



EQUAL ACCESS TO CHURCH BUILDINGS



LEST WE FORGET

EQUAL ACCESS TO CHURCH BUILDINGS

CHURCH BUILDINGS COUNCIL

This paper is published in the name of the Church Buildings Council. The theological material was drafted by The Revd Bill Braviner, a member of the Council and a trustee of *Disability and Jesus*.

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INTRODUCTION

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Ia How this guidance is structured

This note is in two sections that are intended to be used together. The first part is to build understanding of how we think about ‘disabled people’ and enabling all people – whatever their abilities – to be present as part of the church.

The second section has practical examples to help you think through your place of worship from how you arrive and enter the building, take part in an activity and then depart. Links to sources of advice are at the end of the document.

Reading this guidance is the start of a process or journey of understanding access and disability and then of working with the building. It may not be possible to achieve all that you find you want to do. Each step that you take will make a positive contribution to your access and welcome.

Ib Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is intended to help PCCs think about equal access, what it means for it in how it uses its building and relates to people and then how it might adapt its buildings to make them better able to provide equal access.

The guidance includes practical examples and guidance on gaining permission to take forward proposals for building alterations.

‘The Church is for all the community.’ As a premise, this is readily and widely accepted. However, some members of the wider community are excluded from Church – disabled not by their own conditions or needs, but by a lack of good access; by barriers placed in their way; barriers which mean that for them, the way of the Lord has not been properly prepared, his paths have not been made straight (cp Mark 1:2-3).

“We cannot say ‘All Welcome’ and leave some people to find that they can’t access our building or our activities. We shouldn’t use the language of being inclusive, welcoming and accessible if that ignores the limitations of that inclusion, accessibility, or welcome. To do otherwise leaves us open to challenges of dishonesty and hypocrisy.”

A disabled church member

Without good access there is, intentionally or not, exclusion of part of our community. This undermines the Church each time we say ‘everybody welcome’.

Without good access, there is an implicit resignation on the part of the Church from its call to share the Good News with all people.

Without good access, there is fundamental damage done to the offer to belong to the community of Christ’s disciples, and to people’s ability to take up that offer.

Without good access, there is a lack of dialogue with excluded groups, and therefore the Church is disabled in understanding or addressing its own prejudices and biases.

‘A Church without disabled people is a disabled Church.’ Belonging to a community requires being with other members of that community. This document looks at our being together in the shared spaces of our church (and other) buildings.¹ This involves bringing together the ways we view and treat people, alongside the ways we arrange our buildings physically and how we worship in them.

Whenever we deny someone the opportunity to belong, the whole Church is diminished.

Ic What do we mean by ‘disabled people’?

The Bible teaches that all are made in God’s image (Genesis 1:27). We do not categorise people and say that some bear God’s image fully while others are somehow deficient, like ‘factory seconds’.

We believe that the *Imago Dei* is present in every person, that all can say with the Psalmist:

“For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” (Psalm 139: 13-14a)

God saw **all** that he had made, and behold, it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)

Ability / disability is not binary, neither is it fixed. It is, in fact, the common human experience. It is simply not possible to reduce our thinking to two pigeonholes, ‘able’ and ‘disabled’. We are all on a spectrum of ability/disability for all sorts of conditions and our positions on these spectra will shift over time.

The risen Christ was recognised by his wounds, and he took those wounds into the life and heart of God (John 20: 24-29). Why? Because woundedness and disability is part of the universal human experience.

We are all embodied creatures, in bodies that are not perfect – and often seem to get less perfect as we age! We all live with challenges – physical, spiritual, intellectual, emotional – and in the end we are all mortal. But we are also made in the image of God, all worthy of dignity, respect, inclusion and participation, and all made for each other. We are by nature relational and interdependent, made for community.

We are called to belong, and we are called to live now, as best as we can, the life of the kingdom of God in which no-one is excluded – in fact, *the last shall be first*.

The Bible is clear: *You shall not curse the deaf, or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the Lord*”. (Leviticus 19:14)

The Lord calls out behaviour that will especially disadvantage disabled people. We may not speak ill of someone in the security of their not hearing us, nor intentionally put a stumbling block in front of a blind person. More widely, any behaviour that puts stumbling-blocks in the way of disabled people contradicts the character of the God whom we serve. A concern for the marginalised brings integrity to the Church.

