

INSTALLING WCS AND KITCHENS

Guidance note

from the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches
2016



Many PCCs wish to install WC and Kitchen/Servery facilities in their church buildings. There is no statutory requirement to do this under current legislation, however any facilities that are provided must fulfil the requirements of the Building Regulations, and so make all reasonable provision for full access and use by people with disabilities.

The DAC's policy recognises the needs of the church's mission and encourages the installation of such facilities where it is reasonable to do so. However, the DAC also has a duty to seek to conserve the historic fabric, the interior and exterior setting, and the character of our churches.

The DAC offers its advice to help PCCs. It can also share with those PCCs starting to think about providing these facilities, the experience of many other parishes and suggest visits to places where similar projects have been successfully completed.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Having completed the Statement of Significance and Needs which informs the process, the DAC would encourage PCCs to first look at whether the facilities they want can be contained within the existing structure of the building, rather than in an extension. PCCs will need to demonstrate that they have explored every possibility internally and explain fully the pros and cons, including the impact on the church interior, before proposing that an extension or separate building is the only option. These details should be provided in an options appraisal within the Statement of Needs.

In most cases the DAC will advise that:

- Screens, cupboards and finishes should complement existing fabric of the building and be of a comparable quality. This does not preclude contemporary design provided that it is well considered and relates to the area in which it is set. It is expected that, wherever possible, the wood will be indigenous timber rather than an imported variety, and from a sustainable source.
- The standard of materials and quality of workmanship should equal or surpass that which is already in the building.
- Partitions should be of a sound-insulated framework and plastered or timber panelled rather than blockwork; they should not require foundations excavated into the church floor. The aim in listed buildings is to provide structures which, when removed in the future, do no long standing damage to the historic fabric.
- WC doorways should, wherever possible, be designed in such a way that they do not open directly into the nave. Ideally it should not be possible for anyone in the nave to see into the cubicle when the door is open. If there is no other option a lobby should be created between the WC and the nave. PCCs are discouraged from providing facilities at the east end of the church.
- Where kitchen/servery areas are within the body of the church (often at the west end

of an aisle) they should be built with well-made woodwork and with sinks and draining boards placed so that they are not visible from the main body of the church, or are concealed within the joinery. It is expected that the cupboards will be of cabinet-maker quality design and construction. Where the

kitchen/servery is located elsewhere standard “kitchen” type units of high quality from high-street outlets may be considered.

- All electrical work associated with WC and kitchen installations should be carried out by a full scope NICEIC, ECA or NAPIT approved contractor.

WC OPTIONS

The solution for a WC installation will vary from church to church, depending on location, building type etc. As stated above, it is preferable if a location can be found within the existing church building. If this is not possible, the principle of either extending the building or constructing a separate building in the churchyard should be discussed with the DAC at an early stage. Any extension of the church or a new structure in the churchyard will also need Local Authority planning permission, so the involvement of the Local Authority at an early stage is also crucial. In all cases, disabled access door widths and fittings must be as set out in Part M of the Building Regulations and approval sought from the Local Authority.

A survey of the churchyard and adjoining roads showing measurements and levels will inform the decision on which option is viable, for it is necessary to demonstrate that paths, and access routes to the WC meet the requirement of the Building Regulations and the Disability Discrimination Act with regard to gradients.

The drainage route from where the WC is to be located within the church and to the outside drains will need to be considered, with its impact on the floor and external wall.

The type of WC installation in terms of connection to water and drainage also presents a variety of options:

1. Connection to mains drainage

Details of the positions and depth of the public sewers in the roads adjacent to the church will be required and are available from South West Water. With this information it will be possible to see whether connecting into the public sewer is a viable option.

Issues relating to the fall on the drain to meet the requirements of the Building Regulations may highlight difficulties with the location of graves, trees and other structures within the churchyard.

