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Church Building Projects

A Guide to Planning and Managing Work at Your Church

Introduction

This document provides a structured pathway for churches planning capital or development projects. It is designed to help volunteer teams understand how their work connects with the RIBA Plan of Work — the standard framework used by architects and contractors in the UK construction industry.
The aim is to give churches a clear sense of their role as the client at every stage. The church (through the Ministry Area) commissions, instructs, and oversees the professional team. This means the Church/Ministry Area is responsible for defining the project's vision, managing decision-making, securing funding, and obtaining all necessary permissions while professionals such as architects and surveyors provide technical guidance.

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Above: The stages of the RIBA Plan of Work (Royal Institute of British Architects). Our guide is based on the RIBA stages but adapts them to better suit churches and Ministry Areas. A full table of the RIBA stages is included at the end of this guide.

Stage 0

Strategic Definition (Developing Vision and Understanding Need)

This stage is the birth of the idea where the vision, needs, and purpose of the project are explored

Church's Role as Client

At this stage, the church leads the process. The Church/Ministry Area acts as the Client, identifying needs and setting out the rationale for the project. The church must also engage its congregation and community to ensure the project meets genuine needs rather than individual preferences.

Goals

- Establish project objectives (What will success look like?)
- Assess the needs (Why is the project necessary? What problem does it solve?)
- Understand community aspirations (How will this benefit both congregation and wider community?)
- Draft a short mission statement or vision summary
- Gain initial resolution and sign-off from the Ministry Area

Key Actions

- Consult the congregation through listening exercises or surveys to gather ideas.
- Engage the local community through online questionnaires, social media groups, and conversations with regular hall or church users.
- Record evidence from these consultations, this will later support funding applications.
- Begin light touch grant research to understand which funders support projects like yours (e.g. community buildings, heritage conservation, accessibility).
- Document your findings, this becomes the foundation for your Strategic Project Statement.

Early evidence and community support are critical for later grant and faculty applications. The stronger the case for need and benefit, the smoother later approvals will be.

Stage 0-1

Build the Team and Establish Governance

Once your initial vision and evidence are in place, it's time to formalise your project structure

Church's Role as Client
The church, as client, is responsible for appointing a project team, defining roles, and establishing clear governance. This ensures accountability, transparency, and shared ownership across clergy, lay leaders, and volunteers.

Goals
- Form a project team and establish roles and responsibilities
- Define governance and reporting lines
- Write an architect's brief
- Assign a Community & Fundraising Lead
- Ensure financial oversight through the Church Treasurer or Finance Committee

Key Actions
- Conduct a skills audit to identify experience among volunteers (fundraising, finance, communications, building maintenance, etc.).
- Develop a Terms of Reference for your team, outlining decision-making processes and meeting schedules.
- Draft your Architect's Brief with the team (see template on the next page).

Suggested Team Roles

Client Representative
Oversees day-to-day operations, manages timeline and budget, coordinates with architect and contractors, communicates progress to Ministry Area Council.

Finance Lead/Treasurer
Manages budget, cash flow, and payments; maintains transparency; reports financial status to MAC.

Community & Fundraising Lead
Coordinates consultation and engagement, research grants, develops fundraising strategy, manages social media and communication with supporters.
The above duties can be covered by the same person where applicable.

Architect's Brief Template

- Church and project details
- Overview and objectives
- Key requirements and outcomes
- Design style or preferences
- Budget range
- Site and building constraints

When these foundations are in place, you are ready to seek an architect and begin the formal RIBA process.

Stage 1

Preparation and Brief

At this point, you start turning ideas into a structured plan. The church, as client, appoints an architect and begins formal feasibility work.

