



This guidance note will help you considering whether to repair or to replace your church organ.

## The Present Organ

An organ by a good maker will be a work of art, particularly if substantially unaltered, and should be respected in its own right, with regard for its historic importance. Destruction or substantial alteration of an historic instrument is poor stewardship and damaging to our cultural heritage. Organs of historic value may qualify for financial help for restoration. The careful restoration of an organ may well produce a visual and musical improvement.

Before any decisions are taken, it is necessary to make a careful assessment of the existing instrument. For this you may need help. In Anglican churches, each Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) will have an Organs Adviser.

The questions that you should ask are:

1. Who built the organ? When?
2. Has it been restored or rebuilt? By whom and when?
3. Does it contain earlier material, such as pipes or casework, which may be of historic value?
4. Within its own category, is the instrument of any musical distinction? Is it mechanically well-made?
5. How suitable is it for the liturgical and wider uses of the church?
6. How much will it cost to repair or restore and how accurate are these costs?

## Restoration

If the instrument is either of historic value or is fundamentally sound, the best advice is likely to

be that the organ should be restored. However, if the suitability of an instrument is in question, it is necessary to look closely at the reasons advanced for change. These often include:

1. The organ is too small to meet the musical needs of the church.
2. It is unreliable and has been declared irreparable.
3. It is in the wrong place.
4. It looks ugly.
5. It is physically too large.
6. The repair of the organ is beyond the financial resources of the parish.

A series of issues lie behind such statements. It is important to think them through before any decisions are made.





## 1. The musical needs of the church

Do you need an organ for:

1. Leading and sustaining congregational singing?
2. Accompaniment of a choir?
3. The performance of organ music, both as part of worship and for concerts and recitals?
4. To educate, support and encourage your present and future organists and church musicians?

### How large an instrument do you need?

How large does an organ really need to be? It is sometimes assumed that a big church or a large congregation needs an organ with a large variety of stops or tone colours. This is not necessarily so and a small organ, properly placed and voiced, can support a very large congregation, and will be less costly to maintain.

Claims by the organist or organ builder that the organ is too small should not be accepted without independent expert advice. If an organ has served a parish for many years, why has suddenly become too small!

### Musical Repertoire

Where the demands on the organ are principally leading congregational singing and the performance of not more than the simpler organ repertoire, an appropriately-designed single-manual pipe organ, with or without pedals, can meet most requirements. Such instruments may have the advantage of being small enough to be movable.

The flexibility of a two manual and pedal organ becomes more desirable when the church choir needs to be accompanied in a wide range of choral music, and an adequate instrument will be important to attract and retain competent organists. This is also true where it is considered that an extensive repertoire of organ music, in voluntaries or recitals, is required as an important part of the musical life of the parish. The design of a new organ to provide the greatest variety of effects from the minimum resources requires particular skill and taking advice from professionally qualified people beyond the parish. Independent professional advice is available from the Association of Independent Organ Advisers (<http://www.aioa.org.uk>).

### 2. The present instrument is unreliable

Can it be repaired? Who says that it cannot? It is important to check out the advice of an organ builder, or of an organist, with an appropriate independent adviser, and with your DAC.

### 3. The right position for the instrument

The ideal position is in the open, where the sound can speak clearly and effortlessly into the main body of the church building. For this reason, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the vast majority of organs stood on a west gallery.

In England, surpliced choirs were introduced into Anglican parish churches in the second half of the nineteenth century, largely in imitation of cathedrals. As a

consequence, many organs were moved into chancel aisles, side chapels or specially-constructed organ chambers in order to be near the choir. Sometimes there was not really adequate room for either organ or choir in spaces whose original purpose was for liturgical action. On the continent, the problem was partly overcome by providing a separate and quite small organ to accompany the choir, leaving a larger instrument at the west end. In order to answer the main question, one has to ask some further questions:

- What does the present position of choir and organ say about the function of music in worship?
- Has there been, or is there likely to be, any liturgical re-ordering of the church which might affect the position of choir and organ? (It is essential to have a clear overall plan for any scheme of re-ordering, even if the work is to be carried out in stages.)
- Is there a choir? If there is, where would it best be placed:
  - i. to lead the singing of the congregation?
  - ii. to sing choral music?

If the answers to i. and ii. are different, is there any reason why the choir should not move during the service? Your DAC will be able to help you discuss these questions.

- Where, given the position of the altar, choir, etc., is the best





place for the organ?  
(Whatever happens, it is most desirable that the organist and choir should be in close proximity both to each other and to the organ pipes.)

#### **4. Appearance**

An organ with a well-designed case in the right position ought to be a significant visual enrichment to a church interior. If possible, the organ should be a free-standing musical and architectural entity, its pipes and mechanism protected by casework which helps to blend and project the sound.

