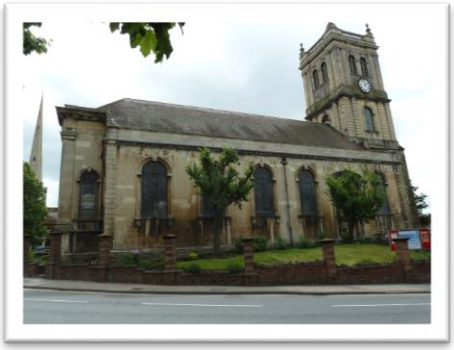
Church Buildings: Burden, Blessing and an Asset for Mission

A discussion document by the West Midlands Place of Worship Support Officers based on their experience in the Dioceses of Hereford, Lichfield and Worcester from 2009 to 2015

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." **Genesis 28:17-18**

"Even the most ardent atheist must accept [the social and cultural] value [of these buildings] to the state must run into billions of pounds…" ***Simon Jenkins***



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Executive Summary

1. **Church buildings are a major asset for the Church of England**. They are usually prominent features in local landscapes, their purpose is easily identified, they attract visitors and are generally valued by the wider community; many are listed, stunningly beautiful and integral to history of the local area.

2. Most Church of England dioceses have **too many churches and not enough people** to maintain and operate the buildings effectively.

3. The Church of England is hampered by a working culture that is inappropriate for the 21st Century. **Bureaucracy and parochial independence** inhibit strategic management at high level but also frustrate efficiency in the parishes.

4. Many PCCs cannot afford to fund the full costs of Church Life – i.e. ministry, operations and the maintenance, repair and improvement of their buildings - **both parish share contributions and building maintenance are underfunded**.

5. Analysis of available data makes it **possible to undertake a strategic overview to identify which PCCs are viable** (can meet all their liabilities) **or sustainable** (with support from the wider Church) and those that are not.

6. **Dioceses should consider church buildings as a portfolio of assets**. Their significance, condition, 'shop front' position plus maintenance, repair and general operational costs should form a key component in any pastoral strategy for a diocese, archdeaconry or deanery.

7. **Congregations feel burdened and frustrated by heritage considerations** that can make repairs and alterations expensive and difficult to achieve.

8. **It takes too long to close church buildings and the process is complex**. It puts buildings at risk of neglect and prevents alternative uses from being identified *before* they have become decayed, unattractive and of potential negative value.

9. **Better training is needed for Church communities and stipendiary and unpaid clergy** so they understand preventative maintenance, legislation and trustee responsibilities

10. **Effective succession planning** is essential. Changes of personnel and long vacancies create significant risks for church based community projects and many are too dependent on the character and personality of the leaders - usually incumbent status clergy.

11. **Positive strategic management is needed so closures are not dependent on local circumstances.** Communities facing change need support from the wider Church to ensure key buildings are not lost resulting in a decline in morale.

Recommendations

The authors of this paper are greatly concerned that if nothing is done to alter the status quo the morale of those involved with the C of E's church buildings will continue to decline and the likelihood is that those at parish level become increasingly disillusioned with the Church's ability to offer them support. Financial pressures will get worse, some PCCs will resign, and there will be greater pressures on the dioceses to sort out the legacy of this.

The Church and many of its buildings may continue to function but the quality and effectiveness of the organisation will become increasingly patchy. More buildings will close for worship in an unplanned way and congregation numbers will decline; strategically and nationally important buildings will be lost. *The Good News of new life in Jesus Christ will not be conveyed by the witness of a minority struggling with the overwhelming task of sustaining church buildings for the many.*

Action for parishes

- **Look outside the Church:** Strengthen links with the local community; network and consider forming a Friends' Group.
- **Pool Resources**: Every parish should have access to a trained administrator to ensure regular maintenance takes place, the letting potential of church buildings is maximised and paperwork is kept in good order. This role could be shared between parishes or might be a deanery post.
- **Effective Succession Planning** will ensure give parish projects a chance to thrive and ensure that they are supported by new clergy. The parish needs to ensure that all projects that have church involvement are continued during an interregnum and that the parish profile clearly states the role the new vicar will have to play in the support of these projects.
- **Develop and use Documentation**: each parish needs to prepare Mission Action Plans, statements of significance and statements of need, and then to act upon them, reviewing and updating them regularly so they become useful tools.

Action for dioceses

- **Better Use of Existing Information:** If PCCs can be encouraged to utilise the church log book and QI reports and to upload some of this information to a centralised database, the data could form the basis of a church buildings audit. In effect, it would enable the National Fabric Survey to be regularly updated and from this information a strategic diocesan buildings review might be drawn up. Better collation of data held by the Diocese would allow earlier identification of churches at risk and a strategic response.
- **Set up a Managed Portfolio of Church Buildings**: All dioceses should have asset management plans for and monitor the maintenance and repair of their church buildings.
- **Conduct feasibility assessments:** In difficult financial circumstances it is important that the Church does not encourage a church development project e.g. lavatories and kitchens, before a building is weatherproof and in reasonable repair. There needs to be confidence the development costs will not impact on the PCC's ability to sustain

the operational costs and there is no risk that they have to be 'bailed out' by the Diocese and, ultimately, by those paying the Parish Share. There needs to be increased scrutiny of development proposals. The Faculty Jurisdiction system is designed primarily to ensure an appropriate type and quality of building works and cannot go into the financial and organisational basis of each proposal. Therefore each Diocese needs some mechanism whereby the financial and social sustainability of projects can be tested[1].

