

# Sustaining historic churches: what does recent research tell us?

Charlotte Dodgeon



The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance

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Second edition (2024), with updated table of number of places of worship

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*The cover photo shows the Church of England church in the hamlet of Hailes, Gloucestershire. This building is well known for its medieval wall paintings, its seventeenth-century chancel furniture, and its charming atmosphere. Hailes was a chapelry of nearby Didbrook, and it has never had a large population, said to number in the low sixties in the late nineteenth century. It is opposite Hailes Abbey, which was converted to a great house at the Reformation, and is now in the care of English Heritage and open to the public. As a result there are a considerable number of visitors dropping in to the church. Services are held occasionally. (© Trevor Cooper)*

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*Reports are presented in chronological order of publication*

## About the author

**Charlotte Dodgeon** is a freelance Heritage Consultant and the Volunteer Policy Officer for the HRBA.

Charlotte previously worked at the NLHF for nearly 15 years, and was the Programme Manager for the Places of Worship programmes and the Townscape Heritage Initiative, and was part of the team developing the Roof Repair Fund for listed places of worship. She also worked at Historic England, where she handled the JPOW casework for the South West.

She primarily works with places of worship, helping them navigate the funding landscape, and develop and deliver their applications.

In her role for HRBA, she works closely with Trevor Cooper (Chair) and Becky Payne (Development Director) to keep abreast of changes to government and ecclesiastical legislation that impacts places of worship, and helps HRBA support the sector in consultations.

*Charlotte writes: Becky Payne has detailed knowledge of recent reports, and Trevor Cooper of earlier ones. I am grateful to them for their help with this publication, particularly in the team effort of collecting together, sorting through and discussing the large number of reports which were a candidate for inclusion, and for their comments on earlier drafts and input to the Introduction. All remaining errors are mine.*

### **Conventions**

Throughout this publication, 'church' should be taken to include 'chapel' or other Christian place of worship. Cathedrals are outside the scope of the publication. 'Church of England' is sometimes abbreviated to 'CofE'.

### **Acknowledgement**

HRBA acknowledges with gratitude the informal help of various organisations and individuals in the compilation of the summaries. Any remaining errors are those of the author.

### **Disclaimer**

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# Introduction

## About this publication

This publication summarises a selection of recent research reports directly bearing on the sustainability of historic churches.

More research has been carried out on the sustainability of these buildings than any other type of heritage. This is not surprising: the many thousands of listed churches form a substantial proportion of the country's built heritage, yet are cared for by volunteers whose purpose is worship, not heritage, and whose numbers are – on average – shrinking. These congregations have rightly been called 'inadvertent custodians'. Given this, it is an important and challenging question how to organise matters so that these significant buildings have a secure future.

In practice, a good deal – though by no means all – of the research into the future of historic churches has looked at Church of England (CofE) buildings. This is not surprising given their dominance in number and grade of listing: about 12,000 CofE churches are listed, roughly two-thirds at the higher grades of listing (see page 5 for the **Number of listed places of worship**). Most of the remaining research has covered Great Britain or the United Kingdom. Rather little is dedicated to Scotland alone or Wales alone.

The reports presented here are all recent. They have been selected on the basis of their originality, interest and significance, and also to include a balance of topics. The focus is churches and chapels: cathedrals are out of scope, as is guidance on how to manage and develop a church building.

The choice of reports was difficult, as a great deal has been published since the turn of the century. In the event, a number of subjects are not covered: there is no report on tourism, or the need for investment to bring facilities up to date and make the buildings suitable for wider use, or the repurposing of buildings no longer used for routine worship. Those who wish to explore these topics, and a mass of other reports, are encouraged to browse the material curated on the HRBA website (see page 24).

The remainder of this Introduction puts the selected reports in historic context; they are **emboldened** for easier identification.

## The 1951 report

The first strategic report of modern times was published in 1951, under the title *The Preservation of Our Churches*. It was produced by a special Commission appointed by the Church Assembly, the forerunner of the General Synod of the Church of England. The background to the publication was the hiatus caused by the War. At this time other denominations were also considering the future of their building stock, though their non-established nature and different pattern of provision meant that there was not the same focus on preservation.

