

## The Conservation office

### Statement of Significance

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A Statement of Significance has one main purpose:

To show that you as a church understand, recognise and have evaluated what is important about your building, especially those parts which are the subject of the project application, and appreciate how the application may impact on features of significance.

Understanding the significance of a church and its setting from an early stage in the design process can help to inform the development of proposals which avoid or minimise harm. Analysis of relevant information can generate a clear understanding of the affected asset, the heritage interests represented in it, and their relative importance.

Early appraisals, a conservation plan or targeted specialist investigation can help to identify constraints and opportunities arising from the listed building at an early stage. Such appraisals or investigations can identify alternative development options, for example more sensitive designs or different orientations, that will both conserve the heritage assets and deliver public benefits in a more sustainable and appropriate way.

A Statement of significance is a document that you revisit at regular intervals – a working document that you keep under review. It can be an excellent source of information for anyone interested in your building and should encourage good stewardship.

#### What is Significance

‘Significance’ can be objective or subjective. Both aspects should be considered (especially if preparation of the statement is delegated to a professional who is not part of the congregation). In addition, objective significance may have a wider-than-local context, whereas subjective significance may relate only to the immediate congregation (or part of it). For example, decorative cast-iron communion rails may be artistically significant as a rare survival of the work of a particular architect, or of the output of a local foundry (objective significance); they may also hold deep theological and emotional meaning for people who come to kneel for communion (subjective significance).

A statement of significance should neither be so short as to be meaningless, nor so long as to be tedious; it aims to give the reader a sense of what is special about the building, and ideally should come from a partnership between the congregation and its professional advisers. The level of detail in the assessment will depend on the listed building and the extent of the proposal (see a note on proportionality below).

The Statement of Significance should be written by anyone competent to do so. In some cases, this may be the trustees, but for a complex heritage asset with high levels of significance, it is advisable to employ a heritage professional (i.e. conservation architect, architectural historian or building archaeologist). However, no one understands the significance of the building more than those who use it, and therefore the trustees should be consulted on any items of significance, and their value in terms of architecture, history, religious and spiritual as well as social should be recorded.

In terms of process the Statement should express significance from the general to the particular. It is a document that will evolve and therefore the *Assessment of the impact* will change depending on the nature of your project.

## Layout of your Statement

The following is a proposed layout, but please note you can also use the helpful tool produced by York University that can help you create a Statement of Significance:

<https://www.statementsofsignificance.org.uk/>

## General Information

- Put the church into its geographical and social setting: location within an administrative area (a map is useful);
- What is the social character of the immediate surroundings (perhaps with a short account of how the locality has developed and changed);
- What are the main elements to be drawn from the listing details (the listing description come later);
- Are there any other planning constraints (within a Conservation area or National Park; close to a scheduled Ancient Monument);
- Describe the church's setting:
  - Is it prominent in the streetscape or landscape?
  - Does it have a graveyard, or other significant features close by?
  - What is the contribution of the setting to the natural environment?

## The Building

- Provide a brief history and description of the church building(s), (does it replace an earlier church?)<sup>1</sup>
- listing description<sup>2</sup>;
- Provide a brief account of the building's development (additions and modifications).
  - Historic maps can help the understanding of the historic layout of sites and buildings, the relationship with other buildings/structures and surrounding landscapes. An examination of historic maps may reveal how the site has changed and developed, providing evidence for identifying different building phases. There are many sources of historic and modern maps, such as enclosure and tithe maps, to the more detailed Ordnance Survey maps which were first drawn in the mid- 19th century.
  - The types of maps that you should consult will very much depend on the age of the heritage asset and your proposals: Old Maps<sup>3</sup>; Old Maps Online<sup>4</sup>; A Vision of Britain<sup>5</sup>; Magic<sup>6</sup>;
- Any historical and social associations (with people or events of local or national importance)<sup>7</sup>;
- How significant is it at a local, regional or national level? What is the building's evidential and community value? What do the users and visitors value most about the building? Does it have:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/chr/default.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.old-maps.co.uk/#/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.oldmapsonline.org/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/maps/>;

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.magic.gov.uk>

<sup>7</sup> <http://dmbi.online/>

- a. Archaeological interest - There will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.
- b. Architectural and artistic interest - These are interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. They can arise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved. More specifically, architectural interest is an interest in the art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration of buildings and structures of all types. Artistic interest is an interest in other human creative skills, like sculpture.
  - Is there reference to it in the Pevsner Architectural Guide or local record offices and archives.
  - Is it as an example of a particular style of architecture?<sup>8</sup>
  - is the architect known – do original plans survive?
- c. Historic Interest - An interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation's history, but can also provide meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity.
  - Are there any general external photographs, including historic photographs are useful here as they can often reveal information about how the building has changed and can provide justification for proposed alterations or inform the design of an alteration or extension.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Building's Use:**

- What is the church used for – by the congregation and the community?
- How does the use made of it contribute to its significance?