- **Care for Vulnerable Churches:** A planned reduction in the use of vulnerable churches needs careful consideration. In reality there is a strong likelihood that out of regular use would be 'out of mind' and as a result, the standard of church building maintenance would decline further. The way that churches which opened only for 'high days and holidays' might be protected would be for the maintenance to be removed from the PCC altogether and for the Diocese to organise and provide it on a central basis - a model which has significant, possibly unrealistic, resource implications.

- **Employ suitably qualified and experienced staff** to provide advice and assistance to Archdeacons and other Diocesan officers and to individual PCCs on the conservation, maintenance and development of church buildings.

[1] Such a mechanism has been established in the Diocese of Lichfield with the formation of a Parish Projects Loans and Grants Committee.

1 Church Buildings

1.1 The Church of England's Church Estate

The Church of England is responsible for a sizeable portion of the nation's most important built heritage - 16,000 places of worship of which three-quarters are listed buildings. It has been estimated that the Church of England could remove 4,000 buildings from use, one quarter of its stock, and its average usage of seats on a Sunday would still only rise to around 50%[2]. In these circumstances, the maintenance and repair of church buildings is an onerous responsibility and one which, apart from the Listed Places of Worship Grant (VAT rebate) scheme and the one-off 2015 Roof Repair Grants (£15m) receives no direct government support.

There have been initiatives designed to quantify this problem e.g. the National Fabric Survey[3] but not many to tackle it. It is difficult to 'rationalise' church buildings on the objective criteria of need and viability because the Church of England is not free to do so. It has an historical commitment to be universally accessible and as many of these buildings are listed they are of concern to heritage groups. Moreover, the process of closing them is expensive, slow and complex and, finally, each church is a sacred space and usually important to its congregation, and often the wider community, for spiritual and emotional reasons.

1.2 Heritage Assets

Much has been written about the social, cultural and economic benefits of the historic built environment[4]. The condition, appearance and setting of a church can contribute to or detract from its amenity. Thus the public benefit of church buildings is not just restricted to those who use it for worship and can be quantified by an emotional as well as a monetary value.

Approximately 11.3 million people - more than a quarter of England's adult population – say that they have been to a Church of England cathedral in the last 12 months. Successive surveys since 2000 have shown that 85% of people in Britain visit a church building in any one year for many reasons apart from worship[5]. Many people who do not attend church nevertheless care about their local church building and do not want to see it looking run down or being closed.

1.3 Mission Assets

In times of crisis communities are drawn to a church building as a place where they can express shared grief. The story of faith written into the fabric of our churches can speak to people in ways which they may find hard to articulate but which are nevertheless significant. Equally, those of no faith often respond positively to the peace and stillness that can be found in a church.

- Church buildings are key locations for children and young people. More than half of the UK's church buildings facilitate activities such as nurseries and youth groups.
- They are significant places for support and counselling. More than two-fifths of the UK's

[2] Trevor Cooper, "How do we keep our Parish Churches", 2004.
[3] Locus Consulting, 2012.
[4] English Heritage, "Heritage Counts", 2014.
[5] Theos, Spiritual Capital, 2012.

church buildings are used to deliver support services on issues such as homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse, debt, and mental health.

- Church buildings are important in the administration of the democratic process. Around one-sixth of the total number of polling stations at the last general election were church buildings. They are significant venues for volunteering. 1.4 million members of church congregations volunteer in any capacity in their church building along with an estimated further 200,000 people from the wider community.[6]

1.4 A Burden for PCCs

Many PCCs express the view that their church building is too big, too cold in winter and too expensive to maintain; for some it is in the wrong place and the building itself is inaccessible[7]. Historic churches are often seen as not fit for 21st century social and mission activities. Concern often focusses on poor and immoveable seating (pews) and lack of toilet and refreshment facilities.

1.5 Closure

Decisions to close are usually made when either the building has deteriorated to the point where it is beyond economic repair or the congregation has reduced to a number no longer viable. Closure doesn't make the building disappear; alternative uses and users need to be found; this is not easy to do if it has deteriorated to such an extent that is has a negative value. Such neglect is a result of an inadequate closure process based on a PCC driven system.

