

FOOTPATHS, ACCESS WAYS, AND CAR PARKS

1. INTRODUCTION

The repair of paths and other hard-surfaced areas in the churchyard, including resurfacing in the same materials and colour, does not require any consent, as it is covered by section A7(2) of List A under the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules.

If the church is not a listed building, repairs and resurfacing to paths in different materials from the existing is covered by section B6(7) of List B, and can be authorised by the Archdeacon, following consultation with the DAC. However, if the churchyard lies in a conservation area, local authority planning approval may be required for the introduction different materials.

If the church is listed, and you propose to create any new paths or hard surfacing, or to resurface in different materials or colour from what is there already, a Faculty will be required and local authority planning approval may also be required.

2. DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The importance of the visual aspect of paved areas cannot be overstated and the surface finish should be chosen after taking into consideration the location, setting and surroundings of the church buildings and the environmental impact including drainage.

It is also important that paths and parking areas are suitable for wheelchair users and others with disabilities, and surfaces should be chosen with their needs in mind.

Church environments vary significantly depending upon whether the church is in a rural, urban or town centre setting. Churchyards with large areas of soft landscaping may require quite different treatment from those with largely paved surroundings.

Further factors to be kept in mind are the design, age and construction materials of the buildings.

There may be archaeological implications where excavation for the creating of paths, access ways or car parks is proposed. The DAC Archaeological Advisor will need to be consulted and will advise as appropriate.

3. CONSTRUCTION

In considering the specification for construction and/or repair, account has to be taken of the type and degree of usage. The surface finish and depth of construction for light footpath usage will vary from that required for vehicle access or car parking, which again will vary with the amount of usage e.g. a car park used once or twice a week as against one used on a regular daily basis.

In all circumstances however the base foundation, whether for a flexible (e.g. crushed stone, hoggin etc.) or for a rigid concrete construction, should be of sufficient depth to sustain the loads imposed on the subsoil by the varying types of usage i.e. pedestrian or vehicular.

With existing surfaces, the foundations should be effectively repaired before resurfacing, and reshaped and regraded as necessary.

In most cases paths can be cambered to be self-draining, but there may be instances with large paved areas and car parks, where consideration may have to be given to piped drainage. Where an existing

permeable gravel or stone chipping surface is being replaced by a non-permeable surface, the DAC will take particular note of the drainage proposals. For footpaths in particular, a strong case will need to be made to install a new non-permeable surface.

Depending on the condition of the areas to be surfaced and the type and degree of usage, a bituminous two course construction may be necessary or, alternatively, the base course work may be limited to making good low and defective areas and for regrading in preparation for surfacing.

4. FINISHES

Colour rendition and texture of finishes is important. The following is a guide to the type of surfaces which may be appropriate, depending on the setting and usage.

- Self-binding or Breedon gravel gives an attractive surface, but it is not permeable and should be laid with a slight camber for drainage, not completely flat. It can also stick to shoes and wheels resulting in dust marks on the church floor.
- Resin bound gravel surfacing fixes together small stones with high-tech resin to form a firm, attractive surface. The gravel is mixed with the resin prior to being laid on the ground. It creates many small gaps that allow water to drain through into the ground, so it is a permeable surface. It is available in a variety of natural looking colours and with no loose chippings, is suitable for wheelchairs.
- Resin bonded gravel gives a similar appearance to resin bound, but is usually a bit cheaper. The resin is applied to a suitable ground surface and covered with loose aggregate. Once cured the remaining loose stones are removed. Like resin bound, it is attractive and comes in many natural colours, but unlike resin bound, it is not permeable, gives a rougher surface and there can be loose stones which need to be swept.
- Tarmac with chippings rolled into the top surface can be appropriate in some locations, but black tarmac without a top dressing is unlikely to be suitable in many cases.
- Loose chippings which are not bound into a bituminous or resin surface are not suitable for wheelchairs or the infirm and should generally be avoided.
- Natural stone paving or other traditional surfaces are normally acceptable subject to the material proposed being in sympathy with the existing surroundings and buildings.
- Concrete block paving and similar products are rarely compatible with historic environments and should be avoided.
- When considering the area to be surfaced care should be taken to retain existing stone or brick thresholds to doors, porches and entrances and to ensure that the surfacing meets these levels neatly and avoids the collection of surface water.

5. EDGING

In cases where the footpath adjoins a grass or cultivated area, if an edging is required it should be of treated hardwood or metal and capable of supporting the construction and providing a satisfactory boundary to the adjoining area. Pre-cast concrete or brickwork edging is not normally acceptable.

Each location has to be considered on its own merits and the DAC is happy to give advice on the preferred treatments for individual circumstances.

6. WEEDS AND PLANTS

Both tarmac and especially gravel paths can develop a growth of plants. In the early stages these are likely to be common weeds and could be killed by weed killers. However, care should be exercised when using weed killers on paths under or close to tree canopies as this may kill the tree whose roots will run just under the path.

Many churches will have paths that have been neglected for many years and so have a rich vegetation which should not be killed, or the path substantially repaired or replaced, without a survey of the plants first. It is also possible that in some areas, rare mosses may be found and there is the possibility of protected species in these paths. Where such vegetation is growing, weed killers should not be used and alternative treatments will need to be considered. (The Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust <https://www.wildlifebcn.org/> or the Norfolk Wildlife Trust <https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/> as appropriate, should be able to advise.)

7. GRASS PATHS

Although hard paths will be used to reach the main entrances of the church, much of the churchyard will be accessed via grass paths. These will obviously be maintained by mowing. If the grass either side is allowed to grow long, keeping a very sharp and neat edge to the path maintains a cared-for look that many parishes desire, without having to keep the grass across the whole churchyard cut regularly.

8. REFERENCES

For further information on access to church buildings for people with disabilities:

‘Widening the Eye of the Needle: Access to Church Buildings for People with Disabilities’ by John H. Penton.

POLICY

1. The DAC will take into consideration the aesthetic and environmental impact of the colour, texture and materials to ensure harmony with the surroundings.
2. The DAC will expect consideration to be given to provision for disabled and wheelchair access.
3. Where archaeological implications are involved, such as excavation in churchyards or adjoining church buildings, the Diocesan Archaeological Adviser is to be consulted.
4. The DAC will expect all parishes when making Faculty applications to take into account the environmental impact of the proposals.
5. Where there is substantial plant and/or moss growth the DAC will expect a path to be botanically surveyed before old vegetation is destroyed.