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A Visitor Engagement Plan helps you to make best use of your building for mission, welcome and public engagement, and to enhance the appreciation of its heritage.

It can support decision-making for future developments, including any changes to the fabric of your building or how its spaces are used.

We can help you develop your plan.

Download our guidance

- [Cathedral Visitor Engagement Plan](#) (13.02 MB)

The fundamentals

Nature and purpose

A Visitor Engagement Plan asks what is important about the cathedral to those who worship, serve, live nearby, come for civic occasions, and/or are drawn by its art, architecture, spiritual power and history. It asks who you are already reaching, and how you can serve them better; and who you are not, and how they could be encouraged to visit.

A Visitor Engagement Plan is a chance to learn more about the cathedral's existing resources and to create new partnerships. It will value what has already been achieved and look for creative opportunities to build upon it..

Who is it for?

It's important for the plan to be agreed and 'owned' by the Chapter. The plan should be a standing document, reviewed and updated periodically.

All those involved in running the cathedral should understand the need for and central purpose of a Visitor Engagement Plan. They should be able to comment on and contribute to it.

Write the plan to be intelligible and inspiring to the lay professionals, craftspeople and volunteers involved with your projects.

Making sure all your policies and plans are consistent

Your Visitor Engagement Plan should sit alongside your cathedral's:

- Conservation management plan
- Access audit
- Liturgical Plan
- Arts policy

The Visitor Engagement Plan will also feed into the brief set by chapter for any development project, and into supporting documentation when any formal application is made for changes to the building.

What should it include?

CORE QUESTIONS

- How are we integrating mission, welcome, worship, heritage interpretation, our civic roles etc?
- Who are our visitors?
- Who aren't we reaching and why?
- What do our (current and potential) visitors want and need? How do we know?
- How effectively are we using interpretation (conventional and/or digital) to offer all visitors the chance to understand the Christian story which has shaped our building and our community?
- How effectively are we encouraging spiritual exploration on-site and subsequently? If people become interested in learning more about the Christian faith, what are we offering them?
- What are we currently doing to enhance engagement with the many aspects of the building and its community life while ensuring that different kinds of provision (e.g. heritage interpretation, group activities, and quiet spaces for prayer) can coexist positively and as part of a greater whole? How can we build on this?
- What do we offer our visitors to take away to help fix their visit in their memories?
- What are our 'assets' (including staff and volunteers, the building and its features and furnishings, our activities, our wider social and geographical context and convening power, and our financial resources)?
- What spaces do we have and are they being used to their maximum potential?
- What local resources are available to us (including people, skills, local expertise, local initiatives, funding)?
- What regional and national resources are available to us (other cathedrals, expertise, professional bodies e.g. the Deans' Conference, the Cathedrals Administration and Finance Association, Cathedrals Plus, the Association of English Cathedrals, the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England, published guidance, statutory advice, creative ideas and initiatives, funding bodies etc.)?

- How does our VEP relate to our other missional policies and practices and to our Liturgical and Conservation plans?
- What are our short, medium and long-term visitor engagement goals?
- What simple, low-level, low-cost interventions can we pilot to test and clarify the most effective ways to engage visitors? What “quick wins” could we achieve
- What possible interventions might have longer-term implications for the fabric or furnishings of the buildings which would require discussion and/or permissions?

