

Guidance for PCCs, incumbents and cathedral Chapters: opening church buildings for works to the building and interior

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Changes from version 3

This document draws together into one document guidance that was previously issued in two separate documents. *Guidance for PCCs, incumbents and cathedral Chapters: opening church buildings for works to the building and interior* and *Guidance for churches and cathedrals on access to their buildings for construction work during lockdown*.

This document now includes a link to an editable version of the template risk assessment for use by parishes when considering access for contractors and construction workers.

Links have been updated to the latest advice and guidance. This has not changed substantially since June.

Introduction

This advice is part of a set of guidance which aims to support PCCs, incumbents, and cathedral Chapters as steps are taken towards the re-opening of cathedral and church buildings. All these documents are available on the Church of England website via the [dedicated Coronavirus pages](#).

This note provides advice on access to church and cathedral buildings for professional contractors such as architects, conservators, archaeologists and ecologists, and for construction workers.

This guidance reflects the situation following the new guidance from the House of Bishops' on 5th May 2020 and the Prime Minister's address to the nation on 10th May and subsequently issued '[Our Plan to Rebuild](#)'. The [Prime Minister's statement on COVID-19 Winter Plans](#) on 23rd November did not change the advice in this note. Government guidance will continue to evolve so we will regularly review this advice. We also welcome questions and comments – please email churchcare@churchofengland.org.

The government guidance says that “ If you cannot work from home, you can go to work but your employer must make arrangements for you to work safely.” This applies to a number of contractors who routinely may work in your church, and they can now be welcomed back if they are able safely to do so. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Professionals carrying out regular maintenance of buildings, interiors, equipment, services, etc. This includes boiler inspections, testing of access systems, etc.
- Surveys and inspections that are undertaken as part of the regular cycle of good maintenance (for example quinquennial inspections, energy audits).
- Emergency repair and conservation work.
- Pre-planned repair and conservation work to address already identified issues.

- Surveys and inspections as part of the planning process for a project (ecology surveys, archaeological/ structural/engineering/conservation/building performance investigations).

Note that the requirements for Faculties and other permissions, where required, remain in place. You should inform your archdeacon as usual if works are to take place in the church.

Decisions on whether or not to allow construction to take place sits with the PCC or Chapter. This guidance aims to help clergy, PCCs and cathedral Chapters decide whether it is safe and appropriate to allow construction work to begin or re-start on their buildings. Construction work is allowed under government guidance and we are mindful that some contracts may include penalty clauses if access to the site is restricted. Getting construction projects underway again is part of preparing for the eventual re-opening of church and cathedral buildings to the general public.

Separate guidance is available via the Church of England Coronavirus pages for allowing access to a church or cathedral building for other works and activities to maintain, survey or inspect the building and its interior where this is not linked to a construction project.

Because our buildings have been closed for a number of weeks we would suggest you find ways to communicate to the church/cathedral community and wider public the circumstances in which limited access to the building is being allowed to resume. It is important to give reassurance that necessary safety procedures are being followed.

Church buildings can now begin to re-open to the public

Churches and cathedrals are legally permitted to open for purposes of individual private prayer from 13th June, and under House of Bishops guidance to open for funerals from 15th June. Any church which is carrying out construction work or allowing access to contractors, and which is also considering opening for private prayer or funerals will have to balance access between these groups.

Allowing construction work to resume does not necessarily require the return of clergy, volunteers or lay staff except as may be necessary to give access to the building. Contractor/client meetings should be conducted remotely. If you are not comfortable leaving the house, meeting others at a distance, opening and closing the building and directing people to facilities, and especially if you are in a group classed as vulnerable, you should say so and don't do these things. See if there is someone else in your community who is willing to undertake these duties. Your Archdeacon or DAC Secretary can help if difficulties arise.

If construction is to resume in one part of a building whilst private prayer resumes in another then consider how you can avoid unnecessary interaction. For example, can construction workers use a dedicated entrance and bathroom facilities? Can entrance times be staggered? There is more detail on managing multiple building users in our guidance for clergy entering buildings for prayer and worship, which can be found via the [Church of England Coronavirus pages](#).

In most cases volunteers will not be accessing construction sites, but if they are doing so the PCC or Chapter has a duty of care to ensure they have access to the same safety equipment and have the same information as everyone else.

Checklist

Before you allow any contractors on site you or your project manager, inspecting architect or other professional managing the work should check the following. The template risk assessment at the end of this document may help you do this.