1 This paper was written during and after the Lockdown in Spring-Summer 2020, a period when we have seen much increased awareness of, and participation in, online church. It is hoped that this continues long after the current Covid19 pandemic. However, online church will always exist alongside ‘offline’ church, the physical gathering of God’s people in a shared space. This document addresses the issues of access to physical church buildings, though much of the Theology is common to both. Equal access to electronic communication is also important, and our hope is that guidance on this issue too, will continue to be developed by the Church.

Id Are all called?

The gifts of God's grace are given freely to all people, without distinction. The call to ministry applies to all the baptised, without exception. Just as all are made in the image of God, so all are called by God to enrich the life of the whole Church, to live out and share the Good News, and to embody God's kingdom.

If we begin from this starting point, our approach becomes one of nurturing in each other the vocation and ministries to which God calls each one of us, and helps us avoid the trap of 'othering' people, failing to include them as fellow disciples and ministers.

Traditional responses to disability tend to focus either on support to help people achieve independence 'from' their disabilities, or the mere removal of hindrances and obstacles that prevent a fuller participation in society. Both are important, but they are not enough.

It is true that there are often aspects of a disabling condition which may require medical intervention or other support, to alleviate their effects. It is also true that there are many barriers to disabled people's full participation in our common life. But focusing only on one or both of these issues makes the disabled person into the object of our thinking, not a fellow participant – and hinders engagement with the fundamental issues of personhood and relationship which are at the heart of both a Christian understanding of our identity in God, and of the call to human flourishing which flows from it. We are the one Body of Christ, one body with many members, and all are called to play their part.

The Church has too often responded to disabled people (not only those with visible disability) in an 'othering' way, as though they are people who must receive ministry, rather than offer it² – yet the Biblical, kingdom, aspiration is for inter-dependence; a way of relating, of being, in which all minister and are ministered-to, all serve and are served, all flourish through enabling all to flourish. For Christians, the focus needs to be on mutuality.

The proportion of the church's active ministers, lay and ordained, who are disabled is far smaller than the proportion of disabled people who are part of the Church, let alone the proportion of disabled people in society as a whole.

It may have been too easy, perhaps for well-intentioned reasons, to see disabled people only as those who receive ministry. This must change, and our buildings must be part of enabling it to change.

To help us be one Body of Christ, we need to be always learning from each other, travelling together, and open to one another's wisdom and experience.

The voice, the experience, the wisdom of disabled people (of all sorts) needs to be at the centre of our approach. Alongside the voice of lived experience, the experience of carers and other professionals have their part. (Disabled people, like all others in society, will never have a complete view of the whole – we all need to work together).

2 Sometimes, sadly, this has been the result of bad theology around disability – theology which equates disability with sin, judgement, lack of faith, resistance to God's healing (a phrase which itself betrays a lack of understanding of the difference between healing and cure). This paper cannot address these issues in the space available, but they are important and worthy of further reading and discussion.

1e Learning from the experts

When it comes to understanding living with a disability, the people who know best are those with lived experience. We all need to listen to each other to learn the best way to meet each other's needs. The practice and process of listening to, and learning from, each other is crucial, because the church is a community.

With the best of intentions, we too easily deny people their agency, their adulthood.

For example, we make those who need an accessible toilet, ask for the key (the last time most of us had routinely to ask permission to use the toilet, we were at primary school). Or we devise wonderful technological solutions like the 'magic steps' that slide away to reveal a platform lift, but then put the controls inside the building with no way to 'summon' the lift from outside. An enabling access solution will be able to be used without requiring any more support than the user will normally require. It should normally be capable of independent use and not be dependent on others being present at the point of use.

The concept of belonging, of being with one another, of honouring, valuing, and respecting each other, is key to the achievement of inclusion (as opposed to accommodation or toleration). The Church is a community of disciples on a pilgrimage. Among the requirements for a pilgrimage group to enjoy a fruitful journey, are communality, interdependence, and mutual flourishing. This applies irrespective of where on the spectra of disabilities - whether mental, physical, sensory or emotional - we sit. Listening to, learning from, and allowing agency to one another are all key elements of community.

There's more to be gained by working together, involving those 'experts by experience' whom we can find to journey with us, and discovering where that takes us. In the process of working out and working through what's possible, we will learn more about each other and ourselves, more about what we can do together, and more about possibilities that we'd never have thought of ourselves. Some of the 'experts by experience' may not be part of the regular church community (maybe they have been excluded in the past) but have valuable insights to share.

