Blackheath Park, St Michael & All Angels (Photography © Light Perceptions Limited)

Introduction

Many rural and urban churches are floodlit successfully by night to dramatic effect and it can be an important tool in ensuring the visibility and longer term sustainability of a church building in the community. However there are obvious environmental impacts and floodlighting should not be used for purely decorative purposes.

The ability to see the stars clearly in the night sky is still treasured in more rural areas and installing floodlighting in these areas is likely to be controversial. In an urban setting, floodlighting is now entirely normal but the combined effect of street lights and floodlighting giving an unnatural glow to the sky is known as light pollution. It must be borne in mind that in urban situations where there is a significant amount of street lighting, the more powerful a building's floodlighting will need to be to be impactful; likewise in a rural setting, very little light will make a huge impact, so care is needed to offer just enough light and no more.

In addition to light pollution there are high energy costs associated with floodlighting your church building. These can be mitigated to some extent by low energy light bulbs and time switches. However, It is important that given the Church of England's target of Net Zero Carbon by 2030, parishes think carefully what they want to achieve and how else it could be done before embarking on a floodlighting programme.

Things to consider

It is important not to confuse floodlighting with security lighting which will need a specific scheme and separate advice.

- **Consider the need** for external lighting (for example, security, mission, desire to highlight an historic landmark) which should be fully articulated in the application
- **Consider the cost**, including both set-up and ongoing running costs, which will include electricity charges, maintenance and replacement of fittings and bulbs.
- **Consider local opinions** to a new scheme, particularly in rural areas where the introduction of floodlighting may impact on neighbours and the skyline.
- **Draw up a brief** with your requirements and ideas for how and why you want the building to be lit as a starting point for discussion with the DAC and your architect who will be able to offer advice on selecting a consultant.
- **Choose a specialist lighting consultant** with proven experience of church buildings.

Design brief

You don't necessarily need to light the whole church. Special features such as a prominent cross or a gilded weathervane will be obvious targets for spotlighting but in some cases it may be that only a part of the building would be lit, a tower or spire would be the most likely choice. A good scheme should:

- avoid too dramatic an emphasis on upward shadowing
- take care that there is minimum light pollution or overspill towards neighbours
- use an appropriate colour of light source: rendering as closely as possible the natural colouration of the church and ensuring differentiation is maintained where different materials abut
- take account of the environmental impacts of energy use
- take account of trees and vegetation and how growth and seasons will impact the scheme
- consider opportunities such as lighting part of the building from the roofs
- be imaginative with fittings: in some urban situations it is possible to floodlight off street lighting columns or from fittings mounted on nearby buildings (however, it is not appropriate to site lights in trees)
- consider the implications of vandalism: fittings may have to be bolted down and toughened glass should be used
- minimise the impact of cable runs, consulting with the Diocesan Archaeological Adviser where necessary

Permissions

You will need a faculty and in some cases planning permission, so consult your DAC at an early stage to gauge initial comments and identify any issues. Seek advice at an early stage from the local planning authority. Local planning requirements for obtrusive light and minimisation of upward light and skyglow vary depending on location. The Institution of Lighting Professionals has produced guidance on this topic, *The Reduction of Obtrusive Light* (2021), which is free to download from their website.

Discuss with the DAC what experimentation would be worthwhile. The DAC will want to look at the principle of the scheme and may want to look with you at the financial implications. The DAC will advise on any additional consultees such as Historic England, the National Amenity Societies and the Church Buildings Council. You should consult Natural England to ensure that your scheme does not impact upon any known bat colonies (floodlighting can be extremely disturbing to bats). And finally, consult your insurers to see whether your policy will cover the floodlighting if additional cover is needed.

Further information

The Churchcare and Historic England websites offer more information on lighting and energy efficiency in places of worship.

Lighting | The Church of England

Lighting | Historic England

External Lighting of Historic Buildings | Historic England

Energy Footprint Tool | The Church of England

Energy Efficiency and Places of Worship | Historic England