

How to Write a Statement of Significance

Introduction

A Statement of Significance is an important document, which describes the history of your church, its furnishings, monuments, stained glass, churchyard, setting and significant events in its history. It will enable your parish as well as people outside your community to understand what makes your church special. The information it provides can also be used to re-interpret your building with a new guidebook or displays.



Every church should have a Statement of Significance, not just in the event of a Faculty application. It is a useful resource for anyone with responsibility for your church's fabric and encourages good stewardship of the building. As a working document, it should be reviewed annually so that new information can be added or any changes that have been made in the church recorded.

Whilst the aim of all Statements of Significance is the same, each will be an individual document, reflecting the character and history of the church it describes. The creation of these Statements may uncover previously unknown information about your church and community and could be important in extending our knowledge of the parish churches in the Diocese of Ely. These guidance notes are intended to help you prepare a Statement of Significance; they are designed to augment the Church Buildings Council guidance which can be found via the link below.

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

SECTION ONE: Writing the Statement

General Guidance notes

- Try to make the Statement interesting and readable.
- Be factual, concise and to the point.
- The Statement does not need to be a lengthy or learned document – one or two sides of A4 should be sufficient, depending on the importance or complexity of the church.
- Use a clear font, for example Calibri, Trebuchet, Gill Sans. Use a legible size font – 11 or 12.
- Write and save your Statement electronically. This makes the document easier to amend, share and read. Consider whether it can form part of the parish's website.
- Nominate someone to take responsibility for the Statement who will ensure that it is up to date and accessible at all times. It remains the property of the PCC even if the author moves away.
- Provide an easily accessible plan of the church and churchyard which will make it easier for those not familiar with your church to identify the areas described in the text.

Outline plan of a Statement of Significance

Part I of your Statement will remain constant as a description of your church and will only need to be amended if changes are made to the church, or if new information becomes known.

Begin by writing down **basic information** about your church such as its parish, dedication, address, deanery, EH Listing Grade I, II* or II. State if it is part of or adjacent to a Scheduled Ancient Monument and/or it is in a Conservation Area etc (see Section Two: Basic Facts).

1. Think about the **Setting of the Church**: describe **your church in the context of its surroundings**.
 - State what contribution the church makes to the physical character and quality of its surroundings.
 - What **impact** does it have on its surroundings in terms of architectural style and scale?
 - Is it a local landmark that contributes to the wider landscape, or part of a designed landscape?
 - Is it sited in the centre of the community or is it isolated from the village?
 - Include a map of the local area.

2. **Describe the churchyard**: consider the significance of its cultural heritage and its natural history.
 - Identify the earliest graves, those of important people in the community or family burials over several generations. Some graveyards have been recorded by the NADFAS (National Association of Decorative and Fine Art Societies) Church Recording project.
 - If some areas of your churchyard have been re-ordered or it has been extended, record it here.
 - Describe the setting of your churchyard. Is it on an earlier archaeological site or part of a mediaeval settlement? Is it a Scheduled Ancient Monument?
 - Record the boundaries of the churchyard and whether it has a lychgate or any other associated church buildings. Were there any now lost buildings in the churchyard?
 - Are there any veteran trees which are of cultural or ecological significance? Are there any trees, memorials or rare specimens? Is the churchyard a conservation Area or registered as a County Wildlife Site?

3. **Assess the social history of the church**:
 - Does your church have any historical or literary associations that make it of local, national or even international importance?
 - Is there a war memorial?
 - Are there any local traditions associated with the church and churchyard?
 - How has the local community changed over the years?

4. Put together a **summary of the known history of your church building in** a simple, factual and accurate form starting from its earliest known and recorded origins.
 - Describe the church: its main features and the materials used in its construction. Be descriptive – is it large or small, spacious or cramped, light or dark etc.
 - When was the church built? There are likely to be several distinct building phases and consequently a number of different styles of architecture from medieval to the 20th century. If it is built on the site of an earlier church, is anything known about its predecessor?
 - Where there is documentary evidence of when parts of the church were built, who carried it out (architect or craftsmen/mason's names) and who paid for the work (Patron or Guilds), this should be included.