The church needs to be more strategic about its property portfolio. Which church buildings need to be kept either because of their strategic location or heritage value? How they are they to be kept in good order? There is a need to move away from seeing a building as either open, 100% owned and used by the C of E, or closed. More effort is required to enable a spectrum of uses and users including leasing to other denominations, church sharing and secular uses, whilst the building is still in use for worship and has a congregation (albeit small) and some remaining PCC officers.

When such a model isn't feasible more attention should be given to preservation as a monument by another organisation e.g. the Churches Conservation Trust, Friends of Friendless Churches, the National Trust, English Heritage or a local or family Trust. All of these are possible but many are currently difficult because they entail lengthy and complex legal processes.

Encouraging a more diverse use of buildings alongside worship will usually lead to a more stable and sustainable future for the building with more stakeholders contributing to its upkeep, maintenance and running costs. Proactive sharing may avoid closure and the decline that precedes it.

1.6 A Strategically Managed Portfolio

A strategic response to managing church buildings is urgently needed. Different models have already been tried e.g. the non-conformist denominations and the Church in Wales, county

[6] These figures come from a recent survey of 47,000 places of *Christian* worship by the NCT (that's all denominations not just the C of E) which concluded that 80% of church buildings are used for purposes other than worship i.e. for some type of secular or community activity.
[7] See also Section 4 , Finance

churches trusts and the Church Trust in Cumbria have also provided these but coherent diocesan or national support tailored to meet local priorities is lacking.

English Heritage's 'Inspired!' campaign (2006) and the creation of the Places of Worship Support Officers (POWSO) scheme has been successful in providing practical support for individual church building maintenance and development. However, there are several areas of the country where the scheme has not been taken up. Parish church buildings are the legal responsibility of individual clergy and churchwardens and it is not always easy or even appropriate for outside bodies to do more than guide, steer and provide support. Yet the need remains for an overview of our church building stock nationally and at diocesan, at rural deanery and at benefice levels.

In rural areas there may be more church buildings per head than will ever be required but location and geographical spread might mean that a church little used for worship is the only public building or landmark for miles around. Many of these country churches are amongst the highest quality listed buildings and are places of collective memory and pride held in deep affection. Church buildings in urban areas may be underused because they are locked for much of the time with security issues or the threat of vandalism often being the greatest barrier to making the building more widely available.

1.7 Managed and Proactive Maintenance

Church maintenance and repair can seem daunting, particularly as the skills and understanding of how older buildings function is in increasingly short supply in individual parishes. Training and support is available from a number of agencies but take up is patchy and often the lack of appropriate skills is only recognised when there is a crisis. Quick fixes using the wrong or inappropriate materials become expensive problems, parts of the building that are hard to reach become neglected, gutters aren't cleared, tiles not fixed etc.

The management of the church building and all the information pertaining to that function should be a shared responsibility and not the duty or preserve of one or two individuals. Sound record keeping and adequate briefing of new church officers will go a long way to acquiring greater competence and confidence in church building matters. And there are a number of initiatives that will facilitate a shared approach:

- The National Fabric Survey, highlighting those churches in poor condition, has been supported by English Heritage through its Heritage at Risk campaign which works through POWSOs to make contact with these parishes.
- The "SPAB Maintenance Co-operatives Project" (SPAB MCP) was developed in conjunction with the National Churches Trust and aims to create and support a series of 'local maintenance co-operatives' bringing together groups of people caring for places of worship and encouraging them to work together to tackle the problem of maintenance and repair. This model suggests one that might be adopted on a more formal basis to spread the burden of maintenance and free smaller churches from having to initiate everything 'from scratch'[8].

[8] This model was piloted in Dudley, Dudley (urban) and Teme Valley (rural) in Worcester Diocese (urban), Golden Valley, Hereford Diocese (rural) and Stoke-on-Trent, Lichfield Diocese (inner-city) and is continuing in the first two. Unfortunately the pilot had a very low level of interest in Dudley & Stoke which is not uncommon in inner city areas.

2. Church People

2.1 The Decline in Stipendiary Clergy

Stipendiary (salaried) clergy numbers have halved during the past 30 years to c. 8,300 representing 26% of the total of 29,000 licensed ministers in the C of E. Single building benefices have also reduced[9]. Thus the Church has been transformed, becoming an organisation where the bulk (66%) of ministry is delivered by volunteers. Yet the priest is still seen as the person with overall responsibility for the church building and the bulk of legislation is still tied to the vesting of the church with the incumbent; responsibility for the maintenance, repair and management being shared by the incumbent, churchwardens and PCC. While many volunteers are happy to give their time as ministers for liturgical or pastoral activities, it is evident that fewer are prepared to take on responsibility for managing the church building[10].

This reluctance amongst leaders has an effect on churchwardens and PCC members who are becoming increasingly anxious about looking after church buildings and are not confident if they are 'left alone' to get on with the task; they feel unsupported. There is evidence to demonstrate that it is becoming difficult to recruit two churchwardens for each church building.[11] It is most difficult in rural and post-industrial areas where managerial capacity may be low and the buildings most likely to be highly significant.

