

DAC Strategy on Biodiversity

The DAC strategy on biodiversity flows from the Diocesan Environmental Policy. It recognises the contribution that the 400 parish churches and other places of worship, their curtilage land and churchyards make to the provision of varied habitat in both urban and rural settings in all parts of the Diocese. [Other diocesan bodies have responsibility for the management of investment land and clergy housing.]

It is a strategy for informing, advising and supporting parishes in the management, care and development of their church buildings and churchyards to support and enhance biodiversity, alongside the functions of care of the church building as a local centre of mission and worship as well as heritage, and care of the churchyard as a place for burial, commemoration and reflection.

The DAC strategy is:

1. To ensure that the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity are taken into account in DAC advice, generally and in casework.
2. To inform and encourage parishes to understand and appreciate the value of the churchyard, curtilage land and church building for nature, and the existing habitats and species the churchyard, land and church building support.
3. To provide information and advice to help parishes to map and assess the relative value of habitats and species for biodiversity.
4. To ensure that parishes have regard to the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity alongside other factors such as the care of historic fabric, needs for mission and outreach, and Net Zero Carbon, in developing schemes of repair and in making changes.

Churchyards

The DAC will support parishes to care, understand and celebrate their churchyards. Churchyards are important as they provide habitats for a range of animals, insects and birds. This is due to them often having had relatively little change and disruption compared to areas of housing developments and fields used for farming.

Like church buildings, churchyards are protected by the Faculty Jurisdiction. Some changes can be done without permission, under Minor Matters List A, and other work is covered by Minor Matters List B, which is authorised by an Archdeacon's Letter after DAC consultation. This means that the DAC is able to advise parishes about changes to churchyards to ensure that biodiversity is cared for and, where possible, enhanced. Whether permission is needed or not, parishes should always seek to consider the impact of changes on biodiversity within their churchyard.

The DAC provides guidance on a range of topics relating to churchyards at: [Churchyard Advice Leaflets - The Diocese of St Albans](#)

In particular, the leaflet on Managing Churchyards for Wildlife provides clear advice on the positive steps which can be undertaken to enhance biodiversity. The DAC will review and keep this guidance up to date.

ChurchCare also provide advice and guidance about biodiversity which includes some of the positive steps parishes can take: [Churchyard Wildlife | The Church of England](#).

When parishes are making a change to their churchyard, the DAC will want to see evidence that the impact on the following has been considered:

- Lichen
- Wildflowers
- Trees
- Birds
- Insects
- Bats
- Other animals using the churchyard
- Water supply/management

In some churchyards, there will be issues created by some of the biodiversity. For example, from rabbits eating churchyard flowers and making the ground uneven; foxes and muntjac tunnelling around graves; or squirrels may even use lead to sharpen their teeth or damage wooden roof tiles. In these cases, contact the DAC team with some context and details of the problems and they will point you in the direction of advice and support.

Church Buildings

While churchyards and church car parks can be home to a wide and varied number of wildlife species, church buildings are perfect for offering safe spaces for bats and swifts.

Bats

Many of our churches within the diocese are very attractive to bats; their activity can be both a blessing and a curse to a church but when handled properly congregation and bats can exist in harmony. It's thought that at least 8 of the 17 species of bats breeding in Britain use churches; churches have attractive nooks and crevices that offer security when roosting at a time when their other natural habitats such as old trees and barns are increasingly disappearing. There is also the added attraction of churchyards close by offering a rich and varied source of food.

Natural England, Historic England, the Churches Conservation Trust and the Bat Conservation Trust undertook a five-year project – *Bats in Churches* – which has now ended. As a result, an invaluable amount of information was collected alongside the advice already available:

[Bats in churches | The Church of England](#)

[Building Works and Bats | Historic England](#)

[Home - Bats In Churches](#)

Churches in England are eligible for free bat advice from Natural England which may include a free visit by a trained volunteer. Call: 0345 1300 228

Swifts

Though swifts only spend 3 or 4 months each summer in Britain, church buildings can play an important role in the future survival of swifts whose numbers have been decreasing for several decades. They also find churches' nooks and crevices attractive to nest in. Churches can also help by installing swift boxes: [Swift Conservation Homepage](#)

Practical advice can be found here:

[Action for Swifts: Swift Nest Boxes in Church Belfries](#)

[Action for Swifts: churches](#) (by placing a camera in a nest box and linking it to a church website the local community can get to know the nesting habits of swifts as well spotting them in flight).

