

CHURCH BUILDINGS COUNCIL
Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3AZ

**ANNUAL MEETING OF THE CHAIRMEN AND SECRETARIES OF THE
DIOCESAN ADVISORY COMMITTEES FOR THE CARE OF CHURCHES**

**Minutes of the 63rd Annual Meeting, held online via Zoom on 28 September
2021.**

The Chair was taken by Jennie Page, Chair of the CBC. Officers of the Council were in attendance.

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the 62nd Annual Meeting were approved.

2. WELCOME by the Rt Revd Rachel Treweek, Bishop of Gloucester.

3. INTRODUCTION

The Chair, Jennie Page, commenced by thanking Bishop Rachel.

Despite the pandemic, many things have been achieved difficult issues during the past year. After a great deal of careful consultation our guidance on Contested Heritage was published, and it is already being used and been cited in determinations of faculty petitions. The new Accessibility guidance was also published and it is hoped that it would be found useful.

Sustainability is a full-time job in its own right and we will hear more on this topic later in the conference. The Energy Footprint Tool, developed by the Church of England Statistics Team has won an award for green technology innovation, and this is an example of how the Church can be at the forefront on an issue that is important to the whole world.

One of the things that we take positively out of the Covid experience is that the wider world really values churches. Research by York University has shown that local communities really minded when churches were shut for the pandemic. We need to build on that, and also on evidence in the National Churches Trust publication, *The house of good*. That report found that there was 4.4 billion pounds worth of economic value in the Church – from direct spending by the church and its users and from the value of the social, community and other projects run by churches. This shows that all the work that we do, at diocesan level and nationally, is works that is recognised as benefiting the rest of the community. We do it by supporting the parish and the wider community of the Church of England.

4. REVIEW OF THE YEAR

Becky Clark, Director of Churches and Cathedrals, gave a review of the year. She pointed out that as we look back, Coronavirus dominates, but that is not all. In terms of

the CCB team, although we have been working at home we are increasingly out and about. David Knight is partway through a six-month secondment, working on the Accommodation project at Church House. Janet Berry has stepped up to manage the Church Buildings team. Rosie Smith has gone on parental leave, and Keri Dearmer is moving over to cover her post. Keri's role will be backfilled in due course. A new member of the team, Nick Chapple, has been appointed to help with Church Buildings Reports, to ensure these are produced in a timely way. A Data Officer will soon be appointed to assist James Miles. We hope to bolster the efforts of James Miles' work with expert data. Becky expressed her gratitude that the team has been able to work so flexibly.

Becky was also grateful to all of those that helped with government liaison and getting guidance up earlier in the year. In particular, for the James Miles' analysis of the grants for the CRF fund, keeping track of which ones went to which churches; this could have been a full time job in itself. 54 million pounds is a big number, and we are aware that this has not gone far enough. The spending review is also important, especially for ambitious bids. We continue to champion the contributions of churches to the economy, not least to tourism. We will champion the Listed Places of Worship grant scheme and Capital Repairs.

There is the technical update to the OFS and the Dean of Arches will be speaking later today about proposals for changes in the faculty rules to support churches moving towards net-zero carbon.

We have developed guidance on solar panels in conjunction with Historic England. That liaison is becoming increasingly important as we present the Church's missional drive, into how historic buildings can lower our carbon footprint.

Becky expressed how touched she had been by what Bishop Rachel had said. It can sometimes be hard to remember the bigger picture and she is grateful to the DACs, and to the Church House team for all the work you do. The feedback we get back from churches is positive. The DAC is there for them, and we need to make sure that works in tandem with the Council.

5. A NOTE ON TRANSFORMING EFFECTIVENESS

Gareth Mostyn, Chief Executive of the Church Commissioners, spoke about the national reorganisation work that has been going on within the National Church Institutions (NCIs). Transforming Effectiveness is one strand of the Emerging Church programme, led by the Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, looking at the functions of certain NCI teams, to make them more effective.

At the heart of this work, we believe our buildings are a much-loved focal point. But we recognise that they add to workload and costs for parishes. The process can often be seen as burdensome and slow, and preventing change. When the NCIs work in partnership across the dioceses we can find solutions that add value and reduce the burden for the whole church, use our buildings to the best effect, and help the church to flourish. Looking after our buildings is a valuable lay ministry locally and nationally. We see it as an opportunity to join up between the national church and the dioceses and step up to help meet the challenges. We are making a few changes, and then we are going to identify certain projects to drive forward. Firstly, the Buildings teams will be gathered

together in one NCI, and Becky's team will move to the Church Commissioners. Everything will remain the same, with Becky reporting to me. We will be streamlining our processes, investing in digital, simplifying our legislation.

We want to hear from you. What do you think our priorities should be? This will help us to build on a customer-centric ethos. The work of the CBC and the CFCE will not change. We want to continue to treasure our heritage, care for the environment, and help you in dioceses.

As well as organisational change, Becky will be working with other senior leaders and myself, on some of those areas mentioned: legislation simplification, and digital investment. As a result we are hopeful we can achieve efficiencies in administrative processes in the dioceses and the local church, and so save time and money. We are keen to hear what you think. Making sure our national teams are working closely, avoiding duplication, managing pinch points and keeping abreast of wider governmental change. In terms of the environment, this is absolutely critical and what we need to continue to build on. We have had the opportunity to brief the two new bishops for buildings, and they are important key support to ensure our work is valued.

