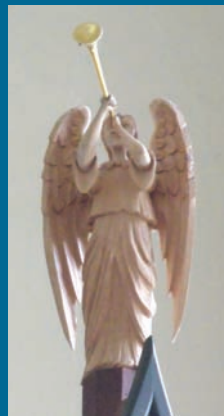


What happens here?

Church buildings for everyone



Towers in the landscape

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*Words by Marion Welham,
Church Buildings and
Tourism Officer,
Diocese of St Edmundsbury
and Ipswich 2012*

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Who can imagine Suffolk's villages and towns without the ancient church towers that soar above them? They are loved by historians, lauded by poets and painted by artists, yet many people have little idea of what goes on inside.

Many of our churches date back almost a thousand years and can testify to a living faith if they are accessible and welcoming. Locked they say: 'This building is not for you.' And if churches are open, people first need to know and then they need to be invited in.

The next challenge is to provide a welcome that sets us apart from castles and stately homes. In short, it is to answer the question, just what happens here?



Why share church buildings?

The PCC is responsible for church repairs and maintenance and churchwardens are responsible for the contents.

But churches and churchyards are not owned by the Diocese, nor the PCC.

They are held in trust by the incumbent, not just for the congregation but for the *whole* parish.

More reasons to share

- The church building can be used to communicate our Christian faith
- Keeping the church unlocked for those who need to pray harmonises with our Christian faith
- Glorious architecture can speak of the awe and majesty of God
- Churches are often full of monuments and other treasures that need to be accessible to the community. Common sense dictates that nothing of high monetary value should be left on display in an unmanned church.
- The history of the church tells us much about the history of the area
- Churches were the hub of the community in medieval times. Why not now?

Find out more...

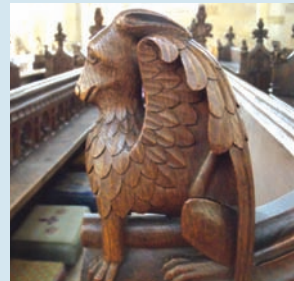
If you have security concerns, work through the issues with the help of www.nationalchurchwatch.com and www.ecclesiastical.com/Churchmatters which offers a whole range of practical advice for churches.



Who visits church buildings?

The simple answer is anyone and everyone, quite apart from the guests at baptisms, marriages and funerals.

What we do know is that they come for different reasons: peace and quiet; a place to reflect; a family history quest; a love of history or architecture; a church crawl; a place of interest on a walk or bike ride; a picnic in the churchyard; a shelter from a storm, or just plain old curiosity.



Bright and beautiful



Find out more...

Faith in Maintenance is part of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and supports volunteers who look after places of worship. Visit the document library on their website for expert advice and guidance to download on historic church buildings www.spabim.org.uk. Details of Elix, the Diocesan Maintenance Scheme, are available on 01473 298533.

For information on disabled access and other legal matters, such as consents, go to www.churchcare.co.uk/legal.

A cherished church is a well-maintained church. If you don't love your building, why should anyone else?

Bird and bat droppings can daunt the best of us but damp is the arch enemy.

- Are the gutters and gullies free of leaves and other debris?
- Have you checked the soakaways?
- Is vegetation well clear of the outside walls?
- Can you see signs of damp such as rotting woodwork or stained plaster?

It may be time to consider joining a regular maintenance scheme. Making someone else responsible for these routine tasks will give you peace of mind.

If your church has lots of friends, the chances are they will help to keep it clean, tidy and well maintained.

Perhaps there are people who would enjoy caring for the church linen, arranging flowers or recording wildlife in the churchyard.

Are you open to new ideas or do you tend to guard the building from non-worshippers?

Relying on members of the local community for church-cleaning parties or churchyard tidying days can be difficult if they don't feel welcome at other times.



Signs that serve

Is there an obvious sign of welcome? The simpler the better:

'Welcome. The church is open. Please come in.'

It's a mistake to think that simply leaving the door unlocked will be sufficient to attract visitors. Many tourists say they feel nervous about entering a church, believing they may be 'interrupting something'.

That's why the number of visitors increases significantly when there is a prominent 'church open' sign outside.

If your church is remote, could you have a portable A-board on the road or at the bottom of the lane? Does your church warrant a brown sign?

It's important to keep notice boards smart, up-to-date and welcoming. Try to display the diocesan coat of arms as well as the name of your church and a contact name and number. If service times are complicated, direct visitors to the porch where they can read the latest information.

Be inclusive

How does your signage serve people with disabilities? It needs to be inclusive and indicate whether assistance is available.

