**Minor Repairs and Improvements Grants Fund**

**Introduction**

As part of the Buildings for Mission project, in their funding allocations for the 2023-25 triennium, the Church Commissioners agreed to provide a fund of just over £6m for grants towards small-scale repairs and improvements to local churches. The primary focus was agreed to be essential fabric repairs. The Archbishops’ Council has given the task of devising and overseeing the Grants Fund to a dedicated Project Board advised by the Church Buildings Council. The Archbishops’ Council and the Church Buildings Council are delighted to have secured this important investment in the future sustainability of church buildings. The overall objective of the project is to help parishes keep their churches open and sustainable.

The fund has been devolved to dioceses to distribute. £177,000 has been granted to the Oxford diocese to grant to its churches. This document is the key guidance note to understanding the fund. If you have any further questions please contact Jennie Schillig, Senior Church Buildings Officer, jennie.schillig@oxford.anglican.org or 01865 208745.

**Eligible buildings:**

* Church of England consecrated church buildings and licensed places of worship (including those which are the subject of sharing agreements or ecumenical partnerships) serving parishes in the 40 mainland dioceses and the diocese of Sodor and Man.
* The ‘building’ extends to its below-ground drainage system, foundations and immediate curtilage.

**Ineligible buildings:**

* Other buildings or structures in the churchyard or curtilage of eligible buildings which are not in ecclesiastical use.
* Cathedrals; churches and chapels which are the responsibility of private owners or institutions; Church of England churches outside England or the Isle of Man; non-Anglican places of worship; closed and closing churches.

**Eligible work:**

This grant is aimed at enabling small packages of work to be carried out where it could otherwise only have been partially afforded or is overdue. The hastening of maintenance

and minor repair work prevents irretrievable loss of historic fabric and saves considerable costs, by undertaking work before costs rise. This is the ‘stitch in time’ principle.

Larger repair projects and those which are less urgent will need to be financed as at present by local appeals and through grants from external grant-givers.

**Minor repairs**

* Repair of building fabric (external): roof coverings, roof structure, walls, parapets, pinnacles and other architectural features, towers, spires, windows, doors, rainwater disposal system including below-ground drainage.
* Repair of building fabric (internal): ceilings, floors, doors, walls and wall linings (plaster/panelling but not wall paintings, mosaics etc).
* Repair of building services installations where essential for health and safety and/or continuity of worship and mission use.
* Emergency repairs or holding works, eg propping, covering, protection etc.
* To be eligible, any such work must be recommended in the most recent QI report (or subsequent professional report or condition survey etc). Work classified as urgent (either category 1 - Urgent, requiring immediate attention; 2 - Requires attention within 12 months; or 3 - Requires attention within the next 12 - 24 months) should take priority but any work required within the quinquennium is eligible. Works of differing urgency within that definition may be undertaken together for the sake of efficiency and economy, especially where ‘stitch in time’ repairs can save money in the long term.

**Improvements**

Small scale improvements which are essential to sustaining worship and mission use will be eligible. These are set out below.

* Additions, alterations or adaptations specifically to overcome building design defects or obsolescence (e.g. undersized hoppers or drainpipes) or to improve access for maintenance.
* Additions, alterations or adaptations where essential to improve physical access, e.g. handrails, ramps etc.
* Improvements to building services installations where essential to sustain worship and mission use, such as improvements to heating, lighting, wiring, kitchens, WCs. Where necessary, this might include the installation or upgrading of pipework or cabling to the perimeter of the churchyard or curtilage.
* New installations or improvements to existing installations for digital connectivity, whether through a wired connection or 4G/5G mobile Wi-Fi, where essential to sustain worship and mission use.
* Bat mitigation measures, including relevant ecologists’ fees and production of a bat management plan, where the impact of bats is a barrier to worship and mission use. A one-off deep clean can be an eligible cost as part of a mitigation plan.

**Other eligible costs:**

* Professional fees to design, specify, procure, administer, inspect and certify the repair or improvement work. This may include investigative reports, such as a structural engineer’s report or a drainage investigation in the case of a serious damp issue. The key factors are that the investigative work is necessary and that it is preparatory to a repair that would itself be eligible for grant.
* Ecologist’s fees to prepare a bat management plan.
* VAT (for unlisted churches and work to listed churches which falls outside the eligibility of the [Listed Places of Worship (LPW) grant scheme](https://listed-places-of-worship-grant.dcms.gov.uk/))**.** It will be assumed that PCCs will apply to the LPW grant scheme wherever possible.

