



SPECIFICATIONS

This note deals only with specifications and drawings. A completed formal application should include other material, such as Statements of Need and Significance, etc. (see separate guidance notes).

The word “Specification” can have a different meaning depending on who uses it! For example, for someone purchasing a new car the “specification” describes what the car offers; the size of the engine, the number of seats, colour etc., it describes its component parts, but has not a word to say about how it was made, the skill of the workman and the materials they used. On the other hand to an architect or surveyor a specification means something quite different and so it should to a parish client. This specification must describe not only the work to be done, but additionally how it is to be tackled (from scaffolds etc.), the materials to be used, the standards and methods of workmanship required, and the final appearance and performance of the project.

On some occasions it has seemed to the DAC that this differing understanding of the word “specification” has given rise to misunderstandings that this note hopes to resolve.

Apart from very small projects the DAC needs to have, as part of the package making up an application, an architect’s specification. Even some apparently “small jobs”, to say a Grade I church, deserve a specification as the work might touch upon important, but unobserved, historic detail. Why does the DAC require an architect’s specification for what may seem to some parishes or their architects, as simple straightforward repairs? The reasons are many and complex. To begin with the full title of the DAC is – The Diocesan Advisory Committee **for the Care of Churches**. This means that the committee, in advising the Archdeacons and Chancellor, needs to know and be content not only with what a parish wants to do but also **how they want to do it in design and building construction terms**.

The specification frequently needs to be amplified by proper scale drawings showing both the existing and the proposed works. Photographs showing the general or specific areas are a great help although the DAC has its own growing archive of church photographs.

Members of the committee have a considerable knowledge of the churches in the Diocese, but applicants need to remember that whilst they and their advisers will know “their” church well, they should always fully inform the committee not only on the full details of the submission but also the context of the whole parish church. For example to explain this – a simple decoration of one part could have a devastating impact aesthetically on another, and the DAC needs to know! Similarly, the introduction of a memorial or a new piece of furniture can change the whole appearance of the church.

Not only will the specification and drawings inform the DAC but they will be the documents from which builders and designers will prepare their tenders. An imprecise specification and drawings will almost certainly lead to tenders that leave it open for builders to claim “extras”. Herein lies another DAC duty: to advise a parish if it is possibly entering into a

potentially open ended commitment. **A properly described and detailed specification will avoid this.**

In the DAC's view a specification of works should include and describe:

(i) The preliminaries

These clauses should set out all general matters, including the form of building contract, insurance provision, access and storage requirements, scaffolds and access, security, seemingly behaviour by workpeople, arrangements for worship during the work and any other similar matters particular to the church. Within this section the architect will set out the headings of the contract, method of payment, settlement of accounts and related matters. A small job may not need the full written contract (its terms are usually known to builders) so an exchange of letters agreeing to accept the contract terms may be acceptable. **Insurances should never be omitted.**

(ii) Workmanship and materials

The clauses will describe the materials to be used, their quality and the standard of workmanship to be expected. A good specification will set out, in clear terms, what is expected of the builder and his craftsmen in terms that are readily understood and not capable of misunderstanding. It will describe the materials to be employed and how they are to be used. For example, stone required in new or replaced work will define the quarry, its quality, method of fixing, mortar mixes to be used and finishes required. Similarly other trades and works should be fully specified.

Details need to have been thought through and difficult matters such as junctions between, for example, glass and stone, resolved. It may be necessary to amplify a written specification with a detail drawing.

(iii) Sub-contracts and Provisional Sums

The specification may need to include provisional sums. These are allowances that the builder is instructed to include in his tender, because neither he nor the architect can see exactly what is required until the work is opened up. However, to assist the DAC there should be an outline in the specification of what the architect expects or hopes to order. If this is done the DAC can quite frequently recommend the work without the need to suggest provisos and conditions.

Sub contracts for work that a general builder does not usually undertake, such as heating, plumbing, electrical and some other works should be included within the specification as named or nominated sub-contractors. In this way these "specialist" sub-contractors come under the control of the builder and in turn within the general provisions of the contract – including insurance. As with provisional sums, there should be a general description of these works and usually a supplementary specification and drawings.

The word “specialist” is, like the word “specification”, capable of misunderstanding and, on occasions, dispute. A “specialist” is a person or a firm who only deals with specific things, such as, for example, flooring. It does not confirm they are experts in that field, but only that they confine themselves to floors! Any firm, or person employed within the main contract should be employed as “experts” and so accept the liability of doing sound and expert work.

(iv) Schedule of works

A general specification as set out above may not warrant a separate schedule of works. Indeed it may tempt a builder only to refer to this outline list of the work rather than to the main descriptive specification. However, on larger jobs it is a helpful “short hand” reference to the project.

The DAC does not resist change! Computer technology has entered almost every field of work; even conservation repairs to an 11th century church. It is up to the petitioners’ architect or surveyor to decide if a set of computer generated drawings and a pre-prepared specification known as the NBS (National Building Specification) is right for the particular church.

The DAC will accept these innovations (even if it sighs over the lost skills of “proper” drawings and sensitive hand crafted specifications) **provided that:-**

- (i) the massive NBS document is supported by a fulsome “schedule of works” cross-referenced to the main document that will describe standards and methods, in a way that is readily readable.**
- (ii) Unnecessary sections are removed. The DAC (and the Court) do not want to wade through pages relating to foundation underpinning when the job relates to a roof repair.**
- (iii) The completed set of papers sets out clearly and without confusion and doubt exactly what is intended.**
- (iv) The vitally important Preliminaries are written so as to reflect the conditions and requirements of the church site in question. [The DAC may understandably be unsure of an architect’s attention to the job when the preliminary clauses describe traffic control but the church in question stands remote in a field reached only by a footpath.]**

No set of guidance notes (if they are to be readable and understood by both laymen and professionals) can cover every eventuality. It is hoped, however, that these will be of help in guiding petitioners and their architects as to what the DAC expects to receive in a submission and, if they are followed, will avoid delay and frustration both to the DAC (whose members serve voluntarily) and to the petitioners who understandably want a speedy decision on their application.

These notes do not seek to impose any additional or onerous conditions on “church work” specifications. They are only what any sensible client and architect should provide to ensure a proper standard of work.

Parishes are asked to remember that the members of the DAC are charged with an important professional duty within the required legal system of the Consistory Court (through which the Church of England is able to retain its Ecclesiastical Exemption from State planning controls). To help us in our work, and to help avoid the unnecessary tensions which parishes can sometimes feel towards the DAC, we seek your co-operation in ensuring that applications are thoroughly produced to a high standard before they are submitted for consideration by the Committee.

If, in the course of preparing any application, you are unsure of exactly what the DAC may require to see, do please be in touch with our Secretary at Church House (01273 425690). We are there to help.

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