

# Diocese of Newcastle

## The Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches

### Carpets in Churches

As a result of changes in liturgy and increased community use of our church buildings, there have been a number of large scale alterations to churches in the last few years including re-ordering, the provision of toilets, tea and coffee making facilities, and in some cases extensions to the church building.

[‘The Church In Your Care’](#) guidance notes prepared by the DAC for the Care of Churches August 2008 was written to help parishes obtain a faculty for schemes such as these.

The following guidance notes should be regarded as an addition to ‘The Church In Your Care’ and set out to help parishes that are considering using carpet as part of a scheme. They aim to answer some of the following questions

- (i) De minimis or Faculty?
- (ii) How much information does the DAC require?
- (iii) Where is carpet appropriate or not?
- (iv) Choosing a carpet

#### Introduction

The type and use of floor coverings in churches has changed over the years in churches as it has in the domestic and commercial sector. In church buildings, the need for flexibility of use, as more churches are used by the community for other activities, and re-ordering to accommodate changes in liturgy, demand that we all, the parishes and the DAC, look again at the use of floor coverings and in particular carpets in our churches.

Laying a new carpet may seem to be relatively unimportant, the choice of colour 'a matter of taste' and the quality of carpet dependent on funds available. The process, however, can be fraught with difficulty as everyone has an opinion and not all opinions agree. Too often professional help is not deemed necessary due to the 'minor nature' of the work even though unless agreed as 'de minimis' a Faculty will be required in order to carry out the work. Usually the task of co-ordination falls to churchwardens, who are then responsible for reaching an agreement on colour, quality and extent of new carpet together with all the appropriate information to accompany a submission to the DAC.

*How do we choose a colour? How far should we extend the carpet or should we remove it? What are we allowed to do? How much information do the DAC need in order to advise the Chancellor?*

It is understandable if a PCC decides to keep things much the same.

The choice of carpet, however, is very important as it can have quite an impact on the experience of worship in a church:

- The right colour can unify the interior and provide focus for the liturgy as well as conveying a sense of warmth and welcome. It can even soften the sound of little (and large!) feet that easily distract prayer./
- A carpet may also be inappropriate in some situations, it can adversely affect the acoustics, lead to deterioration of the floor beneath if laid incorrectly and if the wrong colour is chosen. prove a distraction

Sometimes there is a call for a radical re-think, perhaps a bold colour scheme or even the removal of all carpeting but more often it is the more subtle changes to a colour scheme that are most effective. It is unfortunate if parishes miss out on the opportunity to make such improvements simply because they do not know where to begin.

### **(i) De Minimis or Faculty**

Changing the carpeting in a church requires a Faculty unless the proposal can be regarded as de minimis

De minimis is defined as replacement of carpets or curtains with the equivalent of similar colour, material, pattern and type of backing [The carpeting of additional areas is not included]

## **(ii) How much information does the DAC require?**

The primary role of the DAC is to advise the Chancellor as to whether a Faculty should be granted. It is important therefore that the DAC understands fully any scheme that is proposed. It's worth remembering that members of the DAC may never have visited the church concerned and those that have visited should not have to rely on memory. It is crucial that any application includes as much information as possible. A lack of information is likely to delay the process.

For guidance the following information should accompany a submission to the DAC in advance of the application for a Faculty.

- Small carpet sample. – This is important, as it will inform the DAC of the true quality and colour of the proposed carpet.
- A plan of the church, to scale if possible, showing the extent of existing floor coverings
- A plan of the church, to scale if possible, showing the extent of proposed floor finishes
- Good quality clear photographs of the interior of the church that will inform the DAC of the nature of the church interior as well as show the colour scheme of the church, including fabric and fittings. General views facing east and west also show the existing floor coverings in context.
- Statements of need and significance. These are required where a church is listed. Guidance on the preparation of these two statements can be obtained from ['The Church In Your Care'](#).
- It is always helpful to the DAC whether the church is listed or not, if a few lines are included with the submission to explain just why the change in floor coverings is needed and how the change might affect the fabric of the church.

## **(iii) Carpet or no carpet?**

There are a number of very good reasons why carpets should or should not be used. A consideration of the following may help to clarify whether carpet is the answer in a particular case.

