How to write good Statements of Significance and Needs, and why they matter

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What are Statements of Significance and Needs?

Definition from the Faculty Jurisdiction rules

Proposals involving changes to listed buildings: statements of significance and needs
4.3. — (1) Where proposals involve making changes to a listed church or other listed building intending applicants must provide the Diocesan Advisory Committee with—
   (a) a document which describes—
      (i) the significance of the church or other building in terms of its special architectural and historic interest (including any contribution made by its setting) and
      (ii) any significant features of artistic or archaeological interest that the church or other building has so as to enable the potential impact of the proposals on its significance, and on any such features, to be understood (a “statement of significance”); and
   (b) a document setting out the justification for the proposals (commonly known as a “statement of needs”).

(2) If proposals are likely to result in harm to the significance of the church or other building as a building of special architectural or historic interest, the document setting out the justification for the proposals must set out the basis on which it is said that the proposals would result in public benefit that outweighs that harm.
Why they’re worth taking time to get right

• They help the Care of Churches team, DAC and external consultees to understand better your church building, what you plan to do, why you want to do it and the effect that your proposals will have.

• They can help to clarify your thinking and crystallise your proposal.

• A good Statement of Significance can be reused for future applications.

• They help you get your faculty more quickly!
Statements of Significance
What a good Statement of Significance needs to contain

• A written account of the history, development and notable features of the building
• A ground plan (ask!)
• Good quality digital photographs of the exterior from the principal compass points
• Good quality digital photographs of the interior looking east from the west end and vice versa
• Photographs of notable features (stained glass, fittings, organ, monuments, etc)
• Captions for all the illustrations
• An explanation of the impact on the significance of the proposed works
Ian’s old Statements of Significance

- OK to use for minor projects
- Please don’t use for major schemes
How to insert illustrations in Word
How to edit illustrations in Word
How to convert documents to pdf format
How not to take photographs of churches
West Kent and the Weald is everything south of the M20 and west of the M2
Church Heritage Record and Parish Profile

Welcome to the Church Heritage Record

The Church Heritage Record contains over 16,000 entries on church buildings in England covering a wide variety of topics including architectural history, archaeology, art history and the surrounding natural environment. It is continuously being updated and should not be regarded as complete - find out more.

Search for your church by name and click on the red symbol in the map to access its record. Or find groups of buildings by clicking "Find a set of Churches". You may also be interested in this map of renewable energy use in our churches.

For the best results, write the location first, followed by a colon (:) and then the Church name

Find a church

Church name: Ashford: St Mary the Virgin

OR: Find churches by grade, period, size, etc

Place, postcode or grid ref

Search
Going further - useful sources of information about your church

- Church reports by Tim Tatton-Brown (contact me on eharris@diocant.org)
- National Heritage List for England www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/advanced-search
- Kent History and Library Centre www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/history-and-heritage/kent-archives
- Discovery http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk
- Church of England Record Centre www.lambethpalacelibrary.org/content/cerc
- British History Online www.british-history.ac.uk
- National Pipe Organ Register www.npor.org.uk
Why it’s worth doing research in an archive

• Standard sources often don’t describe features most commonly subject to change (e.g. seating).
• You can write a really authoritative Statement of Significance (no one else will be able to investigate the building in such fine detail).
• You can forestall any speculation about the significance of (a) feature(s) affected by your scheme.
• You can benefit from knowledgeable and helpful staff.
What you might find in an archive
Heritage Statements

• Carried out by external professional consultants

• Can be a good investment for big schemes involving major expenditure

• Gives a comprehensive and exhaustive account of the building
Mythbuster

• There is no list of things that can/can’t be done to a church of a given listing grade!

• If a church is listed, all of the building is listed.

• Fabric isn’t automatically less significant because it’s post-medieval!

• There are degrees of significance, but something is rarely devoid of it completely.

• No one source is totally authoritative and Pevsner and list descriptions aren’t gospel – something isn’t significant just because it’s not mentioned or described in less than glowing terms.
Trash or treasure?

Church treasures are not ordinary assets and belong to the parishioners, not the PCC. The Court of Arches holds that there is a presumption against sale.

Tests for disposal of objects

- Is it historically and/or artistically significant?
- Does it have an historical association with the church?
- Does it have value for mission?
- Could it be displayed securely (elsewhere)?

Leckhampton – a cautionary tale…
Statements of Needs
The questions that a good Statement of Needs ought to answer

• How did this proposal come about?
• Why do you want to do it?
• Does your proposal address a shortcoming in the building or its services? If so, what is that and what problems does it cause?
• How will what you wish to do change the life of your parish? How will it help to further mission?
• Did you look at any other ways of achieving what you wish to do (i.e. an options study)? If so, why did you decide against them?
Definitions of Significance

“The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.”


“The sum of the cultural and natural heritage values of a place, often set out in a statement of significance.”

Conservation Principles, Historic England, 2008, p. 72
The Duffield Questions

1. Would the proposals, if implemented, result in harm to the significance of the church as a building of special architectural or historic interest?

2. If the answer to question (1) is “no”, the ordinary presumption in faculty proceedings “in favour of things as they stand” is applicable, and can be rebutted more or less readily, depending on the particular nature of the proposals.

3. If the answer to question (1) is “yes”, how serious would the harm be?

4. How clear and convincing is the justification for carrying out the proposals?

5. Bearing in mind that there is a strong presumption against proposals which will adversely affect the special character of a listed building, will any resulting public benefit (including matters such as liturgical freedom, pastoral well-being, opportunities for mission, and putting the church to viable uses that are consistent with its role as a place of worship and mission) outweigh the harm?

In answering question (5), the more serious the harm, the greater will be the level of benefit needed before the proposals should be permitted. This will particularly be the case if the harm is to a building which is listed Grade I or II*, where serious harm should only exceptionally be allowed.
Statement of Needs – some dos...

• Keep it proportional – there’s no need for a long SoN for minor fabric repairs! However...

• Do explain things in full, set the scheme in context and don’t assume that everyone else is familiar with the background to it.

• Tell the story: have there been prior discussions with the DAC, external consultees or local authority? How did they shape the scheme?

• Include a brief summary of the work you want to do if there are lots of supporting documents.

• Be honest about the reasons (even if the proposal isn’t accepted in its initial form, we can find a way forward if we have a starting point for future discussions).

• Include details of any equipment you want to introduced and plans and/or annotated photographs showing where it is to be placed.
Statement of Needs – and some don’ts…

• Worry about special pleading for toilets kitchenettes and disabled access – it’s accepted that churches need these things.

• Use speculative justifications, e.g. “We’ve held such-and-such an event in the church and it was a big success, but the pews got in the way and prevent us from expanding it” rather than “If we removed the pews then we could hold such-and-such an event”.

• Engage in emotional blackmail (“If we’re unable to do this, the church will close”).

• Deliberately try to play down the significance of something affected by a proposal.