1. Does the contractor have up to date liability insurance for all the work they will be doing?
2. Has your contractor carried out a risk assessment for themselves and their staff, updated to reflect the latest government advice on Covid-19? Contractors should have clear protocols in place to ensure safe working and you should seek written confirmation of the measures they will take before allowing work to resume.
3. It is the responsibility of the main contractor to ensure that workers on site have proper safety protocols in place. Construction workers should follow [government guidance on safe working during the pandemic](#), which includes recommendations on social distancing.
4. The Construction Leadership Council has published [detailed advice on how to implement the government guidance](#), which you may wish to ask your contractor to refer to. An important point to note in this guidance is that the wearing of facemasks is not a substitute for social distancing: for activities where it is impossible to maintain a two-metre distance between workers, each activity should be risk assessed using the hierarchy of controls and against any sector-specific guidance, with facemasks the last resort in the hierarchy.
5. Has your contractor shown you evidence that they have considered safe working practices of contractors and sub-contractors? It could be useful to ask them to refer to the [Construction \(Design and Management\) Regulations 2015](#).
6. Will there be multiple people on site at once, not from the same contractor? If so, consult the advice below on multiple access.
7. Will contractors be working on their own in the building? Ecclesiastical Insurance provides [guidance on lone working](#). As with all lone working, the PCC should (through the project manager, inspecting architect or other professional managing the project if there is one) ensure they are satisfied with the lone working practices as part of the Construction Design Management Regulations 2015. You may wish the contractor to cordon off areas to limit areas the contractor can access during their work.
8. Even though responsibility for contractor staff usually lies with the contractor, the PCC or Chapter does have general responsibility under occupiers liability for any staff or volunteers, so you should carry out a risk assessment for any of your staff or volunteers entering the building, or instruct a suitable person such as your project manager to do so, and confirm they have done so. You may wish to use the template available through the [Church of England Coronavirus pages](#).
9. Some construction will involve lay staff, especially in cathedrals and major churches. In this case the liability for ensuring safe working lies with their employer – usually the PCC or cathedral. The same safety protocols as for contractors must also cover staff such as stonemasons, and professionals supporting construction work, such as conservators and archaeologists. [Guidance on safe working for archaeologists](#) has been issued by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists and the Royal Institute of British Architects has [extensive materials available for architects](#).

Where there is a need to enable access, or where face to face discussions with contractors are needed, these should be undertaken using good practice around hygiene and social distancing. Those classed as vulnerable should avoid such contact and request that such action be undertaken by others in their church community who are willing to undertake these duties.

Advice on having multiple contractors on site

With projects being delayed during lockdown, the Chapter or PCC may have a number of different activities it wants to start or resume as soon as possible. A good cleaning regime and clear signage directing people towards hygiene requirements, along with processes to monitor who is coming in and out of the building are the best ways to achieve this.

If you do want to have multiple contractors on site then a good way to prioritise work is to consider the urgency of the activity and its importance.

Your QI, project manager or other professional would be able to help with this.

Factors to consider when assessing **urgency**:

- Works that keep the building water-tight and safe (e.g. urgent roof repairs, electrical works)
- Works that have a specific season of the year when they must be completed (e.g. bat surveys)
- Financial penalties if work does not happen now
- Necessity for regular maintenance and survey work that prevents more urgent works from being needed in the future

Factors to consider when assessing **importance**:

- Does this work keep church users safe?
- Does this work make the building usable?
- Are the historic fabric and interiors deteriorating without this work?
- Necessity for works such as surveys that will help with medium-term planning (e.g. QI inspections)

Please bear in mind that the outcome of the assessments will be different for each church building. Some places will be able to accommodate more workers than others.

If multiple people are to access a building, even one at a time, then there should ideally be clearly marked areas for each. If this is not possible then a risk assessment should be undertaken by the PCC or a suitable representative, and written down, and all individuals entering the building must be warned of the risks.

What do I do if someone is diagnosed with Covid-19 within 7 days of accessing the site?

If you learn that someone who has suspected or confirmed Covid-19 has been on your site then it should be cleaned in line with [Public Health England Advice](#).

If it is possible, then for historic buildings with surfaces that will be damaged by the products used during decontamination, quarantining the building for 72 hours is advised instead. Historic England provides [advice on what to do for historic surfaces](#). A simple alternative if you cannot quarantine the building and do not have access to specialist cleaning materials is to use mild washing up liquid and warm water.

It should be noted that construction workers (including archaeologists working on construction sites) are eligible to apply for Coronavirus testing if they exhibit symptoms. Details of how to book a test are [available here](#).

What do I do if I am concerned that contractors are not following the agreed procedures?

Assuming that your contract states that the contractor is responsible for carrying out a risk assessment and you believe they are not following this then they could be in breach of contract. In most cases if someone is concerned, they should immediately remotely contact the main contractor, and record that interaction, asking them to rectify the issue. If they do not do so in reasonable time, then you should consider not allowing them back on site.

Your project manager, inspecting architect or other professional can support in this.

Useful links

Many professional organisations have links to guidance for contractors on safe working practices and Covid-19. A number are listed below:

[Guidance for construction work](#)

[Guidance for Architects and Surveyors and Guidance for Architects](#) [Guidance for archaeologists](#)

[Guidance for organ builders](#)

[Guidance for ecologists](#)