In practice this means is that we need more of a focus on the process, the journey towards accessibility. Treating our efforts towards achieving accessibility as a journey, will helpfully shift focus away from an approach that seeks merely to identify a programme of works that, once done, will make a place accessible (so that we no longer need to think about the issues). How we behave in our churches goes alongside their physical arrangements. Taken together and done well, they make church more accessible, and help to achieve (as best we can) an equality of experience for all those who use our buildings.

“...all must have their voice; all must be heard. The Abbot must listen to everyone, including the youngest and newest”.

Rule of St Benedict

If What about heritage?

Many of our churches meet in historic buildings. It is essential that we find ways for accessibility and heritage to work together to the benefit of both. Disabled people appreciate heritage and can be as keen as anyone else to enjoy a heritage building and so want to see it sensitively adapted to benefit all users.

If we see our approach to accessibility as a journey, then working with our buildings, including historic ones, becomes less challenging.

The challenges posed by a building will not be the only aspect of accessibility to address. Making physical changes might mean developing a plan that stretches out into the future 5, or 10 or more years - a plan which expands our horizons and understanding of what it means to travel together.

This goes beyond finding an expert to fix a problem and moves us towards becoming a community of discovery as we approach a journey we will make together.

We might end up with something that looks like what we ourselves had first thought of, but then again, we might not.

There will be ways of improving overall accessibility that can go ahead in advance of physical alterations. As we do that, we will probably find some quick wins that we can achieve with everyone's support, and some deeper issues that will take time to resolve.

The law in this area is a good servant, but a poor master. Our motivation for physical changes will lead to better outcomes when it starts with a motivation to be *community*.

The law merely asks for 'reasonable adjustments' to make a building accessible. The journey of community asks deeper questions.

The Church Buildings Council has found that quite significant interventions to enable access can be reasonable in the right context. For example, it will consistently encourage access to the building that enables all users to have a shared place of entry. Likewise, it will always work with a parish to find a way to provide an accessible toilet but will consider more carefully when it will encourage consideration of a changing places facility.

Sometimes a compromise is necessary to avoid unreasonable intervention – for example there have been circumstances where locating an accessible toilet outside the main church building is advised as the best solution for all users. This is only done, most often in physically small churches, when it is the only realistic option to avoid removing enjoyment of the place for all people; in most circumstances a solution which keeps all the toilet facilities adjacent to each other is preferred.

In seeking a good accessible outcome, the Council is likely to encourage solutions that provide an equality of experience for all. If there is more than one way of achieving this, the Council is likely to encourage one that involves the least intervention with a historic building.



WHAT CAN WE DO?

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- 2b Core considerations
- 2c The visitor experience at your church
- 2d Getting permission
- 2e How two churches in Bristol reconsidered their access

2a Begin at the beginning

There are many things that we can all do to make clear our commitment to welcome, hospitality and inclusion. We must start with where we are now. Not all disability is physical. There is an emphasis on physical access in this guidance as this is the expertise of the Church Buildings Council.

The first thing to do in any building, then, is to conduct an access audit. This could be done by a professional Access Auditor, which may be required in some contexts – however it will of course come at a cost. Co-production with disabled parishioners, rather than passive consultation on a completed audit can be highly successful and very empowering. The first task of an access audit could be to set up of a consultative access group of existing disabled parishioners, staff and others in the local community who have lived experience of impairment and disability and are keen to help the church improve its inclusivity.

There are various self-audit tools available – for example, Inspired North East and the Open Door team in Newcastle Diocese have produced a useful one available on their [website](#). There are others available from several dioceses⁴ and other sources.

Once an access audit has been carried out, we will have a much clearer idea of what could be done to improve the accessibility of the building. We must then consider what we ought to do, and how we are going to plan for it and pay for it.

The Equality Act of 2010 continues the concept of Reasonable Adjustments first introduced in the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 which it replaced. Put simply, this requires us to make those adjustments to improve accessibility, that we can be reasonably expected to make. It may be seen as reasonable for us to be required to have a number of large-print hymn books available, whereas it might not be considered reasonable for us to be required to install a lift up the church tower in a small village church.

3 At the time of writing, we are aware that Liverpool, Bristol, Leicester, Lichfield and Birmingham dioceses have resources available. cannot address these issues in the space available, but they are important and worthy of further reading and discussion.

The concept of reasonable adjustments recognises that there will sometimes be things which are simply out of reach for a particular church community to achieve. However, this must not be used as an excuse to avoid doing something which could be achieved.

