Diocesan Advisory Committee

Window protection

Providing protection against vandalism is a growth industry which affects churches as much as other public buildings. Church windows are particularly vulnerable and may need to be protected. The provision of guards is fairly expensive and, however carefully done, does not improve the look of your church, but if badly done the effects can be very ugly and harmful.

Before thinking about guarding any windows be sure you need it (vandalism can be quite local and transient) and decide which windows really need protecting. Keeping up with the Joneses because the church next door has them is not encouraged!

There are essentially two kinds, wire and polycarbonate (clear plastic sheeting). None will give you one hundred per cent protection and all require maintenance.

1. WIRE GUARDS

Wire guards may be galvanised mild steel, plastic-coated or preferably austenitic stainless steel.

They are the least obtrusive when seen from the outside (practically invisible except when seen very close to the building) and, if properly fitted, do not greatly reduce incoming light. They are long-lasting, generally cheaper than polycarbonates and therefore economic to fit. In certain lighting conditions, they will just be seen from the inside of the church but generally do not interfere with the overall effect of a stained glass window as seen from inside, provided that the fixing bars are designed properly.

Since they do not reflect light, they tend not to spoil the general architectural features of the building.

They do not provide weather protection for your windows, but, on the other hand, the exterior of the glass is fully exposed to the cleaning action of the rain. They will normally stop most small missiles but not air-gun pellets or flying beer-mugs. They can be bent back and so admit thieves.

The DAC recommends the use of black powder coated stainless steel wire guards.

2. POLYCARBONATES

are more expensive. Some plastic sheets discolour with age, although a new one has recently come on the market which is supposed not to do so. They tend to mark easily so they should never be used where vandals can reach and leave you with a reminder of their visit in writing. They will protect your windows from the worst of the weather thus prolonging the life of both glass and lead work.

They do not offer any heat-saving as they are not in any sense double-glazing. They may stop most air-gun pellets but will not stop sharp or heavy missiles like scaffolding poles or African spears. Unless very carefully fitted, they tend to give a 'blind' effect to church windows. Plastic sheets are always unattractive. However, they are almost invisible when viewed from inside the church, but may reduce incoming light as they age.

Polycarbonate guards are highly flammable. Since fire is such an effective destroyer of glass, these guards should never be used to protect ancient glass or glass of high quality.

The DAC does not recommend, and the Chancellor does not generally permit, the use of polycarbonate window guards, except in very exceptional circumstances.

Please consult the DAC Secretary before contemplating the use of polycarbonate window guards.

3. FIXING

Correct fixing is crucial to the life of window protection and surrounding stonework.

ALL PROTECTION, WHETHER SHEET OR WIRE, SHOULD BE SHAPED TO FIT WITHIN THE FORMS OF THE TRACERY AND NOT FITTED TO THE OUTER FRAME OF THE WINDOW.

1. **Non-rusting fixings,** preferably stainless-steel, which must be specified as **austenitic,** should always be used for both wire and polycarbonate guards. Any brackets, spacers or other fasteners should be of materials which last and will not mark or stain stone or brick-work. **All screws must be non-ferrous**.

2. **Air gaps** are absolutely essential with polycarbonate and glass guards. There should be sufficient gap between the sheets and the stone/brickwork to enable expansion in hot weather, to prevent buckling and cracking, and sufficient gaps at top and bottom to allow air movement and prevent condensation, dirt or water being trapped. Condensation not only makes the sheets more visible but also does great damage to the lead cames and glass.

3. **Cames and Support Bars.** Polycarbonate sheets in larger windows need to be divided horizontally, joined with lead cames, and supported where necessary with stainless steel bars that coincide with the saddle bars of the window to give an appropriate external pattern and reduce distorting reflections. (Sheets should not be allowed to overlap).

4. Window protection should always **be removable** so that, from time to time, it and the windows behind can be cleaned. Window protection can provide the right conditions for quite a lot of wild life!

For further information please read *The Repair and Maintenance of Glass in Churches* by Jill Kerr, published in 1991 by Church House Publishing for the Council for Care of Churches. It is one of their series of booklets covering almost every aspect of church care that are generally available from SPCK Bookshops.

4. PERMISSIONS

New window protection requires a faculty and should always be designed and executed under the direction of your architect.

Repairs to, and like for like replacement of, window guards are permissible under 'List A' of the Minor Items and Routine Works list (which came into effect on the 1st September 2013).

If you are unsure please contact the DAC office for further advice.

This note is for guidance only and the DAC cannot bind itself in a particular case, nor can they predict what may be the view of the Chancellor or Archdeacon.