2.2 Making Best Use of Volunteers

Many struggling churches feel trapped in decline; thus their members' perception is that they want to engage in youth work but are "too old" or perhaps would like a pensioner lunch club but are "too busy". The reality is that whilst many parishes have members who run projects, others have members who are volunteering - elsewhere. Research has found that when individuals are asked to help with a limited task, for a limited time, their knowledge, competence and involvement grow. Growing volunteers relies on good relationships in the church; it also relies on good volunteer management.

Volunteers cannot be made to do that which they don't want to do. However, they can be encouraged to take on new responsibilities and operate in new ways if they are motivated, trained, supported and properly resourced. This takes a considerable amount of investment by the 'parent' organisation; the Churches Conservation Trust and National Trust are good exemplars. Clergy can make or break the goodwill of volunteers and therefore need training and support in volunteer management.

A successful route to active volunteer involvement is by special interest groups. Bell-ringers are an example but all too easily, their enthusiasm can be dismissed because many do not attend worship. The joint Lichfield, Hereford and Worcester Diocesan Festival of Churches brought together a range of people interested in exploring the tourism/visitor potential of

[9] In the Diocese of Hereford with over 400 church buildings only 2 benefices have a single church building and in Worcester Diocese which has 280 church buildings less than 15 benefices have a single building.

[10] A recent review of non-stipendiary ministry in the diocese of Worcester (in preparation for a report to Worcester Diocesan Synod March 2014) identified the freedom and difference they enjoyed included being able to say no to administrative tasks, having no worries or responsibilities about buildings or finance and being able to pick and choose.

[11] Parish Returns for Hereford and Worcester Diocese 2012 - 2014

church buildings. Most dioceses have a group associated with fair trade and peace and justice issues, many of whom are fringe members of the Church.

2.3 Looking Outside the Church – Friends Groups

Church congregations could encourage their local communities to share the burden of church building maintenance. Many residents want to see the church building at the heart of the community, available for weddings, baptisms and funerals, even though they may not attend worship. A situation where the worshipping community funds the cost of mission and ministry and the wider community funds the bulk of maintenance may seem an ideal but a Friends' Group can be the means to achieving this. It requires good relationships between the Church and the wider community and that the church building is open, welcoming and available for community use.

2.4 Succession Planning

Research into the sustainability of church projects has found that the biggest, single cause of failure is the incumbent leaving[12]. This reveals a dependency upon individual clergy and a lack of succession planning. Many clergy move every 5-7 years and a project may be left in its infancy with no requirement for the successor to continue the work and no obligation for the parish to ensure it survives. To compound this, too many parishes are resistant to change. When an incumbent arrives with new ideas or having been briefed to 'sort out' a parish, there can be resistance from the congregation either active resistance, resulting in 'for and against' camps that implode once the incumbent leaves, or passive resistance where the incumbent is left to 'get on with it'.

Projects are often set up to meet a local need; there will be people who rely on the facility/service provided who feel let down when it stops. There may be partnerships with other agencies that have invested in the building and its people. Finally, there are funders who believe that they are investing in an organisation that is there for the long term; failure after a couple of years can lead many to be wary of funding church projects. Church involvement in delivering services needs professionalism. No longer can the decision of what the parish engages in be left solely to the parish priest. When appointing a vicar, a Diocese needs to be sure that s/he is willing to continue what has been started successfully.

With interregna becoming ever longer, it is essential that there is succession planning and an organised hand-over of knowledge and leadership to lay people prior to the departure of a priest. What too often happens is that the church's involvement with local projects is allowed to lapse and, to third parties, it appears that the Church is no longer interested[13].

Both diocesan authorities and PCCs, when preparing for an interregnum, need to ensure all projects which have church involvement are continued during an interregnum. In addition the parish profile should clearly set out the role expected of the new minister in the support of any church project.

2.5 Good Use of Resources

Church buildings are the operational 'premises' of the C of E; every effort needs to be made to ensure they embody the best that it has to offer. In that the Church has a message and lifestyle it is keen to promote, it is in a similar position to the retailer whose premises are key

[12] The Church Urban Fund, "Day in the Life" (2008)

[13] Susan Rowe 'Ten Years On: A review of the Millennium Commission Funded Rural Churches in Community Service Programme'.

to promoting and selling their product. It may well be better for the mission of the Church to have fewer centres of excellence rather than a large number of churches which are 'off-putting' in terms of both the condition of the buildings and the quality of the worship.

Reducing the number of 'premises' is fraught with difficulty; there may be opposition from local residents who may not support the church but are fully entitled to protest at its closure and whose views must, by law, be taken into account. Consultation with the local authority and statutory bodies adds to the complexity and may also inhibit the strategic reduction of church buildings. So if closing a *significant* number of church buildings is not the answer, what is? 'Church planting', the creation of new congregations by 'transplanting' part of a successful church congregation, has worked in parts of the country. The answer must also lie in finding complementary community uses for our places of worship.

