

# Church Buildings Guidance notes

## Statement of Significance

**These notes cover;**

**What is a Statement of Significance**

**Why are they needed**

**What information you should include**

N.B. We recommend that these guidance notes are read in conjunction with the advice published by the Church of England and the Church Buildings Council. Their advice can be found on the following web pages:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/statements-significance-and-needs>

[https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/CCB\\_Statements-of-significance-and-needs.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/CCB_Statements-of-significance-and-needs.pdf)

### What is a Statement of Significance?

The Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2013 define a Statement of Significance as “a document which describes the significance of the church or other building in terms of its special architectural and historic interest (including any contribution made by its setting) and any significant features of artistic or archaeological interest that the church or other building has so as to enable the potential impact of the proposals on its significance, and on any such features, to be understood”.

So, to translate (!) it means that A Statement of Significance is a summary of the history of your church and its development, and identifies what it is about your church architecturally, contents wise and by association with any significant people that makes it valued – both locally and nationally. It identifies how the building has changed over time, through phases of construction and additions such as pulpits or stained glass, and how these changes contribute to the character of your building.

A Statement of Significance should also describe the possible impact of any changes that you are proposing, so it is recommended that it is prepared early on in your project and the faculty process. By doing this you will be able to identify and give proper consideration to areas that

may cause conflict or concern, so these can then be addressed before an application is submitted. A Statement of Significance is usually read alongside a Statement of Need, which gives a lot more information about the work of your church, the changes you are proposing, and how these will benefit your church family and local community for the future.

### Why are Statements of Significance needed?

A Statement of Significance is in fact a mandatory document when working with any historic building – and that doesn't just mean very old buildings. With churches, it must be submitted as part of a faculty application for works on listed churches, as well as often on unlisted ones, too. It is essential you write as thorough as possible a Statement as it'll help you as the applicant really understand the building you're caring for, and it'll also demonstrate to the Chancellor that you understand its importance.

The Statement of Significance is not only viewed by the DAC and Chancellor in the course of your faculty application, but is also seen by external amenity bodies such as Historic England (HE) and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB). It will help them make decisions about your project plans, knowing that the parish has a clear understanding of their church and what they want to achieve, and is therefore aware of any potential risks and consequences for the building and its significance.

Understanding the history of your church and its significance can also aid in the future care and planning of your building.

### What should you include?

When writing your Statement of Significance, it is helpful to use language that is common to these types of reports so the Chancellor will understand the significance of your church. It is helpful to remember that it is very unlikely they know much about your church, so the more precise information you can include, the better.

The following terms are most widely used when assessing significance;

*Low* – this adds little or nothing to the site, or even detracts from it.

*Low-moderate* – of some local value.

*Moderate* – usually of local value, but also of some significance for a regional group (i.e. a church has a particular type and style of architecture specific to the region)

*Moderate-High* – Important at regional level, and sometimes nationally.

*High* – very important at a national level, and sometimes internationally.

Before you start to write your Statement of Significance, it is helpful to know whether your church is listed. This can be found on the Historic England website:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>

If your building doesn't appear on Historic England list, it doesn't mean it isn't important! Some historic or unique buildings that aren't listed are recognised as being locally important, so your council Local Planning Authority should be able to help finding this out.

It is also useful to know if you are in a local Conservation Area – again, the details of these can be found through your local council. If you need help accessing any of this information, please do contact the Church Buildings Officers – contact details are at the end of this document.

As well as the information above, your Statement of Significance should include details of the following:

- Setting of the church
- Aesthetic Value
- Archaeological Value
- Historic Value
- Communal Value
- Environmental Value
- Liturgical Value
- Plans and photographs

### Setting

In this section, talk about the *character*, the building's sense of *place*, and the *setting* of your church. Summarise the history of the building and how it relates to the surrounding area.

*Character* – its overall shape, the general layout of the exterior and interior, the materials it was built with (different materials at different times?) the level of craftsmanship, any decorative details that are specific or typical of their time, interior spaces and features, and how these have changed over time.

*Place* – Does the building sit well in its surroundings? Does it compete/ is it very different to other buildings and structures around it? Is it easily recognizable as a church? From a distance or only as you are directly outside? Do the grounds around the church make it unique from other buildings in the area?

*Setting* – Is your church location rural or urban, in the centre of a large settlement, or on the outside or a small settlement? Is it in an area that is commercial (e.g. with shops and retail outlets) industrial (e.g. with factories or other buildings used for manufacture) or residential (e.g. with a lot of housing around) Is it the oldest building in the area, or are there others such as farms, manor houses, factories that were built at a similar time? Is there any outside space for the church, such as a churchyard? Are there any listed



monuments or significant tombs? Is the land left for wildlife or is the grass cut and the grounds managed on a regular basis? Is it used by the local community in any way?

Useful sources for more information can be Pevsner's *Buildings of England* series, your church website, your public library's local history section or archives, the listing details on the Historic England website if your church is listed, or Heritage Gateway:

<https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/default.aspx>

### Aesthetic Value

Aesthetic value is essentially how pleasing your church is to look at (and this can promote differing opinions!) The aesthetics are the basic appeal of a building, based on a combination of its size, shape, texture, colour, proportions, symmetry, decoration and pattern, balance of design, and context.

- Architectural value is based on the design and construction of your church. Is there anything that particularly stands out about your church's architecture? This could be anything from a Norman doorway, to the pattern of the window frame, to the timber frames of your roof!
- Artistic value: Is there anything that is important artistically within your church? This can include anything that is part of the building (such as stained-glass windows and large pipe organs) or anything that is an addition to the building itself (e.g. a font or font cover, pulpit, wall paintings, reredos or decorative woodwork)

### Archaeological Value

Archaeological value is the type and significance of evidence of historical human activity, and may not be very obvious at first. Remember that archaeology is not just evidence of human activity that is buried below the ground – it can be seen, too, above the ground in the church building or features of a churchyard as well. In fact, it is everywhere.