### **The Building in More Detail:**

#### **1. General:**

- how significant are the spatial qualities and the visual impact of the building, inside and out?
- What is the theological message of the interior and its layout?

#### **2. Exterior:**

- Materials (of walls, roofs);
- Decorative materials and details (photographs will be useful);
- Plan-form (a plan will be needed later – a small-scale version is useful here).

#### **3. Interior:**

A concise but thorough description of the interior, including:

- the porch or vestibule
- the materials of walls and floors;

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<sup>8</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/dlsg-places-worship/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://viewfinder.english-heritage.org.uk/>

- the roof or ceiling,
- any decorative details;
- the windows (especially if there is decorated glass);
- the ground-floor seating (especially if pews are set at an angle or curved);
- the communion-area and pulpit or rostrum;
- the gallery (the front, the supports and the seating);
- memorials.

It is particularly important to note if the interior fittings are part of a single design, or have been adapted piecemeal (dates of alterations if known are helpful). If the project affects other parts of the building (vestries, or meeting-rooms), these need a similar descriptive treatment. Photographs are important – sometimes better than words.

### **Significance for Mission:**

What are the strengths of the building and its present layout for worship and mission?

What potential is there for enhancing the heritage value of the building to increase its future sustainability?

Can the harm caused by the proposal be weighed against the public benefit of the proposal? Including delivering economic, social or environmental objectives. (They should be of a nature or scale to be of benefit to the public at large and not just private benefit, but these may not be visible or accessible i.e. securing the future of the of the heritage asset could be a public benefit).

### **The Nature of the Proposal and Why it is Required:**

Brief description of the proposal which forms the basis of the application. This might usefully set out a short outline of the proposed works, noting their scope and what they are expected to achieve – repair/alteration/extension – and whether they are internal or external.

### **Areas Affected by the Proposed Project:**

It is important to remember that the level of detail provided in this section should be proportionate to the asset's importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on its significance. Consider including:

1. A description (with photographs) of the parts of the building which will be directly or indirectly affected by the proposed works;

- Reference to the significance of those areas (low, medium, high);

- Does the significance include the building's setting or related views of the church? Clarify the way that the setting allows the significance to be appreciated. Consider the impact of new development within the setting, the impact of key views.

2. A description and assessment of the impact on them (low, medium, high). Specify the effect on that fabric including loss or concealment of historic features and fabric which contribute to significance, both inside and out, proposed removals and demolitions and the impact of alterations and extensions, where proposed, etc.

- How this has informed the development of the proposals. Is the scale, design, materials proposed appropriate?

3. Describe the justification for the proposal, including quoting from condition and structural surveys, to explain why a particular course has been chosen.
4. Describe any mitigating strategies to reduce or avoid harmful impact (e.g. is the work reversible?). Could your requirements be met in a different way? Can the harm be avoided or minimised? Is any proposed work in the least damaging place?
5. Are you enhancing significance? Or can the significance be revealed by the proposal, this should be outlined here.
6. What are the benefits of the proposed works? Will the benefits outweigh any harm?
7. Recording - Where there would be an impact on the significance of the heritage asset, detail any further archaeological analysis and recording proposed.

This can be supplemented or articulated in the form of a table (as below):

Location	Description	Level of significance	Proposed work	Impact level	Mitigation
Front door	A good example of a mid-19 <sup>th</sup> C Gothic-style door with elaborate ironwork	M	Replacement with fully glazed doors	H	Reuse doors as 'feature' in the vestibule
Dais & communion rails	Early 20 <sup>th</sup> C dais with wooden communion rails	Objectively M – subjectively H (family of donor still in congregation)	replace dais with moveable stage-blocks: remodel communion rails to be moveable	L (almost no obvious visual change when rails in place)	Communion rails still available for use; work reversible if necessary
Sash windows on East Elevation	Grade II listed building – original 18th century timber windows and much original crown glass.	M – Original glass and frame but not stained or coloured glass.	Replace sash windows with PVC-U for better insulation.	H - Loss of original fabric and glass with unacceptable alteration to external appearance of church.	Abandon proposal. Seek restoration and draught-proofing of original windows. Investigate installing secondary glazing

### Sources:

Where has this information come from?

