



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

This month I have quite a few pieces of information to share with you and I would be grateful if you could take some time to look through this longer than usual update as it has a few important bits of information that I have come across.

Church Building Training 2025

Please find below the Church Building Training that has so far been planned for the year. If you would like to attend a session but the time or location do not work for you, please let me know and I can look at running an alternative session that would work for you. I try to host sessions around the diocese so if your church would like to host a session, then please let me know.

Date	Time	Venue	Event	Booking Link
Mon 31 st March	1.30-3.30pm	St Mark & St Cuthbert Cleadon Park	Undertaking Church Building Projects	https://bit.ly/4gPi6PQ
Thurs 10 th April	6.00– 8.00pm	Cuthbert House	Grant Workshop	https://bit.ly/4bbJmGI
Thurs 15 th May	2.00-4.00pm	Cuthbert House	Achieving Net Zero in your Church Building	https://bit.ly/4gYilCF
Wed 11 th June	10.00am-12.00pm	All Saints, Lobley Hill	Faculty Workshop – New Online System	https://bit.ly/4karBMd
Thurs 19 th June	1.30-3.30pm	St Peter's, Stockton	Understanding your buildings	https://bit.ly/4k5tutL
Thurs 3 rd July	7.00-9.00pm	Cuthbert House	Faculty Workshop – New Online System	https://bit.ly/4bvGKUF
Mon 7 th July	1.30pm	Cuthbert House	New Churchwardens Training	Contact Archdeacons PA to book
Tue 8 th July	6.30pm	Zoom		Contact Archdeacons PA to book
September	TBC	TBC	Annual Maintenance Schedule	TBC
Mon 13 th October	1.30-3.30pm	St Gabriel's, Sunderland	Faculty Workshop – New Online System	https://bit.ly/4hSowyN

Building Projects & Grants

If you are planning a building project over the next year or two, I would like to draw your attention to two sessions that we have planned.

On Monday 31st March we have a session that will go through the things you need to have in place before you start on a building project such as setting up a project team, developing a vision, appointing an architect and developing initial proposals.

On Thursday 10th April we will be joined by colleagues from the Heritage Lottery Fund who will explain about the grants that they can provide. The session will also provide general information about applying for other grants and the information that you will need to have in place.

Evaluation of Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has commissioned research on the repair and maintenance of historic places of worship. Places of worship that have been 'listed' for their special architectural or historic interest can generally reclaim the VAT paid through The [Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme](#). This scheme has operated since 2001 and is funded by the UK government through DCMS. Can you please encourage listed places of worship to respond to this survey to evaluate the scheme.

The short online survey is to help build understanding of individual places of worship's experience of the scheme. This survey consists of around 25 questions and will play a vital role in understanding the outcomes and impacts of the scheme. As many places of worship as possible are asked to participate, to produce reliable findings.

Could you please complete the survey if your Church is Listed. [The survey is here](#) and is open until 25 March.

Sustainability and Community Buildings Event – 19th March

If you have a Church Hall that is primarily used for community use then you may be interested in attending the following event. As well as booking a place via the link below, I would find it very useful if you could let me know that you plan to attend.

Durham Community Action, in partnership with the Rural Design Centre, is holding an event to celebrate [Village Halls Week 2025](#) for organisations operating in County Durham.

The event will take place on **Wednesday 19th March from 10.00am – 2.30pm with lunch included.**

Location: Jubilee Fields Community Centre, Jubilee Road, Shildon, DL4 2AL.

Join us to hear more about:

- Your chance to shape a new, not for profit, community energy initiative which aims to provide solar panels and battery systems in community buildings across County Durham
- Launch of our new guide to help trustees navigate legal issues about property
- Spotlight on Jubilee Fields Community Centre

For any enquiries, please email info@durhamcommunityaction.org.uk

[Click here to Book your place for the Sustainability and Community Buildings Event](#)

Energy Footprint Tool for 2024

Thank you for those of you who have completed the EFT over the last couple of months and so far, almost 30% of churches have entered their data. 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 finalise the end of year church accounts, to put the energy bills to one side to complete the EFT.

