

Monmouth DAC

Removing Pews and Chairs from a Church

DAC Policy

The DAC acknowledges the need that church buildings need to be used flexibly is willing to consider the removal of pews and benches in some churches, to facilitate different styles of worship and extended community use. The scale of the removal and the proposed alternative is considered on a case-by-case basis, and will be a matter for discussion. The Parish should contact the Secretary of the DAC at an early stage so that members might visit and discuss the proposals. A Statement of Significance and Need, which sets out clearly the reasons for the proposed change, should be provided in advance. This should address the significance of the existing seating and why the needs of the parish cannot be met without making the proposed changes.

DAC Members will wish to see that careful consideration has been given to how the whole building is used, what options the PCC has considered, the pros and cons of each option and why these particular proposals are thought to be the best.

Points to Consider

Consideration should be given to the following: -

1. How old are the pews? A detailed survey of the pews may be required. - How significant are they as examples of workmanship over the centuries? - What is their condition?
2. Does their inclusion in the building form part of the whole design of the church or are they a mixture of styles, ages and designs?
3. Were they imported from elsewhere or are they original pews for your building? - What will be the aesthetic impact of removing some pews and will it be detrimental?
4. Are there too many pews for the church building? Can your objective be achieved by removing a limited number of benches or pews?

Where the Parish is removing pews or benches to replace them with chairs, the DAC would advise that the following issues are considered by the church.

1. Upholstered chairs are unlikely to be as durable as simple wooden or steel framed chairs and may only have a short lifespan before they require reupholstering. This is particularly true for churches which are not constantly heated and the upholstery may be damaged by damp.
2. As wood is a traditional material, such chairs often relate more closely to the historic character of the church than fabric chairs.
3. The colour of the wood needs to be carefully selected so that it reflects the tones of the existing timber within the church.
4. The use of modern pews should be considered, as these can provide more comfortable and more flexible seating whilst seating reflecting the historic appearance of the church more closely.

5. An assessment should be made of the probable usage of the chairs, especially how regularly would they be stacked. This may not be as frequently as initially thought, and it may not be worth compromising on comfort and utility for a chair which is seldom stacked in practice.
6. If the church is to be regularly used for public events such as concerts, the chairs will need to be fixed together for safety reasons and to facilitate a swift evacuation in an emergency.
7. The practicalities of chairs should be fully evaluated. Chairs with book boxes can be heavy and not easy to move or stack. If a decision is taken not to have book boxes, then the PCC must consider where hymn books, service books, notice sheets and Bibles will be stored or kept during the service. You may also need to consider whether your chair design incorporates somewhere to keep kneelers neatly and safely.
8. In many cases historic seating is located on raised pew platforms. You will need to consider how will manage the different levels when the existing seating is removed. Retaining platforms is problematic, as there is a danger that chairs will be placed too near to edge and fall off. If the intention is to lower the platforms then consideration will need to be given to what will replace them . The infilling of the voids, which often exist below pew platforms can have archaeological implications. For further guidance please see the Guidance Note Archaeology and Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC),

Every church has its own issues to consider but those identified in this paper are the most frequent. The PCC will is advised to have thought through the questions raised here before requesting a DAC site visit. We also suggest you also take consultation within the wider community, because even if regular church goers are happy with the removal of pews others in the community may not be. This can, in some cases, become a point of tension if not conflict.

Further Information

Further guidance can be found at

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/seating>