- Extending the area of carpeting can make a church seem more comfortable and welcoming in that it deadens the sound of feet and provides a more acceptable floor for children to sit on.
- Extending the area of carpeting may dampen the acoustic of the building necessitating sound amplification. Those that regularly host musical events in their church should consider what impact extensive carpeting might have on the quality of sound at such an event.
- Some churches have a number of different floor finishes within a relatively small area resulting in a somewhat muddled and untidy appearance that can be very distracting. Extending the carpet will reduce the number of different surfaces on show resulting in the church looking less cluttered.
- Some churches may have a number of different floor finishes but it is general clutter that makes the building look untidy. It may be that storage for books or new noticeboards are required and not an extension to the carpeting.
- In some churches the chancel and sanctuary areas have been treated in a different way, with different furniture and colour scheme to the nave resulting in a church in two halves. A carpet linking the nave, chancel, and sanctuary can effectively connect the two halves of the church as well as providing a focus on the communion table.
- It can be argued that wall- to- wall carpeting fails to distinguish between the different liturgical spaces and actions.
- Many churches have heating grilles, memorials set into the existing floor and chancels and sanctuaries are tiled. Care must be taken if these are to be covered by carpet to ensure that no damage is done to them when laying the carpet.
- The question should be asked as to whether memorials grilles or tiled floors should be covered at all especially as carpets do not necessarily protect the floor beneath. Particles of dust and grit trapped under the carpet can have an abrasive effect on the floor beneath as they move when the carpet is walked on. Memorials are an important part of the churches history and lifting the carpet when necessary to gain access may not be a very practical or satisfactory solution.

- Many historic churches have damp and uneven floors. Any carpet chosen for a church should not be rubber backed or otherwise impervious to moisture. Wooden floors will rot if not ventilated. Stone and tiled floors will also suffer if not allowed to dry out.
- In a modern church where seating and furniture is not fixed because the community uses the building for other purposes, fitted carpet might be an option. In this situation however the other uses of the building need to be taken into account - a hard surface may be required for the other activities.
- There are some areas of a church that receive more wear than others. Carpet will become worn around entrance doors and the centre of narrow aisles long before the rest of the carpet is affected. Water damage from flower arrangements, candle grease and accidental spillages where tea and coffee are served can make a fully fitted carpet difficult to maintain. It may be better to refrain from using carpet in these high-risk areas and perhaps investigate the possibility of using barrier matting in porches or entrance areas.
- Carpets have a limited life and will need replacing at least every 25 years
- The use of hardwearing contract carpeting as used in schools and offices may not be appropriate for historic churches as it is usually glued down and therefore damages the subfloor. (This is not a problem where churches have concrete or timber floors that would benefit from being covered.)

#### **(iv) Choosing a carpet**

The churches of the Diocese of Newcastle range from the small and ancient to large and modern and are situated in the country, the town and the suburb. How does one give guidance on the choice of carpet, especially the colour of carpet, where the buildings are so diverse?

**Perhaps the answer is to view each and every church as unique, assessing from the church itself what is required in the way of texture and colour to achieve a sense of spiritual peace and harmony rather than following a set of arbitrary rules.**

There are in fact no rules governing the choice of colour and quality of carpet. Carpets can vary from the rush matting covering damp

flagstones of a country church to those that are handmade or specially commissioned. The range of colours in varying shades and tones that can be used is limited only by availability, though a quick tour of the Diocese would suggest that red or blue are the only options! It is worth remembering, when searching for a new carpet that even the traditional red carpet can vary from terracotta to maroon and can be bright or muted. It is advisable therefore to take some time to consider the church as a whole, taking note of the colour of stone, timber, paint, furniture, altar frontal, hangings, kneelers, cushions, curtains and other textiles as well as the colour of stained glass before automatically settling for the same colour as before. Even a subtle change of shade might make all the difference. Carpets vary greatly in quality and price. A shabby carpet makes the whole church look shabby. It is important to choose a carpet that will wear well, be resistant to stains and easy to maintain and that is of a type that is appropriate to the church itself. A consideration of the following points may be helpful.

