# 

**Yorkshire Synod**

**GUIDANCE NOTES FOR ELDERS**

**Your Church Property**

**Building works – repairs and alterations**

**This version of the Guidance Notes replaces all earlier versions.**

**Introduction**

This Guidance is based on Yorkshire Synod’s agreed practices and procedures as developed by the relevant Committees to whom Synod has delegated this task. It is based on the requirements of the Model Trusts on which all our property is held for churches that form part of the United Reformed Church. (A copy of these Model Trusts can be found in The Manual which, in turn, is available on the URC national website.)

For any property project, whether that is a scheme of repairs or some alterations or improvements to the building, the Synod’s Property Committee and Property Officer are happy to try to support the church and can advise on whether or not the church is likely to need Synod and Trustee approval for the work. They can also offer suggestions of other possible sources of help and support whether that be from a member of the Committee with expertise in the relevant area of work; a known contractor or professional advisor; or from another church that has done similar work recently.

Contacting the Synod, via the Property Secretary, at an early stage also helps ensure that issues such as timing can be managed.

**How does a church know what work needs approval?**

In this Synod the policy is that, provided the property is not Listed, then work such as external cleaning, internal decorations, painting, replacement of fixtures or a boiler, normal maintenance of buildings and grounds, would not generally need the approval of Synod as long as the costs *including* VAT are below £15,000. However, a scheme comprising several items of repair or replacement phased over a period of a few months, and which in aggregate will cost more than £15,000 *including* VAT, may need approval.

Projects that are **likely to** require approval, **regardless of cost**, would be extensions, new access for disabled users, removal of pews, replacing windows, forming structural openings, or any reorganisation of internal spaces. In other words, anything that alters the character, appearance, structure or value of the building concerned.

As a general guideline **any** work to buildings that is expected to cost more than £15,000 *including* VAT will normally need approval.

Where the **building is listed**, **any** alterations to the building, inside or out (as well as demolition), will probably require Listed Building Consent. However, we benefit from a scheme known, somewhat oddly, as Ecclesiastical Exemption. This means that the relevant consent is given by the denomination following a strict process set out and agreed with the relevant government department. Exemption does **not** mean that you don’t need approval, simply that this process is used instead of applying to the Local Planning Authority. This approval, is **in addition** to the normal Synod approval and requires the use of forms which are available on the Synod website.

Where a church building is in a **Conservation area** and any demolition is proposed, Ecclesiastical Exemption may also be required. If this is the case it is important that you consult the Listed Buildings Advisory Committee at an early stage so that you are aware of the procedures and timescales that will apply for the approval.

If churches are in any doubt about the work they are contemplating, they should contact the Property Officer at the Synod Office, as soon as possible. **Synod approval is necessary even if the project is self-financing and the church is not asking for financial assistance.**  Synod does not wish to put obstacles in the way of any church development and approval will not be withheld unreasonably. However, it is important that, as a charity, each church is seen to be using its resources wisely and for the appropriate purposes.

**Large Projects**

For large projects it is **essential** that the church consults with the Synod at an early stage. It is important to ensure that such a project fits within the overall vision for the wider work of the URC as well as the local church. In addition, the support of the denomination will be essential if any funding is being sought from outside sources. It is common for the Synod to arrange for a “cross-committee” team to visit and meet with the church. Such a group would include representatives of Pastoral or other committees as well as those relating to buildings and finance.

In such cases it may be helpful to seek “approval in principle” from Synod to allow grants to be sought. This can be done after outline plans have been prepared and priced approximately, but before costly detailed plans are prepared by an architect or tenders are sought. Final approvals can be obtained at a later date. The Property Officer or Finance Manager can advise about the procedure. If in any doubt, please ask.

**Do we still need approval for work needing done urgently?**

Synod recognises that there are times when work needs to be done in a hurry when, for example, a boiler completely fails or there is a health and safety implication from loose masonry. It is important that any church in this position contacts the Property Officer or Convener of the Property Committee. If it really is an emergency, then they will provide whatever support they can.

If it is simply very urgent then Synod Committees can deal with applications very swiftly making use of electronic communication. A completed form, emailed to the Synod Office can be circulated round the Committee and a response received from a majority in 24 to 48 hours so there is no reason not to make an application. By not seeking to get approval, Elders can place themselves, in their capacity as charity trustees, in a potentially vulnerable position. In addition, Committee members can often be very helpful in supporting a local church at a stressful time, in the capacity of “an informed friend”.

**Grants**

Local churches must not accept any grant funding for sums of £10,000 or above without contacting the Synod Office. It is important that the trustees are able to check the terms and conditions attaching to any grant to ensure that these are not onerous in the long term. It is not unusual for there to be some form of clawback if the purpose for which the grant was given ceases after a period of time and there are some grants where that period of time is actually indefinite. A number of years ago it was agreed that the trustees needed to approve acceptance of any grants in excess of £10,000 and the Trust Secretary will be able to advise further on this.

# What is the process to obtain approval?

The procedure is the same whether or not the church requires financial help. Churches will need **Application Form 1** and the associated **Guidance Notes on completing the form**. These are available from the Synod Office or can be downloaded from the Synod website, [www.urcyorkshire.org.uk](http://www.urcyorkshire.org.uk) This note should be read alongside the Form and completion guidance.