The two main themes of this 1951 report were maintenance and repairs, and finance. On finance there was clearly some concern, and the possibility of State Aid was discussed. In addition, a new national body was proposed

'The choice of reports was difficult, as a great deal has been published since the turn of the century'

'The first strategic report of modern times was published in 1951'

'The two main themes of this 1951 report were maintenance and repairs, and finance'

to appeal for funds and make grants. This led to the creation of what is now the National Churches Trust, together with local County Trusts. Today these bodies support churches of all denominations across much of the UK.

The concern expressed about maintenance and repairs led to quinquennial inspections being mandated for CofE church buildings. Nevertheless, issues with lack of maintenance have not gone away. The 2019 report *The Value of Maintenance?*, summarised on page 12 below, is by no means the first to discuss the problem; however, it stands out as demonstrating for the first time that timely maintenance does make financial sense for church buildings.

The general tone of the 1951 review was one of concern, tempered with a degree of confidence that the issues were capable of resolution. There was brief discussion of the effect of declining congregations, but only in the context of reduced financial support.

‘The general tone of the 1951 review was one of concern, tempered with a degree of confidence’

### The notion of a ‘closed’ church

Nor in the 1951 report was there much on the problem of those CofE churches which were no longer needed for routine worship, despite their being a long-running concern. This issue was finally picked up in 1960, when the Archbishops’ Commission on Redundant Churches published its report. From this stemmed the current processes for withdrawing a CofE church building from the parish system (‘making it redundant’ or ‘closing’ it), including the creation of what is now the Churches Conservation Trust to look after the best of these buildings. Other Trusts were subsequently set up in England, Scotland and Wales for closed buildings of various denominations or geographical locations.

‘Recently there has been increasing interest in the idea that there is a spectrum of roles and models for CofE churches between normal parish use and full closure’

Recently there has been increasing interest in the idea that there is a spectrum of roles and models for CofE churches between normal parish use and full closure, an idea being explored for example by the current *Growing the Rural Church* project in the diocese of Exeter. A church in an intermediate status is now often described as being a ‘Festival Church’, and to support this there is an Association of Festival Churches. In parallel, the possibility of separating congregational *use* from congregational *ownership* is in the air, together with interest in the role of Friends Groups, Trusts and other forms of local community support – see for example Trevor Cooper’s book, *For Public Benefit: Churches Cared for by Trusts*, published by the Ecclesiological Society in 2014. In this context, there is seen to be value in helping congregations before they find themselves in terminal difficulties, and this is the background to the research on *Struggling, Closed and Closing Churches* published in 2020, and summarised on page 14.

### 1977 and onwards

To return to strategic reviews, there was an important series of events in 1977, which covered all of the UK and all denominations. It consisted of an exhibition at the V&A and a pair of books by Marcus Binney and Peter Burman: *Chapels and Churches: Who Cares* (1977) and *Change and Decay: the Future of our Churches* (1977). Together, these stressed the problems and proposed solutions; in particular they pressed the government for State

‘a dedicated grant scheme for major repairs to historic places of worship was set up in 1977 . . . a variety of dedicated schemes followed . . . the last dedicated scheme closed in 2017’

Aid. In fact, this had been under consideration for some years and a dedicated grant scheme for major repairs to historic places of worship was set up in 1977. A variety of dedicated schemes followed: a review of one of them, the ***Evaluation of the Grants for Places of Worship (GPOW) Programme***, is summarised on page 16. That scheme, the last dedicated scheme, closed in 2017.

Two decades after the developments of 1977 there were several strategic reviews and initiatives, with old and new themes coming to the fore. Covering CofE churches was the Church Heritage Forum’s *A Future for Church Buildings* (2003), and Trevor Cooper’s *How do we Keep our Parish Churches?* (Ecclesiological Society, 2004). The latter drew explicit attention to the steady downwards drift in the size of congregations, and the gross inequalities in the burdens laid on individual parishes. That same year the Church Heritage Forum produced *Building Faith in our Future*. After setting out the range of benefits that churches can offer and some of the pressures they faced it proposed a strategy of widening even further the community use of the buildings, an approach which has since risen to the top of the agenda. In 2005 English Heritage (now Historic England) ran its *Inspired!* campaign to promote historic places of worship, make the case for an increase in the level of State Aid, and encourage maintenance.

