

APPROVAL PROCESS

This statement of policy describes the process for the granting of provincial approval for church projects. This process is to be used for projects that require building works and also for those that do not. (If requesting a grant for youth or children's work the church should apply to the Youth and Children's Work Committee. In all other cases the following process applies.)

I. Introduction

Several bodies are involved in the decision-making process. The Development and Support Officers and the Synod Resource Team make the initial assessment of whether or not a project is appropriate. The Listed Buildings Advisory Committee will make a recommendation based on the architectural merits of a project that involves work on a Listed Building or a building in a Conservation Area and the Provincial Property Committee will determine whether or not such work should be permitted. The Finance and Property Committee acts under powers delegated to it by the Synod to approve the buying, selling, letting and alteration of churches and manses under the provisions of the URC Act 1981, Schedule 2. The Synod has also delegated to the Finance and Property Committee the power to approve projects and to recommend grants and loans. Finally, the Synod has ultimate responsibility for all of these actions and will make the final decisions when large grants or appeals are involved.

2. Process

When a church is considering a project that requires the approval of the Synod and involves building works, they must first consult one of the Property Officers. In all other cases they must first consult one of the Development and Support Officers. The Officer will involve other appropriate members of the Synod Resource Team as required and, possibly, members of the Finance and Property Committee.

As a result of this initial consultation it may be decided that a feasibility study is required. An annual budget will be established to pay for such studies. The budget will be administered by the Synod Resource Team and will be set at £10,000 per year initially. If the project involves possible building work, one of the Synod's Property Officers must approve the terms of reference for the feasibility study.

If, following the initial consultation and possible feasibility study, the Synod Resource Team supports the proposal, they will make a recommendation to the Finance and Property Committee. The recommendation must be supported by:

1. an assessment of the current life and witness of the church
2. a description of the project and its mission purpose
3. for a building project, the architect's plans
4. a statement showing the estimated costs of the project and how these will be met

5. if a grant or loan is required, copies of the last three years' church accounts
6. a set of criteria by which the effectiveness of the project will be judged.

The Finance and Property Committee will consider the project and will decide whether or not to approve it. If the project is not approved the process terminates.

If the project involves building work and the building is a Listed Building or is in a Conservation Area the church must then apply to the Listed Buildings Advisory Committee. The Listed Buildings Advisory Committee will make a recommendation to the Provincial Property Committee based on the architectural merits of the project and its effects on the historic fabric of the building. With the advice of the Listed Buildings Advisory Committee, the Provincial Property Committee will then determine whether or not the works should be permitted. Full details about the process for obtaining Listed Building approval are contained in the URC Statement of Procedure, and an informal guide is available from the Synod Office.

Once approval has been given for a project involving building work, either by the Finance and Property Committee and, in the case of a Listed Building or a building in a Conservation Area, also by the Provincial Property Committee, the church can then apply for Planning Permission and, in due course, for Building Regulations Approval.

If a project is approved, whether or not building works are involved, the Finance and Property Committee may also recommend that a grant and/or a loan should be made. The recommendation will be made to the United Reformed Church (Wessex) Trust Limited who will normally act on it.

The details of the policy for grants and loans is contained in the policy document, "Policy - Grants and Loans".

When a project is approved the Finance and Property Committee will also determine when and how the results of the project should be evaluated.

The process described above is reproduced as a flow chart below.

3. Appeals (as approved by Synod in March 2006)

A church may appeal against a decision of the Finance and Property Committee by writing to the secretary of the committee within 28 days of notification of the decision asking the committee to reconsider. The church must indicate the reasons why it believes the decision should be reconsidered and must supply supporting evidence where necessary. The appeal will be considered at the next meeting of the committee.

If the church is still not content, it should again write to the secretary of the committee within 28 days of receipt of the notification of the decision stating that it wishes to appeal further.

The secretary of the committee will inform the Synod Clerk who will then establish a commission to hear the appeal on behalf of the Synod.

The commission will report to the Synod Executive Committee who will report the result to Synod.

If a further appeal is required, it would be to the General Assembly, and the process in The Manual would apply.