NB: If your Church is listed you will also need to complete the Ecclesiastical Exemption Forms which can also be downloaded from the Synod website and these are **in addition to**Form 1 which is required in all cases.

**Procedure step by step**

* 1. The local church must pass a Resolution at the Church Meeting. A suggested form of Resolution is provided in the Guidance Notes on completing the Form and churches are strongly encouraged to use this. Failure to pass a suitable Resolution may mean the application being delayed while another Church Meeting is called. The Trust Secretary or Property Officer will be happy to advise on wording if your situation doesn’t seem to “fit” the suggested format. The resolution will normally stipulate an agreed maximum expenditure.
  2. The Application Form should be sent to the Synod Office together with **all** the associated papers. The form can be completed in hard copy and posted to the Synod Office or electronically and then sent by email as a pdf with attachments. Missing papers and information may lead to a delay in being able to start processing your application. Deadline dates for Committee Meetings are on the Form.
  3. The Conveners of the Property and Financial Resources Committees will look at the papers. A decision will be taken on whether the Property Committee wishes to visit the church to hear about the scheme and see the situation for themselves, or whether the Committee actually wishes to hold its formal meeting at the church. We will consult with the church regarding arrangements. Alternatively, it may be that the church is asked to send representatives to the meetings of one or both of the Committees and details of this will be discussed with you.
  4. The Property and Financial Resources Committees, together with the YCU Committee of Management will then consider the request. Normally they will communicate their views to the church separately. If the view is favourable the Conveners of the Committees will sign the relevant section on the Form and a copy of the form will be returned to the Church. The Church should only proceed when they are in receipt of a copy of Form 1 duly signed on behalf of the Synod Committees.
  5. When approvals have been given, the work may then be put in hand by the Elders of the local church, if appropriate through any committee authorised by Church Meeting for that purpose. For large contracts, you will be liaising already with your architect and Property Officer.
  6. If you will be funding the work using monies invested through the Yorkshire Congregational Union on your behalf, it is important that you speak to the Synod’s Finance staff to ensure monies are available to you when required.

**Useful Contacts and Sources of Information**

**Exploring your church’s vision and mission**

* Jim Coleman, Synod Development Officer and Ashley Evans, Synod Evangelist can support churches in a variety of ways as you explore your future mission. Contact them via Synod Office or details are in the Handbook.
* Your Synod Pastoral Elder and the Synod’s Pastoral Committee can also provide a sounding board and they will be aware of wider Synod or area issues or initiatives. Details are in the Handbook, or Contact the Synod Office.

**Finding Architects or other professional advisers**

* The Synod has a retained surveyor and solicitors. In the first instance contact must always be through the Trust Secretary or Property Officer.
* The Synod does not “recommend” architects to churches for projects or advice but the Trust Secretary or Property Officer can pass on names of firms others have used.

**Sources of Funding**

* The Synod offers loans up to £15,000 at 0% interest over 5 years. Apply using Form 1
* The national URC operates the Church Building Fund which provides grants and loans and a Legacy Fund - see <https://urc.org.uk/finance-information.html>
* Bank loan – your own bank or one of the specialist charity or Christian banks may be able to help. The trustees (i.e. The Yorkshire Congregational Union) **must** be involved in any such loan arrangement and you should speak to the Finance Manager, Trust Secretary or Property Officer if you are thinking about this.

**Grants**

* Heritage Fund (Formerly Heritage Lottery Fund) – their website gives a lot of advice and it is good to contact their Leeds Office if you have a project in mind. <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/>
* National Churches Trust provides **buildings advice** as well as grants. <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/>
* Landfill Tax grants – but beware, these tend to have conditions attached and it is essential you discuss this with the Trust Secretary if you are planning to apply. <https://www.entrust.org.uk/landfill-community-fund>
* Congregational and General Charitable Trust gives smaller grants from £500 - £10,000. <https://www.candgtrust.org.uk/>
* Allchurches Trust also provides grants. <https://www.allchurches.co.uk/>

**Grants (continued)**

Beyond these, there are many local and national grant making bodies. Unfortunately, there is no quick fix, but there are some websites which help you search these out. In particular, the Parish Resources website has a number of suggestions. While not all may be appropriate for non-Anglican church buildings, many will be worth looking at. <https://www.parishresources.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Charitable-Grants-for-Churches-June-2019.pdf>

The finance or property staff at the Synod Office may be able to help, as may other churches in your Mission and Care Group or Churches Together family who may know of local resources.

**It is important to note the comments on page 2, above, regarding grant conditions.**

**Environmental Advice**

You will find a lot of good advice on the Eco-Church website <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/> and on the Church of England’s environmental pages <https://www.churchofengland.org/environment>

**Care of Buildings**

* National Churches Trust - <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/>
* Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings particularly focusses on older buildings but some will be applicable whatever the age of the building. - <https://www.spab.org.uk/>
* The other main denominations such as the Methodists, Baptists and Anglicans (Churchcare ) all have useful information on their websites.

**Health and Safety, Risk Assessments, etc.**

* The two main church insurers used by our churches are the recommended starting points. They have templates to help you and a lot of excellent advice. Don’t just look at the one you are insured with as both have excellent material.

Congregational Insurance - Safer Places of Worship <https://www.spow.co.uk/>

Ecclesiastical Insurance - <https://www.ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/>

* The HSE website has a lot of useful information (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/>) but the most relevant sections are signposted by the two insurance websites,

## October 2019