

OXFORD DIOCESAN SYNOD

Diocesan Office Accommodation

Over the last year, office accommodation in Diocesan Church House (DCH) in Oxford has become very difficult. This is due in part to the increased number of people using the building. The Archdeacon of Oxford and his secretary are now based in DCH to enable closer working with the Bishop's Office, and the Directors of Ordinands no longer have a Christ Church office, which was linked to a previous DDO's role as a Residentiary Canon. We have been joined by the ODST (Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust) team, which is growing rapidly, and the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education staff team has also been increased to provide the school improvement support needed by schools in a challenging educational environment, and which they purchase through a service agreement. It is currently not possible to provide appropriate working space for all our staff team and we are conscious that there are other posts likely to come on line – such as a Historic Places of Worship Support Officer funded initially by English Heritage. It is very difficult to build teams and develop integrated working when some staff have to spend much of their time working from home or off-site.

We are also experiencing considerable pressure on our meeting room space. The Large Committee Room is very heavily used for committee meetings and training and we have inadequate medium and small meeting room space. Staff, diocesan bodies and volunteers are all finding it difficult to identify appropriate meeting space and we are not able to offer hospitality for diocesan activities in the way that we would like. Parking is becoming an increasing problem, particularly when we have training and other events, with cars parked on the verges of neighbouring roads, and we are more regularly receiving complaints from our neighbours. While the staff team have been very helpful, moving offices, and giving up office space to try to make the building work, those solutions have proved short term and are no longer adequate. It is also worth noting that DCH is currently in need of significant refurbishment.

Following discussion, Bishop's Council recognised the need for a fresh approach and asked for some radical thinking about what was needed for the next phase – say 25 years. While it may be necessary for the Board of Education/ODST to move temporarily to separate premises nearby, there is a strong desire for continued, integrated working between the staff of ODST, the Board of Education and other diocesan staff, in a shared facility. Bishop's Council made a decision of principle that this should be so.

Looking forward it is hoped to provide improved working conditions for staff generally. DCH has been enlarged on a number of occasions with additional wings and a warren of corridors. Although staff try to avoid working in a silo mentality the building does not help us. Other dioceses that have moved to modern, open-plan offices have reported great benefits from improved integrated working. Such a move will also provide a valuable resource to the Diocese as a whole.

For many years the Bishop of Oxford has had an office in DCH. There are many benefits to this and so one of the criteria when thinking about accommodation options was that it should be in the vicinity of Oxford to allow this to continue. It was also recognised that we needed both good parking and the availability of public transport.

After a period of investigation, Bishop's Council were presented with a number of alternatives

- two modern freehold properties, one in Kidlington, north of Oxford, and one west of Botley, Oxford;
- proposals for the further redevelopment of DCH with two new extensions and a major restructuring of the existing building;
- a possible redevelopment of part of the site at St Mary's Convent in Wantage while retaining the existing facilities of DCH.

While it is recognised that moving to a property in a new location will cause difficulties for some staff, Bishop's Council determined that the Kidlington property was the most appropriate and discussions will take place with the staff team to mitigate concerns where possible. Negotiations are taking place to determine whether the property can be acquired on acceptable terms. A modern building is likely to have lower running costs in comparison with DCH, which will help offset the cost of the increased investment in the property. The DCH site has increased significantly in value in the last few years and the Chair of the Board of Finance will set out at Diocesan Synod the funding approach to be taken. There will also be an opportunity for discussion and questions.

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Diocesan Secretary

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