Be sensitive and avoid linking your welcome with security warnings:

'Welcome. Security cameras in action' (We don't trust you).

Even the phrase 'Welcome to our Sunday Services', begs the question: 'What about weekday visitors?' Is there a way of saying both?

Try to avoid hostile language such as:

- 'Staff only. Don't park here.'
- 'Don't let your dog foul this consecrated ground'

Instead, be courteous:

- 'Please use the car park across the road'
- 'Feel free to enjoy the churchyard with your dog and please leave it as you found it.'

*Welcome to this ancient church building
May you be blessed by God as you visit
Please help yourself to a prayer card if you wish*



Share your ambitions

If you have a restoration project, try to mount a display with some simple explanations of what is being done and what you hope to achieve.

And if access to the church needs to be restricted for any reason, say how long this is likely to be for and apologise for the inconvenience.



A sacred space



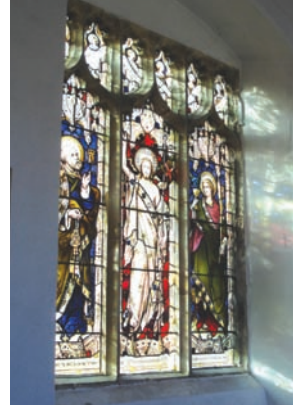
Who's who?

A display board of who's who can work in a spacious church if the photos and captions are clear and there are no curling edges. But consider whether you need to display all those faces, which might overwhelm and make some people feel excluded. The clergy and churchwardens might suffice with a short explanation of their role.

Perhaps you could display your people pictures in an album or well-presented loose-leaf folder so that visitors can have a glimpse of the activities you have in the church during worship and at community events, not just fundraising ones.

Does your church feel like a sacred space or simply an historic building with interesting architecture?

If you have a spacious church, try to resist filling it with stands and displays. Instead let people experience the awe and drama of the space and perhaps get the sense of another dimension. If your church is small, there's even more reason to cut the clutter. Even notices left in the pews can detract from the meaning of the building.



Take a good look at what you have inside the church and assess each item. When did you last move, clean or review it? Is it still wanted? If it is an integral or historic part of the church, is it well looked after and have you interpreted it for visitors?

If your church is dark, could you have light sensors that activate on opening the door?

Remember, visitors tend to decide within 10-12 minutes if they will return. A challenging thought.

A community of faith

What is the purpose of this building?

Outside worship times, some churches can be manned, most not. But a sense of the presence of God can be conveyed in contrasting ways. Some allow the senses to be stilled in holy and beautiful surroundings.



Others are busy, warm and welcoming offering hospitality to all comers, especially those who may not feel self worth elsewhere. If the church is manned, there is a fine balance between a warm welcome and an over effusive one which can be distracting. Even peering at people from a chair or high stool as they enter can be off-putting.

Interpreting the church



When people visit your church, how will they know what they are seeing? Ecclesiastical fixtures and furnishings need to be interpreted for a secular world.

How are altar, pulpit, lectern and font used in worship? What is the function of chancels and sanctuaries, naves and aumbries?

Walk round the church and spot imagery or wording that might be difficult to understand. Invite someone from the village that doesn't normally come into the church, or someone from another church that has lots of visitors to see what they think.

More than facts

Try to ensure there is a clear interpretation of everything that makes this a living church where people worship God. The church should not be full of facts and empty of grace.

You may not have the space to create beautifully written interpretation cards to place next to each item but better still might be a leaflet accessible to all – including children and new audiences to churches. Include a floor plan to make it easier to locate key artefacts.



A great guidebook



Guidebooks give you another chance to interpret the church building rather than simply stating the age of the font or the name of the architect who restored the building.

Guides don't have to be entirely concerned with history and architecture. You are allowed to mention faith! Churches are as much about the history of people as they are about the building.

Explain the Christian ceremony of baptism and how Christening is the giving of a Christian name at the time of baptism.

A guide with a timeline running along the bottom can be useful to put Norman, Early English or post-reformation into perspective for those who are not history scholars.

If you need to say more, why not have more details downloadable from your website if you have one?

Nothing is too good

Nothing is too good for your church so be as professional as you can. Take a long, cool look at your existing guidebook. Is it too stodgy or dull? Do the pictures do your church justice? Could you revamp it with fewer words and simpler explanations? Try to avoid churchy words such as 'liturgy' that make people feel excluded unless you are prepared to explain what it means. Try your new guide out on a non-church goer.



