

CHURCHYARD BENCHES

A GUIDE TO BENCHES
IN CHURCHYARDS

THE ROLE OF THE DAC

The DAC is an advisory body. Where a PCC submits a List B application for the Archdeacon's permission, or submits a petition for the grant of a faculty by the Chancellor, the DAC will refer to the appropriate policy document when advising the relevant parties. The DAC's intention is that such policies will make it clear to parishes what is likely to gain the committee's immediate support.

Where a PCC submits an application which is not in line with the DAC's policy, the PCC will need to explain why that deviation is necessary, so that the Archdeacon or Chancellor (as appropriate) can consider this when reaching their decision.

INTRODUCTION

Churchyards, particularly those in rural locations, should have the character of a burial ground surrounding a place of worship, peaceful and beautiful (not a municipal park), and therefore any items introduced into them should be in harmony with that special character. Benches in churchyards are often intended as memorials, but often they are given for the use of those visiting the churchyard, providing somewhere for rest and quiet contemplation.

PROCESS

The introduction of a bench into a churchyard requires the Archdeacon's permission, so a List B application should be submitted via the online faculty system, selecting item B6 (1).

When a List B application is submitted it should be supported by:

- A plan of the church and churchyard (a sketch plan will suffice), and photographs to show where the new bench is to be positioned;
- A photograph or catalogue illustrations of the bench;
- Details of any memorial plaque to be attached or any inscription to be applied, including the exact wording and if possible the style of lettering.

FACTORS WHICH THE DAC WILL CONSIDER

When presented with an application for the introduction of a churchyard bench, the factors which the DAC and the Archdeacon will take into account include the following:

- The reason for the introduction of the bench;
- If the churchyard already has other benches, whether the addition of another bench is appropriate and/or useful;
- Location – benches are often placed in prominent positions in the churchyard and so they may impact on the appearance of the church and its setting; will the choice of bench and location be likely to affect the character of the church as a building of special architectural or historic interest?
- Material – as wood is a material which harmonises with any churchyard setting, benches should be of timber, preferably hardwood (e.g. English Oak) and sourced from a sustainable forest (FSC); stone (preferably local) or metal (cast or wrought iron) may be acceptable in some circumstances, but mock-timber recycled plastic benches are invariably not as they would introduce into the curtilage of the church a material which was not already part of the fabric);

- Construction – benches should be well-constructed and robust (domestic style benches from garden centres or DIY chains may not be robust enough for long-term public use, so their purchase should be carefully considered);
- Design – benches should be simple and conservative in design;
- Inscription – any inscription should comply with the Churchyard Memorial Regulations (Rule 4.8); if the bench is of timber or stone then a carved inscription is preferred as it becomes part of the design of the seat (whereas attached plaques can appear somewhat municipal) and an inscribed bench is less vulnerable to theft than one from which an attached plaque can simply be removed;
- Base – whether the bench will sit on grass, gravel, flagstones, with/without ground anchors (poured concrete will not usually be acceptable).

OTHER GUIDANCE AND RESOURCES

Consistory court judgements

Re St Mary the Virgin, Ashbury [2021] ECC Oxf 5

A helpful judgement from the Diocese of Oxford which considers the installation, in the churchyard of a Grade I listed rural church, of a new bench made from metal and recycled plastic. Notification of Advice from the DAC was to “Not recommend”. Faculty granted on condition that the PCC reconsidered their proposal before proceeding.

EXAMPLES



CONTACT

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