and mission-focussed spaces			
<i>Ensure buildings support worship, ministry, and vibrant community life</i>			
What we will aim for by [date] (intended impact)	More parishes have buildings that meet the needs of the existing congregations and potential users = ‘fit for purpose’.	Parishes and their buildings are more sustainable through increased usage and available funds.	More parishes are able to deliver new or expanded ministry and mission activities due to improvements in their buildings.
How we’ll measure success	Church condition records.	Parish funds and engagement levels.	Ministry and mission activities.
What we’ll do	Give grants for up to £10k for improvements that enable more usage of buildings for a diversity of purposes e.g. children’s work, social action or community events.	Provide a Church Buildings Support Officer to help plan, resource and manage additional uses of church buildings to generate income and engage communities (0.5 FTE).	Work with the team delivering Growing Younger to prioritise investment where it is needed for children’s and youth work.
	Actively work with partners such as local authorities, charities, businesses and faith organisations to re-grow the role of churches in their communities.		

<p>Reduce the operational burden on clergy and volunteers</p> <p><i>Streamline building responsibilities so people are freed for ministry and mission</i></p>			
What we will aim for by [date] (intended impact)	Reduction in clergy and volunteer time spent on building-related care and maintenance.	Parishes are more able to access funding and resources to support the care and maintenance of church buildings.	Alternative models for church maintenance are tested and learned from.
How we'll measure success	Self-reported data from clergy and volunteers about their experience (clergy wellbeing surveys and Articles of Inquiry).	Funding sourced. Resources accessed.	Cost savings from shared resources and services. Parish expenditure on repairs and maintenance.
What we'll do	Provide a Church Buildings Support Officer to help identify, apply for and manage funding (0.5 FTE).	Pilot a centrally managed provision for key annual maintenance tasks in 2 deaneries over 2 years. Paid for by the Diocese of Truro.	Pending the outcome of the maintenance pilot, roll out provision to all deaneries.
	Provide small grants for resources that will open up churches for use and reduce workload, e.g. heaters, automated locking, giving machines.	Explore possible ways of providing low-cost access to shared resources such as drone surveys, scaffolding towers and temporary heating.	Review the provision of resources for churches including those on the diocesan website and the QI format, considering models from other organisations.

Equip parishes to make confident, informed decisions about their buildings

Provide a clear framework and support that guides local choices about the use, care and future of their buildings

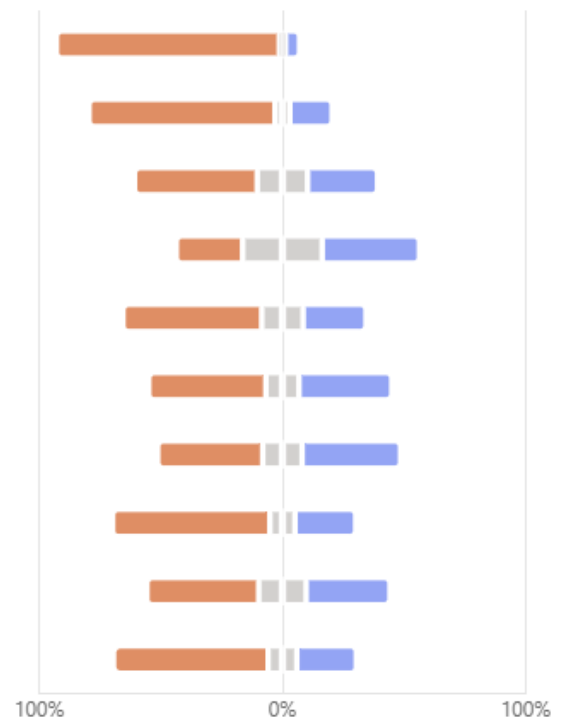
What we will aim for by [date] (intended impact)	Decisions about the future of church buildings are made more strategically, in line with local and diocesan plans.	Parishes are more supported when making decisions about the future of their church buildings.	Alternative options for long-term management of at-risk churches are piloted, enabling different thinking tailored to context.
How we'll measure success	Strategic review data tracking church buildings at risk. Deanery planning reflecting plans for church buildings.	'Church at risk' plans in place. Strategic review data tracking church buildings at risk.	Proposals for long-term management of churches that parishes cannot sustain.
What we'll do	Provide a Church Buildings Support Officer to support churches with decision making about the future of their buildings. (0.2 FTE)	Develop a toolkit for decision making to guide churches that are at risk through the condition of the building, the capacity of the PCC or the finances.	Work with partners (other dioceses, the national church, heritage organisations) to explore alternative models of management of church buildings.
	Embed this strategy in the work of deaneries, the Diocesan Plan for Change & Renewal and Growing Younger to ensure buildings can support wider strategy and investments are co-ordinated.	Carry out a strategy review of church buildings using the Church Buildings Council approach - to enable more strategic decision making about buildings and to inform wider strategy.	

