



Know Your Church Architect ~ Comments from Discussion Groups

Held on Saturday 5th November 2011 at St John's Church, Percy Main, North Shields

Discussion 1 (25 minutes)

What are the barriers to having a good relationship with our professional adviser?

- Lack of communication.
- Not taking time to get to know the professional properly.
- Not starting the process of communication early enough – establishing the client's brief, needs, objectives, problems.
- Trust – this works two ways.
- Lack of finance and resources to pay for the advice needed.
- Fear of incurring charges for advice.
- Prioritisation of resources – “money for fees could be better spent on repairs”.
- Being influenced by what is currently ‘fashionable’ e.g. uplighters placed high up where access is awkward, French drains, underpinning.
- Turnover of personnel – particularly from the client side. Churchwardens change frequently (affected by the effort that has to be put in).
- Lack of confidence about what you can expect professionals to do – some PCCs leave a lot to the vicar.
- Lack of attention.
- Concerns about previous poor work or service.
- No logbook.
- Concerns that professionals may not have up to date knowledge or understanding of the nature of the building / materials.
- Close relationship with builders.
- Problems arising from the PCC not having a clear understanding of what needs to be done.
- A difference in opinion between the architect and the PCC / a difference between what the architect advises and that the PCC thinks needs to be done.
- Timescales – there is a limited pool of professional advice so it seems to take a long time to make progress. Why so long?

How can we improve our relationship with our professional adviser?

- Get to know the architect and look at their previous work before appointing them.
- Gain confidence in talking to the architect.
- Keep the dialogue open.
- Keep the architect on your side.
- More communication / talking to the architect more – make use of telephone and email.
- Send your professional adviser a regular update about your plans / church newsletter etc. to keep them in the loop.
- Consider having an annual meeting with the architect to discuss repairs and plans for the future.
- Include a sum of money in the annual budget to cover a small amount of professional advice each year.
- Coordinate work better with architect – e.g. tell the architect about minor works in case there might be an unforeseen consequence that the PCC isn't aware of but that the architect will think about.
- Keep the logbook up to date. Use photographs.

- Involve the DAC.
- Ask for advice about grants.
- Make sure that the architect is aware of the need for items to be easy to maintain e.g. light fittings.
- Work together with other local churches – economies of scale.
- Create a fabric group to provide continuity on the side of the client rather than relying on the churchwardens and the vicar.
- More honesty about fees and expectations.
- As a client we need to have a clear statement of need / brief.
- Continuity of relationship between the client and the consultant. This should be a long term relationship. Relationships based on the principle of using the QIR architect to carry out the repairs.
- Good will.

Discussion 2 (20 minutes)

What makes a good Quinquennial Inspection Report?

- Clear, plain English so that lay people can understand the report. As little technical language as possible.
- It would be useful to have access to an architectural glossary.
- Concise and simple / succinct and to the point.
- No flowery language!
- A good summary at the beginning with key points and a brief description.
- Well structured report with a contents page and clear headings.
- A plan with a key to ensure that it is clear whether geographical east and liturgical east are the same.
- Good photographs of the problem areas.
- Making sure that all documents have been prepared beforehand (guide book?).
- Making sure that all keys are available on the day of the inspection.
- Must be informed by what happened before – importance of logbook and other documentation.
- No nasty surprises for the next five years.
- Some hints at the process needed to undertake the work recommended (i.e. what to do next).
- Post QI discussions are perhaps the key to making the QIR useful and effective. The architect should visit the church after the QIR is submitted to discuss the repairs needed.

What are the most useful features?

- The report itself!
- List of priorities / ideas of what has to be done.
- Having an overview / the 'big picture' of the condition of the church.
- Rough guide to the costs of repairs. This allows decisions to be made about whether works can be done immediately (de minimis – up to £2,500) or whether they might need faculty. But, PCCs need to understand that these are just estimated costs and the actual sum could be less or more.
- Photographs.
- Having a digital 'working' copy of the document as well as a printed copy e.g. a spreadsheet for the maintenance schedule that can be updated as the work is undertaken.

Q&A Panel Discussion

Q1. How to develop an ongoing relationship with your architect?

- Keep architect well informed.
- Build in time between QIs.
- Regard your architect as part of your church project team.
- A word of caution regarding the tendering process (check rules on procurement that might affect applications for grant aid, e.g. via English Heritage).

Q2. What is the relationship between Archdeacons and the Diocesan Advisory Committee?

- Closely involved in reviewing proposals etc.
- “Cherish your Archdeacon”!
- They represent the pastoral dimension (advocacy role)
- Parishes should communicate with their Archdeacon and avoid “surprises”.
- Archdeacons can help in crisis situations, and ensure continuity of care.
- They can advise on how best to approach the decision-making process, and help to explain/interpret decisions.

Q3. How to develop an ongoing relationship with your architect?

- Not just about going with the cheapest.
- Seek advice from your architect/surveyor.
- Only include contractors that you’d be happy to do the work.
- Ask architect to explain building contracts and process.
- RIBA website offers advice...
<http://www.architecture.com/UseAnArchitect/GuidanceAndPublications/GuidanceAndPublications.aspx>

Q4. Other points...

- If unsure, ask architect for advice on what they can do, and what they will charge for.
- There is a range of other smaller building issues – e.g. decoration: types of paint to use, etc – that may benefit from an architect’s advice.