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# CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO DEVELOPING YOUR PLACE OF WORSHIP FOR WIDER COMMUNITY USE AND MANAGING A SUCCESSFUL BUILDING PROJECT



Written by Becky Payne, with substantial contributions from:

Wendy Coombey, Community Partnership and Funding Officer, Diocese of Hereford  
[www.hereford.anglican.org](http://www.hereford.anglican.org)

Stephanie Norris, Partner, Purcell  
[www.purcelluk.com](http://www.purcelluk.com)

Eleanor Stead, Legacy and Funding Officer, National Stewardship Team, Church of England  
[www.parishresources.org.uk](http://www.parishresources.org.uk)

Nicolas Jenni, National Procurement Officer, National Stewardship Team, Church of England  
[www.parishbuying.org.uk](http://www.parishbuying.org.uk)

HRBA address: Clutha House,  
10 Storey's Gate, London, SW1P 3AY.  
Email: [hrb@theheritagealliance.org.uk](mailto:hrb@theheritagealliance.org.uk) ;  
website: [www.hrballiance.org.uk](http://www.hrballiance.org.uk)

Diocese of Hereford address: Hereford Diocese, Diocesan Office, Units 8 and 9  
The Business Quarter, Ludlow Eco Park,  
Sheet Road, Shropshire, SY8 1FD

Email: [w.coombey@hereford.anglican.org](mailto:w.coombey@hereford.anglican.org) ;  
website: [www.hereford.anglican.org](http://www.hereford.anglican.org)

This is an updated and expanded edition of the Diocese of Hereford's 2013 toolkit entitled 'Crossing the Threshold' (first published 2009).

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[www.allchurches.co.uk](http://www.allchurches.co.uk)

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# WELCOME



**The United Kingdom's churches, chapels and meeting houses are a unique part of our national story. At the heart of communities in cities, towns and villages, they are a veritable treasure trove of architecture, history and faith.**

Although we hear much about declining numbers of people attending church services, church buildings remain a tremendous national asset, much loved by the public.

According to the results of a December 2016 ComRes poll on church heritage, more than four in five Britons (83%) agree that the UK's churches are an important part of the UK's heritage and history. 80% agree that churches are important for society as they provide a space in which community activities can take place.

Many places of worship are kept alive by volunteers. Together with clergy and professional advisors, they work tirelessly to ensure that places of worship are well maintained and secure for the future.

It is testament to their commitment that so many church buildings continue to survive.

'Crossing the Threshold' is an invaluable resource which will be of great use to anyone undertaking major renovations and also for congregations looking for new ways to place their church or chapel at the heart of their local community.

With vision, planning and, of course, funding, churches and chapels can find new ways of being of service to people, thereby continuing to play a vital role in the life and well-being of local communities.

They may be historic buildings. But churches and chapels can be part of our future, too.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Huw Edwards'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**Huw Edwards, Broadcaster and Journalist  
and Vice-President of the National  
Churches Trust**



**Church buildings are holy places. That is to say they are set apart to bear witness to the sacred and to the life of faith, to a three-way relationship between God, people and place. Since the earliest days, church buildings have served as shrines and ‘way-markers’ in the landscape, witness to the saving events of Christian history, being a prophetic presence in the midst of secular society and an eschatological sign of God’s future.**

Church buildings are powerful signs and symbols in the landscapes and townscapes of our nation. The terms ‘pointers to God’ or ‘sacraments in stone’ are often used of our church buildings, referring to their primary purpose as places of worship for the communities in which they are placed. In that role, church buildings embody (bear witness to) the first great commandment - to love the Lord our God. They need also to embody (bear witness to) the second great commandment - love for our neighbour. *Crossing the Threshold* is a practical resource to encourage and help congregations to find ways of opening up church buildings to their local communities in order to do just that.

# FOREWARD

The report of the Church of England’s Church Buildings Review Group, which I chaired, was published in 2015. The report emphasised that, in addition to their role as places of worship, our church buildings need to be *‘sensitively combined with service to the community. The imaginative adaptation of church buildings for community use in many areas is breathing new life into them’*. Welcoming the community to make more use of church buildings may, in many cases, be the key to their continued survival.