As regards Scotland and Wales, in 2009 the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland published *Recommendations on the Long-term Conservation of the Ecclesiastical Heritage*, though the Scottish Government did not respond. More recently, in 2019, the Church of Scotland produced an internal review *Well-equipped Spaces in the Right Places*, which is leading to the disposal of large number of church buildings. In Wales, Cadw published its *Strategic Action Plan for Historic Places of Worship in Wales* in 2015, though there was no funding attached; meanwhile the *Church in Wales Review* of 2012 has been leading to extensive and ongoing reorganisation.

The various themes mentioned above are now commonplace, and have been explored in various ways. Examples include the National Churches Trust UK-wide *Survey* of 2011, the CofE report on rural churches of 2015, *Released for Mission*, and more locally Becky Payne’s book *Churches for Communities: Adapting Oxfordshire’s Churches for Wider Use* (Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust, 2014).

The most recent strategic overview of CofE churches is the ***Church Buildings Review*** of 2015 (summarised on page 6 below). Here the CofE set out in stark terms the problems arising from congregations which were failing to recruit and retain enough young people, and consequently both diminishing in average size and increasing in average age. In 2016 a further important strategic review was published, ***Sustaining Major Parish Churches*** (summarised on page 8), which concentrated on a group of CofE churches which can be as large as cathedrals, but lack their financial base or infrastructure.

In the 2015 *Church Buildings Review* there was an appeal to the government, which responded by commissioning the ***Taylor Review: Sustainability of English Churches and Cathedrals*** of 2017, covering CofE

‘[in 2015] the CofE set out in stark terms the problems arising from congregations which were . . . both diminishing in average size and increasing in average age’

churches (summarised on page 10). It emphasised the importance of community engagement, and made proposals for encouraging this. It also proposed that local Fabric Support Officers be introduced to encourage churches in looking after their buildings, and that money be made available both for minor and major repairs (during the course of producing the report, the 'GPOW' scheme had closed). The proposals were then successfully piloted for all faith groups, though without the major repairs scheme. It was hoped the Government would find money in the recent Spending Review to take forward these proposals, but Covid-19 put paid to that.

### Community value and partnership with government

One shift in the last twenty years or so has been to recognise that historic churches are not just – to use the rather clinical jargon – 'heritage assets', but are also the centre for community activity and engagement, including, of course, regular worship. So their value extends far beyond their historic interest, or their tourism potential, or the sense of place they create.

There are many reports on this social role, though often these simply add up the number of activities, or calculate the number of hours provided by volunteers. However, in 2020 the National Churches Trust published the radical *House of Good* report which for the first time ever put a monetary value on this activity and the wellbeing it creates, looking at churches of all denominations across the UK, using the approved Treasury approach to evaluation. This important report is summarised on page 18.

The vital social role played by churches was driven home during the lockdown phases of Covid, and this was looked at in the report *Churches, Covid-19 and Communities* (2021), written by the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture based at the University of York. This is summarised on page 20. A number of other bodies carried out related research, and the York study provides a useful list of these reports with a precis of their findings. Two of these are summarised on page 22 below as *Partnership between Faith Groups and the State: two reports*, chosen because they focus on the value of greater collaboration between churches and the State, using Covid-19 as an unwelcome but revealing case study.

These reports, and the many others not included here, show that historic churches are not only heritage buildings, often of the first importance, but that their congregations are important in sustaining communities, and have the ability to tackle issues that governments cannot always reach

### Prospects

Sadly, in the author's view the generality of research shows that the future of historic church buildings of all denominations across the UK is becoming less, not more, secure, both through the lack of dedicated funding for major repairs and upgrades and the gradual shrinkage of congregations. This is compounded by the absence, from both national and devolved administrations, of any overarching and properly funded policy to safeguard their future. History will not thank us if we do not put this right.