- If there is work by an important architect, or designer it is a good idea to ask advice from an expert in the area about the significance of your church in the career of the designer.
- Include photographs (both historical and contemporary). At the very least you must include one current image of the exterior of the church and one of the interior.
- It is important to include a plan of the church, date-shaded to identify the age of different parts of the building. It does not need to be to scale but it should be as accurate as you can make it (your architect should have a plan you can use).
- When assessing the significance of the church, its contents or the work of known architects or designers you can use the following terms as a guide:

High: of national to international importance

Moderate to High: of regional importance

Moderate: of local value and regional importance as one of group of churches (group value)

Low to Moderate: of local value

Low: adds little to the importance of the site or its surroundings

Part II of the Statement reflects the work you are proposing to carry out and provides a detailed appraisal of the area of the church that will be affected by the proposed work. It will be an essential part of each application for a Faculty and will be unique to that application.

- Clearly identify the area/s of the church affected by the proposed work on a plan and include photographs of the whole area as it is now.
- Write a detailed description of the area of the building, or furnishings that will be affected and assess their significance using the terms recommended in Part I (4) – **High, Moderate to High, Moderate, Low to Moderate or Low.**
- Assess the impact that the proposed changes will make to the present fabric of the building or furnishings. State whether the change will enhance the significance (give reasons why) or whether it will detract from it (in which case state what is being done to reduce the impact e.g. by making the changes reversible).
- The PCC should justify the need for change by referring to its Statement of Need (see relevant guidance notes). The PCC, especially in potentially controversial proposals, needs to demonstrate that it has a robust case for changes based on well-established needs balanced against a proper understanding of the implications of those changes on the fabric and furnishings.
- An application for removal of pews requires as much detail as possible on their age, their intrinsic importance and who made them (if known). If there are pew platforms to be removed as well, give information on what is beneath them i.e. solid floor or earth, or graves and ledger stones.
- In addition to your architect's plans and drawings of the proposed work, historical photographs or other illustrations are useful, especially in supporting applications to restore architectural features or to re-instate a previous arrangement.

SECTION TWO: Check-list for Compiling a Statement of Significance

Use this to check you have included all the necessary information.

Key Facts:

- Parish
- Dedication
- Benefice (if applicable)
- Diocese/deanery

- Address including Post Code
- Grid Reference
- Local Planning Authority
- EH Listing: Grade I etc
- Conservation Area (if applicable)
- Scheduled Ancient Monument (if applicable)
- Tree Preservation Orders
- SSSI or County Wildlife Site
- Map of the local area
- At least two photographs of the church, normally one of the exterior and one of the interior.

Description of your church:

- Define your building in terms of its wider significance. Is it of national, regional or even international importance in terms of its architecture, furnishings, monuments, churchyard and social heritage?
- Description of the location and setting – e.g. rural, village, market town? Is it a county or regional landmark?
- A description of your church's current use by the congregation and local community.
- Is there any documentary evidence of early patronage, historic use by Guilds or noteworthy people etc.
- Summary of your building's history including architects, craftsmen etc.
- Significant events or personalities associated with the church or churchyard.
- Ground Plan with the overall dimensions of the church.
- Describe the materials used for building i.e. identify the kind of stone or roofing materials.
- A general description of your building as it is today.
- A description of your churchyard and any significant monuments or buildings within its boundary.
- The flora or fauna in the churchyard.
- The contents of the church to be included in the part I descriptions, as applicable. Altar, Reredos, Communion Rails, Choir stalls, Rood screen, Pulpit, Lectern, Pews, Font, Monuments (internal and external), Ledger stones, Stained Glass, Wall Paintings, Organ, Bells and Frame, Plate, Registers (noting details of what exists and where they are kept), other furnishings of value to today's congregation, Gravestones, War Memorials, Lychgates.

Changes made to the interiors of Church of England churches are regulated by the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules and under Ecclesiastical Exemption, are consequently exempt from normal local authority Listed Building and Conservation Area Consent procedures. However, any changes that affect the exterior of the building will require Planning Permission from the local planning authority. It is therefore important to be aware that the stringent guidelines for giving Planning Permission for built heritage are applicable to church buildings. Identifying the significance of historic fabric and ensuring its preservation is central to this process and it is well worth taking note of these Government guidelines when drawing up your Statements of Significance and Need.