Such a connection may require a pump if the main sewer is above the floor level of the proposed WC. The location of such a pump and its sump needs to be carefully considered and whether it is possible to locate it in the churchyard with minimal impact

There are on-costs, with regard to the approval of the connection and the associated works to make good the road on completion, associated with connecting to a main sewer; a building contractor will be able to provide a budget for this.

2. Trench Arch system

The Environment Agency and Devon Building Control have accepted this system in rural areas where the usage will be minimal or sporadic.

The system consists of a shallow trench, often located beneath a path and capped with slabs before the path is re-laid. Into this the drain from the WC or kitchen discharges.

The fluid disperses into the ground around the trench and the solids are disposed of by worms.

Careful consideration will need to be given to the location of the trench to ensure minimal archaeological disturbance.

Approval from the Environmental Agency is required and percolation tests will be necessary to check the porosity of the soil – the more porous the better. Formal discharge consent is required from the Environment Agency; the application for which should be accompanied by a letter explaining that it is for a low volume (less than 5 cubic metres per day) trench arch discharge system.

3. Cesspit / Septic tank

Current septic tanks are formed from pre-formed fibre glass 'bottles' which are set in the ground. The excavation for the tank will initially be quite extensive and, again, percolation tests will be necessary where the land drains are to be sited. The location of graves, trees, and other structures may impact on whether this option is viable.

A septic tank will require run-off land drains; the extent of which depends on the porosity of the ground. It may be too complex to fit the land drains within the confines of the churchyard. It may be possible to site the tank and its drainage on adjoining land with consent of the owner. The Environmental Agency has a set of requirements with regard to the location of septic tanks to water courses, wells and boreholes to prevent pollution and advice will be forthcoming from the Building Inspector.



Wherever the location of the tank it must be sited in such a way that it can be reached by a specialist contractor for the emptying or removing of sludge – typically 30 metres from tanker to septic tank or cesspool.

Current cesspits are a preformed fibre glass 'bottle' similar to a septic tank but without any run

off drains; therefore issues relating to pollution do not occur. It is a holding system which must be emptied on a regular basis, and must be located such that it is accessible from an adjoining road. The siting of a cesspit has the same issues as a septic tank.



4. Composting system

Some churches in the Diocese have in the last 10 years or so installed composting WCs, in one case within the church building, and in others in a separate building in the churchyard. These can be a good solution for rural churches, where connection to mains water or drainage is problematic and/or expensive.

Although each location is slightly different, the equipment within is always the same, and consists of a dry composting toilet run on electricity only. No drainage, water supply, or chemicals are needed. Compost toilets are less disruptive of church fabric and archaeology than cesspools or septic tank systems and the residue provides good compost.

There are two types of composting WC; one that requires electricity and has a self-contained humus tray within the WC. The compost is retained in a tray within the WC fitting. The amount of usage determines how often the tray has to be emptied. Various capacity WC's are available depending on the projected usage. These environmentally friendly toilets are about the same size as a conventional convenience. They are odour-free, simple to install and require minimal maintenance. The churchwardens of those churches who have

installed they are happy to talk to other parishes about how they work; contact details can be obtained from the DAC office.

The second type discharges into a 'vault' below the WC floor from which the finished compost is removed. This system does require a soakaway.

KITCHEN OPTIONS

The scale of facilities installed will very much depend on what activities the PCC intends to hold in the building. A facility which will be needed to serve drinks after a service will be quite different from that required to serve hot meals in the church. The PCC's needs will dictate what is required, and will form the brief for the church's architect or surveyor.

An area for serving drinks will usually be in the form of a 'servery' – somewhere with a sink, storage, electrical points and a place for serving. A 'kitchen in a cupboard' is ideal for this, and many examples have been installed in the Diocese, all slightly different to suit the church in question. Some are very basic with no water or mains drainage provided, while others have all mod cons. It is recommended that fixed water boilers are installed for the provision of hot water, rather than the use of kettles, both for health and safety reasons and to eliminate too much steam being created in the building.