WELCOME

- How do people encounter and experience our cathedral now?
- How is welcome signalled in our precinct and wider setting through external furnishings and invitational signage?
- Is our entrance clearly marked? What do people encounter immediately as they enter?
- How open is our welcome? How are our volunteers encouraged and trained to provide a consistently inclusive and “open-ended” welcome to all? See Section 11b, Tools and Resources.
- How does the process of entry (whether visitors pay an entry fee or not) help visitors feel at home and encourage wide-ranging exploration of heritage and spirituality?
- How is charging handled or donating encouraged?
- If charging for entrance to the cathedral or a part of it, do we use space on tickets or other materials to thank visitors for their contribution and encourage them to appreciate all the dimensions of the building?
- How are people encouraged to attend worship and use the building for prayer and personal reflection? Do the processes of entry facilitate this? In cathedrals that charge for entry, is there a separate, easy, quick-to-use entry point for locals and those simply wishing to pray or light candles? Is private prayer apparently restricted to particular areas?
- How do we ensure that there are always clearly signposted quiet spaces available for prayer and reflection?
- How clear is our communication (internal and external)? How user-friendly is our signage? Does it help or hinder?
- How adequate, attractive and clearly sign-posted are our facilities (including accessible toilets, baby changing spaces, café, shop etc)?
- What “takeaways” can we offer? Prayer cards; an invitation to visit again; highlights of the cathedral year with key events, etc?
- Communication is two-way: how is visitor feedback being gathered?
- Do we have volunteers who say farewell / au revoir, as well as hello?

ACCESSIBILITY

- Do we have an Access Group?
- What provision do we make for physical access?
- What provision do we make for those who are visually impaired?
- What provision do we make for those with autism, dyslexia or dementia?
- What provision do we make for those from a range of educational backgrounds and levels of knowledge and understanding?
- What provision do we make for different age groups and for speakers of different languages?

WORSHIP, PERSONAL DEVOTION AND REFLECTION

- How welcoming is our worship, especially to those for whom it may be a new and important experience?
- Is our worship hidden away or visible as the centre of our life?
- How intelligible and easy-to-use are our service leaflets for people who are unfamiliar with worship?
- How are visitors encouraged to observe and gradually be drawn into weekday and Sunday services? Is seating available nearby?
- Are notices about services invitational rather than forbidding? Do they make it clear where services are taking place?
- How effective are we in creating spaces which offer peace, a sense of safety, and the opportunity for enhanced mental, emotional and physical wellbeing?

HERITAGE

- What parts of our heritage are people most drawn to?
- Which elements of our heritage speak most strongly of the cathedral's meaning and purpose?
- What opportunities are there for us to enhance the presentation of our building's heritage (for instance through works of conservation)?
- How can we ensure that all visitors enjoy the cathedral's heritage to the full by giving them the tools to understand the beliefs and practices which have shaped it in the past and continue to do so?
- What other groups may be able to support engagement with heritage?
- How can we use the heritage of our building as a missional tool in the present?

VISITOR MANAGEMENT

- How do people encounter and experience our cathedral?
- Where are visitor-facing components such as a welcome/information desk, shop etc. best located?

- What are the most effective ways for visitors to move around the building so that it can speak to them most powerfully? How do we facilitate this? Do we have a visitor flow diagram which works with the design and purpose of different parts of the building?
- How effective are we in creating spaces which offer peace, a sense of safety, and the opportunity for enhanced mental, emotional and physical wellbeing?
- How inviting are our spaces (such as chapels) and our signage?
- Are our facilities clearly signposted? Are they easily reached from every part of the building?

ENHANCING EXPERIENCE

- What focal points, sensory experiences, and simple but meaningful activities and resources (such as prayer cards) do we offer to bring spaces alive for those interested in reflection, mindfulness, or spiritual exploration?
- If candle-lighting and leaving prayers are offered, are there seats available nearby where people can sit and reflect on these activities?
- To what extent do we connect our spaces (such as small chapels) with particular audiences (e.g. families, or the bereaved)?
- What steps could we take to enhance the invitation and the experiences offered to visitors of all ages?
- What simple, low-level, low-cost interventions can we pilot to test and clarify the most effective ways to enhance visitor experience?
- What do we offer people to take away to reinforce memories and promote further exploration?
- What small memento, such as a prayer card, could we offer to attendees of big events as a memory of their experience and a reminder to return?
- Do we allow/encourage appropriate photography? (Research shows that photographs provide an ongoing connection and memory with a place, and can also extend the experience to others. Thus, the photo of a candle lit for someone who is ill can be a powerful tool for showing care and building faith.)