Following an access audit, it is good practice to prioritise the improvements that are suggested, and to make a plan - perhaps one which stretches over several years - for how they will be addressed.

The plan ought to include all the potential improvements, and specify for each one, whether it is felt to be reasonable or not (based on facts and figures, advice and research, wherever possible). The plan should include a planned work programme to show how the reasonable adjustments will be programmed and tackled over time.

Often, this planning exercise reveals both a number of 'quick wins' – items which can be achieved relatively easily and inexpensively – and a number of things which turn out to be reasonable even though at first glance they may have seemed otherwise. For those things that turn out not to be reasonable, the planning will provide a rationale for why that is and allow the PCC to demonstrate that due consideration has been given to the issue.

It is vital to work in liaison with the Archdeacon and DAC throughout, to ensure that any required Faculty or other permissions are obtained before any work starts. If proposals will impact on the outside appearance of the building planning permission may also be needed from the Local Authority.

Online presence

Use your online and social media presence to give clear information about the physical arrangements at your building, and what is provided for worshippers. [A Church Near You](#) has provision for indicating accessibility provisions, such as ramps, loops, large-print and Braille service orders and hymn books, etc. Indicating to people what to expect when they arrive can be a big help to anyone considering worship with you, whatever needs they have.

It is helpful to draw attention to any specific features of the building that could impact on being able to worship with you. Sharing this information empowers people to make an informed decision and recognises that what is a positive for one person may be a stumbling block to another.

If your building is not presently accessible, please be honest about it. If there is a nearby church with better access it would be helpful to point this out.

Be consistent

For most provisions their consistent use is as important as their being in place. For example, if there is a provision such as a loop system to work with hearing aids, make sure it works and then use it consistently. This means ensuring that all who participate in leading or speaking use a microphone, even if the speaker may not feel that they need to. For some styles of worship this may mean providing a roving mic as well as person or place specific ones.

Mind your language!

One of the most effective ways to enable access to our liturgy and other information, is to make it available in the language of the person trying to access it. This may mean having liturgies translated into other languages for Refugees and Asylum Seekers, for example, or having live interpretation available. We should also consider having interpretation into BSL where possible and using Makaton for signing and symbols where that is helpful.

How we use our own language can also reveal our attitudes to people. Phrases like 'accessible' are much preferred to 'disabled' and sound less like they are singling out a particular user group. An accessible toilet sounds more like a positive provision than a disabled one, for example.

2b Core considerations

How accessible a place is will result from careful consideration of many of its resources. Areas to consider when thinking about how we use provision accessibly include, but are not limited to:

- toilets
- AV
- kitchens
- ramps
- lighting
- pews/seating
- signage
- parking

There is no single 'right answer' for many of these things, and good maintenance and consistent use of what is provided will make a big contribution to your church gaining a reputation for its welcome.

Some examples to grow your reputation for welcome:

Physical arrangements

- Having parking readily available when it is advertised, with accessible parking clearly marked and always kept free for those who need it.
- As far as possible, ensure that the same entrances, routes and facilities are used by everyone, rather than making those with access needs do something different.
- Make sure ramps and lifts go to a door that is usually open.

Use of the building

- Keep your accessible toilet clean **and clear of storage**.
- Set sound levels to be comfortable, not at an extreme.
- If you provide catering, be able to answer questions about allergens.
- Use lighting to ensure the face of each person speaking is easy to see, to aid lip-reading and audibility.
- Provide signs and service sheets in Clear Print.

2c The visitor experience at your church

Entering the site

If a visitor with a blue badge arrives by car, is it clear if there is any dedicated accessible parking? Is the route from the parking to the church step-free and well signposted?

Is there step-free access to the church grounds? If not, is there space to regrade paths to avoid the need for steps?

Signage

Signage to identify the church name should be clear, and in an accessible font – guidance can be found in the [Sign Design Guide](#) produced jointly by the Sign Design Society and the RNIB.

The more information that there is on a noticeboard, the harder it is to read. Less information clearly presented will be helpful for all people.

Signage in and around the building should be clear, in an accessible font, with good contrast and with only the words and symbols that are needed to convey the required information. Internationally agreed standard symbols / pictograms should be used alongside text where possible, rather than using locally-devised symbols or images.