A place for prayer



Look no further than the visitors' book to see that the need for quiet prayer or reflection is a key reason that people enter a church outside of worship times.

For larger churches it is easy to set aside a quiet side chapel but smaller churches might consider a prayer walk round the church. Both are effective but it is important to make the purpose clear and not scatter prayer aids randomly round the building.

Here are some tried and tested ideas that may help to address spiritual needs and take your visitors forward on a Christian journey.

- Prayer cards to take away. Include large print prayers and consider different languages.
- Prayer pebbles immersed in water that represents God's all-surrounding love. Say the prayer – let it go. Symbols speak louder than words and transcend language barriers.
- Consider how you can meet the spiritual needs of people from other cultures by providing something especially for them.
- A prayer tree or a box to deposit prayers. Make sure you say when these might be read out and what will happen to them.
- An opportunity to light a candle for a loved one. Lord Jesus light of the world, we pray that your light may shine in our lives and in the lives of those we love....
- Nightlights standing on pebbles in a large and beautiful stone bowl create a prayerful atmosphere
- A statue from our link African diocese of Kagera in a special prayer space rather than newsletters that quickly date.

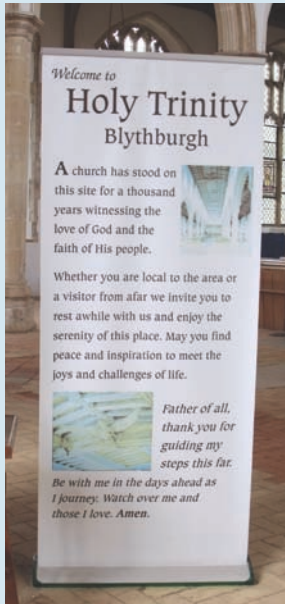
Find out more...

'Encouraging visitors on a spiritual journey' by the Revd Eileen McLean, former Vicar of Bamburgh, Northumberland, is available to download from the church buildings section of www.stedmundsbury.anglican.org

SGM Lifewords resources guide visitors round the church in a prayerful way. They are low cost and available from www.sgmlifewords.com



Friendly facts for all



Clear and concise

Information that is beautifully presented shows you care for your visitors and want to be courteous towards them without being patronising.

Try to look at the building as a whole to ensure its grandeur is not lost in untidy distractions. A single pop-up banner can work well and one decently-sized visitor table is plenty if you keep it free of out-of-date newsletters and magazines.

Imagine yourself visiting another church in another part of the country. What would you need to know?

- What are the service times?
- What else happens here?
- Where are the parish records kept?
- Is there a good circular walk?
- Where's the nearest toilet?
- Where can I get a cup of tea or a decent lunch?
- Are there other local attractions or events?
- Is there a handy B&B?
- Are there other churches of interest in the area? (not just the benefice)

Watch the pound signs

Think hard about what you want to convey to visitors. Are they sources of income or is your building a tool for mission?

Pleas for donations can sound negative and even desperate. 'It costs £xxx amount a year to keep this church maintained. Please help!'

Consider instead:

'A special thank you for any donations you have made to this church. They help to keep the building open and welcoming for everyone to enjoy'

If you have a charity of the month, then say so if only to show that what you do is relevant to the outside world.

A helping hand

Some visitors may come to the church seeking help so it is important to display telephone numbers of clergy and anyone else that might fill that role.

Contact numbers for the Samaritans, Alcoholics Anonymous and other useful help-lines for those in need can be clearly displayed in the porch.



Creative merchandise



When visitors have a positive experience, they love to take something away with them. What is there in your church to buy or take away?

Many communities have local artists. Why not ask them to develop a design that you can use throughout your church merchandise or literature. This can be really effective on a re-useable shopping bag that your visitors will be proud to carry around.

Make it eye-catching so people ask.... 'Where on earth did you get that shopper?'

Beyond the tea towel

A strong theme can be compelling so if you have an important roof or monument, or a connection with a famous person, make sure you highlight it. Have postcards, or even posters on display. Your digital photos can be blown up to A4 size at very little cost. Greetings cards are always popular but try to ensure they are unique to your church by using images such as your wildlife churchyard or some beautiful woodcarving.

The shop might be just the place for an explanatory booklet helping to explain the Christian faith such as: 'What do Christians believe?' that you could offer free of charge.

Pews are not bookends

Recycling books is commendable in a wasteful society and might be a way of raising much-needed extra income. The key is to keep your display neat and tidy by putting a few books out at a time. Tatty cardboard boxes and garish plastic trays spilling out of the back pews is not the most uplifting introduction to a church for a new visitor.