Disability Project

We have now received applications for all of the large grant funding that was allocated for our diocese and no further applications are now being accepted. If this situation changes and additional funding is available, I will let you know. Applications for the small grants of up to £5,000 remain open and are on a first come first served basis, so if you have a project that might qualify, I would suggest that you get applications in as soon as possible

Online Faculty System Update

The Online Faculty System is currently being redesigned and the new system will hopefully remove some of the issues that people have found with the current system. The faculty process itself will not change but how it appears on the online system will look different. The transfer to the new system looks likely to occur early in the Autumn but final details are still to confirmed. I will be doing some training over the summer and will confirm dates as soon as possible.

The current system for Durham Diocese currently has over 130 active faculties, however 80 of those have been issued and are waiting for parishes to confirm that the work has been completed. I would be grateful if you could check your parishes faculty records and update these by the end of February. We also have a large number that were started some years ago but have not proceeded beyond the initial stage. I will remove those started before 2024 from the system unless parishes confirm that they are still planning to proceed with the work.

Heating

If your church boiler is over 20 years old, now is the time to start considering options for the future. 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.

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.

Living alongside bats in churches grant

The next round of the Living Alongside Bats in Churches grant is now open and will close at **9am on the 28 April**. These grants are especially intended to help churches who are facing another summer of lots of cleaning get the help they need. Grants can be awarded for:

- Pew covers
- New hoovers
- A telescopic brush
- Specialist cleaning
- Bat detectors for future events (in addition to cleaning equipment)

A requirement of the grant is that the church holds a positive community event inspired by nature. Examples of these include:

- Local schools having a bat day
- Several bat walks/evenings with local bat groups
- Bat inspired flower show
- Community event making pew covers

Part of the grant can be used toward the costs of the event. Applications and more information are [online](#). If you have questions about the scheme please contact the Bats in Churches adviser, [Hazel Tocock](#)

Net Zero Webinars

If you are struggling to get your head around how your church can possibly get to Net Zero by 2030, you are not alone. We have no magic solution as every church building in the diocese is different and the usage of every building is different. The webinars are a good place to start and they can be found at [Webinars on getting to net zero carbon | The Church of England](#). I am always happy to come out and visit churches to help you look at some of the things that you could consider first and those things that will take a little bit of time to plan. I am also running a session in May and you can find further details at <https://bit.ly/4gYilCF>.

Heritage Open Days: online Planning and Inspiration Webinar on 6 March

Join the national Heritage Open Days team online for a free, interactive Planning and Inspiration session - perfect for current organisers and anyone interested in running an event this year. Explore the year ahead, connect with the festival community, hear from inspiring local organisers, and discuss this year's theme - 'Architecture'.

<https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/get-involved/how-to-get-involved/event-calendar/planning-and-inspiration-2025.html>

Love your Burial Ground Week/Churches Count on Nature 2025 registration 17th March

Churches Count on Nature is part of Love Your Burial Ground Week (now in its 15th year), focusing on the brilliant wildlife to be found in churchyards and chapel yards. It is a joint initiative of Caring for God's Acre, the Church of England, the Church in Wales and A Rocha UK.

Registration starts on 17th March and we are looking forward to welcoming even more history talks, picnics, bioblitzes, recording events and photography competitions!

[More information can be found here](#)

Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) Meetings

The DAC meets 10 times during the year and as well as providing formal advice to the Chancellor on Faculty Applications, the DAC can also provide informal advice to parishes on any projects that they are considering. If you would like anything including on the DAC Agenda, please let me know two weeks before the meeting so that I can ensure that it can be included. Dates of the DAC meetings can be found at. [2025-durham-dac-meeting-dates-deadlines.pdf](#)

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

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