Church's Role as Client

The church must now:

- Manage the appointment process for professional support including Principal Designer under CDM (Construction (Design & Management) Regulations) 2015 where applicable.
- Approve the architect's brief
- Maintain active communication with the architect and DAC
- Begin developing a funding and grant strategy
- Ensure that all work aligns with church governance and faculty requirements
- Review the last Quinquennial Inspection Report and ensure relevant recommendations are included in the plans

Key Actions

- Invite Expressions of Interest (EoI) from suitable architects.
- Review submissions and appoint an architect with relevant heritage or community project experience.
- Seek Archdeacon's approval before committing to professional fees.
- If the project exceeds your diocesan threshold, complete a DAC Preliminary Enquiry Form.
- The appointed architect begins feasibility and options appraisal work.
- Client must formally appoint the architect (in writing) as Principal Designer under CDM (Construction (Design & Management) Regulations) 2015 where applicable.

Fundraising and Grant Strategy
Finalise a Funding and Grant Strategy Document, including:

- Target funders and eligibility notes
- Evidence required (community consultation, costs, permissions)
- Deadlines for different grant applications
- Application timeline and submission responsibilities
- Internal fundraising targets and match-funding goals
- Launch early community fundraising events to show local commitment and build momentum. Through your MA charity number set up a JustGiving account and create your project campaign page.
- Keep a record of all donations and supporter engagement for use in grant reporting later.

Faculty Permission (Early Stage)
Engage your DAC Secretary to discuss faculty requirements early. Early advice prevents costly design revisions and ensures your project remains in line with diocesan and statutory expectations.

Stage 1-2

Understand Constraints and Risk

As the architect develops feasibility studies and early concept designs, the church must balance ambition with practicality.

Church's Role as Client

- Provide timely feedback on design options.
- Oversee consultation with the DAC, conservation bodies, and local planning authority.
- Approve decisions that affect scope or budget.
- Prepare for faculty submission and grant applications.

Faculty and Grant Readiness

- Your architect will prepare a draft faculty petition for you to sign off.
- Use concept drawings and cost estimates as part of your grant submissions. This may be based on budget costs from the Architect, or via a Quantity Surveyor on larger scale projects.
- Ensure all necessary permissions and consents are being progressed alongside funding applications.

Key Actions

- Identify planning, heritage, ecology and accessibility constraints.
- Request cost estimates to test financial viability.
- Continue developing your fundraising pipeline.
- Begin drafting grant applications where evidence and early designs are sufficient.
- Document all decisions — this helps maintain clarity between church, architect, and funders.
- The appointed architect begins feasibility and options appraisal work.
- Client must formally appoint the architect (in writing) as Principal Designer under CDM (Construction (Design & Management) Regulations) 2015 where applicable.

Stage 2-3

Concept and Developed Design: Fundraising and Faculty Submission

At this stage, the project moves from initial feasibility into detailed design and formal approval.

Your architect will now develop the preferred concept into coordinated design proposals that meet diocesan, planning, and building requirements. The MAC should formally appoint a Principal Designer at this stage (usually the architect).

Church's Role as Client

During this stage, the church continues to act as the informed client, approving designs, confirming budgets, and leading all funding and fundraising activity.

The architect takes the lead on technical preparation and faculty submission on behalf of the church, but the church remains responsible for decision-making and ensuring all approvals are properly authorised by the Ministry Area Council.

Key Actions

Design Development

- The architect refines the chosen design, prepares detailed plans and 3D visuals, and coordinates input from other professionals (e.g. ecologist, structural engineer, M&E consultant, quantity surveyor if applicable).
- The church reviews these designs, ensuring they reflect the original mission statement and the community's needs.
- Obtain updated cost estimates from the architect or quantity surveyor to confirm project affordability.

Faculty Permission
The architect normally prepares and submits the faculty application on behalf of the church, including:

- Drawings, specifications, and schedules of work
- Statement of Significance and Statement of Need
- Supporting photographs and reports (e.g. accessibility, heritage).
- Any other statutory consents such as Planning Permission/Change of Use, Building Regulations Approval etc.

