

Disability Audit

As we start moving towards funding, Nick BB and myself, in one of our increasingly exciting conversations over the project, came to the conclusion that we should undertake a disability access audit. A disability audit is required in any project to ensure that the space, service, or activity is genuinely accessible, safe, and inclusive for people with disabilities.

After having the standard response (or none so far) from the diocese, I did some research, and the name of one person seemed to crop up more than most.

I contacted John Beauchamp, who is the Diocesan Disability Ministry Enabler for the Diocese of London. He is a key advocate for improving disability access and inclusion in churches, making him an excellent person to consult on accessibility projects.

John is a blind priest with lived experience of disability, which he says deeply informs his work and advocacy. His role was created to help churches across the diocese become more welcoming, accessible, and inclusive for disabled people—both in terms of physical access and participation in ministry.

His guidance on having a disability audit undertaken was that talking directly to people with disabilities gives you a significantly better understanding than just doing a checklist or audit. That audits are normally carried out by non-disabled educated people who tend to use cut and paste a lot.

Audits can spot things like missing ramps or narrow doorways, but they don't tell you what it feels like to use the space. People with lived experience can explain what really works, what's frustrating, and how things could be more welcoming—not just accessible on paper.

He used the phrase “Disabled people highlight usability, and know how easy, safe, and dignified it feels to move through and use a space.”

He believes that involving disabled people shows respect and commitment, not just box-ticking. It fosters a sense of agency and belonging, making a church a genuinely inclusive space. Solutions shaped by users are more likely to be effective, creative, and future-proof and we'll avoid costly mistakes or retrofits by designing with - not just for -disabled people.

He also believes it gives a stronger funding case, as funders increasingly expect community-led design and inclusive consultation and that it demonstrates that disabled people helped shape our project strengthens our application and aligns with best practice.

His suggestion was that we form a group of exclusively people with disability – bearing in mind that disability includes a wide range of physical and mental impairments that have a substantial and long-term negative effect on a person's ability to carry out everyday activities – to undertake their own audit.

He was part of a team that has produced a self help guide for the Diocese of London called The 360 Accessibility Audit – further information can be found at:

<https://www.london.anglican.org/church-and-parish-support/diversity-and-inclusion/disability-ministry/the-360-accessibility-audit/>

The introduction to this tool says “A 360 accessibility audit is a process of deep reflection about your church and how diversity is recognised and appreciated. It is not a 30 minute task, achieved with a quick walk around the building, but it is an ongoing process within which you will always get better.”

I have looked at the first two of 19 modules and was impressed by how easy it was to use.

John did say that the challenge will be that if you are brave enough to have disabled people undertake an audit, that its not like the quinquennial report that people read and then put on a shelf to gather dust, they will hound you until it is done.