

# Church Projects – Community Buildings Fund

**For discussion and decision:** Do Councillors feel that church and other religious building based projects should now be eligible for the Community Buildings Fund? In the last few months I've had queries from a few churches, which I've ruled out in the same way that these have always been ruled out since the funds inception.

## Relevant sections from the Community Buildings Fund criteria:

- Community buildings must be multi-use (minimum of three separate user groups), with open community access, and owned and / or managed by the community.
- This grants scheme is open to all multi-use community buildings within Parish Council areas covered by East Devon District Council. Community shops in Parish Council areas can also apply.
- What we won't fund - single use buildings for example, sport club or church.

I've had a couple of queries from churches recently, so I felt it was appropriate to bring this decision to Councillors to either confirm that churches won't be funded or to consider certain church projects.

A few key points to think about:

- One of the difficulties would be that we can't fund projects that benefit or promote religion, and I'm not sure how church based projects would be able to separate out benefits to their primary basis i.e. religion, from any capital projects.
- Every year we only have £22,250 in the Community Buildings Fund pot to give out to community buildings including village halls and community shops, this is usually all or nearly all given out in grants. This year the fund is oversubscribed with us being asked for more in funding than we have. To open this up to the many churches and other religious buildings within East Devon could lead to many more applications than we're able to fund.
- Churches and religious groups however can be very important community organisations, especially recently, doing a lot of voluntary work to help the community such as running foodbanks, youth groups, toddler groups, coffee mornings for the elderly. Their halls could also be rented out by voluntary and community groups.

## Information from the Hawkchurch Church as an example:

I am the secretary of the Hawkchurch Church council (PCC). I have had it suggested to me to try for a grant from the above fund. However I see from the website that it does not support single use churches.

Our church is planning to install a full accessible toilet and baby change facilities. To do this we have to improve access to the church. We also intended to install a small kitchen facility. Our church is used by various groups including the local primary school and youth and adult choirs. However to extend the use of the building we must improve the facilities within to encourage all to use it. We are trying to return the church to its original use as a meeting place for all ... religion aside ...

1. Are there two other groups completely unrelated to the church that use the building? One would be the school, is there another one? Would they use the improvements to the building?

*The community and youth choir are not church related. The two groups use the church as a practice venue. I think only a couple members of the choir are church goers! They use the church because they cannot afford to hire another building and in return give an occasional concert and contribute to the upkeep of the building. We would like to encourage more activities like this to maintain and upkeep this grade one listed building.*

2. Are there any other community use buildings in Hawkchurch?

*We have a village hall within the parish available for hire. This is the only other community building in the parish.*

3. What benefit would there be to those other than the church users and church group users to the improvements you're wanting to make?

*The benefit to the wider community would be all day access to a disabled toilet as the church is open during the day. The aim after installing facilities is to encourage wider secular use for the building and return it to its original use as a meeting place or venue. The religious aspect is secondary to maintaining and upkeeping the building. The church is the only grade one listed building in the parish and we must diversify to afford to continue to keep this building. The Church of England pay NOTHING towards the any church and we are a small parish of about 550 voters.*

*We must also keep pace with modern needs and requirements and a disabled toilet and disabled access is a basic need for a community building such as this. We can only open the building to wider use with these basic facilities in place.*