

Statements of significance and statements of need

Under the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules applicants for a faculty are required in certain cases to provide the Diocesan Advisory Committee with a Statement of Significance and a Statement of Needs. These statements should also be included with a faculty petition so as to be available to the Chancellor.

This new requirement only applies where:

Y The church concerned is listed.

and

Y 'Significant changes' to the church are proposed.

These Statements are therefore not required in respect of an unlisted church, or for repairs or minor changes to listed churches.

What is a 'significant change' will depend very much on the facts: structural changes, the removal of furniture (for example, pews or the organ), and the removal or insertion of a stained glass window will always be significant. In a Grade 1 listed church the introduction of some new feature, even if quite small in itself, may affect the character of the building and should be treated for this purpose as significant.

Statement of Significance

The Statement of Significance is described in the Rules as 'a document which summarises the historical development of the church and identifies the important features that make major contributions to the character of the

church'. This Statement does not have to be a lengthy document. The 'historical development' involves reporting, for example, that the church is mainly a 16th century building but with traces of an earlier church at the base of the tower at the west end of the church, that the chancel was rebuilt in the late 18th century and the present stained glass windows and furniture date from the restoration carried out under (such and such an architect) in the 1880s.

The 'important features' will usually identify themselves quite readily, for example the notable glass, the unusually tall nave, a very early font, the tombs of the Earls of Barchester in the South aisle, and so on.

The official listing of the church, or descriptions in such books as the Northumberland volume of Pevsner's 'Buildings of England', will often provide all that is needed. (For example, Pevsner has three very full paragraphs on St Mary Ponteland that seem very adequate; St Mary Belford, a Grade II listed building, is less fully described, but apart from a reference to recent changes to the gallery little needs to be added). Once this Statement of Significance has been put together, it can be re-used as required in later faculty applications.

Statement of Needs

The Statement of Needs is 'document which sets out the reasons why it is considered that the needs of the parish cannot be met without making changes to the church building and the reasons why the changes are regarded as necessary to assist the church in its worship and mission'. Those reasons must exist, for the law will not allow a change to a listed church building without them. Again, a long document is not needed. The contents will vary with the changes proposed, but here are three examples of what might be appropriate.

Example A

It is proposed to clear the pews and pew platform from part of one aisle, to carpet it, introduce chairs, and so create a space with a number of uses, as a meetings area and for children's activities. Here it would be important not only to explain that plan, but also to say why there were no adequate facilities elsewhere (e.g. there was no parish hall, or it was too far away, or across a dangerous road, for children's use) and why the need was now

perceived (e.g. new development which had increased the population of the area, or recent success in attracting young families).

Example B

It is proposed to replace the stained glass in a window at the East end of the South aisle. It would be essential to describe (probably with a photograph) what the existing window looks like (perhaps it is simply a pattern of coloured glass) and how the new window will express some idea or provide a new focus for the attention of worshippers. Perhaps the aisle is used, or will be used, for small midweek services and the new window will be a welcome feature in that context.

Example C

It is proposed to create a new vestry/office area in the south-west corner of the church. The proposed glazed screen will also provide an inner porch to the South door. In this case it might be that one of the purposes of the changes was to provide a base in the parish for the incumbent, who now lives in another village some miles away. And perhaps the changes would also enable the old vestry off the chancel to be used for a crèche.

It will be seen from these examples that there is no need for elaborate, formal explanations. The Statement of Needs simply sets out the compelling reasons for the proposed changes.

P N Collier QC
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