A child's view

Children can often regard historic buildings as one big adventure and there is much they can learn about history and their ancestors from a medieval Suffolk church as well as traditional crafts such as woodcarving or stone masonry.

It is important to give children a welcome of their own and that should not include cast-off toys, blunt crayons and tatty books and worksheets.

Consider a guide just for children to explain in simple terms the meaning of the font, the pulpit and the altar.



Promoting your church



You have made your church as welcoming as possible but how will you get people to come? A welcome sign clearly visible from the road has the advantage of drawing in genuine visitors while deterring potential criminals who usually prefer a church that looks neglected and forgotten.

Strength in numbers

If you can get together with other churches to create heritage trails or churchyard discovery projects, you are halfway to the successful promotion of your church. Local tourism agencies like 'packaged' activities they can promote as part of a day out and your church could benefit greatly from exposure on their websites.

Your tourism 'partners' need not be restricted to churches in your benefice. You could create a circular walking trail with a churchyard picnic site halfway round, or a cycle route taking in other places of interest. A trail based on a memorable theme such as 'The Glories of Glass' or 'Saints and Symbols' could work well over a longer route. Ensure leaflets are available in each church to encourage tourists to move from one church to another.

Find out more...

For a good examples of district authority tourism websites, go to www.southandheartofsuffolk.org.uk which includes short profiles of churches under What to do.

Discover Suffolk is Suffolk County Council's official countryside website for walks and cycle routes in Suffolk and it includes churchtrails. www.discover.suffolk.org.uk

Check out Britain Express www.britainexpress.com which has a whole section on historic churches by county. Is your church there?

Introduce a 'Pilgrim's Passport' that encourages tourists to visit more than one church. Perhaps the churches could be linked by their dedication as in 'The Five Marys'. At each church, the visitor could have their 'passport' stamped by a steward or even stamp their own if the church could not be manned.

Each district authority in Suffolk has its own website for visitors to the county. Make contact with your district tourism team to see if your church can be included on the site or take part in any annual festivals.



A local experience



Be creative and go beyond the 'look and see' concept of flower festivals and art exhibitions, lovely as they are. Offer an activity that allows tourists to be part of the local scene such as brass rubbing, a heritage workshop, painting a picture or discovering local flora in the churchyard.

Here are some eye-catching ideas:

- Have a medieval day with exhibition, guided tours, children's activities and local re-enactors.
- Invite craftspeople into the church to talk about stained glass windows or a wood carver to demonstrate how the pew ends might have been carved.
- Host workshops on traditional limewashing or brass rubbing. Invite special interest groups.
- Do a Hands on History session about tracing your ancestors

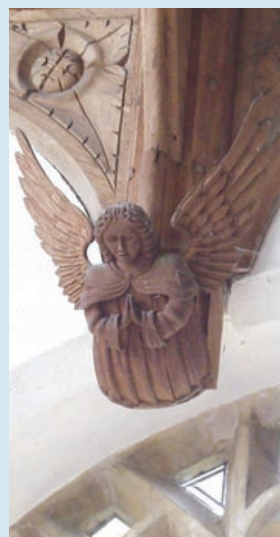
Be professional

- Be inspired by great design ideas from leaflets in your local Tourist Information Centre
- Make full use of your digital camera.
- Check out local printers for reasonably priced design services
- Find a local person with good publicity skills
- Consider outdoor banners for regular events
- Persuade local businesses to display your publicity and do the same for them

Get an identity

If your church can become known for a regular event such as a local produce market, cafe and stalls, or a regular music concert series, you will be serving the local community as well as attracting tourists and weekenders.

What is your church's unique selling point? Whether it is the angel roof, the fine tombs or the unique wall paintings, learn to tell the story and make sure your local Tourist Information Centre understands its significance.



Media matters

Find out more...

Would you like a website but put off by technical lingo such as domains, hosting or content management systems?

www.goodchurchwebsites.org.uk provides readable chunks of clear and sensible advice on all aspects of creating a church website. If you would like help with a website, take a look at www.churchwebsitedesign.org.uk

Twitter is an information network made up of 140-character messages called Tweets and is increasingly used to promote churches, heritage buildings and places of interest. The Twitter help centre is a good place to start support.twitter.com

Don't forget to enter your event on local listings at the East Anglian Daily Times or the Eastern Daily Press and in the events section of www.visitsuffolk.com



The local Press loves community stories and picture opportunities but the county is full of these and you are up against stiff competition.

