

CARPETING IN CHURCHES

Guidance note

from the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches
2016

Carpets are becoming increasingly common in parish churches. To some they provide a friendly warm atmosphere, to others they make the church feel more like a hotel or a domestic interior and strike a discordant note. The function of carpet in a church is therefore quite different in one respect from its function in other public or private places.

TO CARPET OR NOT TO CARPET

Before considering carpet the following factors should be considered:

- The church is a significant space and its furnishings serve a higher purpose than mere comfort.
- Carpet can contribute to, or detract from, the overall spiritual impact of our Places of Worship.
- Carpeting fails to differentiate between the symbolism and function of particular areas and the rest of the building into which it is introduced.
- Many churches have ancient or artistically important floors. It is often thought that carpets protect a floor, but this is not necessarily the case as they can retain moisture both from the solid floor and from the atmosphere which can cause flagstones to decay or wood to rot. Dust and grit which work their way through can also be very abrasive.
- The majority of churches have no damp proof course and the general level of moisture and humidity is high when compared to a dwelling. This can lead to high levels of moisture being retained within carpet and other soft furnishings. Increased moisture levels make churches feel cold and unwelcoming. Dampness can also provide a habitat for harmful insects which may damage historic elements within the church.
- Extensive or heavy carpeting could have a dampening acoustic effect and have an impact on speech, choral and other music, as well as impact on any sound reinforcement systems. An unsympathetic, 'dead' acoustic will discourage congregational singing, by making people self-conscious about their efforts. Consult your organist and choir and listen to their concerns about carpet!
- Seek advice from the church architect/ surveyor and from the Diocesan Church Buildings Advisers at the start of the process. It may be wise to request a DAC site meeting to help you in your deliberations.



HOW TO MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE OF CARPET

Use a floor plan of the church to consider the different areas which make up the building. Consider why and how you feel the carpet will enhance the interior.

- Choosing a colour and pattern is a subjective matter which can arouse great differences of opinion.
- The subtle and muted tones of the church interior must be considered and the colour of the carpet should give a sense of spiritual peace and harmony.
- Strong colour needs careful consideration; the jewelled effect of stained glass windows should not have to compete with strident, misplaced colour or pattern in carpets for example. Subdued, neutral colours will often remain satisfying long after strong colour has palled.
- Careful consideration and advice should be sought to ensure that any proposed colour/pattern is dementia friendly (see box below).

HOW TO CHOOSE A CARPET

If, having given due consideration to the above advice, it is decided to carpet, two questions need to be addressed:

1. What type should be chosen?

Any carpet chosen for a church must NOT be rubber-backed, or otherwise impervious to moisture. More than one church has come to regret the laying of such carpet on a wooden floor which has subsequently been destroyed by rot. The effect on a stone or tiled floor can be almost as disastrous.

The durability of a carpet depends on its density, resilience and the weight of its pile. The quicker the pile recovers from an impression, the better the carpet. Short, dense fibre carpets are the most durable. Any **underlay must be breathable**.

In churches with flagstones and no damp-proof course it is traditional to use coconut, rush or sisal matting, with good quality wool carpet at the altar steps. The coarse open texture of these mats allows the floor to breathe. Every year they should be lifted so that the dirt beneath can be removed. Check the manufacturers' instructions regarding cleaning and maintenance to ensure that it meets your requirements.

2. What colour and pattern?

When choosing colours it is often 'red' versus 'blue' as if these were the only possibilities. Red is a very strong colour and draws the eye; it also shows up the slightest pale mark, and some blues do not live happily with the tones of walls and the woodwork, liturgical red or violet.

Avoid pale plain carpets as they will show stains and shading. Avoid carpets with a large pattern as they will detract from windows and liturgical colours. It is essential to look at good-sized samples in the church.



REMEMBER steps need to be clear for the visually impaired, and churches should be dementia friendly places - advice is available from the Alzheimer's Society on how colours and patterns affect people; the effect can be quite upsetting.

PRACTICALITIES TO CONSIDER

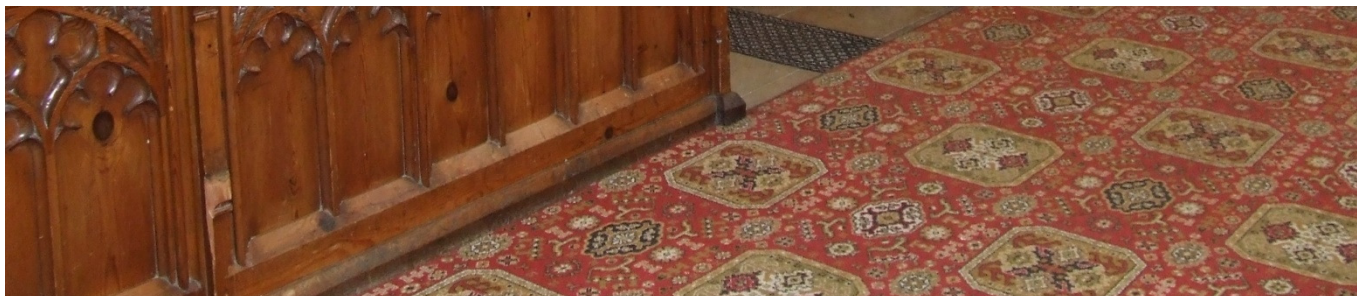
Carpets should be laid on even floors - there are many situations where using levelling materials is not possible as such action could damage historic fabric. Consult your church architect/ surveyor at the outset.

Uneven distribution of wear and tear - the spaces where people are directed into a narrow pathway and areas near entrance doors are most at risk. Accidental spillages will happen in places where tea and coffee are served. Candle grease and oil from sanctuary lamps can also cause trouble. It could be very expensive to replace a complete carpet simply because some areas have become worn or stained. Detailed consideration must be given to the durability of the carpet to ensure that it will cater for all requirements and is easy to maintain.

LENGTH OF WEAR:

If a carpet is to last it must be of good quality and have a 'heavy duty' rating to ensure that it will last at least one generation. As many solid floors are well over a century old it could be argued that carpet represents a short-term economic advantage that will pass the burden of replacement to future generations.

The DAC advise that carpets should be considered where they contribute to the role of church as a place of worship and mission. Our churches have a place for dramatic gesture or striking colour but such bold effects, if not rationed, become self-defeating. The aim must be not to reproduce the cosy and comfortable atmosphere of a hotel or home, but by a certain disciplined restraint to create a setting for prayer and reflection, as well as welcome and warmth.



If you have any queries, contact:

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dac@exeter.anglican.org; or consult the diocesan website:

<http://exeter.anglican.org/resources/church-buildings/>