- Above ground: Is there evidence of your church being older than it looks now? Are some parts of the building very different in style to others? Are there windows or doorways that have been blocked up, or lines in the stonework indicating an earlier roof line? Some features such as these could be Anglo-Saxon brickwork or a medieval feature that has survived a Victorian rebuild.
- Below ground: Have you ever had any field archaeologists dig around the church and find anything of note? Have any artifacts been found at other places in the area that might indicate something is more likely to be found at your church? If the grounds under and around the church are very different to anything else locally, could your church have been built on top of an earlier structure?
- It is worth noting though, that having a lot of archaeological features doesn't automatically yield high archaeological value; for the archaeological value to be high it has to be a rare or unique find that is crucial to the understanding of local or national history. For example, having a large quantity of Victorian pottery found in the church grounds is not as unique or valuable as finding a fewer number of items from the bronze age. If you are unsure of the archaeological value of your building or items found in the grounds, please do contact the Church Buildings Officers and/or the DAC archaeology advisor.

## Historic Value

Historic value places your church within history. Where archaeological value demonstrates *evidence* of history, historic value demonstrates *association* with history and the *illustration* of history.

- Associative value is the association a church has with either a notable family, person, event or movement. In terms of a church, this can be association with a particular noble family of the area, possibly through patronage or financial backing. Associative value could arise from the association with a particular architect who designed the church. There could be a particular historical event that your church is associated with or a historical movement. Historical association is increased if the church has remained largely intact since the historical event in question.
- Illustrative value is how well a building illustrates the history or a place or the people who have inhabited it. In the case of churches there is already a baseline of illustrative value as the building is being used for its intended purpose, providing a link between people in the past and people now. Illustrative value can also be seen in the presence of a technique or design that was one of the first of its kind or one of the only surviving examples left, the earlier or rarer something like this is the higher value it has. Illustrative value may seem similar to archaeological value however the two are different. For example, a building may be one of many examples therefore providing little archaeological/evidential value, however every building may illustrate the history of design effectively, providing a high illustrative value.

Looking at a local studies library catalogue or contacting local history groups can be very useful in finding further information on the historical and archaeological value of your church.

## Communal Value

Communal value is important as it helps to understand what your church means to the wider community area. This can be through events and groups that have met in the past, that meet at the moment, or that you have plans to set up in the near future.

- How has the church served the community in the past? Were there groups that were well attended before the Covid 19 pandemic? Are there groups and events that you are running now to meet a need that has come about in recent years?
- How important is the church now as a community space? Are there any other community spaces locally, or is it just the church that has space for community groups?
- Are there groups representing all the different members of your community?

- What is the church's potential in the future as a community space? Are there ways that you could hire your church to local users as an income stream? Can you run one-off events to bring the community together? Is there a need that can be met by a group using the space you have in your church?

### Environmental Value

Environmental value is identified by the progress you have made towards achieving carbon net zero by 2030, as well as any other environmental based projects.

- Is your church part of the A Rocha Eco-Church scheme? Has it achieved bronze award or higher? Are there any plans for your church to join the scheme?
- Have you been utilising the 'Practical Path to Net Zero' document to implement quick wins? Does your church building have its own Net Zero route-map? Help for writing these can be found on the central Church of England web pages:  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/net-zero-carbon-church>
- Is your churchyard being used for increasing biodiversity? Are you a wild churchyard or working towards it? Do you take part in the Love Your Burial Ground Week or the Churches Count on Nature event? Resources can be found on the Caring for God's Acre webpage:  
<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/get-involved/resources-for-love-your-burial-ground-week-and-churches-count-on-nature-events/>
- Is your church well-maintained? Do you have a maintenance plan that you work through each year? A building that is cared for and well maintained will inevitably be drier and warmer, so will be better for visitors, and for reducing the cost of heating.

### Liturgical Value

Liturgical value is the value of your church as a place of worship.

- How is space used for worship inside the building? Do you have a variety of service styles and different congregations? Has the style and regularity of worship changed much over the years? Do you hold services at times throughout the day, and throughout the week? Do any other denominations or church congregations use your building?
- Does the building work for all your missional activities? Do you have meetings and run courses such as Lights for Christ or the Alpha course? Do you have specific outreach to particular age ranges or groups of society?

- Is the building accessible for all ages and abilities? Have you made special consideration to be Dementia Friendly? Is there easy access for wheelchairs and children's pushchairs? Do you have a hearing loop? Do you have large print books or texts suitable for those with sight impairments? Are guide dogs and hearing dogs welcomed?
- Do you have anything that detracts from worship? Are the lighting and sound systems of good or poor quality? Do you have an audio-visual system that enables the congregation to see the order of the service and song words etc? Is the heating system suitable for the use of the church?

#### Plan and photographs

As well as the written content of your Statement of Significance, it is also helpful to include some visual information. These might be one or all of the following:

- a map of the local area showing the church's location,
- A plan of the churchyard or grounds and the church's position within it.
- A photograph or two of the exterior
- A photograph or two of the interior.

The photographs are especially helpful if your proposed project is in an area that is of particular interest or significance.

For guidance on your Statement of Significance, please contact the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) Secretary Simon Chesters-Thompson by email:

[simon.chesters-thompson@sheffield.anglican.org](mailto:simon.chesters-thompson@sheffield.anglican.org)

Alternatively, you can contact the Church Buildings Officers by email:

[cbo@sheffield.anglican.org](mailto:cbo@sheffield.anglican.org)