



*Our mission is to support the Church of England's ministry,
particularly in areas of need and opportunity*

Guidance for Purchasers and Lessees on Acquiring a Closed Church Building

These pages will guide you through the process of purchasing a closed Church of England church building. They also contain important information about conversion and ownership. There have been a number of successful conversions of and uses for these buildings, about 1900 in total. The number in any year is stable at about 20 - 25. We welcome proposals for new uses and are happy to answer any questions.

What is a Closed Church Building?

Closed church buildings are no longer needed for worship by the Church of England and are closed under Church legislation (the Pastoral Measure 2011).

The Pastoral Measure also explains the process of finding a suitable future for these buildings. This is important in preserving these important parts of our national heritage.

Each diocese (the Church of England territorial unit which is roughly the same as a county) is responsible for finding new uses for closed churches in its area. A Mission and Pastoral Committee in each diocese carries out this work and usually appoints a firm of agents to market the building.

Examples of Alternative Uses of Closed Churches

Most proposals which are sensitive to the setting and history of each building will be welcome. Many suitable new uses have been found for closed churches including:

- places of worship for other Christian bodies
- civic, cultural or community use
- arts and crafts, music or drama centres
- museum



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- sports use
- storage
- office or light industrial use
- housing

Finding a Closed Church Building

If you have no particular building in mind please see the list of closed churches available for disposal all over England on our website at <http://www.ccpastoral.org>. This information is updated regularly and includes information on the agent you will need to speak to.

Making an Offer

Contact the local agents or the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee Secretary if you are interested in a particular building. They will be your main contact throughout the process.

The Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee do not have the power to hand over the building, but will contact the Church Commissioners about your offer. Before your offer can be accepted we will need to: Conditional acceptance of your offer will be subject to:

- Consult the public through a draft scheme
- Confirm this scheme to allow the property (including perhaps part or all of the surrounding land) to be converted for an agreed use
- Make sure all the legal processes have been followed
- Approve any detailed plans for proposed structural alterations
- Get planning permission and listed building consent if required.

Role of the Church Commissioners

The Commissioners will prepare a draft pastoral (church buildings disposal) scheme to authorise the new use and will speak to you or your solicitor about its contents.

They will then allow members of the public to make comments for or against the scheme over a 28 day period. They will make a decision, which takes into account any objections.

The scheme can be confirmed when planning permission and listed building consent have been granted. This allows the Commissioners (for sales) or the



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Diocesan Board of Finance (for leases) to make a formal contract and complete the remaining legal requirements. We will do everything we can to make this process as quick as possible.

The scheme usually removes the legal effects of consecration

Planning Considerations

When you are drawing up conversion plans you will need to consider how these will fit in with the character of the building and its environment.

Normal planning, listed building and conservation area controls apply to church buildings. Planning permission will usually be needed for a change of use and listed building consent for any significant alterations to a listed building. You should contact the local planning officer to discuss your proposals as soon as possible.

The local planning authority might already have agreed a development brief on likely permitted uses. Occasionally planning consent for change of use is already in place. Check with the agents or Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee Secretary for details.

Structural Alterations

You will also need to send the agents or Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee Secretary any plans for structural alterations and the Commissioners will ask for expert advice on their suitability. You might not want to pay the costs of preparing detailed plans before your offer has been accepted. Sketch or outline proposals are welcome at an early stage but more detailed plans are preferred before you submit your proposals for planning permission or listed building consent.

Plans and Drawings

Plans and drawings should be of a quality required for listed building consent to give a full understanding of the impact on the building. Usually they will include:

- a set of survey drawings of the building as it currently looks
- floor plans showing proposed alterations
- elevations of the building or relevant parts of it after the proposed changes, together with an indication of the materials and finishes



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- sections showing the levels any proposed new floors will be inserted, the supports, and the effect on windows, doorways, arches and arcades
- a site plan if new access and parking arrangements are intended, and any revision of the landscaping
- a plan showing the introduction of any mains services which will have a substantial effect on the fabric or archaeology of the building site
- an initial archaeological report if there will be any ground disturbance

All drawings should be to scale and the position of north shown.

Details, such as windows, doors, screens and galleries should be drawn to a larger scale. Supporting comments or photographs of the parts of the building affected by the proposals are helpful.

Where There are Human Remains

If land containing burials will be included in a sale or lease the law requires the human remains to be removed and re-interred elsewhere. However, if your proposals would not involve any disturbance of the burials, an exemption from removal and re-interment can be granted by the Home Office. To apply for an exemption we will need:

- plans on a scale of 1:200 showing the precise route of the service pipes and exact position and dimensions of any septic tank; and
- confirmation that the local authority and utility companies have agreed the siting of the main services, and any septic tank, and that service pipes will be laid at the minimum depth that is permitted.

To minimise the possibility of disturbance, service lines (if not there already) should be laid under existing pathways if possible. Between exchange and completion you may need to carry out bore-hole tests for service runs.

Rights of Next of Kin and Personal Representatives

The Bishop gives instructions for what will happen to any tombstones, monuments or memorials. Usually these are either left in place or removed before completion.

The Commissioners or the diocese will let personal representatives of those buried or commemorated within the property know their own rights to remove any tombstones and (if disturbance is intended) human remains within two months of the date of the notice.



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The sale or lease can be completed once these procedures have been carried out. It will help early progress if information needed by the Commissioners or the diocese is provided without delay

What Happens to the Contents of a Closed Church?

Contents will usually be removed from the building before the sale or lease is completed and this may be specified in the contract.

Occasionally contents may stay where they are. This can be provided for in the sale or lease documents, or by separate loan agreement. If you have questions about the contents you should speak to the agent or Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee secretary

Covenants

Covenants will be included with the property.
These are designed to:

- make sure the property is only used for authorised purposes
- protect it from any unauthorised changes or demolition
- reassure local people and allow public access to tend or visit any graves at agreed times
- protect against disturbance of any human remains, tombstones, monuments or memorials.

Changing Circumstances

If in the future you want to change the authorised use, or make further changes, your proposals will be looked at as long as they continue to fit in with the character and setting of the building.

We want to work with you to make sure that the building continues to have a future that benefits you and the community.

Summary of Organisations Involved

The Church Commissioners make the final decision on the future use of a closed church and are responsible for any freehold disposal.
Other bodies are also involved:



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- **Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committees** look for an alternative use for any closed church in their area and make a recommendation to the Church Commissioners. They usually appoint a firm of agents to market each property.
- the **Diocesan Board of Finance** is the owner of a closed church building while a use is being looked for and is responsible for leasehold disposals.
- the **Statutory Advisory Committee** of the Church Buildings Council are the Commissioners' expert advisers on the architectural, historical and archaeological merit of closed churches and their contents. They advise the Commissioners on plans involving structural changes.
- the **Local Planning Authority** is responsible for planning permission for a change of use and listed building consent for structural changes to listed buildings. The latter might also involve consulting English Heritage.
- the **Ministry of Justice** is consulted if burials are involved. It has responsibility for giving instructions on what should happen to any human remains.