INTERPRETATION

- What existing interpretation do we offer? How effective is it, and how do we know?
- How well does our existing interpretation weave together the history, art and architecture of our buildings, and the stories of the people associated with them, with the Christian story which shapes our past and present?
- What stories and elements of the building will help visitors to relate personally to what they see and experience?
- What are our options for providing additional interpretation in the form of printed, audio-visual or interactive elements, or guided tours and talks? What are the pros and cons in terms of accessibility, short- and long-term cost, and visual impact?
- How are we ensuring that our interpretation effectively communicates Christian concepts, stories and symbolism to audiences who may be unfamiliar with them?

- Do we offer simple (but not simplistic) explanations of the theological and liturgical meaning behind aspects of the building and its furnishings, as well as their architectural history?
- Taking account of our particular context, what provision should we make to ensure that our content is accessible to visitors whose first language is not English?
- What contested heritage does the cathedral contain, and how is it presented? How could it be made a means of engagement and reflection?
- What do we want our visitors to take away in terms of understanding and the desire to explore further and/or visit more churches?
- Do we need permission from our Fabric Advisory Committee or the Cathedrals Fabric Commission to install any new interpretative tools?

PERMANENT AND TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS

- What are our aims (missional, financial or otherwise) in creating a permanent exhibition area?
- What impact might a permanent exhibition space have on access and use of that part of the cathedral or its precinct?
- What are our aspirations for borrowing and/or displaying precious and fragile items, and what additional security and environmental requirements will that impose on the design of an exhibition area?
- Is the creation of an exhibition area supported by a robust business plan and a strategy for the ongoing programming of content?
- What are our missional aims in staging events and temporary exhibitions? Why are we holding these events here and what mission opportunities do we see?
- How will a temporary exhibition or special event affect regular day-to-day life at the cathedral? Is there a risk that some visitors will be discouraged from visiting for the duration of the event (or perhaps disappointed by their experience if they do) and how should that be managed?
- How can we advertise (online and locally) that access to some areas of the cathedral will not be possible due to a special event (such as a corporate or civic event, funeral, royal visit etc.)? How should we contextualise such temporary disruption in relation to the mission, ongoing life and financial sustainability of the cathedral?
- How will we integrate the temporary exhibition or event with worship?
- What long-term effect do we hope these will have on visitors? What are we giving them to take away to build an ongoing relationship with and interest in the cathedral and the wider Church?
- How far are we linking temporary exhibitions to our own collections or aspects of the building which visitors could explore?
- What new equipment will be needed and where will it be stored?
- Will expansion of these activities require changes to the building or have implications for movement into and around it?

Creating your plan:

TIMETABLE

- Putting together a team which represents all necessary constituencies
- The contributions which can be made by consultants
- Consulting widely
- Research exercises to undertake (see below)
- Seeking advice from FAC, CFCE, Historic England etc.
- Relating VEP to other key plans
- Decision-making
- Testing approaches
- Creating a roadmap with milestones, development and implementation stages
- Training staff and volunteers

RESEARCH EXERCISES

- Imagine you are visiting the cathedral for the first time: it's the trip of a lifetime and you've flown thousands of miles. You've looked at the website: what would you expect?
- Imagine you grew up three streets away but have never been in: what encouragement would you need?
- As you approach your cathedral from the outside, what encouragement to enter do you see?
- What or who is the first thing that greets people when they step inside?
- Is there a space where visitors can get their bearings before choosing to engage with welcomers or deciding which way to go?
- Try being, or using, a "Mystery Shopper"

Remember:

We will expect you to be able to show that you've taken the above guidance into account in your thinking before seeking advice on concrete proposals.

Also of interest



Prepare your application

Find out what documents you will need



Consider God's creation

Make the environment a key liturgical message

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/cathedral-fabric-commission/advice-and-guidance-cathedrals/visitor-engagement>