

How to manage a Church Building project

**Plymouth and Exeter Methodist District Property Day
21 September 2012**

Introduction:

The emphasis of this talk is on 'Church' - not 'Building'; we are considering projects that are motivated by a desire to build the Church, rather than primarily sustaining or maintaining the building.

The focus is mainly on the initial phases; you will have professionals to advise you once the scheme starts to progress.

Initial Planning phase:

The most important phase, and often the hardest to get right:

Why do you need (do you need?) to embark on a Church Building Project in the first place?

Some mistaken reasons:

Dissatisfaction with Church gets attached to apparently dysfunctional building; declining numbers, aging membership, lack of 'connectivity' with community.

Personal dislikes (pews and bad loos!).

Temptation to focus on a predetermined 'solution' to a problem that may not exist.

Analyse the problem:

What is wrong with the building as it is?

Some things may be glaringly obvious - the loos are woefully inadequate, the pews painful and you can't get inside the building using a wheelchair.

But before you can answer the question, **you need to know what it is you are trying to do as a Church.**

Avoid a piecemeal approach to sorting out any issues - real or perceived - with no overall plan or objective. Establish a long term vision for the building, possibly through a phased delivery.

Building Development Group:

Needs to be mission and vision led.

Make up of group; avoid temptation to dominate the membership with 'nuts and bolts' property people, the group will need visionaries and mission led people.

The group will need to be perceived as endorsed by Church leadership / authority - in many cases, this probably means the Minister needs to be included.

Found on and support the group with prayer - involve God in the decision making process!

At this stage, the role of the group will be to look at how the building equips the Church's mission - current and future: What are the buildings shortcomings? In what ways does it restrict or obstruct the Church's mission? **Focus on the problems - not the solutions.**

Practical suggestions:

Audit existing uses.

Audit existing spaces.

Analyse expected and target uses.

Appoint a professional advisor.

Selecting an architect or surveyor:

Architect or Surveyor? Depends largely on the nature of the shortcomings you have identified; if these are pragmatic, a Surveyor may be best. If the shortcomings suggest a wider, more visionary, approach is needed, an Architect may be best).

The Methodist website page 'appointing an architect':

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/property/technical-and-conservation/appointing-architects>

This has links to the Royal Institute of British Architects and Royal Chartered Institute of Surveyor's websites.

Talk to other Churches that have done similar projects.

Talk to District Property team.

Check websites of possible companies; evidence of similar projects - type and scale - to yours.

Meet - relationship with your professional advisor is important. How do they propose to develop your project and how will they charge for the various stages.

Ask for references and check Professional Indemnity cover.

Feasibility scheme design

Please note, this is our approach - other professional consultants may differ.

'Architect' is used as shorthand for 'architect or surveyor'.

Development Group and architect meet to discuss group's findings and establish a brief for the project.

The architect produces an initial design (feasibility study). This would consider appropriate possible options - different solutions, scale of project, phasing.

Once the Development Group is happy that the feasibility scheme answers the key issues, it is presented to the wider Church for their endorsement: Church Council, but also consider: members and adherents, other community users or target groups. There is likely to be some

dissent, this probably can't be avoided, but it is important how it is dealt with. In any event, it will be much harder to progress a scheme without broad support from the Church as a whole - but probably not as hard as progressing without God's support!

Budget advice

Note that we haven't talked about costs up to now! This is deliberate (but see next item). I would suggest that initially it is more important to focus on what needs to be done than restrict vision with concern over cost.

Get a professional cost exercise carried out (your architect can advise how to go about this).

Progressing the scheme design

Consider the scale and cost of the proposals. Is the scheme affordable? What are the probable timescales (planning, fundraising and construction)? What are the phasing options? Time for a reality check - notwithstanding faith!

The architect, working with the development group, evolves and refines the design of scheme to a definitive proposal.

Keep the Church community informed; misinformation and a conviction that 'nothing is happening' can derail a scheme, spread general dissent and undermine fundraising.

Consents:

Methodist consents are the subject of a talk later on.

Your architect will guide you through the statutory consents (Building Regulations and Planning permissions).

Listed Building consent deserves a particular mention - whilst your architect will guide you through the process, this can be very protracted and time consuming. If you are considering substantial changes to the fabric of a listed building, anticipate a long haul, be sure there are convincing (missional) arguments to support your proposals and be determined!

Consider and put processes in place for any property disposal or purchase - obtain legal and Methodist advice.

Fundraising:

This is a subject in its own right, so we are only going to touch on it:

I would suggest that if the Church community does not show financial commitment to the project, it is unreasonable to expect others to do so.

You will need funds in place from the outset to cover professional fees.

In our experience, a 'pot of gold' is the exception rather than the rule.

It has been said of Churches that generally, vision is in shorter supply than money!

Timescale:

The project will almost certainly take longer to realise than you would like.

Take a realistic look at the programme, discuss this with your architect, consider the approvals process (especially listed building consent, if applicable), phasing of the works, Church meeting timings for approvals and fundraising.

Keep your Church community informed!

Realisation

Development Group:

At this stage, with the scheme design fixed, the role of the Development Group shifts and it may well be appropriate for its membership to change to reflect this.

Its principal role will now be to act as the Church's representative to the professional team and contractor.

Communication - who is the point of contact for the architect and who reports back to the Church?

Limit of authority - whilst major decisions will need referring back to Church Council, the Development Group will need to make and authorise day to day decisions in order for the project to progress smoothly. It is best if this is established in advance by Church Council.

Professional team:

As the scheme develops toward construction, you will likely require other professional consultants. Your architect / surveyor should advise and assist with this.

Depending on the scale and nature of the scheme, these may include:

- Quantity Surveyor (cost consultant).
- CDM (health and safety) co-ordinator.
- Structural engineer.
- Building services engineer.
- Environmental engineer.

Use of premises during construction:

This is likely to be restricted and the Church may need to consider alternative venues.

Availability of funds for building works:

For all but the smallest projects, the contractor will be entitled to stage payments as work proceeds. Before you enter into a contract for the construction of the project, you will need to have the funds in place, or at the very least be able to demonstrate that they will be in place, for the projected stage payments. Once you have signed the contract, you are legally obliged to pay the contractor for work they have done.

A plea:

Keep out and let the professionals do their jobs!

It is understandable that people will be interested but please, please bare in mind two key things:

Health and safety: On all but the smallest projects, the contractor will be legally responsible for 'the site' (your Church!). YOU ARE NOT PERMITTED to enter the site without their permission.

Communication: Please do not ask the contractor to change, add or omit things! Ask your architect and let them sort it out with the contractor. The reason for this is to protect both you and the contractor and ensure the smooth running of the project.

Completion

Celebration!

Our job will now (largely) be done. Yours - the Church - can now continue!

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