The table below shows the changes parishes could make to their churchyards and church buildings and highlights the points which should be considered in relation to biodiversity. The DAC will need to see that parishes have thought about these points as part of an application.

Work/Proposal description	Permission needed	Information which must be submitted to the DAC	Points to consider	Resources/more information
Tree work (as covered by Minor Matters List A)	None but this can be confirmed with the DAC Team	None (if checking the permission, then please include a quotation with the details)	If the tree you wish to manage has nesting birds, bat roosts or badger setts at its base, you will need a professional survey and may have to apply to Natural England for a licence before you can do the work The bird nesting season officially extends from February until August. If you are dealing with a mature tree, with cavities, you will require a bat survey, before you start	The Church of England's Tree Guidance
Tree planting	List B permission	Location of the proposed tree (marked on a churchyard plan and with photographs) Type of tree	Where possible, local and/or native tree varieties should be selected Plot the tree and its girth onto a churchyard plan to check it will not cause issues for existing structures which might lead to its future removal, and also think about potential issues with shading The Church of England's Tree Guidance (see link to the right) is statutory, so the PCC must have regard to it	The Church of England's Tree Guidance
Creation of community orchards	List B permission	Location of the trees (marked on a churchyard plan and with photographs) Type of trees	It will take a minimum of five years for the trees to get above head height and feel like an orchard; nuts will be eaten by squirrels and lots of watering will be required. A management committee of at least 5 members is advised; insurance is required; there will be a cost of £15-£25 per tree for good stock and other costs will be needed for equipment, fencing etc. Even dwarf stock requires significant space between trees and restricted sites between buildings will not be suitable. Soils which are waterlogged in winter should be avoided and subsoil must be thoroughly broken up	The Orchard Project Social Farms & Gardens Orchard People Funding from the Tree Council Funding from the Orchard Project

			before planting; avoid soil where fruit trees have grown in the past; the site should be sunny. Varieties which are compatible for pollination are advised and local varieties.	
Tree felling	Faculty, unless it is dying, dead or dangerous which requires List B permission	Advice (usually in the form of a report) from an arboriculturist. <i>Note: if a report is from a tree contractor, it must be commissioned separately to any quotation for works. A tree consultant is best placed to advise on works to healthy trees.</i> Churchyard plan marking the location of the tree(s) Permission from the local planning authority if within a conservation area or the tree has a TPO	If the tree you wish to manage has nesting birds, bat roosts or badger setts at its base, you will need a professional survey and may have to apply to Natural England for a licence before you can do the work The bird nesting season officially extends from February until August. If you are dealing with a mature tree, with cavities, you will require a bat survey, before you start Consideration should be given to replacement tree planting (possibly in a different location) Can some wood from the felled trees be retained in the churchyard to create habitats for wildlife? Can the stump be left in situ for ivy or other plant growth?	The Church of England's Tree Guidance [The <i>Works to Trees in Churchyards</i> leaflet includes links to registers of tree consultants and tree contractors]
Cleaning churchyard memorials (including the removal of ivy/weeds from stone)	Faculty (unless being done directly by the family with the incumbent's permission – check with the DAC team)	Details of the cleaning equipment and techniques to be used Justification of the need to clean the memorial because it is more likely to cause harm to the memorial	Removal of ivy and other weeds from memorial stones must be done with care to avoid greater damage The removal of lichen is a specialist task and should not be necessary as it is likely conserving the detail on the memorial Over 700 of the 2000 UK lichen species are found in burial grounds – take a look at the links in the right hand column to find out more	The Church of England's Conservation of Monuments Historic England's Guidance on Monuments Historic England's Guidance on cleaning War Memorials The Living Churchyards Project (for lichen library)