6. QUESTIONS

Becky Clark explained that there would be two sessions later today where we would be talking about this and how this might be driven by parishes. Transforming Effectiveness was conceived to be two parts: one about Church House, and one about dioceses, but it became obvious early on that with churches, it's a system that you can't divide up.

Alan Simpson (Manchester)

I welcome this bringing together of the departments, as I work with both. Particularly around church closure, I think it's a good thing working together, more streamlined. We have had simplification of the Ecclesiastical Exemption and now there are proposals to simplify the Mission & Pastoral measure, and I think this is good.

Diana Delap (Gloucester)

I am aware when I am applying for funding, that every charity has a different form. Could funding be streamlined, and the way grants are made?

Becky Clark: There has been some work on this. CBC transferred the Wolfson grants to the NCT, so that they could make one application there for potentially three grants under offer. Many churches have benefited from this, but we are aware it is a drop in the ocean. One of the biggest players is the NLHF, where the changes there have made it less able to fund churches – we are hopeful that this will shift, as the new chair is very engaged. There are others such as the Pilgrim, Radcliffe, who are loyal funders every year, and we work with a Church Funders Group. The difficulty is that each funder has different requirements, but that doesn't mean it is impossible. Also, in Church House, there are staff in Parish Buying who focus on fundraising, specifically for environmental projects, and we will keep on top of this.

Philip Fletcher (Southwark)

I haven't heard the word cathedrals yet. Whilst we are streamlining, cathedrals are the exception as they are also visitor attractions.

Becky Clark: The Cathedrals Measure came into effect this year. We are looking at whether Major Churches can benefit from some of the approaches the CFCE takes, not legislatively, but to provide additional support. Bath Abbey was conceived as such a project. For those that aspire to the visitor-attraction led approaches to be open 365 days a year, they can benefit from this.

Gareth Mostyn: Cathedrals are on the radar. Becky's team has a strong cathedrals remit, as does Bishops and Cathedrals team.

Emma Critchley (St Albans)

I realise that the structural changes are going to be a huge change for those working there. I welcome the greater integration of CBC with the Pastoral team, that is something we have been looking for and I support that. Gareth said he was looking at a customer-focus feel to things. So I wondered who the NCIs see as customers, and who as colleagues.

Gareth Mostyn: I detected two questions, one about whom, and the second, is there a distinction between customers and colleagues. On the whole, this is providing support across the Church, whether dioceses, cathedrals or the local church. And helping the diocese to provide support on the front line. And then the church family – I know some people feel uncomfortable with the term 'customers'. I use it because we provide a service. But we are all part of the church family. We have our priorities but we really want to hear what you need or what churches need and whether the national church is able to provide that.

Becky Clark: It's all semantics from my perspective, all of us on this call (CBC, DAC, church buildings roles) we are all here to serve the parishes. We need to serve each other to do that in the best way. This will hopefully draw out what we can do better but at the end of the day the aspiration is to make things easier for parishes so that they can flourish.

Gareth Mostyn: I think there were questions in the chat about the Mission and Pastoral Measure and the consultation period. It is about to be extended to the end of the October, so please send in any comments you have.

Jayne Potts (Carlisle)

It feels like we are having a risk analysis taken of our buildings at the moment. Is that the case? We seem to have a few options: where we treat the problem, tolerate it, transfer it, or remove it.

Becky Clark: I wouldn't characterise it quite like that. The closure of church buildings during Covid led to a lot of reflection, and also where some have simply not reopened. Or churches remain locked. Covid has led to people thinking about what they are able to deliver. There has been a more strategic approach in recent years, not risk driven but opportunity driven, and that strategic approach is not a negative, it's a parish taking an overview. I do think there are places where a risk-based approach is acceptable but generally on a national basis, where is the operational risk? It's about insurance, maintenance. The focus on a national level is saying, what are the unifying factors that everyone finds difficult? We are working on proposals that will give churches the opportunity to collectively procure maintenance or insurance. That could potentially remove operational risks. That would release capacity at parish level, but the parish has

to be prepared to go in and open the doors. It might mean the PCC doesn't have that whole burden but they could hand it to a trust, allowing others to take the burden.

Jayne Potts: I wouldn't disagree; I think everyone would agree that church buildings have been the elephant in the room for many years, and it's good that change is starting to happen. As much as you can spin in that way, there will be that occasion, more than you may want to admit, where they will have to close. I welcome the changes, and anything on maintenance that can help churches. Here in Cumbria we would welcome anything that would help churches.

Diana Delap (Gloucester)

That capacity for meeting cost is not just from a financial point of view but also the volunteers who fund the churches. We have a lower number coming to church so a lower amount in the coffers. That will affect capacity.

Becky Clark: If you don't talk about them at the beginning of the plan, it will trip you up later. I am encouraged that more and more dioceses are doing that. Buildings need to be built into how dioceses think about mission, the benefits they can offer. We are trying to provide as much practical help as we can, so that the strategic planning can happen. On Church Building Management Plans, Joe will talk about that tomorrow, and it is part of a suite of tools we have been working on nationally. Funding remains a major issue.

Ends.