What research has been undertaken?

Who is the final author of this Statement?

### **Further Guidance on Producing Statements of Significance:**

Methodist and Nonconformist Chapels in Cornwall: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/guidance-methodist-nonconformist-chapels-cornwall/>

Non-conformist Places of Worship: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/iha-nonconformist-places-of-worship/heag139-nonconformist-places-of-worship-iha/>

Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/gpa2-managing-significance-in-decision-taking/>

Setting of Heritage Assets: <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/has/setting/>

## **Appendix 1 - Glossary**

**Listed Building** - A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest.

**Statement of Significance** - The process of establishing the impact of a specific proposal on the significance of a place and identifying ways of mitigating any adverse impacts.

**Historic Environment Record** - Information services that seek to provide access to comprehensive and dynamic resources relating to the historic environment of a defined geographic area for public benefit and use. Typically, they comprise databases linked to a geographic information system (GIS) and associated reference material, together with a dedicated staffing resource.

**Mitigation** - Action taken to reduce potential damage to a significant place. This may include avoiding damage, design solutions, options appraisal or seeking further information, as well as, where damage is unavoidable, recording elements that will be destroyed.

**Setting** - The surroundings in which a listed building is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.

**Significance** - The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic.

## Appendix 2 - General Guidance on Proportionality:

The following is taken from *Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets*, Historic England Advice Note 12, a guidance note produced by Historic England that can be accessed here: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/statements-heritage-significance-advice-note-12/heag279-statements-heritage-significance/>

The level of detail in a Statement of Significance should be proportionate to the asset's importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. Therefore, such statements will differ in length and treatment according to circumstance.

The following examples indicate how the material in a statement of heritage significance differs depending upon the significance of the asset and the scope of the proposal:

For a **modest proposal** to a listed building or part thereof that is of lower significance you may wish to limit the statement to:

Introduction - purpose, scope of the proposal, designation records for the heritage asset, references in the Historic Environment Record.

Description of the asset and its significance - understanding of the history and form of the church, assessment of its significance

For a more **harmful proposal** to a listed building or part thereof of greater significance you may wish to include:

Introduction – purpose, scope of the proposal, designation records for the church, reference(s) in the local Historic Environment Record, archaeological potential (if relevant), planning history (if relevant), approach and methodology, consultations undertaken

Description of the form and history of the church

Analysis of its surviving fabric, particularly that affected by the proposal and an analysis of the setting of the heritage asset, if relevant

details of documentary research, map regression, architectural history and archaeological investigation (note whether field evaluation suggested)

photographs and plans, both historic and contemporary, where necessary

Description of significance - description of the various interests: archaeological, architectural and artistic, and historic interest

assessment of the level of the general significance of the heritage asset and the particular contribution to the significance of any features and/or of its setting, affected by the proposal

concise explanation of the effect of the proposal on significance of the heritage asset and how harm to significance has been avoided, as a summary

**Complex and harmful proposal** to a listed building or part thereof or assets of high significance

Introduction – purpose, scope of the proposal including note of parts of asset not affected, designation records for the listed building, reference(s) in the local Historic Environment Record, archaeological potential, planning history, approach and methodology, consultations undertaken

Description of the form and history of the heritage asset and its significance



Full analysis of historical development with analysis of surviving fabric and full analysis of the setting of the heritage asset, where significance or ability to appreciate significance affected  
details of documentary research, map regression, architectural history and/or archaeological investigation – desk-based assessment and/or field evaluation

production of phased account of the development of the site with a gazetteer

photographs and plans, both historic and contemporary, showing evolution of heritage asset, where necessary

note of any further investigative works necessary to further the understanding/analysis of significance of the heritage asset

Description of significance

full description of the various interests: archaeological, architectural and artistic, and historic interest

full assessment of the level of the general significance of the listed building and the particular contribution to the significance of any features and/or of its setting, affected by the proposal

concise explanation of the effect of the proposal on significance of the listed building and how harm to significance has been avoided, as a summary

Succinct explanation of the impact of the proposal on significance of heritage asset(s) and how impact on significance, both positive and negative, has been avoided, by continuing to follow the staged approach - impact on the significance, avoid harmful impact(s), justification for harmful impacts, need for recording

A clear and succinct explanation of the effect of the proposal on significance of the heritage asset, and how any harm to its significance has been avoided, can be helpful, as a summary of the proposal