

Church Maintenance Advice Note

Why regular maintenance and inspections are so important

Major repair and improvement projects grab the headlines but routine checks and maintenance are equally important. They also express the love and dedication that churchwardens and other volunteers have for the church.

Regular inspections, maintenance and small 'stitch in time' repairs have proved to be excellent value for money. They stop damage and costs rising month after month and help prevent major failure and disasters. Just getting a contractor to clear out the rainwater system twice a year can start to make a huge difference.

The stops and starts resulting from Covid-19 and the increased difficulty of getting grants for some repair projects as funding priorities are changed make routine inspections and maintenance even more vital at the moment.

Typical checks include looking out for slipped roof tiles or failed or missing flashings plus making sure that water runs freely through the gutters, downpipes and channels. Can you spot any other changes or problems such as an area of damp, a broken window or even a break-in? It is of course crucial that problems discovered are followed up without delay.

The more you look and think about the building the more you get to appreciate the way it works. What happens to the rain that falls on the building? How does it flow over different surfaces and where does it go? And yes that might mean going outside and having a look when it's pouring! Reading your quinquennial inspection report will also help you understand your building better.

Maintenance plans

Putting together a maintenance plan or checklist is a great way of thinking what you need to do and making sure that nothing is missed. A template for a maintenance checklist (or plan) which covers different parts of the building and services is [here](#).

The ChurchCare [Calendar of Care](#) suggests what you might want to include and when. Your quinquennial inspection report should also highlight checks and maintenance tasks and when boilers and other services and equipment need to be inspected and serviced.

You will fill in your maintenance checklist (or plan) with what needs doing and when. You also need to think who will do what and add that to the plan.

Who does what maintenance?

Along with inspections and servicing of heating and other parts of the building by appropriate specialists and tradesmen some regular inspections may be required by say a conservator, structural engineer or your professional adviser.

'Core maintenance' work will be divided between parish volunteers and contractors.

Maintenance by parish volunteers

Parish volunteers should only do what is safe and appropriate for them. That might mean work they can do from ground. Or it could include work carried out a little higher with support and the safe use of a ladder. (See our DAC Advice Leaflet on the ['Safety of Ladders and high-level access'](#)). A regular church building working party could be organised or combined with one looking after the churchyard. Think about inviting volunteers from the wider community who may appreciate the church and enjoy getting involved. Another approach is to set up a joint working party for a group of parishes.

There is a lot of advice available on maintenance by parish and other volunteers. The Society for the Protection of Ancient Building's website has helpful advice on church maintenance by volunteers from identifying and organising work to which kitchen implements are best for clearing blockages! See these SPAB links to [maintenance matters](#), [faith in maintenance](#) and the [maintenance co-operatives project](#).

In 2018 we had two 'Church Maintenance Workshops for St Albans Parishes'. The first in April by a SPAB architect introduced maintenance and the role of parish volunteers. The second in November focused on organising maintenance by contractors and what you should expect and require from them. Find information on both workshops by scrolling down this [linked page](#).

Maintenance by contractors

Maintenance by contractors is required at all churches. Typically this will involve checking the roofs for holes or other obvious problems and inspecting and clearing the gutters, downpipes, channels and readily accessible drains. The maintenance contractors should then tell the parish what they have found and the work they have done in a short report with before and after photos and/or verbally.

Maintenance contractors should visit the church twice a year with November (after leaf fall) and May (after bird nests are occupied) ideal. If twice yearly is impossible then it is essential that an annual visit is arranged. Where parishes lack people able to carry out the tasks often done by parish volunteers then these should be added to the list of work for the maintenance contractors.

Maintenance contractors have different backgrounds can provide different types and levels of service though the core work may well be similar. You should think and write out what you want them to do.

Many parishes have long and successful arrangements with contractors which carry out regular inspections and maintenance at their churches. If you are in the position of looking for a maintenance contractor there are a number of ways to find one:

Talking to a contractor who has done a good repairs job at your church to see if they would be interested in providing a maintenance service and what that could be and at what price.

Asking your quinquennial inspector for his or her advice on maintenance contractors that might be suitable for your church.

Talking to churches in your benefice or deanery about the maintenance contractors they use that have provided a good service. (Procuring a contractor for more than one church may save money.)

Asking the Historic Church Buildings Support Officer or other members of the DAC team for the names of contractors we are aware of that carry out regular maintenance in the diocese.

Exploring [MaintenanceBooker](#) the online booking system for maintenance contractors hosted by the National Churches Trust.

Grants and maintenance

While maintenance and 'stich in time' repairs have always been a key part of caring for historic churches it has a particularly high profile after Historic England published *The Value of Maintenance?* [Project Report](#).

Some grant funders such as the National Churches Trust and National Lottery Heritage Fund expect a church to have a maintenance plan or to prepare one. More generally a maintenance plan is taken as evidence that a parish is looking after its church and being prudent. That is an important message to give when seeking grants.

Funding has traditionally been directed at significant repairs rather than routine inspections and maintenance or small-scale repairs. Repairs to roofs and rainwater systems now have a higher priority but routine maintenance does not qualify for many of the grants available.

The National Churches Trust has made maintenance one of its priorities including improving the access needed to inspect the fabric and maintain and repair it. Two grant streams support maintenance and small investigations and repairs:

Foundation (small) Grants – for Maintenance (grants of £500 to £5,000)

<https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/foundationgrants>

Preventative Maintenance Micro-Grants (grants up to £500)

<https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/preventative-maintenance-micro-grants-apply>

The latter grants are only available if you book a service for work through the MaintenanceBooker website.

The National Churches Trust have very specific criteria that have to be met with its grants and you should read all of its guidance and the application form questions before applying. We can also advise on making a good application.

Further resources

A number of sources of information and advice including the SPAB website have been given above. The National Churches Trust's resources can be found [here](#).

For further information and advice contact:

David Bevan, Historic Church Buildings Support Officer, St Albans Diocese

Email: HCBSupport@stalbans.anglican.org

Telephone: 01727 818108