Entering the building

So far as it is possible the Council encourages everyone to enter a building at the same place. It strongly discourages a separate 'disabled entrance'. Many church buildings have a step – either at the entry, or into a porch or both. If you have multiple entrances do they all have steps? Could a door that has level access become the main door?

If you have steps, a handrail will make ambulant users more secure. Remember that the handrail needs to be used by either left or right hands – so ideally there should be handrails at both sides. A central handrail should be provided if the steps are particularly wide.

An elegant solution to steps is to regrade churchyard paths to bring the path to the level in the church. It also has the advantage of not drawing attention to the user, which helps to make it a genuinely equal solution. Where this is not possible some churches have reworked a flight of steps to include a ramp.

Welcome desk and internal noticeboards

If you have a welcome desk, or place to serve refreshments, how accessible is it? How easy to find what you need on arrival? If you are planning a new facility does it have a good space around it? For existing welcome areas is the signage clear, in an accessible font and with only what a visitor will need on arrival?

A useful resource is the Sign Design Guide, available on the [The Sign Design Society](#) website.

If you give people printed material, use an accessible font. There is a useful summary information sheet on Clear Print and Large Print on the [Sensory Trust](#) website.

Below: **Bramcote, St Michael and All Angels (Southwell & Nottingham), before and after.**



Below: **Blandford Forum, St Peter and St Paul (Salisbury)** before and after.



Below: **Axbridge, St John the Baptist (Bath & Wells)** before and after.



Being comfortable in the building

How the building is equipped and used can help all people present engage better with the worship, or other activity, rather than being unable to participate.

Lighting needs to be bright enough to read any printed material, including books, used in worship. It also needs to clearly illuminate the face of anyone speaking as this aids lip reading. If light levels are low is there scope to relamp with brighter lamps?

Guidance on [lighting in churches](#) can be found on the Church of England website.

Sound levels need to be audible, without being oppressive. The organisation [Louder than words](#) can give advice on improving access for people with hearing loss.

Where to sit: Neither pews nor chairs are necessarily good or bad for equal access, and whatever seating you have there is usually scope to find a way to make the building accessible. With chairs, can one or two be readily removed to accommodate a wheelchair? Some of the chairs need to have armrests to support people who need this to help standing and sitting.

With a pewed church what are the options to make spaces in the church to accommodate a wheelchair user alongside others in the congregation? This is far friendlier than only having a space at the front or back of the church. Giving people a choice of where to sit, and enabling them to sit with the other members of their party, is crucial.

Below: **Edwinstowe, St Mary and Bramcote, St Michael and All Angels (Southwell & Nottingham).** Note that steps have been retained as some users find these more accessible than a long ramp.



Accessible toilet

A toilet that has space and is equipped for use by wheelchair users, and those with additional needs, is an important element of making a building welcoming. Where it is possible please consider providing one where its use can be discreet – so at the back of a block of seating, for example, and not near to the place where a preacher or worship leader will normally be to lead or preach.

Where there is room in the church the Council strongly encourages providing the toilet within the building. There are some places where this is not possible. This is usually where a building is not big enough to take an accessible toilet without it dominating the space. Ideally the accessible toilet will be separate from a baby changing facility, although this is not always possible.

The Council encourages careful consideration of installing Changing Places toilets. A Changing Places toilet can be used by the over quarter-million people who cannot use standard accessible toilets. This includes people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, as well as older people.

There should be compelling reasons given if deciding not to install a Changing Places toilet. In cases where such reasons prevail, an Accessible Toilet should be provided as a minimum acceptable level of provision.

More information can be found from [Changing Places](#).

Taking part in worship/other activity

Think about how you present worship and use the facilities that you have. Do you have extended periods of loud music, low lighting or use flashing lights? These all have potential to make some users feel excluded and maybe not able to worship with you. If these things are vital to your worship is there part of the building that is quieter or better lit, for example?

Leaving the building

Are any elements of your equal access unavailable after worship is completed? Could a visitor find the way in locked after the service? If you tend to move into a hall or other space for refreshments is that place accessible from the church, or do you lock the main doors after moving to an alternative space? Would a disabled person feel unable to join in?

Below: **Edwinstowe, St Mary (Southwell & Nottingham)** before and after refurbishment of the entrance area.