The church, as client, must:

- Approve the final submission before it is sent to the DAC
- Sign the official faculty petition (or authorise the architect to do so on its behalf, depending on diocesan process)
- Respond promptly to any DAC feedback or requests for clarification
- The DAC and Chancellor will review the proposals, and once approved, the faculty permission will be issued, allowing work to proceed.

Fundraising and Grant Applications

- With the developed design and permissions in progress, the church should now finalise and submit major grant applications.
- Many funders (e.g. National Lottery, Garfield Weston, Benefact Trust) require detailed drawings and cost breakdowns at this stage.

The Community & Fundraising Lead should:

- Ensure all evidence from community consultation and need assessments is included in applications
- Coordinate deadlines, supporting documents, and letters of support
- Keep a central record of all submissions and outcomes (a Funding Tracker)
- Continue local fundraising and communication campaigns to demonstrate ongoing community backing and match funding

Governance and Communication

- Keep the Ministry Area updated with written progress reports and minutes of all key decisions.
- Approve any changes in scope, cost, or specification before the architect proceeds.
- Maintain close contact with the DAC to address any queries during the faculty process.
- Once major grants and the faculty are approved, confirm the project budget and prepare for technical design and tendering.

Stage 4

Technical Design and Pre-Construction

With faculty permission granted and principal funding identified, the project now moves into the technical design and pre-construction stage.
Here, your architect develops the detailed drawings, specifications, and schedules that contractors will use to price and deliver the works.

Church's Role as Client
The church, acting as the client, must:

- Review and approve the final technical documentation.
- Ensure that all costs, risks, and specifications are understood before any contracts are signed.
- Oversee the tendering or quotation process, ensuring openness, fairness, and compliance with funders' expectations.
- Confirm that adequate funds or grant commitments are in place before appointing a contractor.

Although the architect leads much of the technical preparation, the church retains authority for every financial and contractual decision.

Key Actions

- Work with your architect to finalise all technical drawings, specifications, and schedules.
- Ensure all relevant conditions are understood and incorporated.
- Identify an appropriate list of contractors, ideally those experienced in conservation or community buildings.
- Ensure at least three comparable tenders or quotes are obtained.
- Review tender returns with your architect, comparing costs, programme, and quality.
- Prepare a Tender Report summarising the options and the church's decision — this can be shared with funders and attached to grant applications.
- Confirm the preferred contractor through the Ministry Area Council and formally appoint them in writing (normally under a standard building contract prepared by the architect). The Contractor may be appointed as Principal Contractor under CDM 2015 where other sub-contractors are to be employed.

- Check insurance arrangements for the works and notify your insurer.
- Maintain clear communication with funders, providing copies of tenders or contractor details if requested.

What Is Tendering and Why Does It Matter

The tendering process is how the architect and church invite contractors to price the works. It ensures that costs are competitive, specifications are understood, and that the church achieves value for money.

For larger or more complex projects, the architect will issue a formal Invitation to Tender (ITT) to selected contractors. These contractors receive the drawings, specifications, and any special requirements and then submit detailed costed bids.

For smaller projects, the process may be simpler, often obtaining at least three written quotations for comparable scopes of work.

The aim is to provide clear evidence that:

1. The church sought fair and competitive prices.
2. Costs were tested against the market.
3. The chosen contractor was selected for good reason (quality, experience, price, reliability).

This evidence is not only good practice, but also often required by funders and grant bodies before they will release funds or even approve a grant. Many funders ask to see copies of the three quotes or the tender summary as part of their due-diligence checks.

Stage 5

Construction and Oversight

Once the contractor is appointed, the programme is agreed and contracts are signed, construction begins, and the project moves on site. The architect now takes the role of Contract Administrator, overseeing the contractor's work and certifying payments. The church remains the Client, responsible for decision-making, cash flow, and communication with funders and the congregation.

Church's Role as Client

- Act as employer under the contract.
- Authorise payments when certified by the architect.
- Attend site meetings and review minutes.
- Approve any changes in cost, design, or scope.
- Maintain financial records for funders and auditors.