Appendix 1: Results of stakeholder survey - support for church buildings

1. Which of these would you find most helpful for your church/parish? **Please select any you think will help.**

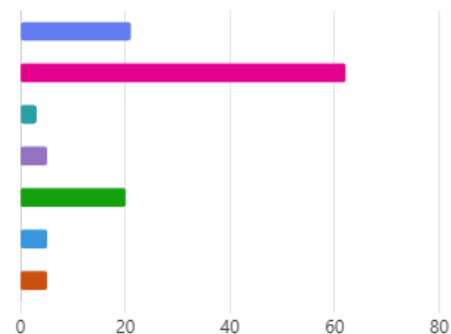
● Yes ● No ● Maybe

1. Small grants (up to £10k) for things like repairs, improvements and professional fees.
2. Free Quinquennial inspections.
3. Free or subsidised resources such as Digital giving machines, automated locking systems, CCTV systems.
4. Annual maintenance tasks by contractors engaged by the diocese and **paid for by the Parish.**
5. Annual maintenance tasks by contractors engaged by the diocese and **paid for by the Diocese.**
6. Diocesan support for groupings of parishes to coordinate shared services such as insurance, surveys, maintenance & repairs
7. More support for making decisions about the care of and future of buildings
8. Help completing funding applications.
9. Help developing additional uses of your church including community engagement.
10. Help generating income for your church such as giving, enterprise and completing funding applications.



3. Your role

- Clergy 21
- Churchwarden 62
- Lay minister 3
- Other parish officer 5
- PCC member 20
- PCC as a group 5
- Other 5



Which description best fits your church(es)

- in a town 31
- in a village 73
- in a hamlet or very rural 42
- Listed 76
- Unlisted 8

Comments, suggestions or questions relating to the above options

Working together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is value in local churches working out together how to do things which, if the Diocese did it for them, could encourage a dependency culture. • It doesn't make sense for individual churches/parishes to apply for funding or support without reference to a wider vision or strategic priorities and a joined-up approach.
Engaging wider community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging the wider community in the ongoing care of their church. If you live in a parish the church belongs to you! • Empowering the building to be used more effectively within the community; which could mean repairs but also changes for community use which help with funding would help.
Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funds should be allowed to be spent on roofs. Without a roof nothing else matters. That should be a priority especially if church roof repairs are deemed to be urgent. The cost is huge and many funders require match funding. Unsafe roofs and ceilings are probably the biggest risk to closure. • Any works should not be capped at a £10K total cost for a requirement of the grant. • Include church halls and grounds of churches. • Help to reach match funding requirements for other grants. • A focussed fund for bringing all church buildings who can evidence a desire to engage with their wider community up to a reasonable minimum standard and so giving them a fighting chance to be used every day for community engagement not just the Sunday congregation i.e. proper Toilet facilities, reasonable hospitality space and some responsive heating for specific areas. • Diocesan funding would be best channelled into repairs for which it is difficult to get grants because funders consider them "boring" eg rainwater goods, roof & ceiling repairs, pointing etc. • Medium level building expenses (especially if unexpected) - say £3K to £20K - are the hardest to deal with. • There is very little financial help available to support lots of small to medium maintenance expenditures or they seem to be disproportionately hard to access. • Cover for professional fees would be great, these are a 'hidden' cost of getting on with planning projects. • Help for urgent repairs. • Essential to have "emergency fund" where no alternative funding/insurance is available. • As a large church we are unusual, having the resources to do most of the routine issues above. Our biggest issue is always obtaining appropriate funding for the many small and large repairs that our church buildings require.
Funding bid support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to help write them and a checking system may be helpful for some, i.e. training sessions. But not employing someone specifically to write them. • If a church does not have the capacity to undertake a funding application, it probably doesn't have the capacity to manage a building project.