3 Process

3.1 Ecclesiastical Exemption

The Church of England enjoys ecclesiastical exemption for its church buildings from the listed building consent elements of the national planning system. This arrangement requires that those advising and making decisions must balance the mission of the church with protection of the heritage. This is a unique status for a building type in terms of planning management and it is not universally popular. At its best, good advice can lead to good decisions and work of excellent quality, but it can seem complex, overbearing and long-winded to those seeking the consents. Paradoxically, local authorities and amenity societies often regard the exercise of the exemption as inadequate in comparison with the secular system. This leads to much frustration and can mean short cuts or even evasion of the system resulting in poor work that is difficult and expensive to rectify.

3.2 Faculty Simplification

The Care of Churches and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction (Amendment) Measure is designed to streamline the faculty process and will be under-pinned by an on-line faculty management system and centralised church heritage database. It aims to retain the C of E's exemption from Listed Building Control (LBC) by demonstrating that the Church's planning system is accountable and to make this system more user-friendly, less bureaucratic and speedier.

Proposals include taking some categories of work or matters associated with church buildings and churchyards out of the faculty process. These will be either delegated to the archdeacon or classified as minor matters for which permission is not required. The simplification of Faculty Jurisdiction (FJ) will require dioceses to appoint staff to this area of work who are not merely administrators but who can offer practical qualitative advice. With much being delegated to the Archdeacons to determine, the recruitment of archdeacons and support staff with the requisite expertise, knowledge and interest will be essential.

The development of an interactive church planning portal/national churches heritage database could enable the amalgamation of various information sources and generate national statistics on the present condition and future sustainability of our church buildings. It could enable Dioceses to exchange information more easily both with each other and with national bodies and could therefore encourage a greater integration of church buildings strategy and policy.

3.3 Statements of Significance and Need

Under the FJ Rules, a PCC seeking to alter its church building is required to obtain a faculty for which statements of significance and need are required. These two documents explain why a church building is important and which its most 'sensitive' areas are; when considering a re-ordering, this knowledge is essential. Statements of significance were developed by conservationists and based on the premise that unless one understands the cultural worth of an object, one should not alter it. This concept is not readily embraced by most PCCs whose motivation is the need to do something that is not possible in the building as currently arranged.

Many PCCs realise that they may have to justify their proposals for change but are not resourced to undertake the necessary research and are unsure how to set about the faculty process. Often they are so focused on achieving their goal that they see the production of statements as something to be 'ticked off'. They view the statement as relevant to their immediate proposals only; this is regrettable.

There are real benefits from producing a statement of significance, not least permission to carry out works and grant funding, but also the better management of precious resources. Understanding how its building was constructed means a PCC is less likely to undertake inappropriate repairs that are not cost- effective in the long term. Understanding its architectural, archaeological, artistic and historic significance means that the PCC is less likely to spend time developing schemes that are likely to be rejected on historic conservation grounds. If the incentive to producing statements is a saving in time and money, the production of these documents should be more acceptable to PCCs.

It needs to be emphasised that the information gathered in a statement of significance can be used in other documents for example, funding applications. There is overlap between the information required in a statement of significance and in a Mission Action Plan (MAP). Before it can begin to address how best to fulfil its mission to the local community, a PCC needs to understand that community; the type of mission activities that it subsequently develops will have an effect on the PCC's perception of their church building and also on their proposals for it. It would be best if the proposals stemming from mission aims were informed by an understanding of the building's significance from the start but the two things are seldom linked in a PCC's thinking.

If responsibility for producing statements is shared, the process builds relationships within the Church. Increased awareness of the building's importance can result in the whole congregation becoming more interested in and proud of it. The more a PCC knows about its church and presents this in an interesting way to non-church people, the easier it will be to promote enthusiasm for the building as a local heritage and community asset. This is particularly relevant now that the Heritage Lottery Fund has become a major funder of church projects.

3.4 Parish Administration

Dioceses should be encouraging an awareness of the range and diversity of free help and advice that is available via Diocesan officers and other national bodies such as the Church Buildings Council. This can be achieved by keeping a good contacts list and adding appropriate reference sheets/guidance notes to its website as appropriate; a PCC needs to be consulting this website and updating its records regularly.

Encouraging an appropriate frequency of turnover of key post holders with good hand over between the outgoing and incoming persons will help to keep church officers 'fresh' and ensure that knowledge is not lost but, when volunteers are short, this may be an unattainable ideal. However, it is also true that individuals can monopolise positions to the discouragement of others and the potential detriment of the church as a whole.

There is a need for better local record keeping. Key documents include: the church log book; the QI report; the inventory; insurance records; utility bills. It is important to ensure that this information does not stay in one individual's memory or in their personal papers. These documents form a rudimentary manual of the building's performance. Analysis of this information can provide insights into how and why things may be going wrong and how they might be improved.

