

Why is the faculty process so hard?

QUESTION: WHY do faculties take so long? And why are they so expensive?

ANSWER: When a parish wants to revamp part of its church building to make it more welcoming or to engage with its local community, it can be frustrating that it takes a while to get permission. A parish often has to apply for a 'faculty' and get approval from our Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches (often called the DAC). This can all seem a little complex.

Imagine, therefore, that your parish has decided that it would like new toilets, or a modern extension, or a new kitchen in your church – to improve facilities for church or community groups meeting there. Your project might be quite ambitious and run into hundreds of thousands or even millions of pounds.

You would be keen to make sure you used the right materials in your building work, that you got value for money, and that you kept within legal constraints. You'd also want to preserve the

frequently asked questions

Our Archdeaconry consultations gave you a chance to ask staff from our four central diocesan sections questions about their work. Those questions were noted down and will form the basis of a new Pompey Chimes feature – in which we try to answer questions you're asking.

important historical elements to your building and the right ambience for worship too.

That's where our faculty process and Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches come in. The 'faculty' process was created as an alternative to applying via local authorities for consent to alter listed buildings. The thinking was that a specialised group of experts would be better placed to advise on changes to church buildings.

The ultimate legal authority in our diocese is the Chancellor, often a judge or senior barrister with plenty of experience. In our diocese, the Chancellor is His Honour Judge Philip Waller, who has held the post since 2014. It is

he who ultimately decides whether you can change something inside or outside your church building.

Our DAC therefore advises him on whether such a change is necessary or desirable. Our DAC is chaired by the dean of our cathedral, the Very Rev David Brindley, and includes all three archdeacons – who know our parish churches well – plus experts in buildings, organs, historic buildings, liturgy, architecture and church bells.

These people give their time for free to make sure that alterations are done in the most appropriate way. They have already committed themselves to try to say 'yes' to those changes that improve the mission of your

church. Our DAC secretaries (details below) may want to work with your church before it even submits a faculty to make sure the first draft of those plans is likely to be accepted.

The faculty application typically includes detailed plans, photos and estimates of costs, as well as details of the contractors who might be used. Sometimes delays come because a parish has submitted these plans right on or after the deadline for monthly DAC meetings – thus delaying the decision until the next month. At the end of this year, a new system will allow you to submit plans and track them online, making this part of the process simpler.

The DAC members might ask for a site visit so they can see what's being proposed more easily. They might make suggestions about improving the plans still further. They may want to consult with other interested parties such as Historic England.

Once the DAC has approved the plans, the parish pins up some public notices, telling its local community what is planned. It's important to check if any local residents have concerns. If people

do object, the details are sent to the Chancellor. He might approve the plans anyway.

This may all seem to take a while, but of course these alterations are designed to be long-term. There's no point creating a new extension and having to tear it down in three years' time because it is falling down or riddled with damp.

The fees involved help to pay for the legal and administrative costs. There are a few simpler alterations that an archdeacon can approve without the need for a faculty at all, and there may not be a fee at all for this.

The Church of England has recognised that the process can be quite complex. New simplified rules for faculties come into effect in January, and details of those changes will be circulated.

For more details, please see www.portsmouth.anglican.org/dac (where you can also see our DAC deadlines) or www.churchcare.co.uk.

You can also contact our DAC secretaries, Catherine Gray or David Cain, on 023-9289 9664 or portsmouth.executiveassistant@portsmouth.anglican.org.

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