These buildings have an enormous impact on how the Church and the God we worship is perceived by those beyond the congregation. The faith we proclaim, will, whether we like it or not, be judged by our buildings. If they are closed or look miserable and uninviting then, for those beyond our congregations, the same is seamlessly true both of the worshipping community and also of God.

“Sir, we wish to see Jesus” was a request made by some Greeks to Philip (John 12:21).

It is a request which is just as valid in our own time as it was when originally made.

It is a request made by people on the outside to those on the inside. Getting people through

the door, to cross the threshold, is the first challenge. The way to do that is to have something inside that people want.

We need to work to have buildings which facilitate relationships, buildings which enable:

- engagement
- encounter
- being alongside
- dialogue

If they are effectively to serve their communities as well as being places of worship, church buildings should be:

- a meeting place for the community
- a place for learning, listening and telling stories
- a place for creative and artistic endeavour
- a threshold between heaven and earth

‘Crossing the Threshold’ provide the means to achieve these objectives. I commend it wholeheartedly.

**+John Wigorn: Lead Bishop on Cathedral and Church Buildings**

# INTRODUCTION

## BRINGING BUILDINGS BACK INTO MISSION



“We have been entrusted with the care of many beautiful and historic churches. These have been passed down to us from previous generations and our challenge is to care for them, maintain them and pass them on to those who come after us in at least as good a condition as that in which we received them. Our church buildings can be a valuable asset. They are a focal point for our communities, a reminder of God’s presence and starting point for our worship, ministry and outreach in mission.”

The Diocese of Liverpool (CofE)  
[www.liverpool.anglican.org/Buildings](http://www.liverpool.anglican.org/Buildings)

### IMPORTANT NOTE

Although this document is written from an Anglican viewpoint, and uses Anglican terminology, we hope and believe that it will be helpful to all denominations, and it is offered freely to anyone who can make use it. Our case studies cover a range of denominations, and we give references to the tools and resources produced by a range of faith groups, not only Anglican. We think that it should be straightforward for those of other denominations to apply the toolkit to their situation, taking from it what is useful, and ignoring the rest.

### AN INTRODUCTION TO THE RESOURCE

The guidance in this toolkit will be useful to any congregation which wants to develop a new vision for their church which will include opening up their church building for wider community use and may also include making physical changes to that building.

Much of the information in this resource will apply to any major building project in a church including repairs. In particular, the toolkit supports churches considering making alterations that would enable them to use their buildings for wider community purposes.

## CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

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### Specifically, we hope it will help you to:

- develop those parts of your church's mission, which are about community use and involvement.
- use your building to reconnect with your local community while also providing a sustainable future for your church as a place of worship.
- achieve the balance between conserving the historic fabric of your building/s and the desire to make your church more accessible and able to meet the needs of a 21st Century place of worship.
- understand the process and the stages involved in getting a community-based, re-ordering project off the ground and through to completion. This will include guidance on managing a building project whether repairs and/or new capital works.
- understand how to manage any major church building project whether it involves repairs and/or new capital works.

## THE CHURCH BUILDING

Many congregations have a positive view of their church buildings; for some, the buildings are in excellent condition, well used, well cared for and the congregation is sustainable both in terms of finance and in the numbers of people who attend and worship. Many have successful Friends Groups helping with the repairs and care of the buildings, and many are still firmly placed at the heart of their communities, part of the spiritual and social glue that holds people together and becomes part of their sense of place. However, it is fair to say that in some cases this isn't the case, and with too few people, little money and an awareness of the big responsibility, a congregation's view of their church building can be a less than positive one.

The care and upkeep of a building is not the primary reason why people join a church and yet congregations find themselves inadvertently responsible for a building which with its expensive repair costs and complex maintenance needs, they may feel drains their resources and impacts negatively on what they really want to do. The building can feel like a millstone, too big for the congregation's needs and too inflexible and when they want to make changes, there are a host of other organisations which have the right to get involved and place restrictions on some of those changes.

Many congregations are rediscovering the role that their church building can play in their mission. It is for many of them, after people, their most important asset and congregations across the country have been working with others in their communities to develop a range of new and extended uses for their buildings.