There is legal requirement for the churchwardens to present an annual report on the fabric of the church building. However there is a need for more regular and good communication between the churchwardens and the PCC and the PCC and the fabric committee (if in existence). It helps if there is a regular system for formal reporting; this may not be established in smaller congregations

3.5 The Quinquennial Inspection (QI)

The quinquennial inspection of the church building is a legal requirement and the report stemming from this is a fundamental tool for looking after the fabric of all church buildings. The five year inspection is highly regarded by practitioners and professionals who look after secular buildings and can be envious of the legislative framework which provides this routine of inspection for church buildings.

For all its benefits however, it is evident that the Churches are not obtaining best value from the QI and the accompanying QI report. To get the best out of this system, it is important that a PCC cultivates a good working relationship with its architect and doesn't only call him/her in every five years. However, this is dependent on a proper understanding of the architect's role. He or she is not there to provide a cut-price service; they are there because they have the requisite knowledge and experience and their chief value lies in their ability to give appropriate advice informed by a long-standing understanding of how the building performs throughout the year.

There are many myths about what can or can't be done to church buildings; many church officers fear to ask the advice of their QI architect lest they incur a charge[14]. This is unfortunate as failing to get expert advice at the appropriate time often leads to delay, mistakes and, ultimately, greater expense.

PCCs should not be scared of approaching their QI architect for help and advice; provided that everyone is clear about the terms of the architect's engagement, this need not result in hefty bills. A good working relationship with the QI architect will often result in help and advice over and above that which the architect is contracted to give; it depends largely upon the individuals concerned.

[14] The Quinquennial Inspection of a Church Building by an appropriately qualified conservation architect is a requirement of the Inspection of Churches Measure 1955 (subsequently the Care of Churches and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1991).

4 Finance

4.1 Background

A PCC is solely responsible for the care and maintenance of its church building but cannot make alterations to it, cease to use it for worship, lease part or all of it or close it without formal, legal permission. As its congregation declines and its maintenance bills increase, a church building becomes financially unsustainable but its historical and architectural importance may make it difficult to close and sell.

English Heritage has met some maintenance costs with grants, most recently with the Places of Worship Repair Grants for *listed* churches. However, this fund which is now managed by Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) is for urgent fabric repairs and not routine maintenance. The government's chief financial assistance for churches is via a cash limited fund for the refund of VAT which is, at present, adequate to meet all requests. It has recently made available a one-off fund of £15million for urgent roof repairs which is also open to churches and/or faith buildings outside the C of E.

4.2 The PCC's Finances

There are two main aspects to the finances of any local church: ministry costs - these are the operational costs, which include Parish Share, administration, heating, lighting, insurances and other costs of providing for the life of the Church, and building costs which can be split into three: regular maintenance to keep the building and its fittings in good order; capital repairs to replace items that fail and new work to make the building a better place.

4.2.1 The Parish Share

More PCCs are faced with making the choice of whether to maintain the church building or pay the Parish Share. Research in the Worcester and Lichfield Dioceses suggests that between 25% and 50% of PCCs are unable to meet both financial obligations.[15] It is only the fact that the Parish Share contribution is voluntary and cannot be classified as a debt that protects 'defaulting' PCCs from bankruptcy.

At a time when the reduction of stipendiary clergy and changing pastoral schemes are bringing individual churches into groups, teams and combined benefices and when financial shortfalls result in stipendiary clergy spread thinly, an increasing Parish Share can be difficult for many congregations to understand. The Diocese can be perceived as uninterested in parish life, concerned only to keep the centre functioning and oblivious to the issues faced by its congregations.

4.2.2 Funding for Church Repairs

The main source of funding for church repairs is now the HLF Grants for Places of Worship which gives £10,000 to £250,000. This scheme will fund up to 95% of a repairs package and is for projects that involve urgent structural repairs to places of worship that are at risk. As part of a repair project, the fund will also cover work to encourage greater community use, interpretation and engagement and this can make up 15% of the budget. An HLF funded project must help a community engage with its heritage (thus the PCC needs to talk to the

[15] Review of PCC accounts and Quinquennial Inspection Reports for Lichfield & Worcester Dioceses in period January 1st 2011 – December 31st 2013

community and have a well-researched statement of need) and for any community engagement must be with new audiences through additional activities.

Additional and match funding will normally need to be raised and other funders at present include the All Churches Trust with a general fund and the National Churches Trust with a repair grants programme offering grants of £10,000 and above towards the cost of urgent and essential structural repair projects which have an estimated cost of at least £100,000 (including VAT and fees). There are also a small number of grants of £40,000 and above available. The County Historic Churches Trusts provide relatively small repair grants to congregations of all denominations. The Church Buildings Council also offers repair grants and funding for specialist conservation projects. There are also a number of trusts and grant making bodies that will fund specific items such as bells, clocks and organs etc.[16].

