



## DAC GUIDANCE NOTE

### Protection for church windows

#### **DAC policy**

In principle the DAC does not advise that windows are protected unless absolutely necessary. They take the view that metal grilles should be considered only where they are absolutely essential. They are opposed to the use of polycarbonate sheeting unless there are exceptional circumstances. Such proposals are dealt with on a case-by-case basis and no one exception will be seen as a precedent for subsequent applications.

#### **Response to vandalism**

Damage to church windows is a cause of great distress and considerable expense to parishes. Often, it is a result of vandalism, which raises additional concerns and fears.

Where a significant damage occurs to a window, it will need to be repaired and the PCC should contact the church architect and DAC as quickly as possible. Where only small areas or individual panes have been damaged the PCC is advised to wait a while and repair all the broken sections in one go. This means that the whole job can be covered by a single faculty application and one contractor.

The reason for waiting is to see if the vandals grow up, move on or get bored. This is usually the case and the PCC can then repair all the damage when the spate of attacks is over rather than repairing frequently and repeatedly. The DAC appreciates that waiting can be a test of the PCC's nerves and can leave a building looking unsightly for a while. Sadly, experience has shown that where windows are repaired very quickly vandals may see this as a challenge to make further, worse, attacks on the glazing. In some cases putting up window protection has merely diverted attention to other accessible areas such as porches, doors or stonework.

It is very important that PCCs have an accurate photographic record of every window in the church. A professional photographer may need to be employed to ensure that there is an accurate record of design and shading. If any damage does take place the PCC then has a clear picture of what has been broken which will help conservators and insurers to deal with the problem efficiently.

Churchwardens, cleaners and all those involved with the building should understand that if any damage is discovered ALL pieces of glass and leadwork should be carefully collected and retained. These can then be used to rebuild the window and will ensure both accuracy and economy in putting the damage right.

#### **Prevention is better than cure**

PCCs are strongly advised:



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- To consider sensitive external lighting as a way of putting vandals off lurking around the church and churchyard
- To develop *Churchwatch* and awareness in the local community so that vandals can be put off by the presence of other people around the church and any damage be reported quickly
- Consult with the local Crime Prevention Officer to see if the police can do frequent checks on the church over an agreed period so that vandals are put off “having a go”. This is clearly not viable long-term (or in rural areas) but can be useful to “break the habit” of a known group of trouble-makers at a particular time. It may also be possible for urban churches to be incorporated into town centre policing policies.

The DAC recognises that there are some situations where windows must be protected. Each case is taken on its own merits but the following situations have arisen and window protection has been authorised by faculty:

- Where glass is historically outstanding
- Where vandalism appears to be endemic in the area over many years
- Where windows are at a low level and are at risk from stones flying from lawnmowers, strimmers or other equipment used to maintain the churchyard
- Where windows are easily accessible and pose a security risk

#### **Types of protection that may be considered**

1. Clear glass to “sandwich” fragile historic glazing - a conservation technique
2. Wire mesh grilles
3. Polycarbonate pieces cut to cover specific areas of particular windows
4. Traditional metal bars, fixed externally into the mortar to prevent access through the window

#### **DAC advice on these methods**

##### *Conservation glazing – isothermal glazing*

This method is sometimes controversial, both for aesthetic reasons and because it requires the coloured glass to be moved forward within the window to allow for plain glazing to be fitted in its original position. Such work has an aesthetic impact on the outside of the building but can be appropriate in particular circumstances.

- This is very specialist work done by accredited craftsmen. English Heritage and the Council for the Care of Churches would normally be involved in such projects.
- This method of protection is primarily intended to preserve the window by defending it



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from wind and weather rather than vandalism

#### *Black powder-coated stainless steel grilles*

This is considered to be the least visually intrusive method of protecting glazing, where necessary. Consideration should be given to the following:

- Each grille must be carefully profiled to each section of the window
- Grilles should be attached using non-ferrous fixings into existing mortar joints.
- The church architect should be involved in drawing up a specification and advising on which contractors can offer a good quality service.

#### *Polycarbonate*

This method of protection is very seldom recommended, for the following reasons:

- It is visually obtrusive and discolours quickly (it can become completely obscure within five years, making the interior of the building very dark).
- The surface is easily scratched and rapidly attracts lichens and moulds
- It creates a micro-climate where mould and moisture build up very rapidly.
- The lack of ventilation between the polycarbonate sheeting and the window can cause severe damage to glazing, leadwork, ferramenta and stonework.
- The reduced access for cleaning results in a build-up on the outside of the glass which looks unsightly when viewed from inside the church.
- Polycarbonate burns readily and may increase the threat to the fabric of the church from vandalism.
- Sheets that are not precisely cut and well-fitted can provide a haven for nesting birds: their excrement can etch into the surface of the guard making it unsightly, or fall behind, damaging glazing and stonework.
- Polycarbonate sheets need to be removed regularly so the windows can be cleaned and the ferramenta properly maintained. This needs to be done more frequently with polycarbonate than stainless steel grilles because polycarbonate does not allow natural washing and removal of debris through rainfall and wind.

In the very rare cases where polycarbonate is permitted, it must be at least 6mm thick, profiled to the window mullions, so that the sheeting only covers the glazed areas, fitted with non-ferrous fittings into the joints/mortar, include clear ventilation gaps at top and bottom, be fitted in sections which do not overlap, and incorporate space for expansion.

#### *External metal bars*

This is a traditional way of preventing access on windows, which may be appropriate as



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follows:

- For windows which could be broken and used for illicit entry to the church.
- For inconspicuous for windows which are not overlooked e.g. vestries, boiler houses.

For larger windows, or ones in more prominent positions, designs can be developed which look like normal ferramenta but are made of stronger metals. They do not prevent damage to glazing but do help to prevent people getting in through the window.

#### *Laminated glass*

Laminated glass (sometimes reinforced by metal mesh) is uncommon in churches, and would be exceptional in an historic building, for the following reasons:

- It often has a green tint and the glass used must be free from the iron oxide which causes this tendency.
- It is just as visually intrusive externally as polycarbonate, although it does not scratch so easily.
- It will craze if fired at with an air pellet.
- Fitting is a major issue as badly fitted sheets can cause all the problems of polycarbonate whilst being heavier and harder to remove.

#### **Further information**

Sarah Brown and Sebastian Strobl (2002) *The Care of stained glass and historic glazing: a handbook for custodians*

#### **Help and advice**

For further information, help or advice please contact the DAC Secretary on 01633 267490.