

Bath and Wells Diocesan Advisory Committee

Heating and Renewables Policy

June 2026

“Churches are visited by thousands upon thousands of people every year and seen every day by countless more. So, whether they are young or old, listed or not listed, our church buildings should be living witnesses that engage for good in the most pressing challenge of our age and the response we need to make to it – the increasing temperature of our planet and the moves that are urgently required to turn away from the burning of fossil fuels.”

Michael Beasley, Bishop of Bath and Wells



Background

The Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) is responsible for providing specialist advice and guidance on the care, conservation, and appropriate development of church buildings. The DAC does not have decision-making powers; it is an advisory body. The authority to grant or refuse faculties lies solely with the Diocesan Chancellor.

Most church buildings were never designed with heating in mind. Typically, they are large, thermally inefficient spaces that are used infrequently. In most instances, at any given time, less than one percent of a church building's total volume is actually occupied by people, making traditional heating methods highly inefficient.

For decades, churches have relied on central heating systems that distribute warmth through convection via radiators, pipes, vents, or underfloor systems. These systems are predominantly powered by gas or oil (fossil fuels). A typical parish church hosts services, weddings, funerals, concerts, and meetings throughout the month, but when averaged out, it is used for only one to two days per week - and for just a few hours each day.

Given the vast volume of most church buildings, large-capacity heating systems are required, along with several hours of 'warm-up' time to reach a comfortable temperature. Heating an entire church once or twice a week is energy-intensive, costly, and inefficient. After a church's parish share, energy bills are usually the second-largest expense, and research suggests that, generally, heating accounts for over 80% of this expense.

Today

- Churches are increasingly used as community spaces.
- Higher energy consumption, rising bills, and increased carbon emissions.
- Infrequent or improper use of central heating has exacerbated fabric damage, including moisture buildup and condensation.
- Many churches are now heated to unrealistic and even harmful temperatures, accelerating the deterioration of the building's historic fabric.
- Expectations of warmth mirror those of homes rather than heritage spaces.

While providing comfort is important for encouraging wider use, it must be done in a way that preserves the building, is environmentally sustainable, and remains genuinely effective.

In reference to the concept of 'conservation', it is important to note that this is not simply about preserving church buildings exactly as they are, rather, enabling them to thrive for generations to come. Not just maintaining their past appearance, but ensuring they remain usable, relevant, and resilient.



The historical value and significance of church buildings is not fixed in the past – this evolves over time. Many churches have been rebuilt, adapted and altered across centuries: some damaged by war, many were subject to Victorian central heating systems, pews became the norm, and more recently, solar panels have been installed. Many of these changes, whilst unthinkable at the time, are now part of the heritage and identity of church buildings.

The Diocese of Bath and Wells is committed to achieving Net Zero Carbon by 2030.

Faculty Jurisdiction Rules Amendment 2022

In 2022, the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules were amended to embed the Church of England's decarbonisation ambitions within the formal faculty process. As a result, where relevant guidance applies, applicants must demonstrate that they have given 'due regard' to that guidance when developing proposals for heating and other works.

Key changes

- Applicants must explain how they have considered Net Zero guidance when submitting proposals for List B or faculty matters.
- If the DAC feel 'due regard' has not been satisfied, then they cannot recommend an application.
- Net Zero considerations are now explicitly referenced in the documents required for faculty applications and notifications.

In practice, this amendment embeds environmental impact and carbon reduction within formal decision-making for applicants, the DAC, and the Chancellor. However, the DAC recognises that the 2022 requirement to demonstrate 'due regard' to Net Zero guidance can present challenges. The current wording allows for significant interpretation, meaning that outcomes for similar proposals (such as solar panels, heat pumps, or infrared heating) can vary between dioceses.

This policy has therefore been developed to provide greater clarity and consistency within our permissions process. It sets out what the DAC and Chancellor expect to see in applications and what will constitute appropriate 'due regard' in practice. The aim is to streamline the faculty process, reduce uncertainty for applicants, improve efficiency, and ensure long-term accountability, regardless of changes in personnel.



Our policies

This section sets out the DAC's overarching approach to navigating applications for new heating systems and renewable technologies. It takes a strategic, big-picture view, considering whether proposed systems are conservation-minded, environmentally responsible, financially viable over the long term, and compliant with planning requirements. The DAC recognises that many of these decisions are complex.

Rather than providing detailed procedural requirements, this policy is intended to offer clarity on the DAC's general direction and position on key technologies. Our growing library of faculty application guidance documents will set out in practical terms what information and evidence the DAC requires to support a smooth and efficient application process. Decisions will, however, continue to be made on a case-by-case basis, taking account of the specific context and significance of each church.

