



Dear Churchwarden (and those who look after your Church Buildings),

As this is the last update of the year I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very Peaceful Christmas and a Happy New year.

Below is my monthly round up of information that might be of interest to you.

Christmas 2024

With Advent upon us and the Christmas season approaching, I appreciate there will be many churches planning services and events. Ecclesiastical Insurance have provided some useful Christmas Guidance, which provides helpful information on a variety of subjects including safe use of candles, fire risk management, electrical safety, running events and working from height. This guidance can be found here; [Churches at Christmas | Risk Management \(ecclesiastical.com\)](https://www.ecclesiastical.com/churches-at-christmas-risk-management).

As it is likely that there may be visitors attending that are unfamiliar with the church premises, this can be an opportune time for churches to review and check the adequacy of what they have in place to meet their Health & Safety obligations. Ecclesiastical's self-assessment is a really helpful tool to assist churches with this task and the questionnaire can be found here; [Self-Assessment for Churches | Risk Management \(ecclesiastical.com\)](https://www.ecclesiastical.com/self-assessment-for-churches-risk-management). This resource also includes lots of additional information and guidance.

Church Building Training 2025

To help me plan the training programme for 2025, I would be grateful if you could complete this simple survey indicating the types of training that you think would be useful. <https://forms.gle/8NSdcXfkS68r631Y9> I try to host sessions around the diocese so if your church would like to host a session, then please let me know.

I am hoping to get the Training Calendar out early in the New Year.

Heating

As we are now in the winter period, we have already had a number of heating failures across the diocese. Obviously a boiler can fail at any point but if you have a boiler over 20 years old the chance is much greater and it is also more likely that parts may not be available for them. Since 2022, in line for the Church of England's Net Zero Carbon pledge, any new boilers have required a faculty application and as part of that application you have to be able to justify the replacement of a gas boiler rather than moving to a lower carbon heating solution.

I would therefore encourage any churches with a boiler over 20 years old (or with known problems) to begin investigating the range of heating options that are available, so that you have a basic plan that can quickly be updated when the time comes. If you have an oil boiler these cannot be replaced after 2025, so looking at alternatives now will save time when you need to find an alternative.

If you would like myself or Bethan Still to visit to discuss the options with you then please get in touch.

Contractor Database

This month I will be updating our database of contractors ready to send out a pdf version to you all in the new year. The information that I have is only as good as the information that I receive from parishes and I would be grateful if you could share details of any contractors that you have used and would be happy to recommend them. You can send details directly to me or complete the simple form at the following link. <https://forms.gle/MATrtajDSCeVLIzY6>

As a diocese we do not recommend any particular contractors but I am happy to pass on recommendations from other parishes.

Energy Footprint Tool for 2024

The EFT for 2024 will open early in the new year and we would really appreciate an early response to this so that we have the data in the first part of the year. With this in mind I would be grateful if you could remind treasurers, as they start collating the end of year figures and documents for church accounts, to put the energy bills to one side to complete the EFT. I will confirm the date the EFT will open as soon as this is confirmed.

Grant Database

We try to keep a simple grants database updated so that parishes know which grant providers to approach for particular projects that they are requiring funding for. As with the list of contractors, we only know if churches obtain grants from certain providers if you tell us.

If you have received any grants in the last few years, it would be really useful to know which grant providers you have used as they may be able to offer other churches a grant for their building projects. Again, please send these to me or you can complete a simple form at the following link. <https://forms.gle/2Lo5NEgrVKjHAUWU9>

Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (LPWGS)

It currently appears to be far from certain that the scheme will continue beyond March 2025. If the scheme is not retained, this will have a significant impact on Listed Churches as they would no longer be able to claim back VAT on repairs and improvements.

If you, or anyone you know, has used the grant scheme, and thinks it worth retaining, you may want to send an email in its support? –

Below is some guidance that I have received from the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance on how to send an email in support of the continuance of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme beyond March 2025

1. In your subject line, put 'Attn: the Secretary of State (LPWGS)', or something similar. Make sure you say at the beginning why you are writing - to ask for the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme to be extended beyond March 2025.
2. If you have concrete experience of the Scheme, then in **just one or two paragraphs** explain what your project is/was for, and why the VAT refund is/was important. If the building is used for community activities, or is important to local people in other ways, say something about this. Do say if your work was funded by gifts and donations. Also mention if it involves action in response to climate change, or other environmental benefits. Also consider being explicit that you are grateful that government provides the Scheme!
3. Send your email to The Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport 1st Floor, 100 Parliament Street, London SW1A 2BQ at enquiries@dcms.gov.uk. You can also copy your own MP (find their email address <https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/contact-an-mp-or-lord/>).

Durham Diocese Churchwardens Forum

It has been really good to see this forum being used more regularly to share or request information or advice. The online Churchwardens Forum uses Google Groups to allow you to ask questions and share information with other Churchwardens. If you would like to sign up and you can do so by clicking on the following link. [DDChurchwardenForum - Google Groups](#)
If you are already on the Churchwarden Forum, why not ask a question. The more it is used the more useful it becomes.

Finally if you need any support regarding work on your buildings, please get in touch with me and I will do my best to find you the information that you require.

Kind regards
Martin

Martin Howard

Buildings for Mission Secretary,
Diocese of Durham
Phone: 07586090996