

Choosing a Professional Advisor

General Considerations

Working with any historic building usually requires a great deal of technical knowledge of both historic building practice and the best modern materials, a wider appreciation of the historic environment, a working knowledge of conservation principles and an ability to produce innovative design solutions.

It is therefore, strongly recommended that either a qualified architect or similar conservation accredited professional advisor should be appointed, such as an experienced and accredited architectural technician or surveyor as this choice is likely to save a significant amount of time and expense later in the project.

Whilst this is particularly true of Grade I and II* listed churches, a professional advisor with a working knowledge of historic buildings will almost certainly enable unlisted churches to obtain the best value for its money

They will also simplify the process of obtaining a faculty by providing the full range of information which the DAC, Cadw and ultimately The Chancellor will need before they can grant the faculty.

They can also help you find a suitably experienced builder and provide quality control over the build, helping you to complete your project efficiently, and manage the budget.

Points to Consider

Consideration should be given to the following:-

What does the church want to archive as a result of the project? A professional advisor can facilitate meetings and hence help the church to define their aspirations for the project and provide them with a route to achieve these much more effectively than may otherwise be the case. Even for a seemingly simple project such as replacing the guttering on a church, they can advise on the extent of guttering which needs replaced and the type of guttering which should replace it.

Does the church need a major grant in order to undertake the project? Many of the larger heritage grants specifically require that a conservation accredited professional form part of the overall team and signs off the design of the scheme whilst smaller grants may require that a competitive tendering exercise for the building work is conducted to ensure that the church obtains the best value that it can for its grant spend.

Will the works require a faculty? Any projects except for minor works are likely to require a faculty. As part of the faculty process, the DAC will usually require detailed information on what is proposed such as drawings and a schedule of works, as well as reassurance that the project will be managed in such a way as to avoid the long term damage to a church that can potentially result from poor quality or inappropriate building work. Although compiling this information can often be done without the need to use an architect, employing one will make the process much simpler for the church and minimise delays to the faculty.

Are additional reports required? Many projects will require additional specialist reports such as Statements of Significance, Ecological Reports, Engineers Reports, asbestos reports etc. While the church is often able to manage such consultants directly, employing an architect who already knows such contractors will be able to advise when such reports are required in a timely manner, minimise the work required by the church and ensure that best value for money is obtained.

Is a formal tendering process required? Prudence dictates that it is always better to request at least three quotes from reputable building companies and most grants will require that a formal competitive tender exercise be undertaken. Compiling the material that is required to ensure that quotes are accurate and can be compared directly is a time consuming activity which requires an in depth knowledge of building practice and techniques but will enable the contractors to accurately estimate the costs as they will know the exact amount of work required. When building contractors are provided with vague briefs they always assume the worst case scenario which inevitably results in increased costs overall. In addition, the more precise the specification is, the less likelihood there will be that costs will significantly increase during the building process, and it becomes much easier to control such increases in costs where they are inevitable. In addition, the architect will be able to compare the submitted tenders and advise which actually represents the best option, as this is often not the cheapest.

Can you accurately assess the quality of workmanship, especially when poor workmanship could cause defects in the future? Building as a very technical process, and apparently small deviations from best practice or poorly performed work can cause huge and expensive problems in the future. This is particularly true for heritage buildings such as churches, where many of the traditional skills are no longer practiced regularly. Few church members would have the skills required to adequately supervise such work, and the level of quality control which an experienced conservation architect can provide should ensure that your building work is carried out to the highest possible standard which will ensure that future defects, and the (possibly very expensive) future failures are minimised.

What level of fees should I expect to have to pay? Unless your project is either very small or very large, you should expect to pay between 8% and 15% of the project cost in fees, with about half being payable for initial design work and half for the project management of the works.

Which professional advisor should I employ? There are a number of different building specialities which have lists of specialists in historic building construction and conservation. Although the precise speciality which is best for any particular project will differ, the need for the specialist to have extensive conservation expertise within their own field will not, as historic buildings perform very differently to their modern counterparts. The main types of advisors are :-

Architects- these will have a first degree in building design followed by four years of professional training and exams, and additional training in conservation. Conservation architects are registered either with the Register of Architects Accredited in Building Conservation (AARB), or on the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) register. Architects are usually the professionals with the greatest design skills who come out with the really inspiring innovative designs.

Architectural Technicians- these will usually have a first degree in building design followed by more informal, but not necessarily less extensive, post qualification training and experience. They should be

members of the Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists, and on CIAT's Conservation Register. Technicians traditionally specialise more on individual building elements, and their designs are often less fluid and more mechanical than those of an architect.

Surveyors - these will usually have a first degree in building in a building related subject followed by significant post degree training and experience. The term "surveyor" covers a large range of different disciplines including project management, costing projects, valuing buildings and analysing defects in buildings. Surveyors should be listed on the Register of Accredited Building Conservation Surveyors administered by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. Although some surveyors have design skills. They are more frequently involved with projects involving the repair and restoration of the buildings main structure.

Final Advice

Every project will have different needs, and although some may seem too small to justify relatively large professional fees, employing such a professional will make running the project much easier in the short term and enable the parish to get the best value for money in the long term.

Should the parish need any assistance then the DAC Secretary is available to provide help, support and advice.

Further Information

Further guidance can be found at

<https://www.architecture.com/working-with-an-architect/conservation-register>

<https://architecturaltechnology.com/joining/specialist-registers-cenv-con/conservation-register-new.html>

<https://www.ricsfirms.com/accreditations/building-conservation-accreditation-scheme/>