We hope that this resource will help congregations to view their building somewhat differently. Our church buildings as well as being a witness to the glory of God, also provide wonderful opportunities for outreach and for witnessing the glory of God. They can become an asset for their communities and with a bit of vision and perhaps some sensitive adaptations, they can be used for seven days a week.

## THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND'S CHURCH BUILDINGS REVIEW

In October 2015, the Church of England published a Review and Consultation document on how the Church might manage its church buildings in the future. It highlighted the challenge facing our parish churches especially the rural ones commenting that 'the underlying challenges are likely to grow unless decline is arrested and reversed' (para 54). This is a challenge affecting many of our denominations. [www.churchcare.co.uk/about-us/campaigns/news/951-church-buildings-review](http://www.churchcare.co.uk/about-us/campaigns/news/951-church-buildings-review)

In addition to the statistics contained within this report, the sobering fact is that about 98% of the population today have no formal commitment to their parish church. In other words, only about 2% of the population are on the electoral roll for their parish church, and even then not all will actually help fund it; the percentage on the electoral roll has been falling for many years, and now stands at about one third of the level of fifty years ago. (Trevor Cooper, October 2016)

However, there is some good news:

- Even if people no longer go to church in the way that they used to, we know that people still value and care about these buildings. *'More than 83% of Britons agree that the UK's churches, chapels and meeting houses are an important part of the UK's heritage and history and 57% of British adults said they had visited a church, chapel or meeting house in the last year'*. Findings of the ComRes poll, commissioned by the National Churches Trust, which interviewed 2048 GB adults online between the 15th and 18th December 2016. [www.nationalchurchestrust.org/2017poll](http://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/2017poll)
- The 2015 *'Released for Mission'* report states that 54% of Anglican parishes run at least one organised activity to address a social need in their area, tackling issues including loneliness, homelessness, debt, low income, unemployment or family breakdown.
- *'The Church in Action: A National Survey of Church-Led Social Action'* (Church Urban Fund 2015) found that on average, churches are addressing seven different common social uses, and a third are tackling nine or more. 14% of churches use their premises for food banks, 81% are involved in food banks in some way, and 22% of churches offer debt or money management advice.
- This research also showed that churches are able to provide as many activities to address social need in rural locations as they are in urban locations; moreover its analysis of the number of organised activities shows that there is hardly any variation between the activities provided in listed and unlisted buildings, indicating that listed status is not the barrier to social action it might be perceived to be.
- National and local government and public sector agencies are increasingly acknowledging the contribution of faith groups to social cohesion, education, and regeneration. Research is available which shows that faith groups have a special contribution to make. They are deeply rooted in community life, able to reach out to the most vulnerable groups, and are well placed to provide high-quality local public services.



## THE CHURCH BUILDING AND ITS LOCAL COMMUNITY

As well as looking after the spiritual needs of the local community, part of the mission of churches has always been to work among and for the well-being of the entire local community, not just for the benefit of those who attend services.

Many communities up and down the country are facing the centralisation of public services and seeing facilities such as their local pub, post office, shop, youth club and school close. In many areas, and especially in rural and suburban areas, the church building may be the only community building left. Increasingly, this is becoming the case in inner-city areas too as institutions such as the banks, the Post Office® and even public houses withdraw from “poorer” areas which fail to provide them with sufficient profit. These factors can provide the opportunity for a church to reconnect with and return to the heart of its community.

Across the UK, you will find churches hosting a variety of activities and providing space for a range of community services, which include:

- civic events and cultural activities, such as exhibitions, drama performances, concerts and rehearsal space;
- community services e.g. children’s centres, mother and toddler groups, playgroups, after-school clubs or drop-ins for youth groups or elderly people;
- support services e.g. projects to support the homeless, asylum seekers, refugees and other vulnerable groups, food banks, welfare/debt advice services, credit unions and Citizens Advice

Bureaus, health centres, doctors’ surgeries, satellite community police stations;

- resources for school educational visits and local tourism; heritage centres;
- public meeting spaces for councillors’ surgeries and ward or area meetings, polling stations and other public meetings;
- premises for vital services such as school halls, community shops, farmers’ markets, libraries, cafes, internet cafes and computer clubs, training centres and adult education, arts centres, outreach post offices and community banks; and
- short mat bowls, pilates, yoga, table tennis, exercise classes.

