

St Albans Diocesan Advisory Committee

Annual Report 2019 – version for DBF Report

Chair: Dr Christopher Green

The DAC is a statutory body whose functions are set out in ecclesiastical legislation. Its role is to advise the Chancellor and parishes on proposals for works to church buildings and churchyards and church furnishings, and to advise more generally on the care and development of churches. In line with statutory provision and the priorities of Living God's Love, the Committee has regard to churches as local centres of worship and mission, in which

- *people can encounter God and be drawn into a worshipping community*
- *parishes can reach out in mission*
- *local communities can be transformed.*

Main achievements and themes in 2019

- Schemes completed in the year include the re-ordering of St Mary's Watford for the 21st century and the tower repairs and re-ordering at St Michael & All Angels, Shefford.
- The DAC has sought to provide on-going advice in cases where a church building has suffered a major disaster. These have included the theft of the main roofs at Houghton Conquest and more recently Furneux Pelham; the serious fire in the tower of the church of St John the Baptist, Royston; the failure of the heating system at Luton Parish Church (St Mary's); and major fabric failure at Flamstead and Letchworth (St Michael). These are cases which have needed a coordinated approach to repair, involving a range of professionals, the insurer and other bodies to decide on the appropriate method of repair, costs and funding – as well as much prayer and temporary arrangements to enable the life and work of the parish to continue.
- The DAC was saddened to have to consider proposals for repairs to stained or historic glass damaged by break-ins and vandalism at Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted, Bishop's Stortford, Leighton Buzzard and Harlington.
- The on-going issue of metal theft was a focus of work in 2019, including DAC consideration of alternative roof materials; security seminars for deaneries run by the Support Officer in conjunction with the police and Ecclesiastical Insurance; joint working with the Beds and Herts Historic Churches Trust; and a continued drive to identify vulnerable churches as priorities for the installation of roof alarms. By the end of the year 120 churches had installed roof alarms and the number of vulnerable buildings had been reduced to less than 30.

Going Deeper into God

- Parishes continue to seek to make their church buildings more fit for purpose, as the places in and from which the worshipping community carries out its Mission Action Plan priorities. Through site visits and advice on applications, the DAC continued to encourage parishes to consider ways to improve access. This might include:
 - improving **accessibility and facilities** as at Bramfield, Sandy and St Matthew's Oxhey.
 - **Re-ordering** to provide a sustainable future as at Great Wymondley.

Making new disciples

- *All Saints Croxley Green and Clifton - **re-ordering** projects to provide better space for community and worship activities*
- *St Paul Letchworth, Christ Church Chorleywood and St Nicholas Stevenage - seeking to make space in their **growing churches**.*

Transforming Communities

- Around 10% of the church buildings in the diocese are post-war and they, as well as much older buildings, may need refurbishment and redevelopment to meet current needs. Projects include improvements to fire exits and accessibility at St Francis, Luton; the redevelopment of the halls at Christ Church, Bedford; a scheme for complete redevelopment of St John's Radlett and St Stephen's

Barnet; and options for redevelopment or improvement of the Luton churches of the Holy Cross, Marsh Farm and St John, Farley Hill.

Specialist support

Bats in Churches

Bats in the belfry may sound like a joke, but bats are protected animals and hosting a hundred or more of them in a church can have a very serious effect on the fabric and fittings of the church and especially on the life of the worshipping community. The national, Heritage-Lottery funded Bats in Churches project seeks to work with selected churches to understand how bats are using the building and the impact on people and heritage; and to work with highly qualified ecologists to find mitigation measures. Four churches in the Diocese were included in the original project and we were delighted that applications to include four more churches were accepted by the project. Proposals for mitigation measures at Willington were developed during the year.

Outside the buildings

Judith Evans continued to promote the Living Churchyard scheme across the diocese, including running a Heritage Lottery funded workshop day at Potton. She and other DAC representatives worked with PCCs and local authorities to find appropriate ways to manage open and closed churchyards as places of burial and remembrance as well as havens for wildlife and biodiversity.

The DAC discussed partnership projects in different stages of development to improve closed churchyards and consecrated cemeteries at Great Berkhamsted, All Saints' Leavesden and the former Leavesden Hospital Cemetery.

Extension projects on site at Bromham and Ickleford (and earlier at Braughing) raised sensitive archaeological and technical design issues with the discovery of unmarked burials close to the north side of the church. David Baker, the DAC archaeological adviser, worked with the field archaeologists, churches architects and local authority colleagues to find solutions. He also recorded the completion of the project he had spearheaded with others to bring back into use the chancel of his own local church at Bletsoe.

Support Officer's work

The ongoing review of the Diocese's 380 churches identified over one in ten in bad condition with these registered as Heritage at Risk or targeted as other priorities for action. Significant support was given to most of the 13 'at Risk' churches and other priorities. Advice was given to a further 90 parishes individually and more at workshops. The Support Officer contributed to National Lottery Heritage Fund applications from Dunstable Priory, Houghton Regis and Anstey (the first two successful) and the development of future NLHF bids. Applications for Greensand Country Landscape Partnership grants for churchyard walls were encouraged and partnership funding secured with Tingrith parish. Advice was given on procuring professional advisers, following up QI reports and organising achievable projects at training sessions and working with individual parishes, such as Hockliffe. A large amount of the Officer's time was spent on protecting churches from metal theft and dealing with the results as described under 'Main achievements and themes in 2019'.

DAC members and staff

In September the team said farewell to Debbie Cochrane as team secretary after 8 years supporting the committee and its work. We welcomed her successor Joanna Chandler who joined us after completing an MA in Conservation Studies (Historic Buildings) at the University of York.

At the end of the year DAC members were saddened to learn of the death of Andrew Argyrakis. Andrew had been a member of the committee for more than 20 years and his expertise and gentle wisdom on matters relating to conservation were much appreciated. Former DAC architect member John Burnett passed away in November. He was an architect member of the DAC in the 1990s.

2019 Statistics (2018 in brackets)

- **6** (6) DAC meetings
- **61** (70) visits by DAC members and staff
- **418** (462) cases completed

For matters including:

Notifications of Advice for Faculties	177 (152)
Archdeacons' Letters of Authority	231 (297)
Archdeacons' Temporary Re-ordering Licences	10 (12)

Extensions/New Build	5 (6)
Re-ordering/alterations	30 (41)
Repairs	107 (79)
Furniture/fittings	49 (56)
Services/M&E (mechanical and electrical)	58 (66)
Churchyard (incl. trees, benches, signage)	96 (169)
Other (e.g. bells; organs, clocks)	73 (44)