

Church buildings are a big part of how we carry out our mission and worship. Every parish has at least one church and they form the heart of many communities.

Dioceses need to integrate thinking about their church buildings with their mission and ministry planning so that their possibilities and challenges are part of a growth strategy.

We can help you with your diocesan strategic review of church buildings.

Download our guidance

- [Diocesan strategic review template \(PDF\) \(647.22 KB\)](#)
- [Diocesan strategic review template \(Word\) \(336.5 KB\)](#)

Church spire in distance, with trees and buildings

Diocese of Winchester

Regular diocesan strategic reviews are important for making sure that building issues are given their proper weight – neither dominating nor being overlooked or seen as a specialist subject. They take account of:

- Diocesan plans
- Deanery plans
- Mission action plans
- And parish audits

[Download our template](#) or see our main recommendations below.

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What are our church buildings for?

The strategic review process involves defining the roles of our church buildings more clearly.

We recommend that dioceses work with deaneries to place all churches within one of these categories.

The roles can change as circumstances change. And the overall aim is for our church buildings to be [open and sustainable](#).

[Parish churches](#)

Parish churches provide a traditional model of ministry, mission and outreach. And they are comfortable doing so. This may include [innovating complementary uses and partnerships](#).

The parish church is often the recognised hub of a community, especially in rural areas.

Recent legislation allows for Parochial Church Councils to cover several parish churches in a benefice. This not only pools resources, but allows for more strategic thinking about the roles which the buildings are best suited to.

They can complement rather than compete with each other.

Chapels-of-ease

Parishes can be united reducing the number of PCCs.

For example, parish A could unite with parish B creating the new parish of A with B. Or one church could stay a parish church and the other becomes a chapel-of-ease.

This might reduce the strain on the incumbent and the local community in terms of governance, and allow for greater flexibility in terms of the services provided.

Find out more about parish reorganisation

Festival churches

Festival churches allow for maximum flexibility in offering services.

The services can be tailored to the needs of each community (e.g. celebrating local or patronal festivals as long as the church holds at least 6 each year).

This flexibility can avoid the requirement for a predetermined rota of services in a number of isolated rural churches in a benefice, which can lead to poorly attended services, a sense of failure and a waste of resources.

Find out more about festival churches

Resourcing churches

These are large churches, often in urban locations and often "planted". They have the potential for growth and possible expansion.

Resourcing churches may use existing buildings, or take on new ones. They will often be supported by grants from the Reform and Renewal programme.

There are also rural resourcing churches. They may grow from fresh expression groups, or be strategically planted into market towns with the intention of further planting into the surrounding countryside.

This model might work well with existing parish churches and chapels-of-ease or festival churches.

Major parish churches

The **Church Buildings Council** controls the list of major parish churches, which presently numbers over 300.

A major parish church has all or most of the following characteristics:

- Physically very big (over 1000m2 footprint)
- Grade I, II* or (exceptionally) II listed
- Exceptional significance and/or issues necessitating a conservation management plan
- Usually open to visitors daily, or strive for this
- Have a role or roles beyond those of a typical parish church
- Make a considerable civic, cultural and economic contribution to their communities

Parishes and dioceses are **invited to bid** for churches which they think might match these criteria to be included on the list if they are not already on it. The **DAC** must approve of an application from a parish before the CBC will consider it.

Major parish churches may require a higher level of attention from the diocese and the CBC because of their special functions, significance and potential.

All churches in this group should consider putting together a **conservation management plan**, which the CBC can offer advice about. It will help them to get to grips with the risks and issues which they face and help them to maximise their potential.

Search for major parish churches in your diocese or **contact the CBC** for help

Find out more about Major Parish Churches

Minsters

Although not clearly defined legally, the new status of Minster (as opposed to an historic honorific title) can be given by the Bishop to allow a church building to adopt an extra- or super-parochial role beyond that of a normal parish church.

This can be adapted to circumstances but should always be carefully considered within an overall diocesan mission plan.

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Also of interest

Church bookshop inside bell tower

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Sharing church buildings and finding partners

Find out about your legal options



Parish audits

Download the toolkit

Interior of St Matthew's Westminster

Image not found or type unknown

Cathedrals and Church Buildings

Read our advice, attend our events, and find out what's new



Parish reorganisations

Get help with your changing mission and pastoral needs

Patron

Person or corporate body with the right to nominate to the diocesan bishop a priest to be instituted as incumbent of a parish when there is a vacancy.

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/diocesan-resources/strategic-planning-church-buildings>