All of these activities are taking place in ‘living churches’ that are still in use as places of worship. The activities may be organised by the church itself, by an outside organisation or by a partnership between the two. These uses have required varying degrees of physical intervention into the building. They cover a wide range of sharing options with many different types of organisations employing varying administrative and legal arrangements.

The ideal project enables the building to continue as a place of worship, while at the same time helping to meet a specific need or needs of the community. Furthermore, using the building, and where appropriate, attached land, can better secure the building’s future by generating an income. By providing additional services to the community it will create a wider group of people able, and importantly willing, to take on the shared responsibility of maintaining the building.

Developing a community project and re-ordering or adapting your church building are not simple processes. Any project, even small ones, will involve vision, a lot of hard work, determination and a team of people. It will raise issues which have to be faced thoughtfully and worked through. Many buildings are protected by law in recognition of their historic and architectural merit. The need to ensure that any alterations are sensitive to its historic fabric and cultural significance while making the building fit for 21st century purposes must be met. The wish to create a community space while preserving some or all of the building as a space fit for worship has to be carefully balanced. Many of these buildings are loved by their local communities and are viewed by many as sacred places (and that word itself means different things to different people); so change has to be introduced carefully and with due consultation. It takes a lot of careful thought, creative ideas and good design. It will also involve a range of skills, some of which you will find within your congregation and wider community, and others that you may have to develop as you go along.

As church buildings are being used for an ever increasing number of community activities over the last few years, perhaps one key lesson has been learnt: the value of accessing support and funding from a wide range of support networks and funders.

Concurrently, secular funders are recognising the ‘community’ role of places of worship and including them on their lists of eligible organisations.

Churches are also working together with people and groups in their wider communities on projects. **Community development** is a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems.

Churches and their buildings are now crucial to the well-being of many communities.



“But if a theological resonance is found between the twin values of beauty and justice, then a historic building can be made more beautiful partly in order to make the world a more just place. We will redecorate the church interior, or install toilets, or a small kitchen, partly in order to make it a more beautiful place for the local mums and toddlers or night shelter project. It is the same principle as not keeping the most beautiful tea set in the glass cupboard where the cups and saucers become ornaments, but using them for the hospitable purposes for which they were made.”

Revd Lucy Winkett, Rector of St James’s Church, Piccadilly taken from the National Churches Trust’s Annual Review 2016-2017

## HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This guide aims to take you step by step through the various stages of developing and carrying out a major community project and building project. While no two projects will ever be exactly the same and developing and managing a community project is not an exact science, we hope that this guide can at least explain the basic processes, make you aware of the many issues involved and offer useful tips along the way.

We would suggest that it is a good idea to initially read through the complete guidance so that you understand the whole process. This will help you with your project planning. Note that although the chapters cover different areas, many of the stages will need to run concurrently.

Overall resources are provided at the end of this toolkit and we also provide a list of resources specific to each particular area at the end of every chapter for you to follow up. There are plenty of resources available, some written specifically for church groups and others for community groups. Searching the internet can lead to a whole range of ideas and support, but we hope that we have provided the essentials.

Everything written in the toolkit is based on two things, existing good practice from the voluntary and community sector, and real life examples from parishes and church communities all over the country that have decided that part of their mission is to share their buildings with the wider community. Every project is different, every project has had its high points and low points – but the one thing they all have in common is that they have followed a process that has led them to achieve what they set out to achieve. What worked for one group or community may not be the same for another and what was stressful or difficult for one parish or church, may not be a problem for another – but if you follow the procedures and advice contained in this toolkit, we feel you won't go far wrong.

We have also included **case studies** to illustrate the range of possibilities. For these, we have tried to use examples where there are good websites so that you can read more about any project that interests you.

We hope that this resource will help you to get the very best of the experience; the best for you and those with whom you work, for your church building and the community it serves. It will help you to think about what the building offers and could offer, to weigh up the options for what you might achieve, dream up ideas, explore the apparently impossible and the wildly exciting. It will help to identify who might also want to be involved and what contributions they can make.



