

Provision of Initial Pre-application advice by Historic England to places of worship from 1st July 2017

Historic England offers places of worship one free cycle of Initial Pre-Application advice

From 1 July 2017, the Initial Pre-application advice service will offer one free cycle of Initial Pre-application advice to prospective applicants for listed building consent issued by local authorities, listed places of worship consent under the Ecclesiastical Exemption Order 2010, planning permission affecting designated¹ heritage assets (or undesignated heritage assets of archaeological interest in Greater London²), and scheduled monument consent. If a site visit is needed travelling time will now be included as part of the free service cycle.

What does this mean for places of worship seeking free advice?

This means that all places of worship³ will continue to have two opportunities to consult with Historic England without charge while in the process of developing projects and seeking permission to do work:

1. As proposals are explored and developed, before ideas are fixed or the proposals are finalised, they can ask for Initial Pre-application advice, which will include a review of submitted information, possibly a site visit, and an advice letter. It is a local decision whether or not a site visit or meeting is required to fully understand the proposals. Historic England staff will determine this based on the initial information provided.
2. When applicants are ready to make a formal application to the local authority or the relevant denominational advisory body⁴ for permission to go ahead with the works, and have a full set of information ready, there is a further opportunity to get free advice from Historic England. This is known as Formal Pre-application advice that provides a clear statement of our view on the proposals for which permission is sought, not the start of fresh discussion!

¹ The pre-application advice service covers proposals where we would be statutory consultees should an application be made. See <http://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/our-planning-services/charter/when-we-are-consulted/proposals-for-development-management/>

² Except for the City of London & Southwark who have their own in-house archaeology advisers. Searches of the Greater London Historic Environment Record for commercial purposes are chargeable separately; please refer to the Greater London Historic Environment Record Access and Charging Policy.

³ A place of worship is one that is open for the general public to attend acts of worship at least six times a year, without invitation or restriction, it may include buildings constructed for the purpose or taken over by a faith group for its use e.g. a former cinema, school now used for worship.

⁴ For Roman Catholic, United Reformed, Methodist and Baptist Union churches, the appropriate determining Advisory under the Ecclesiastical Exemption (Historic Churches Committee, Listed Buildings Advisory Committee).

What is Extended Pre-application advice for places of worship?

If one cycle of free Initial Pre-application advice is not sufficient, there is an opportunity to purchase additional input prior to the formalisation of proposals through our Extended Pre-application advice service. This continues to be available after 1 July 2017 on a full cost recovery (not-for-profit) basis, as before: [links]

- Extended Pre-application advice will only be available to a customer if they have already received free Initial Pre-application advice.
- Nobody will find themselves paying for Historic England services without having signed a formal agreement and being fully aware of what is involved.
- This service is only offered if a customer signs a contract to cover on-going verbal and written advice, such as regular involvement in design team meetings, advice on archaeological assessment and field evaluation and comments on emerging schemes, from a named lead specialist from Historic England.
- Customers using this service will pay for the full cost of staff time, including travel and administration time.

How do places of worship make best use of the free cycle of advice?

We appreciate that places of worship have very limited resources and we want them to make the best use of free pre-application consultation. We therefore ask applicants to provide sufficient outline information to make desk-based appraisal a realistic possibility. This should include information setting out:

- what the place of worship seeks to achieve and a draft Statement of Need explaining why alterations to the building are now needed;
- preliminary ideas about what areas of the building might be affected by the proposals and the pros and cons of different options for meeting the needs;
- a draft Statement of Significance, telling the building's story and explaining the significance of the areas affected by the proposals.⁵

We will review the information provided, attend one site visit/meeting if necessary (reviewing further information arising from this), and issue an advice letter on Historic England headed paper (which might be sent as a pdf file attached to an e-mail using a Historic England e-mail account). Clarification may be provided if the applicant is unclear about the meaning of the advice within a one month period of the advice being given, but if further pre-application discussions or site visits are required the applicant will need to enter into a contract for Extended Pre-application advice.

What does Formal Pre-application advice add?

⁵ On-line help to develop Statements can be found on <http://www.churchcare.co.uk/churches/guidance-advice/statements-of-significance-need>, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/static/rm/statementsignifneed.pdf>, Church of England congregations can prepare their Statements through the Church Heritage Record and other denominations and faith groups can use the on-line system at <http://www.statementsofsignificance.org.uk/>

For Formal Pre-application advice, applicants are required to provide a full set of plans and other relevant information exactly as would be included in the intended application. Historic England will then undertake a one-off assessment to provide our formal written advice (on headed paper as described above) on the proposals should they be submitted as an application. This advice does not have scope for negotiations or Historic England involvement in any further amendments. We believe that local and denominational authorities will find the formal statement of our view on the final specification to be an effective way of establishing Historic England's position.

What if the local authority or denominational decision-makers have more questions?

Once an application is formally submitted, whether to the DAC for Church of England applicants, the determining Advisory Committee for other denominations under the Ecclesiastical Exemption or the local authority, further advice can be required from Historic England as a statutory advisor on planning applications. This advice is also offered without charge.

What about places of worship that Historic England has identified as Heritage at Risk?

Buildings on the Heritage at Risk Register will continue to receive Extended Pre-application advice without cost recovery, even if more than one cycle of advice is necessary.

What about those places of worship already in contact with Historic England?

Places of worship that are currently in the process of receiving Pre-Application advice from Historic England will be entitled to continue on the basis of one free cycle of advice; they will individually be notified of the change of approach as appropriate.

Where can I find out more?

For further information after 1st July please see <https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/our-planning-services/enhanced-advisory-services/>