'historic churches are . . . the centre for community activity and engagement, including, of course, regular worship'

'in the author's view . . . the future of historic church buildings of all denominations across the UK is becoming less, not more, secure'

## Number of listed places of worship: (England, 2021; rest of UK, various)

	All POW	Listed POW			
		Total listed	by grade of listing		
			I	II*	II
<b>GREAT BRITAIN</b>					
England (rounded)		14785	4318	4565	5902
Wales		1180	214	470	1340
Scotland		2470	370	1570	540
Northern Ireland		900	42	140	710
<b>TOTAL (rounded)</b>		<b>19340</b>	<b>4940</b>	<b>6750</b>	<b>8490</b>
<b>ENGLAND</b>					
Church of England	16000	12201	4250	4243	3708
Methodist Church	5350	509	2	30	477
Roman Catholic Church	3230	631	27	119	485
Baptist Union of Great Britain	1950	266	0	10	256
United Reformed Church	1470	307	3	22	282
Other Christian	? 9000	807	29	126	652
<b>Total Christian (England)</b>	<b>? 37000</b>	<b>14785</b>	<b>4318</b>	<b>4565</b>	<b>5902</b>
Non Christian faiths (England)					
Jewish		27			
Muslim		14			
Sikh		7			
Buddhist		5			
Non-Cn unknown		4			
<b>Total non Christian (England)</b>		<b>57</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>WALES</b>					
Church in Wales	1352	940	147		
Baptist Union of Wales	381	100			
Methodist Church	300	40			
Roman Catholic Church	197	50	52		
Baptist Union of Great Britain	152	20			
United Reformed Church	99	30	1		
Other Christian	?				
<b>Total Christian (Wales)</b>	<b>?</b>	<b>1180</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>?</b>	<b>?</b>
<b>SCOTLAND AND NI – breakdown not available</b>					

POW = places of worship. The data for England is robust, that for the other countries less so. Nevertheless it will provide adequate context.

Larger figures rounded sometimes affecting totals.

The non-English 'Grade of Listing' data is from a different and earlier source than the 'Total Listed', and there is some disparity, particularly for Wales. The number of listed English places of worship was provided by Historic England in mid 2022, based on their August 2021 figures (total figures and breakdown are as provided). The number for Wales is from a briefing paper to the Welsh Assembly, though the total number of Grade I buildings comes from a separate Cadw document (which confusingly claimed 3000 listed places of worship in total in Wales, a figure not included here). For Scotland and Northern Ireland the figures were provided by the National Churches Trust from its 2010 survey. For the rest of this material, see Trevor Cooper, 'How many seats in church?' in Trevor Cooper and Sarah Brown (eds.), *Pews, benches and chairs: church seating in English parish churches from the fourteenth century to the present*, 2011



Report published: September 2015

Scope of report: England, Church of England churches

Report available at  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/launch-major-new-report-how-church-england-manages-its-16000>

'rural areas have six or seven times more church buildings per head of population than urban or suburban areas'

# Report of the Church Buildings Review Group

Church Buildings Review Group, Church of England

## What led to the review

The Review Group was asked by the Archbishops' Council and the Church Commissioners to consider what functions need to be exercised nationally to advance the mission of the Church of England through its use and stewardship of church buildings; and how these functions might best be carried out. This report was part of a wider initiative looking at the National Church Institutions.

The Group quickly concluded that it could only approach this question sensibly if it stepped back and surveyed the nature of the opportunities and challenges that the Church of England faced regarding its buildings.

Thus Part 1 of the report was an assessment of the present situation regarding buildings. It asked (though did not directly answer): 'What drives the anxiety of some that the Church may be approaching a tipping point? Are these concerns well founded?'

The remaining parts of the Review developed a theological and institutional response to the issues exposed in the first part.

## Summary of findings and recommendations

### 1: Findings in Part 1

*Part 1 of the report was an assessment of the present situation regarding buildings and the congregations who fund and care for them. The data below are a selection from a very rich set of material, some available for the first time following the introduction of the online Church Heritage Record.*

- **Listing:** Some 78% of the Church of England's 15,700 churches are listed. Some 91% of rural churches are listed, compared with 63% in suburban and 55% in urban areas.
- **Grade I listing:** The Church of England is responsible for around 45% of the grade I listed buildings of England and almost three-quarters of these are in rural areas.
- **Capital spending:** The total amount of capital spending by parishes was around £157 million in 2013.
- **Population in rural areas:** Over 57% of churches are in rural areas, where only 17% of the population lives. Thus rural areas have six or seven times more church buildings per head of population than urban or suburban areas.
- **Average attendance:** In urban and suburban areas, average attendance per church building is just over 100, whilst in rural areas it is about 30.