2d Getting permission

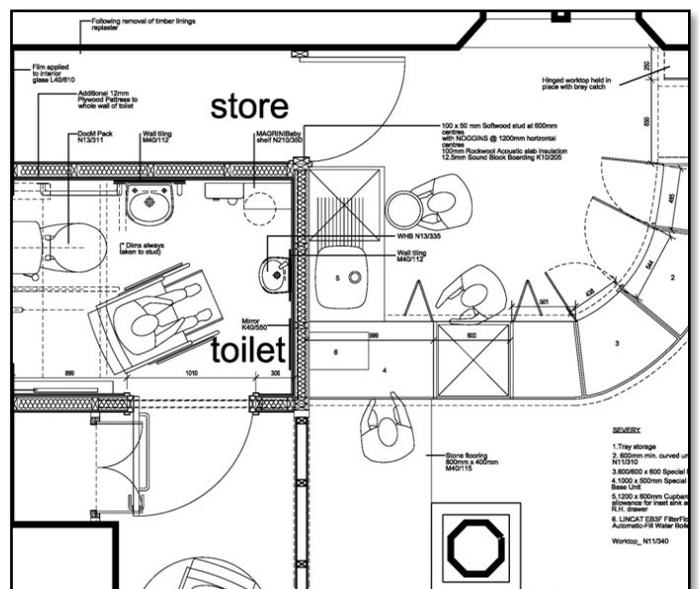
Getting permission to make changes to a church building is a matter that can cause anxiety. Not every change that you may want to make to improve access will need permission, and some alterations will not need a full faculty application. As part of your journey to equal access you may be able to have some quick wins and show your commitment to all users by doing first things that do not need permission.

Most changes in how you use the building and its facilities won't need permission; such as good housekeeping to keep the building clean and uncluttered, for example. If you have lighting that is too dim (or too bright) relamping may be a solution. Checking that you are using your PA in a way that is helping all worshippers, checking for clarity in printed material, and making access arrangements clear in your online presence are all things that can be done without permission or consultation outside the PCC.

Maintenance and repair can usually be done without permission. Keeping the building in good order will make it a more welcoming place for all users, and give confidence to disabled users that facilities to help them will be working and in good order. Although most changes that will affect the character of the building, in particular a listed building, will need permission, introducing handrails to steps or paths in the churchyard can be done with permission from the Archdeacon.

Permission in a faculty is needed for works that will make a change to the building. The need to go through the process can be beneficial for the church and improve the proposals. Gaining a faculty requires consultation within the diocese with your Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC). Many DACs will have an access adviser who should be of particular help to you. If the church is a listed building you may also have to consult with Historic England and amenity societies, such as the Victorian Society or the SPAB. The Church Buildings Council may also be a consultee for some proposals.

Below: **Gotham, St Lawrence (Southwell & Nottingham), the accessible toilet and plans for the new entrance area.**



All the people you consult will know that you have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments to provide equal access. They will also understand historic buildings and will have seen many proposals for equal access in a wide range of different places. They can suggest relevant examples from elsewhere that can support you to achieve what you need. Within the faculty rules they also take account of the fact that the church is a centre of worship and mission. This is given more weight in the faculty system than in secular Listed Building Consent. Having a church that is accessible is a key element of your mission and it is a strong element of the case that you will need to make for the changes that you need.

It will help you get permission to show that you have considered how the proposals will impact the character of the building. If there is more than one way of achieving what you need it will help to show that you have considered them all and then chosen the one that will give the best outcome. The chart on page 12 of Historic England's [Easy Access to Historic Buildings](#) will help you here. You will need to prepare [statements of significance and needs](#) for your faculty application. Knowing why you have chosen the proposals that you have will help with this.

If your proposals will change the external appearance of the building planning permission may be needed from the local authority.

Below: **Minsterworth, St Peter (Gloucester).**
Example of a bespoke CantiLift™ entrance lift .



The Church Buildings Council has set some precedents for how it will approach scheme for equal access. These include:

- Equal access provisions should allow a similar experience of the building to all users, ideally all using an entrance in common.
- Where adequate access cannot reasonably be achieved in any other way, disturbance and alteration of an historic opening might be justified.
- The Council strongly appreciates that toilets provided in churches need to be accessible. It will strongly encourage equal access provision accessed from within the building. It considers occasions where external access is recommended to be rare.
- For church of great prominence with high visitor numbers the Council will encourage consideration of providing a Changing Places toilet.
- Where a church proposes to provide new accommodation it should have equal access designed in from the start. This includes accommodation on more than one level. Any new accommodation that does not have equal access should only be used to provide services that can be accessed elsewhere.

There is a fuller description of the [faculty process](#) on the Church of England website.