4.3 Government Support

In July 2013 the Chancellor of the Exchequer confirmed that the £42 million per annum available for the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (LPWGS) "VAT refund" will be maintained for the fiscal year 2015-2016; the Opposition has also indicated its support for the scheme. From 1st October 2013, the scheme was extended to cover turret clocks, bells, and works in respect of pipe organs. In a significant move forward, the costs of professional services are now also eligible. The fees must be directly related to eligible building work but this can include work necessary at the planning and design stage.

Whilst there are other Government funded initiatives, such as Near Neighbours focussing on interfaith work, from which PCCs may benefit, and local government continues to support other initiatives, cuts to government spending mean that there are fewer opportunities for PCCs to access public funding.

An amendment to pastoral measures to allow for parts of a church building to be leased to other organisations without requiring it first to close has enabled some churches to host public services. Thus the use of church buildings to host libraries, village shops and advice centres is increasing -mainly in rural areas and with local authority support. Local authorities are also looking for providers of social services but these activities tend to be delivered in church halls.

4.4 Building Partnerships

There is growing demand for the voluntary sector to partner local authorities in delivering services. Day care and luncheon clubs are found in church halls across the country. Local authority detached youth workers often work with church youth groups. There are also specialist projects working with mental health, addiction, training and employment. If a PCC can develop networks and has the ability to host such projects, then the benefits of regular income and good connections with the local community can move a church from being unsustainable to viable.

Good legal advice is necessary both to ensure that the commitments of all the bodies concerned are well understood and to protect the PCC from risk if relationships break down or personnel change. The PCC needs to be sure that having made expensive alterations to provide facilities for partner organisations, it will not face liabilities when the partner ceases to operate due to loss of funding. Without a regular income, the PCC may yet have to pay-off loans or meet funders' conditions.

[16] An excellent source of information on funding specific and specialist items is the Church Building Council Church Care website; www.churchcare.org.uk.

4.5 The Consequences of Financial Pressures

By the time the consequences of neglected maintenance are sufficiently bad for repairs to be put in hand, costs can have increased by a factor of 100. For example, £2000 'saved' by not clearing the rainwater goods for over 10 years on a church in Lancashire became repair costs of £250,000[17] The SPAB Maintenance Cooperatives Project states, *"Every £1 'saved' by not carrying out maintenance, could cost £20 in repairs within five years"* but this message isn't readily heard by PCCs occupied with short term needs.

Insurance cover for third parties and for the building is a legal requirement. A PCC must insure its church building even though, were it to burn down, it might never be replaced. Both Synod rules and the HLF grant requirements mean that PCCs cannot opt out of insuring the building. For some PCCs the insurance premiums are increasingly difficult to fund and many are now taking out proportional rather than full cover as a means of reducing premiums; this does not, of course, reduce liabilities in the event of a claim.

4.7 Viable and Sustainable

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary makes a distinction between 'viable' and 'sustainable':

- Viable - Capable of living, able to maintain a *separate* existence
- Viability - The quality or state of being viable
- Sustain - To succour, support, back up
- Sustainable - *Supportable*, maintainable

Within the specific limits of a financial assessment, a *viable* Church is one that can pay its own way meeting all of its ongoing liabilities in the long term and not rely on other Churches to support it financially. A *sustainable* Church is one that, with the financial support of other Church communities, can continue to operate and manage its own affairs.

A simple 'rule of thumb' is that if a church community can meet its ministry costs (Parish Share and operational costs) *and* keep the building(s) adequately maintained, it is sustainable at least in the short to medium term. Identifying churches which are *viable* in the longer term is not so clear cut.

Socio-economic factors, the size, complexity and condition of the building and the drive and passion of the people will all influence whether or not an individual Church is viable. Experience demonstrates the finances of PCCs fall into the following three categories[18]:

1. Parish Share paid on time and in full; sufficient funds available to meet operational costs; buildings well maintained, no outstanding repairs, committed and active PCC
2. Parish Share paid late but in full; operational costs can be funded most of the time, basic preventative maintenance done; some repairs outstanding; committed but perhaps struggling PCC

[17] Ecclesiastical Property Solutions Ltd, Project Log, 2007 - 2009

[18] Report to Worcester Diocese PoWSO Steering Group 2012

3. Parish Share and operational costs are a struggle and the PCC faced with a choice of paying one or the other; little or no maintenance; repairs backlog; PCC insufficiently resourced

Category 1 is likely to be viable, category 2 sustainable but probably not viable and category 3 not sustainable unless interventions are made.

These categories can usually be determined by looking at trends over a five period in the parish accounts. This data is especially useful to determine in which direction a specific church is moving and, of those in categories 2 and 3, their potential for survival. Moreover there is the potential to determine which of category 3 could, with help, support and training, become sustainable; of category 2 which could become viable and of category 1, which could support another Church in another place – i.e. being engaged in a tangible mission activity not just being content that there are funds to spare[19].