‘in the forty years between 1969/70 and 2009/10, usual Sunday attendance decreased by 46%’

- **Range of attendance:** In rural areas, 75% of churches have attendance of fewer than 37 people, half fewer than 19, and a quarter fewer than 10. Nationally, a quarter of the 16,000 churches have attendance below 16, and around 2,000 have a weekly attendance below 10.
- **Trends:** In the forty years between 1969/70 and 2009/10, usual Sunday attendance decreased by 46%, stipendiary clergy in post by 47% and church buildings by 11%.
- **Future trends:** Since the 1980s, the average age of Church of England members has increased very significantly. Given the current age profile, church membership is likely to go on declining, at least for a while.

## 2: Recommendations in subsequent parts of the report

*The report expressed a strong preference for local ownership where possible, whilst streamlining the legal/management/ownership options for church buildings. In this context, a number of recommendations were made, relating to funding, governance and ways to streamline management.*

*Recommendations with a more external focus included:*

*Recommendation:*  
‘Explore ways to secure more assured financial support for listed churches and cathedrals long term’

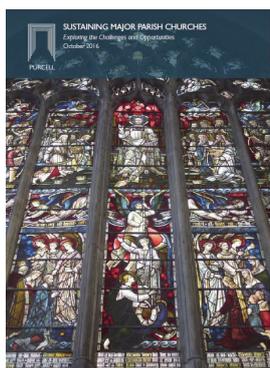
- Explore ways to secure more assured financial support for listed churches and cathedrals long term. (Part 1 pointed out that by European standards the Church of England bears an unusually heavy financial burden of maintaining part of the nation’s built heritage. At this time, the NLHF GPOW scheme was still going strong (see page 15)).
- Amend legislation to enable a PCC – with diocesan consent – to transfer its care and maintenance liabilities to another body
- Make the guidance on legal models relating to the use of open church buildings more widely known
- Develop and facilitate the Festival Churches model
- Incorporate building reviews / audits into diocesan planning for mission

## Comment

The report provided a sobering and in-depth assessment of the situation, the first systematic appraisal since Trevor Cooper’s 2004 report, *How do we keep our parish churches?*; it described a situation which had noticeably deteriorated since then. To the best of our knowledge, this was the first time that the Church of England had explicitly acknowledged in a full-length report the difficulties it was facing in maintaining its buildings.

It is not part of our remit to comment on the internal impact of the report, though we are aware of a review of the relevant statutory background; and – especially post-Covid – it has become more common for dioceses to carry out integrated strategic reviews. There has also been further work on Festival Churches.

Externally, the most dramatic impact was the setting up of the Taylor Review by the Government, whose reports and pilot are discussed on page 10 of this publication, and which it is hoped may eventually lead to ‘more assured financial support’. Overall, this Review has permanently changed the terms of discussion regarding the future of historic religious buildings of all groups and denominations.



Report published: October 2016

Scope of research:  
England, CoFE greater churches

Report available at  
<https://historicengland.org.uk/research/current/threats/heritage-in-changing-society/major-parish-churches/>

The Major Parish Churches website is at  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/diocesan-resources/strategic-planning-church-buildings/major-parish-churches>

‘Major churches are repositories of the material, cultural and spiritual history of their local communities . . .’

# Sustaining Major Parish Churches

## A partnership report

A partnership project between Historic England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), the Greater Churches Network, the Church Buildings Council and Doncaster Minster, who formed a working group to explore this topic, and commissioned the report.

## What led to the report

There are over 200 historic parish churches in England with a floor space of more than 1000m<sup>2</sup> (that is, larger than some cathedrals). However, it was not known what made them harder or easier for their congregations to maintain than the 14,800 smaller listed places of worship. The need for evidence, rather than anecdote, encouraged the partners to work together and commission independent research funded by Historic England.