2h How two churches in Bristol reconsidered their access

St Mary, Lydiard-Tregoze

The Grade-I listed medieval church of St Mary, Lydiard-Tregoze, had recently made a series of improvements to improve its welcome, putting access at the forefront. Many of the changes were simple steps to deliver genuine benefit for all. The improvements included:

- Creation of space and visual decluttering inside main west entrance to create welcome and interpretation panels
- Relocation of hymnbook shelves and slimming of radiators making more space for wheelchair users at services
- Lowering of Book of Remembrance display case
- New user-friendly signage and literature
- Hearing loop
- Opening of route between back of house and church with new disabled access via South Chapel (considerably cutting distance)
- New section of path surface in graveyard suitable for wheelchair use
- Disability awareness training for volunteer stewards/guides

Holy Trinity church, Westbury-on-Trym

Holy Trinity church, Westbury-on-Trym, is a Grade-I listed medieval church. The entrance to the church was up steps from the car park and then a further steep set of steps into a dark lobby, notices were then plastered all over the lobby above the banisters of the steps so difficult for someone who was able bodied to see let alone someone with mobility difficulties.

The parish completely redesigned the entrance and put in a ramp from the car park, re-set the steps and put a platform lift alongside it. Glass doors and changed lighting made the entrance more welcoming as the notices were moved to a much better setting. The PCC consulted with disabled people within the congregation to plan the changes.

Below: Lydiard Tregoze, St Mary (Bristol). The entrance area before, and the proposed new design.



3



WHERE CAN WE GET ADVICE?

3a Sources of help and information

3b Published guidance

3c Useful websites

3a Sources of help and information

It is clearly important to look within your community of users, to learn from experience how to improve access to your building and to worship. However, to help you develop your ideas and put them into practice, outside help can be invaluable. Places you could consider approaching for help include:

- Your Diocesan Disability and Access Adviser (DDDA) – all dioceses should have one, in full- or part-time, though some are in vacancy. Others carry the role as an additional responsibility alongside a parish, so capacity (and of course experience) varies across the country. There is a good network of DDDAs, so wisdom and expertise can be sought from that wider group when needed.
- An advisory group of disabled people and carers – inviting people to form such a group can be a great way of engaging with disabled people in the communities you serve.
- Disability societies such as RNIB, Alzheimer’s Society, and RNID
- Architects and others with expertise in developing accessible buildings
- Access consultants from outside the church
- Existing trusts and charities
- Behavioural psychologists
- Occupational therapists and physiotherapists.
- Other organisations who welcome people to historic places - for example, Historic England or the National Trust
- For any proposal for change to the building you should work with a qualified architect or surveyor. If you have extensive proposals, working with an expert in historic buildings may help you identify solutions that are most readily deliverable.

3b Published guidance

Church of England

Lighting (2020)

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/lighting>

A Place to Belong (2018)

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/A%20place%20to%20belong%20Guide.pdf>

Historic England

Easy Access to Historic Buildings (2015)

<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/easy-access-to-historic-buildings/>

Easy Access to Historic Landscapes (2015)

<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/easy-access-to-historic-landscapes/>

National Trust

Access Guide (2019)

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/access-for-everyone>

3c Useful websites

Historic England

Access to Places of Worship

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/caring-for-heritage/places-of-worship/making-changes-to-your-place-of-worship/advice-by-topic/access/>

Statements of significance and needs

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/caring-for-heritage/places-of-worship/making-changes-to-your-place-of-worship/principles-for-making-changes/assessing-significance/>

Other sources

Action on Hearing Loss

<https://louderthanwords.org.uk/>

Changing Places toilets

<http://www.changing-places.org/>

Churches for All

<https://churchesforall.org.uk/>

Design Council Inclusive Environments Hub

<https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/built-environment/inclusive-environments>

Disability and Jesus

<http://disabilityandjesus.org.uk/>

Livability

<https://livability.org.uk/>

National Register of Access Consultants

<https://www.nrac.org.uk/>

Sensory Trust (Clear Print and Large Print guidance)

https://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/resources/connect/infosheet_clearlargeprint.pdf

Sign Design Society and the RNIB (Sign Design Guide)

<https://www.signdesignsociety.co.uk>

Through the Roof

<https://www.throughtheroof.org/>

Welcoming all people to churchyards

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/>

Below: **Bourton-on-the-Water, St Lawrence (Gloucester), new internal ramp into the chancel.**