**Becky Payne and Wendy Coombey**  
**November 2017**

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

### OUR TOP TEN TIPS



1. Key is engaging with others early in the process; this includes your congregation, your wider community and other organisations in your community.
2. Many funders will not support a project that promotes religion. You must be able to clearly separate your community activities from your faith-based activities. Community projects are still part of your church's mission, but are not about promoting religion.
3. Developing a clear vision of what you want to achieve and why, is one of the most important aspects of any project. Every church building differs in size, the materials it is constructed from, its history and the size of its worshipping community. Every community is different and so are its needs. Your project should fit your particular set of circumstances.
4. Bear in mind that often only minor changes will enable a church building to continue serving its worshipping community while also being able to offer new services to the wider community. It is not always necessary to undertake a major reordering.
5. Think about starting small and trying things out before embarking on a major re-ordering. Remember that small changes can achieve a lot.
6. Time spent researching and planning before the project starts is never wasted. Applying for grants can be onerous and time consuming, however, if you have fully developed your vision and objectives and worked out an implementation plan, a budget, developed strong relationships with your partners and set out how your project will be sustainable in the future, it will be a lot easier.
7. Be professional and business-like in every aspect whether designing a poster or organising a fund-raising event. Potential funders and supporters, including your local community, will want to see that you are a professionally-run group capable of managing a project from development through to completion and beyond.
8. A major building and reordering project can take anything between 3 and up to 10 years from start to finish. In general, whatever length of time you first think a project will take, in reality you may need to double it.
9. Be realistic about what is achievable.
10. You're a church – so remember to pray throughout the project and trust in God's vision.

# HIGH LEVEL TASK LIST

Many of these tasks will need to happen concurrently.

CHAPTER NUMBERS **1**

TASK	KEY ACTIONS	WHO IS INVOLVED	
A <b>Establish your church vision and the aims of your project</b>	Develop a mission statement & purpose of project.	<b>1</b> Church leadership and members and current users of building.	
	Consult with community and local agencies.	<b>2</b> People to undertake a Church Audit and Community Audit, undertake surveys, organise public meetings.	
	Understand your building by writing Statement of Significance. Define need for the project by writing Statement of Need.	<b>5</b> <b>6</b> Initial conversation with DAC or equivalent.	
B <b>Establish robust structures to deliver your project and for when new activities up and running</b>	Decide how you are going to manage the development of your project eg: create a Building Group.	Volunteers from church and from wider community.	
	Define roles.		<b>3</b>
	What form of Governance will you need for the project once up and running?		<b>4</b>
	Plan how to communicate to stakeholders throughout length of project and beyond.		<b>3</b>
	Think about sustainability of all parts of your project.	<b>9</b>	
C <b>Develop proposed detailed timelines and budgets for your project</b>	Plan the project.	<b>7</b>	
	Start developing fundraising strategy.	<b>10</b>	
	Start compiling Business Plan and financial plans for both building project and for when new activities 'up and running'.	<b>8</b>	
	Keep congregation, church leaders and community informed.	<b>3</b>	
D <b>Appoint professional support</b>	Interview and appoint architect.	<b>5</b> Building Group.	

TASK	KEY ACTIONS	WHO IS INVOLVED
<b>E</b> <b>Develop a design and estimated costings</b>	Drawings and plans.	5 6 Building Group. Architect. DAC or equivalent.
<b>F</b> <b>Finalise fundraising strategy and implement</b>	Gift/Pledge days for congregation. Local fundraising. Applications to Trusts and funders.	10 11 12 Fundraising group. Volunteers to run local events. Communications person.
<b>G</b> <b>Obtain the necessary permissions</b>	Consulting with DAC or equivalent; other bodies where necessary eg: Historic England, Amenity Societies, secular planning authorities.	6 Building Group. Architect and other professional(s). DAC or equivalent. Other agencies.
<b>H</b> <b>Get works on site and complete the building</b>	RIBA Stages, appointing contractors. Agree works schedule and timetable. Managing cash flow. Sign off Completion of works.	14 13 Building Group. Architect. Communications person. Open Days/wider community.
<b>I</b> <b>Open the building and manage the activities</b>	Plan official launch. Set expectations of congregation on how building may be used differently from the past. Monitor and adjust regularly Business Plan.	15 Communications person. Church leadership to set tone. Management Group which may be different from Building Group.