- A carpet should never be the focus of attention but should draw the eye to what is important, either the chancel and sanctuary or furniture such as the communion table, lectern, pulpit or font
- A carpet will draw attention to itself if it shows marks from accidental spillages or dust from feet. Careful maintenance of a good quality stain resistant carpet and immediate removal of accidental stains should ensure that this is not too much of a problem in most instances. The colour of dust, however, is a lot lighter than one would think. A carpet that is mid-green in colour will require less attention than the traditional dark red or dark blue coloured carpets that seem to show every mark.
- Marks and stains show up more clearly on plain carpets than those that have a pattern or contain a fleck of a darker tone or a different colour.
- A church interior will appear more peaceful and tranquil if there are few or no colours competing for attention but some church interiors can appear very 'busy' with furniture, fittings and fabric of many different colours. A mixture of furniture incorporating different timbers can just add to the muddle. In this situation one literally can lose sight of what should be the focus of attention as there is just far too much going on. It is important in these interiors that the colour scheme is simplified. This can be achieved in a number of different ways. If, for example, a green carpet is chosen that matches

or tones with a row of kneelers, the kneelers will cease to stand out and green will become the background colour. All other colours such as those in stained glass and altar frontals will then stand out whilst anything of the same shade of green will recede. In order to shift the focus of attention from parts of the church that shouldn't stand out to those that should the rule is therefore to add more of the unwanted colour to make it recede! This is in total contravention of the belief that the way to choose a colour of carpet is to select a colour from an altar frontal or stained glass window. If a bright blue carpet is chosen and placed under stained glass of the same hue, the eye will dismiss all the blue and focus on the small pieces of glass of other colours resulting in a distorted view of the window.

- It should not be overlooked that the stone or brick of a church adds a large amount of colour. Stone varies in colour from warm and light to cold and grey. An attempt to 'warm up' an interior of grey stone by the laying of a red carpet merely succeeds in a church appearing even more cold and grey. A grey carpet, however, that is similar to the colour of the stone will have the effect of making the colour recede as it becomes part of the background. Fair-faced brickwork can sometimes be difficult to accommodate within a colour scheme, as it too can appear to be cold and austere. Carpet in subtle shades of brown, terracotta, gold or neutral can be used to soften the effect of the brickwork and also help it to blend into and become the background.
- If it is decided to choose a neutral coloured carpet in order to reduce the number of colours in the church, it is important that a shade is chosen that is compatible with the colour of existing stone, timber or brick.
- Care must be taken when choosing the colour for a carpet that is 'wall to wall.' What may have been appropriate in a small area could be totally overpowering in the larger area, especially if kneelers, chair upholstery or pew runners are, or are to be, the same colour. In this situation it is safer to opt for a more neutral colour of carpet or change, if possible, the colour of upholstery or kneelers.
- Bright colours can be difficult to handle. A bright carpet will not necessarily brighten up a church, rather the opposite as everything else could look a little dreary by comparison. It may be the lighting that is at fault or that redecoration is needed.

- Bright coloured carpets have their place in churches that are already light, bright and well cared for.
- Softer, subtle shades in mid tones are much easier to use and blend into an existing colour scheme more successfully than stronger versions of the same colour. Grey green, soft gold, and pale terracotta are all colours worth considering.
- A carpet that consists of densely packed short tufted fibres will recover quickly from being trodden on. The denser the carpet, the better it will wear although of course this is reflected in the price. It is worth investing in the highest quality possible of both carpet and underlay to ensure the longest life and the greater resistance to stains. Carpets, such as Berber, that are looped should be avoided as over time the top of the loop will be rubbed off and the carpet will look worn. A carpet composed of 80% wool 20% manmade fibres will wear better than 100% wool, whilst maintaining the appearance of an all wool carpet.
- It is advisable to agree on what the ideal colour and shade would be before searching for carpet samples. The search can then be concentrated on carpets within an agreed price range and quality. Taking a sample of the agreed colour [perhaps a paint colour card] to the showroom can be helpful as it speeds up the elimination of unsuitable shades – memory is fallible and lighting is very different in a showroom!
- Although a small carpet sample is required for a submission for a faculty, it is important that, if possible, large samples of potentially suitable carpet are borrowed from the carpet supplier and positioned in various places within the church before a final decision is made. Colours appear differently when viewed in natural light as opposed to artificial light. Lighting intensities may vary in different parts of the church and this too will affect the appearance of some colours.

### **And finally....**

The churches of Newcastle Diocese are varied as are the budgets to maintain them. An extensive area of top quality carpet will cost a lot of money and will be expected to last a long time. Parishioners will have to live for many years with their choice of colour. Where there is little to no money available only a cheaper carpet may be possible, that will be more difficult to clean and will not wear as well. The right choice of colour in this situation, however, can



dramatically improve the appearance of the church interior. With the right colour, stubborn marks will be less noticeable as the eye is drawn to the liturgical focus, the carpet either receding into the background or providing a link from nave to chancel to sanctuary.