

Open Doors Policy

Public access is one of the cornerstones of The Churches Conservation Trust. Use by the public and local community is the most fundamental element of conservation. A building is only properly cared for if it is understood, appreciated and enjoyed.

It is our policy that our buildings should be open to the public during daylight hours, 364 days a year. That can be achieved by-

1. 24/7
2. Opened and closed daily
3. Automatic, timed lock

In addition to the fundamental element of conservation there are other very strong practical reasons for keeping our churches open in daylight hours.

Public Benefit

Public access and use is the main criterion by which the Trust qualifies for charitable registration under the 'public benefit' test administered by the Charity Commission.

Visitor numbers

Many church visitors are put off if they find a locked door and have to go to find the key, no matter how clear the arrangement and instruction. Where an open church policy has been implemented, we have seen an immediate rise in visitor numbers.

Income

Leading on from this, the Trust are increasingly reliant on donations from visitors as core income. If we do not have the visitors, then we cannot achieve the income needed to repair our estate.

Security

Ecclesiastical Insurance recommend that churches are kept open because of the positive effect this has on security. An open church looks more cared-for, it attracts more visitors and interest from the community and therefore generates increased 'eyes and ears' - natural surveillance, which deters theft and vandalism. While there is always a risk of a small number of individuals abusing increased public opening, this again is outweighed by the benefit of natural surveillance.

Indeed we have found over the past number of year that the numbers of incidents of thefts and vandalism across the estate have not increased, despite steady increase in the number of churches kept open.

Sponsor/funder expectations

CCT's main funders, in particular the Government, expect significant public benefits to result from the money they provide. CCT is measured on the number of visitors its churches receive and this is directly related to the amount of hours a church is open.

Automatic Door Locks

Automatic door locks appear to be the most simple solution to getting churches opened regularly and reliably.

The system operates via a time control and a magnetic door lock. This can be either a magnetic bolt or magnetic shear depending on the type of door.

Depending on the door type and the way it closes it may be necessary for the lock and catch-plate to be mounted on or within an oak block mounted on the door. This will have to be assessed before installation and discussed and agreed with the architect etc. This may require the services of a carpenter to carry out this work if required.

Of course, all of this work may require Faculty.

In order to work, the lock must align precisely with the catch-plate. For this it may be necessary to make adjustments to existing door latch to allow precise alignment.

This system relies on visitors to the church closing the door and ensuring the existing door latch has been engaged. Failure to do so will mean the church may remain open all night. The installation of door a closer will prevent this problem but not all doors will be suitable.

An external keypad (if required) will be used to allow access during closed periods.

An emergency release must be provided within the church immediately adjacent door.

This facility will allow anyone who finds themselves locked in, a safe exit. This facility is, required by law.

Electromagnetic Locks

Electromagnetic locks consist of an armature and electromagnet plate. By attaching the armature plate to a door and an electromagnet to a door frame. Currents passing through the electromagnetic device naturally attract the armature plate and keeps the door shut.

Unlike electric strike locks, however, electro-magnetic locks have no interconnecting components and do not offer high security. By interrupting the power supply it is possible to bypass an electro-magnetic lock.

Whilst we can appreciate the attraction of automatic door locks, to date our experience has not been entirely positive.

Ecclesiastical Insurance is not in favour of these locks – taking the view, if it can fail, it will. They are also concerned that these systems can be easily overcome and often they do not show any indication if they have failed

- Their specification and installation costs and associated Faculty/Listed Building Consent can be expensive;
- They can impact negatively on the ancient fabric – such as cabling to provide power supply and any modifications to the door. All of which must be designed on a case-by-case basis;
- They are unreliable: they repeatedly fail or are fiddled with requiring contractor/electrician/locksmith attendance quite frequently
- If there is a power outage, the lock will fail in open mode;
- Beyond the cost implications and aesthetic impact, the greatest concern for all is that these systems can lead to neglect of a building. If there is no one opening the church daily or popping by, the site can appear abandoned and may be vulnerable to vandalism.