Fig 1 High Level Task Chart

## PROJECT TIMELINE

Here is a project timeline which aims to show in another way, the order in which different parts of the project have to happen and how they may overlap.

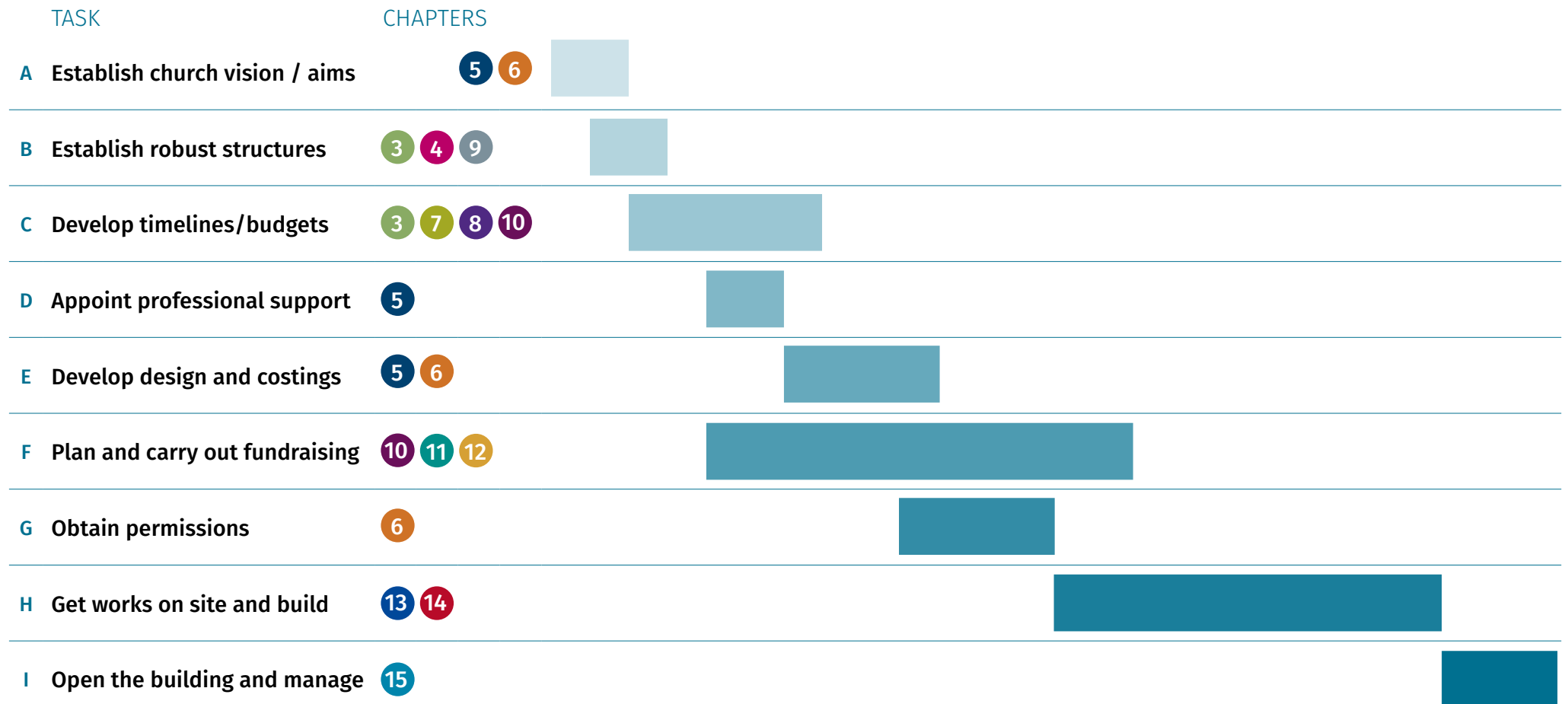


Fig 2 Project Timeline