Diocesan paid contractors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The idea of having diocesan contractors seems possible but will they be able to reply quickly to requests made by a parish? When a local contractor who regularly visit or work may be able to do these tasks quicker. • It is very difficult to find contractors for roof and gutter maintenance, but it would be unrealistic for all of this work to be paid by the diocese. A panel of contractors that could be engaged by parishes would be valuable. • Grass cutting service, perhaps by deanery. • Simple maintenance e.g. gutters etc are often done for free by locals so that's not so much help and we don't want endless advisors- just give us the money! • We would prefer to employ local people to clear gutters, routine maintenance. • Central/regional purchasing can lose the financial goodwill of volunteers/local contractors - consider only the more specialist maintenance works which are harder to source e.g. church windows - to be paid for depending upon ability to pay (4 & 5). • Don't assume that centralised purchasing always reduces cost. For example, insurance is costed against risk on the surveys of buildings - which would not reduce - however, there are advantages from being a "big" client in terms of achieving more favourable terms and conditions.
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisting with an administrator for parishes would be a big help - i.e. £5kpa to help parishes understand the need for one, and the support one can give to both CW's and Incumbents! • Finding people to carry out small and mid-sized jobs is really tricky, so contractors engaged by the diocese but paid for by parish may be useful - but there would need to be reassurance that they weren't more expensive.
Quinquennials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't support sharing amongst all, e.g. by paying for QIs. This should only be done for churches with less than 6 months General Fund reserves and no use of restricted funds unaccounted for. • Quinquennial inspection cost is at least a limited figure, but putting things right that have been identified can be much more difficult to fund so small grants for these maintenance costs • The Quinquennial is a huge cost so any help would be good. • Discussed at PCC meeting and felt that things like QI inspection fees would mean that every church benefits. • We do see the benefit to the Diocese of ensuring that every church has a QI and in collating much better information about the church estate which could prioritise targeted funding/funding bids.
Managing works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone to talk to who could navigate us through significant repairs.
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrading rainwater gulleys as more water now.
Deanery plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To support implementation of Deanery plans and strategic priorities, these resources need to be allocated with reference to the DIT, to focus resources where strategically most useful

General comments

- I like the idea of seeking opinions first before making a decision.
- What a wonderful new prospect.
- If the burden care of for buildings was taken off the PCC it would free up a lot of time and mental energy. (A sort of National Trust for the buildings, with a strategy for attracting parishioners to support it financially) It might attract more mission minded people on to the PCC rather than just preservation minded people, and help the PCC channel funds into ministry.
- Any assistance to help maintain our beautiful churches welcome. But please don't use all the money on administering and allocating the funds with endless meetings, group consultations and new literature.
- Thank you for giving me a voice on something that affects me and takes my time virtually every day. It's lonely trying to fix Church fabric problems even with support from Church members.
- A couple saying spend the money on clergy.
- Money invested where most needed = "means" tested + assessment of church capacity (funding and resources).
- Don't dilute the funding potential with items that can be funded or subsidised from elsewhere.
- In our situation it's very hard to say no to any of the questions.
- The small schemes grants and the diocesan support officers are transforming how the congregation see 'the diocese'. Unfortunately, MMF is seen as a tax and a preventative measure that stops progress. Being able to pay the diocese and get grants back sends a significant and subtle message that the central church cares.
- There has to be a fundamental change in the realism of those who advise on repairs and improvements to churches. Churches should use competent people. Indeed, that is what the Regulations require. Expectations of some DAC members are beyond what rural churches can afford.
- In these financial difficult times, there is a big difference between what is necessary for the continuance of the ministry of the church and what is nice to be done with a lottery grant.
- Continually helping patching up old buildings at all costs can divert from being church. We should encourage different places or worship alongside the existing old stock.
- Help to increase the congregation size seems our first priority, in order to share the church tasks and move forward.
- Buildings takes up a huge amount of my capacity. I have no qualifications in maintaining or project managing them, and few volunteers who will help. In this day and age it seems ridiculous that we have these amazing assets, and expect handfuls of volunteer amateurs to treasure enable the thriving of such high value assets.