Key Actions

- Attend site meetings and circulate updates to the Ministry Area.
- Record and file minutes, photos, and certificates for funder evidence.
- Approve certified payments promptly while monitoring cash flow.
- Notify funders of progress, delays, or variations as required.
- Share visible progress with congregation and community.

Funding and Cash Flow
Funders often release money in instalments or only after certain milestones. There can also be delays in hearing back from applications made earlier in the process. Contractors also require staged payments based on valuations approved by the architect.

The church must therefore:
- Keep a cash flow forecast and be ready for temporary funding gaps.
- Communicate openly with funders about timelines and delays.
- Ensure no expenditure is committed without confirmed funding or risk of overpayment.

Community Engagement
Although the building is a construction site, keep people updated through newsletters, social media, or open days (with the contractor's consent). Visible progress maintains confidence and demonstrates accountability.

Stage 6

Handover and Evaluation

When construction is complete, the building is formally handed back to the church. The architect issues completion certificates, the contractor leaves site, and the church takes full responsibility for the building's use and care. This stage is about closing out the project well and recognising achievements.

Church's Role as Client

- Receive completion certificates and warranties from the architect.
- Ensure that evidence of Building Regulations Completion Certificate, and any Planning or Faculty Conditions are fully discharged
- Approve final accounts and payments.
- Ensure all grant claims and reporting requirements are met.
- Organise a thanksgiving or celebration event to mark completion.
- Lead an evaluation of the project to capture lessons learned.
- Health and safety file is completed and handed over along with any record drawings and maintenance manual.

Key Actions

- Confirm snagging list (final defects) is completed by the contractor and note the defects liabliity period.
- Submit final reports and evidence to funders for release of final instalments.
- File all project documentation for audit and future reference.
- Hold a celebration service or community event to thank supporters.
- Review successes and challenges with the project team.

Purpose of This Stage

The aim is to close the project responsibly, celebrate achievements, and fulfil all obligations to funders and stakeholders. A careful handover ensures the church takes possession of a building that is safe, complete, and ready for use in mission and community life.

Stage 7

In Use: Sustain and Grow

With the project complete, the focus shifts to making sure the building is well used, well maintained, and continues to serve both congregation and community. This stage is about long-term sustainability and ensuring the project's benefits are fully realised.

Church's Role as Client

- Take full responsibility for the ongoing management and upkeep of the building.
- Monitor how the building is being used and whether it meets the original vision.
- Maintain engagement with the community and funders.
- Plan for long-term financial sustainability through lettings, donations, and reserves.
- Ensure that defects are reported to the Architect for resolution within the Defects Liability (guarantee period)
- Approve payment of any contractual Retention monies at the end of the Defects Liability Period on receipt of the Making Good of Defects Certificate issued by the Architect.

Key Actions

- Implement a Maintenance and Sustainability Plan, including regular servicing, cleaning, and inspections.
- Track usage and community impact through bookings, surveys, or feedback.
- Continue fundraising or apply for follow-up grants (e.g. for equipment or programming).
- Keep the congregation and community updated on how the building is benefitting them.
- Review and adjust governance arrangements to support ongoing management.

Purpose of This Stage

The aim is to ensure the project delivers lasting value. By caring for the building, continuing community engagement, and planning ahead financially, the church secures the long-term success of its investment and strengthens its mission in the community.

Further Reading

More resources to help you with your project

Crossing the Threshold Toolkit. Diocese of Hereford.
https://www.hereford.anglican.org/parish-support/community-partnership/crossing-the-threshold-toolkit/

Developing and Managing Church Building Projects. National Churches Trust.
https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/get-support/buildings-maintenance/building-projects

Managing Changes to Places of Worship. Historic England.
https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/caring-for-heritage/places-of-worship/making-changes/

ChurchBuild Project Guide
https://churchbuildingprojects.co.uk/how-to/

RIBA Plan of Work
https://www.riba.org/work/insights-and-resources/riba-plan-of-work/

RIBA Plan of Work 2020

The RIBA Plan of Work organises the process of briefing, designing, delivering, maintaining, operating and using a building into eight stages. It is a framework for all disciplines on construction projects and should be used solely as guidance for the preparation of detailed professional services and building contracts.