1 Under Section 35 of the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018, the DAC is required to have regard both to:

- (a) the church's role as a local centre of worship and mission, and
- (b) the importance of environmental protection.

Policy: In line with this duty, we will encourage applications for low-carbon technologies (including those previously considered controversial, such as solar panels) where there is clear evidence that the proposals will support worship and mission, and where their impact on the historic fabric and aesthetic character of the building has been fully and responsibly assessed.

2 The National Planning Policy Framework advises decision-makers to give significant weight to the benefits of renewable and low-carbon energy.

Policy: In line with the NPPF, we will give significant weight to proposals that support the Church of England's Net Zero Carbon 2030 target, while also ensuring that this is carefully balanced against national and local policies relating to the conservation of historic buildings and places of worship.



- 3** Historically, the DAC has encouraged new heating systems to make use of existing infrastructure. While we continue to support proposals that minimise intervention, we also recognise that many low-carbon heating systems may require new fixtures, visible elements, or internal alterations.

Policy: Where the evidence shows that a low-carbon system is the most appropriate option for the church, the DAC will support its installation even if it introduces elements not previously present within the building, provided that the proposals are endorsed by the church architect, are low-impact, and remain fully reversible.

- 4** The DAC already ensures that ‘due regard’ is given to national Net Zero guidance. Going forward, where a parish proposes a new or replacement fossil-fuel heating system, we will expect a much more detailed, evidence-based justification.

Policy: Applications for fossil-fuel heating will only be supportable in exceptional circumstances where the parish can demonstrate that no sustainable alternative is viable. In those exceptional circumstances, applicants must demonstrate that they have followed the DAC’s faculty application guidance for gas and oil boilers.

- 5** The DAC recognises that the capital and running costs of low-carbon heating systems can be a genuine concern. However, applicants must demonstrate they have:

- explored all external funding opportunities,
- sought support from diocesan funding advisers,
- obtained quotations where relevant, and
- provided transparent comparisons of predicted running costs.

Policy: It is not sufficient to state that low-carbon systems are too expensive without providing supporting evidence.



- 6** This policy does not introduce a new principle but restates the long-established requirement - shared by all statutory consultees such as Historic England, the CBC, and local planning authorities - that the DAC must assess whether any harm to a church's significance is outweighed by public benefit, in accordance with the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules (FJR 4.3(2)). The DAC recognises that some degree of harm is often unavoidable when introducing new heating systems or low-carbon technologies. Such harm will not automatically count against a proposal.

Policy: Instead, we will continue our established practice of supporting schemes where:

- the benefits to mission, community use and sustainability clearly outweigh the harm; and
- the design has been robustly developed with expert input from the church architect, diocesan advisers and qualified heating engineers; and
- all reasonable steps have been taken to minimise and mitigate any impact on fabric.

- 7** The mechanism of a temporary faculty for a fossil fuel boiler enables churches to maintain worship, mission and community use while:

- exploring sustainable long-term options,
- undertaking fabric-first measures (e.g. draughtproofing, zoning, ventilation improvements),
- seeking technical advice from diocesan heating advisers and their church architect, and
- applying for grants or undertaking fundraising for a low-carbon system.

Policy: Where a church faces an urgent heating failure or unavoidable need for immediate heating provision, the DAC may recommend that the Chancellor consider granting a time-limited temporary faculty or licence (normally up to two years).

The intent of this approach is to buy time to achieve the sustainable solution, rather than defaulting to permanent fossil-fuel installations made under pressure.

The DAC will expect parishes granted a temporary heating solution to continue progressing their long-term sustainable plan and to provide updates as required.





Conditions to be applied to successful faculty applications for fossil fuel heating may include:

- The petitioners shall ensure that the church's energy supply is provided through a certified 'green' energy contract for the duration of the fossil-fuel installation.
- The petitioners shall make appropriate arrangements to offset the carbon emissions associated with the fossil-fuel heating system until such time as it is removed or replaced.
- The fossil-fuel heating system shall be reviewed and replaced, decommissioned, or otherwise removed by a date specified in the faculty (for example, no later than 2030), unless further faculty permission is obtained.
- The petitioners shall install and maintain appropriate monitoring and control equipment (including temperature and humidity loggers and suitable heating controls) to ensure the system is operated efficiently and in a manner that safeguards the historic fabric of the building.

Policy: In the rare and exceptional circumstances where a fossil-fuel boiler or similar heating system is permitted, the DAC will recommend, unless inappropriate, that the Chancellor attach conditions to ensure the system is transitional and aligned with diocesan and national Net Zero Carbon commitments.

These conditions ensure that any faculty granted for fossil-fuel heating remains strictly transitional, and reinforce that the long-term solution must be sustainable, fully considered, and aligned with the Diocese's environmental obligations.

