



Subject:	DOE Consultation Paper Ecclesiastical Exemption
Date:	Tuesday, 19 th April, 2016
Reporting Officer:	Phil Williams, ext 2300
Contact Officer:	Robert Kennedy, ext 2294

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	A consultation paper has been issued by the DOE containing a proposal to end the system of ecclesiastical exemption in Northern Ireland whereby churches do not need to apply for listed buildings consent. The purpose of the paper is to obtain the agreement of the Planning Committee on the position of Planning Service not to object to the proposed change. The closing date for responding to the consultation is the 13 June 2016.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<i>Committee is requested</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>To consider the information provided</i><i>To agree to with Planning Service opinion not to object to the proposed change to remove ecclesiastical exemption.</i>
3.0	Main report
	<u>Key issues</u>

3.1	Listed Churches / other places of worship are exempt under planning legislation from the requirement to obtain listed building consent. This is known as 'Ecclesiastical Exemption'. Northern Ireland is in line with the rest of the UK in this respect.
3.2	Internal procedures operated by church bodies in other parts of the UK equate to a listed building consent regime. These procedures have not been operated by church bodies here.
3.3	This has lead, in some instances, to the loss of historic fabric and elements of significance that form part of the essential character of these buildings. 45 churches have been delisted due to inappropriate alterations.
3.4	NIEA therefore propose to remove the ecclesiastical exemption currently enjoyed by churches here. The proposed change has resulted from a recommendation of a Ministerial committee set up to examine this issue, comprising DOE officers and Historic Buildings Council Members.
3.5	This change will not require amendment to the legislation but would be brought in via Departmental Direction.
3.6	The effect of the change will mean that listed building consent will be required for external and internal changes proposed that would affect the character of the church building.
3.7	This would bring NI into line with practice in the ROI. Often full applications are required for works proposed by churches and so the proposed change will not in the majority of cases result in additional expense in terms of preparing architects drawings.
3.8	There is no fee in respect of a Listed Building Consent application.
3.9	NIEA proposes to prepare detailed guidance on works to churches which would be

	published in parallel to the removal of the exemption.
3.10	The Planning Committee is requested to note the above and agree with the position of Planning Service not to object to the proposed change.
3.11	<p>Proposed Planning Service Response to Consultation Paper</p> <p>Belfast City Council notes the content of the Consultation Paper on Ecclesiastical Exemption. There is no objection to the proposed change to remove ecclesiastical exemption and require listed building consent when needed for alterations to places of worship. It is assumed that DOE in proposing this change is adequately resourced to implement it effectively.</p>
3.12	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None</p>
3.13	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>None</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	<i>Appendix 1: DOE, (March 2016) A Consultation on Ecclesiastical Exemption</i>