				Caring for God's Acre Lichen Guidance
Burials in new land which is ancient/species-rich grassland	Consecration for extension to the churchyard. Preliminary steps will include planning permission for change of use, following assessment of the suitability of the land.	N/A (unless requesting a faculty for an extension to the churchyard which requires plans and photographs)	Thought must be given to appropriate care of the grassland in areas proposed for burial. Identification of the species is an important first step Consider the water table; is there a risk of contaminating local water sources? [This will be part of the preliminary checks on the suitability of the new land for burials. Advice will be needed from the Diocesan Registry at an early stage.]	The DAC's advice on New Land For Burials
Reburial in ancient/species-rich grassland	Faculty	Plans and photographs Details of proposals for marking the area aside and for marking burials Evidence of publicity and consultation with families	Thought must be given to appropriate care of the grassland in areas proposed for reburial. Identification of the species is an important first step Consider the water table; is there a risk of contaminating local water sources?	Chancellor's guidance on use of churchyard land for further burials
Drainage and disturbance of turf	Faculty (List B for various investigative works)	Plan and photo of the area to be disturbed Identification of any important species of grassland	Is there any other way to carry out the work without disturbing turf? Provision for care of any important species of wildflower	Contact the DAC team
Lighting in the churchyard	List A for unwired lighting to	Plan and photos of the path	If the lighting is being introduced for security measures, could infrared cameras and movement sensors be used instead? Could movement	The Church of England's Lighting Guidance

(including church floodlights)	mark the edge of a path, otherwise a faculty	Details/specification of the lights Details of how the lights will be operated	sensors be used to prevent the lights from staying on for long periods? Some light colours and frequencies can be harmful to animals and insects so this must be considered. The direction of the light could impact some animals. Generally, low level path lighting is less harmful than floodlighting If your church has bats, a scheme must formally assess the likely impact on them.	Historic England's External Lighting Guidance
Erection of permanent buildings/garden furniture within the churchyard (e.g. shed/bench)	List B permission for benches, otherwise a full faculty	Details of location (plan and photo) and fixings to secure the furniture. Details of any plaques or wording.	What impact will the proposal have on the existing biodiversity? Will it have an impact on any future biodiversity which could be encouraged in the churchyard?	The Diocese of Chelmsford's Seats and Benches in Churchyards Guidance
Dealing with invasive species, such as Japanese Knotweed or Himalayan/Indian Balsam	No permission under faculty rules; some works may be notifiable to the local authority		Before disposing of any parts of Japanese Knotweed or Himalayan/Indian knotweed, contact your local authority because it is illegal to plant Japanese knotweed and it can grow from a small piece of root or stem.	Caring for God's Acre's guidance on Pesky Plants and Animals Government rules and advice on invasive non-native plant species Government rules and advice on stopping knotweed Japanese from spreading
Dealing with badgers/other protected species	List B for investigative work/Faculty for some interventions	Details and photograph of the issue; advice from a licenced ecologist	Is the sett active? When will the work take place? Work often cannot be carried out over winter. Will the work be carried out by a licenced ecologist?	The Badger Trust

Repairs to church buildings	List B permission /Faculty depending on extent of work	Specification (and schedule of work) to include details of materials, when the work will be carried out, location and photographs where appropriate	If bats are present, will the timing of the work impact them? The Church of England guidance (link to the right) includes a timetable of suggested optimal times to avoid bat disturbance. Will the work impact how bats access the building? For more extensive works, a bat survey will be needed if they are present in your church.	The Church of England's bat guidance The Bats in Churches Project The National Bat Helpline
Reordering, especially subdivision; new heating; lighting	Faculty (List B for some minor items)	Specification to include materials etc.; location plans; photographs; timing of work	If bats are present, will the timing of the work impact them? The Church of England guidance (link to the right) includes a timetable of suggested optimal times to avoid bat disturbance. Will the work impact how bats access the building? Would subdivision restrict access to roosts? For more extensive works, a bat survey will be needed if they are present in your church.	The Church of England's bat guidance The Bats in Churches Project The National Bat Helpline
Pests/invasive species, including wasps, masonry bees, rodents including glis glis, corvids and pigeons in roofs and towers	Seek advice from the DAC team	Details of advice received and the problem; proposed solution	Is there any risk other, harmless (including protected) species could be harmed as a result of the proposal? Electronic devices against rodents could be harmful to bats.	The Church of England's Biodiversity guidance
Bat mitigation measures	Ranges from no permission (e.g. most cleaning) to faculty for other interventions	Bat survey; details of the issue; details of the proposal and any advice received	Has professional advice been received about the proposals and how the bats use the building? When will the work be carried out to minimise risk to the bats?	The Church of England's Biodiversity guidance The Church of England's bat guidance The Bats in Churches Project

				The National Bat Helpline For funding, including from the Buildings for Mission diocesan grant scheme see the grants pages .
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