

Inspection of Churches

Guidance notes

Background

An inspection of Church buildings is required by law for all Church of England churches licensed for public worship in England. Although the legislation does not extend to the Diocese in Europe, there may be a local requirement for inspections of Church buildings, and the Diocese also wishes to encourage regular inspections, as a matter of good practice so that buildings are kept in good repair.

Recommendation

Some Chaplaincies will already have appropriate arrangements in place. For those that have not, we recommend that the inspection should be undertaken by a local qualified architect or building surveyor and that an inspection (a QI) should be made every five years. The Inspector should advise the Chaplaincy in the light of local legal requirements and these notes.

We have prepared these Guidance notes to help Chaplaincies undertake inspections. The notes are primarily intended for churches but they may be useful for other buildings owned by the Chaplaincy, e.g. a parsonage.

What Can the Chaplaincy Do to Keep Buildings in Good Repair?

Some costly repair work can be alleviated if the Chaplaincy undertakes frequent checks in the everyday care of the interior and exterior of the building and follow this up with routine maintenance tasks.

These checks are outlined in Appendix 1 and cover:

- Care of gullies, drains, down pipes and gutters.
- Care of tiles and slates.
- Care of metal flashings and stone dressings.
- Care of window glass and window fittings.
- Care of equipment and heating and lighting fittings.

However, we also recommend a professional's regular input with a QI and when necessary to supervise any repairs. Things that a Chaplaincy can do to help an Inspector to undertake a survey are covered in Appendix 11, summarised thus:

- Provide physical tools e.g. ladders and keys.
- Provide documents, e.g. any relating to the building's care or history.

- Provide details of any known defects.
- Provide guidance on the scope of the report (on the lines suggested in this guidance note).

Why Undertake an Inspection by an Inspector?

The purpose of the QI is to tell the Chaplaincy if repairs are needed. It should be a general report on the church, concentrating on its state of maintenance and repair and written in non-technical language. It is not a full survey (which would be too expensive for the Chaplaincy) but it should give a rounded “portrait” of the condition of the church.

A QI will often highlight early signs of trouble and save money by allowing a problem to be tackled before it becomes more serious. An Inspector may also be able to advise on sources of potential grant aid.

The Chaplaincy and Its Inspector

It is important that a good and close relationship should be developed with the Inspector, who should be seen as an impartial and independent professional adviser. The chaplaincy should trust the Inspector to recommend only what is necessary or beneficial; the Inspector should be able to trust the chaplaincy to carry out recommendations in a proper manner. The chaplaincy should use its Inspector in a creative way, as aids to the preservation and enhancement of the church. It is helpful if the Inspector attends the Chaplaincy meeting at which the report is initially discussed.

The Quinquennial Report

Reports will vary greatly in their presentation. However, it is hoped that all QIs will follow the guidelines prepared by the diocese, as suggested in Appendix 111 which cover:

- Preliminary information in report, e.g. name and address of the church, its dimensions, any photographs etc.
- Main report, including a commentary on what has happened on any previous report and any new observations.
- A report on “Services”, e.g. heating and electrical systems.
- A report on the site, e.g. boundary walls.
- A report advising on the undertaking routine inspections and maintenance and cost estimates for repairs.

Conclusion

So, on behalf of the diocese, I hope that this guidance will help everyone entrusted with the responsibility to look after your church and any other of your buildings.