**Ineligible work:**

* Routine maintenance, as set out in the Church of England’s [Calendar of Care](https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/building-maintenance-and-repair).
* Routine cleaning.
* Work to furnishings, such as bells and bell frames, books and manuscripts, church plate, clocks, monumental brasses and decorative metalwork, monuments, organs, paintings and wall paintings, stained glass, textiles, wooden objects. These may qualify for the grants administered by [ChurchCare](https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/churchcare-grants) (see Grants for historic church interiors and churchyard structures | The Church of England).
* Conservation reports. These may qualify for the grants administered by [ChurchCare](https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/churchcare-grants) (see Grants for conservation reports | The Church of England).
* Routine inspection (Quinquennial Inspections, periodic inspection of electrical installations, appliance testing, gas safety checks, etc).
* Routine servicing of building services installations.
* Any work covered by insurance.

**Considerations**

At least half of the money allocated to each diocese has to be spent on fabric repairs, in view of the primary focus of the project. Churches in areas of demonstrable need will be prioritised. Churches on Historic England’s Heritage at Risk Register will also be prioritised. Grants will be focussed on cases where the work is identified in the most recent QI report (or a subsequent assessment) as required within the quinquennium, especially where ‘stitch in time’ repairs can save money in the longer term.

Grants of up to £20,000 can be made towards projects with costs of up to £20,000 (or £24,000 if the VAT is not eligible under the Listed Places of Worship (LPW) grant scheme) at a rate of up to 90%, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

It is expected that parishes will supply an element of partnership funding from their own resources.

Grants will be targeted and prioritised according to the circumstances of the parish. The appropriate level of grant can be assessed consistently, according to the indices of multiple deprivation by ecclesiastical parish as shown in the Church of England Parish Map.

The following scale for grant rates is recommended:

• Deprivation rank 6,236 to 12,307 – grant @ 50%

• Deprivation rank 5,012 to 6,235 – grant @ 60%

• Deprivation rank 3,812 to 5,011 – grant @ 70%

• Deprivation rank 2,558 to 3,811 – grant @ 80%

• Deprivation rank 1,232 to 2,557 – grant @ 90%

• Deprivation rank 1 to 1,231 – grant @ 90% (or more if exceptionally justified)

However, the deprivation profile of the households in the parish might not match the scale of need faced by the church. If the diocese considers that there is a case for a different rate than those shown above then it may depart from these limits.

Grants drawn from the Fund will be subject to standard conditions:

* The offer of a grant from the Fund will not remove the requirement for the PCC to obtain faculty or approval under list A or B, as necessary, or any other necessary permission before the work goes ahead. The offer of a grant does not imply support for the proposal for the purposes of faculty or any other approval and does not indicate that permission will be forthcoming.
* Work should not begin until the diocese has approved the scope, methodology and costs of the work and made an offer in writing which the PCC has accepted.
* Work costing more than £1,000 will need to be subject to some form of competitive procurement (normally by obtaining itemised quotations for comparison) on a best value basis. A full competitive tender exercise will not be required unless the nature of the work or other factors make it necessary.
* Work will need to be carried out, paid for and claimed within 6 months of the offer date or by 31st December 2025, whichever is sooner.

**Applying**

The grant pot is small relative to the size of the Diocese of Oxford, and therefore the Church Buildings Team have identified parishes it believes to be eligible and are aware may be in need of support, based on existing knowledge of church buildings across the diocese. These parishes will be contacted directly to support them in considering and applying for a grant.

Applications from all eligible churches, considered in light of the criteria set out above, are welcome, but inevitably will be highly competitive, and success will be dependent on the level of uptake from prioritised churches.

The application form is available on the webpage.

Successful applicants will receive a grant offer in the form of a letter and agreement for signature.

Jennie Schillig, Senior Church Buildings Officer, will support parishes in making applications to the fund. Jennie.schillig@oxford.anglican.org 01865 208745

Decisions will be made by Liz Kitch, Head of Church Buildings, and Mark Humphriss, Diocesan Secretary, on a rolling basis.