4.8 Current Initiatives

Many dioceses are confronting the issues of maintenance and the extended use/re-use of church buildings and a number have started to develop more strategic approaches. As well as those already mentioned in this paper:

- The Diocese of Exeter has been looking at proposals to concentrate the use of under-resourced churches opening them for major church festivals and community events rather than for regular worship.

- The Diocese of Lincoln is using and building on the information provided in the National Fabric Survey and attempting to categorise its churches so that Diocesan support can be appropriately focused.

- The Diocese of Gloucester is looking at how it might "re-design the link between the parochial system and church buildings so that they don't overburden a few people with the maintenance of buildings that are only used for weddings, baptisms and funerals".

- The Diocese of Norwich is to launch a 'Diocesan Trust Churches' a scheme which allows churches that would otherwise face redundancy to remain open to the local community for occasional services, while some of their normal activities would cease. The Trust, which will be legally separate from the Board of Finance and not funded by Parish Share, will take on a basic level of insurance and preventative maintenance but crucially without formally closing the building or making it redundant.

More work needs to be done to develop a national overview of these models, so individual dioceses are not reinventing the wheel or exploring options that will, in the end, result in assets being wasted and a catastrophic financial and pastoral burden falling on communities that can least afford it.

[19] This approach has been adopted by the Diocese of Lichfield in its "Plain Speaking" Initiative, 2012.

Glossary of Terms:

CCT	Churches Conservation Trust
CBC	Church Buildings Council
C of E	Church of England
DAC	Diocesan Advisory Committee
DBF	Diocesan Board of Finance
EH	English Heritage (Historic England from 1st April 2015)
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
MAP	Mission Action Plan
PCC	Parochial Church Council
POWSO	Places of Worship Support Officer
QI	Quinquennial Inspection
SPAB	Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

Relevant Links

CCT www.visitchurches.org.uk/
CBC www.churchcare.co.uk/churches/church-buildings-council
C of E www.churchofengland.org
EH www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/places-of-worship
Friends of Friendless Churches www.friendsoffriendlesschurches.org.uk/
National Churches Trust www.nationalchurchestrust.org
SPAB Faith in Maintenance www.spabfim.org.uk
SPAB Maintenance Co-operatives Project www.spabmcp.org.uk

Tim Bridges t.bridges@hereford.anglican.org
Pat Evemy patevemy@gmail.com
Andrew Mottram amottram@cofe-worcester.org.uk
Kristina Williamson kristina.williamson@lichfield.anglican.org

Appendix 1 Authors' Biographies

Tim Bridges
Tim spent 22 years working at Worcester Museums, first as Keeper of Archaeology and then as Collections Manager. A lifelong interest in churches also led him to develop lectures and guided tours around churches in the West Midlands and Welsh Borders, whilst writing books on churches in Worcestershire and the Black Country. Tim serves on Worcester and Birmingham DACs and currently chairs the Worcestershire and Dudley Historic Churches Trust. Since 2006 Tim has worked part-time as Conservation Adviser for the Victorian Society covering casework in the West Midlands, and since 2011 he has also worked as Church Buildings Support Officer in Hereford Diocese.

Pat Evemy
With a background in commercial interior design, Pat has worked in urban regeneration and related fields since 1989. She has been Chair of Planning for Southampton City Council and Principal Project Officer for Southampton Regeneration Partnership and Development and Partnerships Manager for the Church Urban Fund. Since 2010 she has been a Places of Worship Support Officer, initially match- funded by two local authorities, Methodists, Baptists and Diocese of Lichfield, Pat worked in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme. Since 2013, Pat has worked across the Diocese of Lichfield and the Chester and Stoke-on-Trent Methodist District.

Andrew Mottram
Andrew was Priest in Charge of All Saints Hereford when the church building was re-ordered and opened up for wider community use in 1997. In response to numerous requests for help from Churches across the UK, Andrew to set up the specialist property consultancy 'Ecclesiastical Property Solutions Ltd' (EPS). During the period 2004 to 2009, EPS provided training and support to clergy and laity of 500 Churches, 28 Dioceses and national bodies of the Anglican Church in England and Wales. Andrew took up his current post in the Diocese of Worcester in September 2009. In addition to his theological training, Andrew has a Post Graduate Diploma in Conservation of the Historic Environment, is currently co-authoring 'Buildings for Mission – a practical handbook for renewing your church building' and is a member of Worcester Cathedral FAC.

Kristina Williamson
Kristina is qualified and experienced in archive studies, heritage management and historic conservation and is a full member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation. Since 1984 she has worked across the heritage sector, encompassing archives, museum collections and historic buildings, for: the Tate Gallery (Archives Assistant), the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside (Curator, Maritime History), the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery Service (Curator -Manager, Historic Properties) , the National Trust (Regional Curator), British Waterways (Heritage Adviser) Walsall and Lichfield local authorities (Conservation Officer) and English Heritage (POWSO, Diocese of Lichfield). Since 2010 she has worked as Church Buildings Officer and DAC Secretary for the Diocese of Lichfield.