Stage Boundaries:

Stages 0-4 will generally be undertaken one after the other.

Stages 4 and 5 will overlap in the **Project Programme** for most projects.

Stage 5 commences when the contractor takes possession of the site and finishes at **Practical Completion**.

Stage 6 starts with the handover of the building to the client immediately after **Practical Completion** and finishes at the end of the **Defects Liability Period**.

Stage 7 starts concurrently with Stage 6 and lasts for the life of the building.

Planning Note:

Planning Applications are generally submitted at the end of Stage 3 and should only be submitted earlier when the threshold of information required has been met. If a **Planning Application** is made during Stage 3, a mid-stage gateway should be determined and it should be clear to the project team which tasks and deliverables will be required.
See *Overview* guidance.

Procurement:

The RIBA Plan of Work is procurement neutral – See *Overview* guidance for a detailed description of how each stage might be adjusted to accommodate the requirements of the **Procurement Strategy**.

ER Employer's Requirements

CP Contractor's Proposals

	0 Strategic Definition	1 Preparation and Briefing	2 Concept Design	3 Spatial Coordination	4 Technical Design	5 Manufacturing and Construction	6 Handover	7 Use
	← Projects span from Stage 1 to Stage 6; the outcome of Stage 0 may be the decision to initiate a project and Stage 7 covers the ongoing use of the building. →							
Stage Outcome at the end of the stage	The best means of achieving the **Client Requirements** confirmed If the outcome determines that a building is the best means of achieving the **Client Requirements**, the client proceeds to Stage 1	**Project Brief** approved by the client and confirmed that it can be accommodated on the site	**Architectural Concept** approved by the client and aligned to the **Project Brief** The brief remains "live" during Stage 2 and is derogated in response to the **Architectural Concept**	Architectural and engineering information **Spatially Coordinated**	All design information required to manufacture and construct the project completed Stage 4 will overlap with Stage 5 on most projects	Manufacturing, construction and **Commissioning** completed There is no design work in Stage 5 other than responding to **Site Queries**	Building handed over, **Aftercare** initiated and **Building Contract** concluded	Building used, operated and maintained efficiently Stage 7 starts concurrently with Stage 6 and lasts for the life of the building
Core Tasks during the stage **Project Strategies** might include: – **Conservation** (if applicable) – **Cost** – **Fire Safety** – **Health and Safety** – **Inclusive Design** – **Planning** – **Plan for Use** – **Procurement** – **Sustainability** See *RIBA Plan of Work 2020 Overview* for detailed guidance on **Project Strategies**	Prepare **Client Requirements** Develop **Business Case** for feasible options including review of **Project Risks** and **Project Budget** Ratify option that best delivers **Client Requirements** Review **Feedback** from previous projects Undertake **Site Appraisals** No design team required for Stages 0 and 1. Client advisers may be appointed to the client team to provide strategic advice and design thinking before Stage 2 commences.	Prepare **Project Brief** including **Project Outcomes** and **Sustainability Outcomes**, **Quality Aspirations** and **Spatial Requirements** Undertake **Feasibility Studies** Agree **Project Budget** Source **Site Information** including **Site Surveys** Prepare **Project Programme** Prepare **Project Execution Plan**	Prepare **Architectural Concept** incorporating **Strategic Engineering** requirements and aligned to **Cost Plan**, **Project Strategies** and **Outline Specification** Agree **Project Brief Derogations** Undertake **Design Reviews** with client and **Project Stakeholders** Prepare stage **Design Programme**	Undertake **Design Studies**, **Engineering Analysis** and **Cost Exercises** to test **Architectural Concept** resulting in **Spatially Coordinated** design aligned to updated **Cost Plan**, **Project Strategies** and **Outline Specification** Initiate **Change Control Procedures** Prepare stage **Design Programme**	Develop architectural and engineering technical design Prepare and coordinate design team **Building Systems** information Prepare and integrate specialist subcontractor **Building Systems** information Prepare stage **Design Programme** Specialist subcontractor designs are prepared and reviewed during Stage 4	Finalise **Site Logistics** Manufacture **Building Systems** and construct building Monitor progress against **Construction Programme** Inspect **Construction Quality** Resolve **Site Queries** as required Undertake **Commissioning** of building Prepare **Building Manual** Building handover tasks bridge Stages 5 and 6 as set out in the **Plan for Use Strategy**	Hand over building in line with **Plan for Use Strategy** Undertake review of **Project Performance** Undertake seasonal **Commissioning** Rectify defects Complete initial **Aftercare** tasks including light touch **Post Occupancy Evaluation**	Implement **Facilities Management** and **Asset Management** Undertake **Post Occupancy Evaluation** of building performance in use Verify **Project Outcomes** including **Sustainability Outcomes** Adaptation of a building (at the end of its useful life) triggers a new Stage 0
Core Statutory Processes during the stage: Planning Building Regulations Health and Safety (CDM)	Strategic appraisal of **Planning** considerations	Source pre-application **Planning Advice** Initiate collation of health and safety **Pre-construction Information**	Obtain pre-application **Planning Advice** Agree route to **Building Regulations** compliance Option: submit outline **Planning Application**	Review design against **Building Regulations** Prepare and submit **Planning Application** See ***Planning Note*** for guidance on submitting a **Planning Application** earlier than at end of Stage 3	Submit **Building Regulations Application** Discharge pre-commencement **Planning Conditions** Prepare **Construction Phase Plan** Submit form F10 to HSE if applicable	Carry out **Construction Phase Plan** Comply with **Planning Conditions** related to construction	Comply with **Planning Conditions** as required	Comply with **Planning Conditions** as required
Procurement Route Traditional	Appoint client team	Appoint design team			Tender / Appoint contractor			Appoint **Facilities Management** and **Asset Management** teams, and strategic advisers as needed
Design & Build 1 Stage					ER / CP / Appoint contractor			
Design & Build 2 Stage			ER	Pre-contract services agreement	CP / Appoint contractor			
Management Contract / Construction Management			Appoint contractor					
Contractor-led			ER	Preferred bidder	CP / Appoint contractor			
Information Exchanges at the end of the stage	**Client Requirements** **Business Case**	**Project Brief** **Feasibility Studies** **Site Information** **Project Budget** **Project Programme** **Procurement Strategy** **Responsibility Matrix** **Information Requirements**	**Project Brief Derogations** Signed off **Stage Report** **Project Strategies** **Outline Specification** **Cost Plan**	Signed off **Stage Report** **Project Strategies** Updated **Outline Specification** Updated **Cost Plan** **Planning Application**	**Manufacturing Information** **Construction Information** **Final Specifications** Residual **Project Strategies** **Building Regulations Application**	**Building Manual** including **Health and Safety File** and **Fire Safety Information** **Practical Completion** certificate including **Defects List** **Asset Information** If **Verified Construction Information** is required, verification tasks must be defined	**Feedback** on **Project Performance** **Final Certificate** **Feedback** from light touch **Post Occupancy Evaluation**	**Feedback** from **Post Occupancy Evaluation** Updated **Building Manual** including **Health and Safety File** and **Fire Safety Information** as necessary

RIBA Architecture.com

Core RIBA Plan of Work terms are defined in the *RIBA Plan of Work 2020 Overview* glossary and set in **Bold Type**.

Further guidance and detailed stage descriptions are included in the *RIBA Plan of Work 2020 Overview*.

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