

PIPE AND ELECTRONIC ORGANS

Guidance note

from the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches
2016

A main concern is to preserve any historic pipe organs in the Diocese. Great care is required to maintain them properly by an appropriate organ builder. All instruments need attention from time to time to keep them in good working order. It is usually at this point that help is needed before taking decisions for maintenance or alteration.



NEW INSTRUMENTS

In new churches, in churches without an organ or where the present instrument needs replacing, decisions may need to be taken about installing a new organ. Almost certainly a visit will be required from the Diocesan Organ Adviser (contact via the Church Buildings Office). The church might also wish to employ a professional consultant to give independent advice; the Association of Independent Organ Advisers may be able to help here (<http://www.aioa.org.uk>)

Amongst the factors to be considered are:

1. Pipe or electronic organ

Apart from musical considerations, bear in mind the life expectancy of the organ. Pipe organs often work without major maintenance for more than 25 years. However the initial cost of a pipe organ is usually higher than an electronic organ and it requires a larger space. The life expectancy and reliability of some low cost electronic organs have proved to be poor, especially when installed in damp churches. Electronic organs can vary considerably in tonal quality depending on the details of digital technology. Seek advice from the Diocesan Organ Adviser and ask the manufacturer of any organ under consideration to demonstrate the instrument on site. The size of electronic organ needs to be governed by the size and musical needs of the church.

2. New pipe organ

The purchase of a new pipe organ is sadly a rare event. Costs are high but help can be sought from various sources. The appearance of the organ needs to suit the architecture of the church (this does not mean it has to have a mock Victorian casing; a modern case and pipe work can enhance the building if sympathetically designed). The specification and positioning need to meet the musical requirements. Thought also needs to be given to the type of action: this may depend on the positioning of the pipes and console.

3. Second-hand pipe organ

There are a number of fine second-hand pipe organs which can be purchased at little cost and have become available due to churches being declared closed for regular public worship. A list of such organs is maintained by the Institute of British Organ Building (IBO); see their website <http://www.ibo.co.uk> for the current list. Local organ builders would also know of such organs. Bear in mind that the cost of rebuilding a second-hand organ will be fairly substantial as it is labour intensive.

VISUAL POSITIONING OF ORGAN

Electronic organs and other electronic instruments need loudspeakers. Suitable speakers need to be positioned so that the sound clearly reaches the right areas with the speakers being discreetly hidden or fitting well, appropriately coloured, into the architecture.

MAINTENANCE OR ALTERATION TO ANY EXISTING ORGAN

In churches where there is an organ, work may be needed for: overhaul and general repair; improvement of the organ by some tonal alterations (i.e. changes to the stops and pipework) or relocation of the organ due to liturgical reordering of the church (or some other musical reason). In such instances bear in mind:

- Reports and estimates should be obtained from organ builders. In most cases it is advisable that two or three quotations be sought. An independent organ adviser could also be employed to submit a report with recommendations.
- In cases where the existing organ is in a poor state, it may be best to replace by a new or second-hand instrument (see above).
- Any relocation of an organ or alteration to the specification or action requires careful consideration by the DAC, especially if the organ has historical interest. In these cases guidance from the Diocesan Organ Adviser is particularly recommended.
- The Minor Works list allows for routine tuning and adjustments of organs, all other works require a faculty.
- Grants can be sought for the maintenance or restoration of an historic organ.



GENERAL CARE AND MAINTENANCE

A contract with an organ builder for regular tuning of a pipe organ and attention to minor faults is essential. The organ blower is often not the responsibility of the organ builder and should be regularly oiled and checked by a qualified engineer.

Heating and ventilation need to be checked.

Extremes of damp and dryness should be avoided.

A humidifier can prevent timbers from cracking due to heat and dryness.

Provision for the maintenance of the organ, including periodic overhaul, should be part of the

church budget. The organ should be insured against accident or misfortune.

It is essential that the organ is properly protected during building works to the church, external and internal. This is particularly important were redecoration is being carried out. Accumulation of dust within organ pipes and air ducts can cause serious problems. The church's insurer may refuse to pay a claim for the repair of an organ where it has not been properly protected. (Ecclesiastical Insurance state that organ protection must be approved by the organ builder.)

ELECTRICAL ISSUES

The organ's electrical functions should be restricted to the organist and authorised persons only. In the case of new organs, or when rewiring the church, it is possible to place the organ electrics (blower, organ controls, console and lighting) under separate electrical circuitry. The control of the various circuits can be via a key switch operated contactor. The key would have a limited distribution, thus enhancing organ security. Early consultation with the organ builder and an NICEIC, ECA or NAPIT registered electrical contractor is necessary. It is important that **any electrical socket outlet within the organ assembly which may be used to operate power tools and hand lamps is provided with 30mA RCD protection in line with all sockets in the church.** This is to ensure the safety of organ builders and organ tuners who clamber around 'inside' an organ.



Remember the DAC should be consulted and a faculty sought for the installation or removal of an organ (electronic or pipe) or any overhaul or alteration of an existing organ. The report and estimate of an organ builder should be submitted together with any plans and drawings relevant to any proposed visual alteration of the organ e.g. relocation of the organ. The Diocesan Organ Adviser will be pleased to offer informal advice at the planning stage, with contact made through the Church Buildings Office, as noted above.