Should the PCC wish to install a full kitchen, with a cooker etc. in order to be able to provide meals in the church, other issues will need to be considered, such as ventilation, cooking smells and provision for hand washing in accordance with Public Health legislation. The Local Authority would need to be involved with approving the facilities in such a situation.

Whatever the usage it is important to think, when considering the location for the kitchen/servery, about how the water supply is to reach the sink, and what the waste from the sink will be and the impact that these will have on the fabric of the church.



ARCHAEOLOGICAL ADVICE

A PCC undertaking work in a church or churchyard is legally a 'developer' and is required by law to be responsible for the costs of any archaeological work which may need to be done including observations which must be made before, during or after the works. This is not an option for PCCs but an obligation just as it would be for a commercial company developing land, laying services to an historic property or constructing a highway.

Within the church building the PCC will still have to take into account the possibility of disturbing archaeological deposits in providing the necessary services. Cess pits and septic tanks, trench arching and pipes to mains sewage connections all require excavation in the church building and churchyard. If the facilities are to be provided in a new extension the archaeological implications of the work are massively increased.

WHAT THE DAC SEEKS TO HELP THE PCC ACHIEVE

While the Committee may question a scheme as originally proposed by a PCC this is not dismissive and should lead to a creative dialogue which produces a practical solution that sustains the dignity of the place of worship and also provides:

- Facilities which serve the needs of the church and parish
- Minimal impact on the character of the building
- High quality workmanship and attention to detail
- The provision of water and foul drainage with minimised archaeological impact above and below ground
- A scheme that is within the PCC's budget, phased to accommodate fund raising if necessary.

PROCESS

1. If the PCC are having initial thoughts about the installation of a WC and/or Kitchen, contact should be made with the DAC office as a first step.
2. The Church Buildings Adviser can visit the church and meet with a small group to talk through what options may be available, and what steps to take next.
3. Informal Advice from the DAC should always be obtained for WC and Kitchen projects as a first step. To obtain this advice, draft Statements of Significance and Need, photographs and sketch proposals should be submitted to the DAC office.
4. After initial assessment in the office, depending on the scale of the proposals, the papers will either be sent to two or three committee members for scrutiny, or for larger projects a site visit with all interested parties will be arranged at the church.

Depending on the listing grade of the building and the extent of the proposals, wider statutory consultation may be necessary (see below and the DAC Guidance note on Consultation for further information). If a site visit is being arranged, the statutory consultees involved would also be invited.

5. After discussion at a DAC meeting, the PCC will receive a response with comments on their sketch proposals, to assist them and their architect or surveyor in drawing up the final plans.
6. Once the specification and drawings for the project have been agreed by the PCC and the DAC recommends the work for a faculty, the application and public notice forms are sent to the PCC and the formal faculty application can be made.

THE NEED FOR WIDER CONSULTATION

- The DAC has found that the best way to get all consultees 'on board' is to have a site meeting to which all are invited at an early stage in the project. This means the PCC hears from all interested parties right at the outset and can incorporate advice into the development of the scheme. This saves PCCs from the financial and pastoral embarrassment of having the specification drawn up only to find that it is not acceptable to other bodies and that permissions will not be forthcoming.
- It is highly likely that English Heritage and other bodies will need to be consulted about proposals for listed church buildings. If the DAC believes that this is the case the PCC will be advised early on in the consideration of the work. The DAC will do its best to help the PCC to achieve good communication with whatever bodies have to be involved.
- If an extension is proposed the formal consent of the Local Authority must be obtained because Planning Permission will be required.
- The Local Authority Building Regulation Control Department should always be consulted at the outset to see whether any scheme would, in principle, be acceptable. This can be particularly helpful in respect of disposal of foul water, drainage and access to ringing floors (when the facilities are to be installed in the tower).
- If the specification has not been drawn up by the church architect or surveyor the DAC is likely to suggest that s/he should be consulted about the proposals and technical aspects of the project as well as those which might have a visual impact on the church. The PCC may find it helpful to do this at the outset rather than after the DAC has discussed the proposals.