The local media

- Make a list of local press contacts, including radio and TV
- Write a succinct press release using the time-honoured checklist of Who? What? Where? When? How? Follow it up with a phone call a few days later
- Always supply a picture and provide a photo opportunity
- Cultivate local reporters but don't pester
- Use the diocesan communications service to publicise your events

A website

A church website will save you time and money and will always be useful for the local media to refer to. If you don't have the skill or patience to create your own, search for a site you like, see who designed it, and get a costing for something similar. Make sure training is included and that you will be able to manage the content yourself once it is up and running.

Social media

Unlike the regular media, social media allows you to interact and communicate. It includes social networking such as Facebook and Twitter and social photo and video sharing such as YouTube and Flickr.

There are plenty of opportunities on the internet to allow you to get started and to discover how this could help you promote your church.

The parish picture

In many villages the shop has gone; the school has gone; the pub has gone, but the church remains and it's usually open. Churches are increasingly becoming community hubs just as so many of them would have been centuries ago. Yet some churches are so devoid of information about the surrounding community that once inside you could be anywhere.

It is easy to complain about a lack of interest among local residents about what happens in church but think instead about how to make the church building relevant to the local community, starting off where people are in life, worshippers or not.

First steps

The views of parish residents can be sought via a letter to each household or a notice in a prominent place to advertise an open meeting. By asking questions you can find out how to share the building in a meaningful way. It is important to follow up on any responses and not to raise expectations that can't be met.

Genuine needs

Questions that might arise will be: Is there a genuine need for a community space? Could the church develop partnerships with local organisations to host vital services such as a citizens' advice bureau or a post office? Could it be used by the local school as a learning resource? Would a local produce market provide serve the community well? Even leasing out space in the church for a regular activity is possible under the Pastoral (Amendment) Measure 2006.

Every church is different. Some churches work well as quiet sanctuaries for prayer and reflection; others for a warm and welcoming meeting place or venue for events. The main thing is not to bite off more than you can chew and whatever you do, do it well.



Find out more...

All you need to know about how to develop your church building for new ways of worship and community use can be found at www.churchcare.co.uk/develop. The Arthur Rank Centre offers resources for rural churches at www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk

Crossing the Threshold is a community development approach to church buildings. Search for the toolkit to download at www.hereford.anglican.org

The charity Suffolk ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) supports partnerships that help local communities to help themselves www.suffolkacre.org.uk

A vision for the future



Statement of Significance

Whether or not you have a clear vision for your church, the best place to start is with your Statement of Significance because it tells you what you have in terms of architecture and fittings, the history of the church and its particular setting, and how all this contributes to the unique character of the building and the value placed on it by worshippers and the local community.

It is the single most important document for your church building and should be prepared independently of faculty applications (see page 18).

Dwindling incomes and rising bills are a familiar story for churches. Many struggle with aging congregations and it is fast becoming evident that they will need to come up with new and inventive ways of securing a sustainable future.

Remaining solvent

- Look ahead and create a strategy for the future. A retired professional in the community might be glad to help with this.
- Assess your annual fundraising events to see which have been the most successful.
- Seek sponsorship from local businesses when producing promotional material and reciprocate with their logo or website address.
- Consider community uses that might generate income such as a local information centre or library, a health advice and fitness centre, café and stalls, or a local produce market. The list is endless but if you need to adapt the building you will need to provide evidence of need, not only for consents but if you are to benefit from community funding.



The funding maze



It's a jungle out there and competition for funding is fierce. The key is have a clear idea of who will benefit from your project and what would happen should it not go ahead. Once you have waded through the myriad of charitable trusts and other potential funders to see if you meet their criteria, focus on half a dozen to start with as your funding is likely to come in small amounts.

Making friends

Non-worshippers may have family ties, be supporters of history and heritage, or keen to stage events in the church. How can their skills and enthusiasm be harnessed to help safeguard the future of the building?

Church friends groups are springing up all over the diocese, raising funds for repairs and development projects. Call the Diocesan office to find a church friends group near you and seek advice on how it works. Friends help the church to engage with the local community, which can be vital when approaching potential funders.

All you need to know about starting a Church Friends Group is in the 'Supporting you' section at www.nationalchurchestrust.org

Find out more...

Good sources of funding can be found at

www.parishresources.org.uk
www.churchcare.co.uk
www.ffhb.org.uk

The UK Church Fundraising Handbook by Maggie Durran is an excellent source of information on raising funds and creating a viable organisation for your church.

You can subscribe to websites that identify funders for whom your project may be eligible. More information on www.dsc.org.uk/fundingwebsites

Some funders, such as the All Churches Trust www.allchurches.co.uk, the National Churches Trust www.nationalchurchestrust.org, and the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust www.shct.org.uk will help fund community projects as well as building and restoration projects if you can meet their criteria.

The Diocese runs a parish resources service. Tel 01473 298500.

Protecting our heritage

Find out more...

Contact the DAC Secretary on 01473 298533 for general advice or for a step-by-step guide to writing a Statement of Significance, or go to the church buildings section of www.stedmundsbury.anglican.org

Visit www.buildingconservation.com for a really clear explanation of how Ecclesiastical Exemption works for churches.

Consult the English Heritage red book 'Caring for Places of Worship' sent out to parishes in 2010, to find out more about repair grants, alterations, security issues, health and safety regulations and other legal duties. You can also download the information in the Caring for Heritage section at www.english-heritage.org.uk



Our churches are a key part of the nation's heritage so it is hardly surprising that special permission is needed for alterations and traditional materials specified for repairs. The faculty system of 'Ecclesiastical Exemption' is designed to do this, while allowing a degree of freedom for churches to develop in line with worship needs. It is operated by the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches on behalf of the Chancellor, a senior lawyer who issues the consents, following appropriate consultation with English Heritage and various amenity societies.

Key statements

As part of your faculty application, the DAC may ask you for Statements of Significance and of Need. The first document is one of the most valuable you have for your church and is worth doing even if you don't have plans for change because it will help you focus on a clear strategy for the future of the building.

You will also be asked to demonstrate a genuine need for the change you are proposing. For example, if you plan to remove some pews, who is going to benefit? And is there evidence for this?

Get in touch

Remember, early advice from the DAC is crucial and costs nothing, even if you think you may not need a faculty, because the list of exceptions – known as *de minimis* – can change. Church buildings have been developed over many centuries and the DAC is entrusted to ensure their character is safeguarded. If your first thought is for an extension, then you will probably be asked to consider existing space within the church. An architect experienced in listed churches will steer you through the challenges ahead.

The process of change is complex so you will need patience!

Only the best

In years gone by, only the best craftsmanship was good enough for God's house and this still applies today. A high standard of workmanship and timeless design is always worth aiming for, with an eye to the legacy we are leaving future generations.

Greening your church

There are over 470 Anglican churches in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich and most are centuries old. Each is a unique manifestation of how people used to live in our communities and a vital learning resource for children and future generations.

Churches and churchyards carry special responsibilities of stewardship, not only for the sake of historical heritage but also in terms of our planet and global justice. The world's poor suffers most from damage to the environment.

Community projects can be far more rewarding and sustainable if environmental concerns are moved up the agenda. They can save money too!

Living churchyards

Churchyards have been a focus of parish life for centuries. They can tell us about archaeology and the lives of our ancestors. They can be quiet places of reflection and are perfect for summer picnics.

Ancient churchyards have usually escaped the use of modern herbicides and it is vital to conserve them for their wildlife treasures. Managing your churchyard for wildlife rather than routine mowing takes time and effort but Suffolk Wildlife Trust can advise you how to do this in a way that suits your time and resources.

Churchyard Discovery Days such as wildlife surveys or graveyard recording for all ages will encourage the local community to get involved with the churchyard and displaying the evidence is bound to interest visitors from further afield.



Find out more...

Shrinking the Footprint provides practical advice on reducing your churches carbon emissions and energy bills www.shrinkingthefootprint.cofe.anglican.org and has a section on churchyards.

Greening your church community project is on the Working Together section of the Church Urban Fund website www.cuf.org.uk

Understand the links between Christianity and the environment and ecology, including ways to conserve or plant your churchyard 'Eden' at www.ew.ecocongregation.org

A Guide to Churchyard Management is one of the factsheets available to download from the species and habitats section of www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org

Caring for God's Acre aims to inspire and support local communities in caring for churchyards www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk

Parish archives, including baptisms and burials, are held at the Suffolk Records Office in the Local history and heritage section of www.suffolk.gov.uk/leisureandculture



If you have difficulty accessing any of the resources listed in this book or have any questions, feel free to contact the Diocesan Office, St Nicholas Centre, 4 Cutler Street, Ipswich, Suffolk. IP1 1UQ. Tel. 01473 298500

All the information and recommendations in this booklet have been given in good faith. The Diocesan Board of Finance cannot be held responsible for the content of websites and resources from other organisations.