The hope was that the research would inform both funders and the public, and assist advocacy with Government and philanthropic bodies. Quantitative data would provide evidence and the qualitative material would demonstrate experiences at local level.

Eighty congregations were invited to complete a questionnaire exploring:

- Attitudes towards the buildings
- Who takes responsibility for, or contributes to, their care
- How they welcome visitors
- Funding and finances
- Making changes to accommodate new activities or facilities

Fifty respondents provided more information via telephone interviews and twelve detailed case studies were completed.

## Summary of findings

### 1. Characteristics

Major churches are repositories of the material, cultural and spiritual history of their local communities, illustrating the impact of national events and changes. Towns grew around some. Others, once monastic centres of learning and hospitality, are now isolated in rural areas. Many are awe-inspiring because of their size, architecture and the treasures they contain. All provide place for personal sanctuary and grand public spectacle, serving the most vulnerable and hosting the most important civic events.

### 2. Challenges

Most buildings are well cared for and in a good state of repair. Others need urgent repairs, but there aren't the funds to carry them out. Some don't have the facilities to enable complementary uses and most find it difficult to recruit skilled volunteers. Few have effective plans in place to tackle repairs or to raise the necessary funds. Volunteers and the limited number of employees and incumbents are coping with huge pressures.

‘Most PCCs believe their Major Parish Church is an asset to ministry and mission . . .’

‘The ability to grow the congregation, the volunteer base and available skills may be restricted . . .’

### 3. Perceptions

Most Parochial Church Councils (PCCs) believe their Major Parish Church is an asset to ministry and mission, not a hindrance. Public understanding of how they are funded and managed is very low. Most people assume that they are funded by ‘The Government’ or that ‘The Church’ was very rich. Very few realised that upkeep was the responsibility of the worshipping community. The scale of even basic maintenance work makes it difficult to demonstrate proportionately increased public benefits to underpin big grant applications.

### 4. Sustainability

The ability to grow the congregation, the volunteer base and available skills may be restricted by the demands upon existing resources. Some new models of governance are being explored but their long-term effectiveness is unknown. Most Major Parish Churches depend on financial support from national funding bodies for major repairs or development work.

### 5. Opportunities

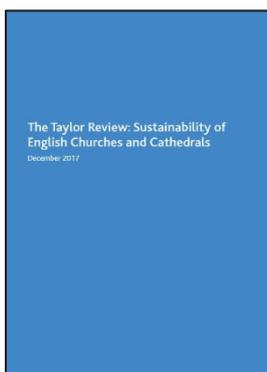
Many Major Parish Churches have successfully implemented projects to increase sustainability which provide good examples of best practice. The PCCs responsible for these buildings need support to improve strategic planning and income generation, provide new community and visitor facilities, increase staffing and grow capacity. Parish representatives have asked for support in these areas, and are seeking a forum to share best practice.

## Impact of the research

The Church Buildings Council went on to develop the concept of Major Parish Churches, broadening the definition from that used in the research. No specific Government funding has been made available for this group of buildings but the grants offered under the Programme of Major Works Emergency Culture Recovery Fund grants, during the Covid-19 pandemic 2020–22, provided substantial funds to support major repair projects.

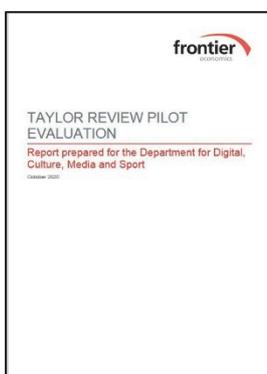
## Comment

There had previously been no concrete information on major parish churches, so the project was an important step forward. The report itself is accessible, including videos; and the case studies are of considerable value. The great size of these buildings is not matched by their funding nor their public profile, and they will need focused attention, which this report will underpin.



Report published: December 2017

Scope of report: England, CofE



Pilot evaluation published: October 2020

Scope of pilot:  
Two English areas, all faith groups

Report available at  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-taylor-review-sustainability-of-english-churches-and-cathedrals>

Evaluation of pilot available at  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-taylor-review-pilot-final-evaluation>

# Taylor Review: Sustainability of English Churches and Cathedrals

*The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport*

## What led to the report and its pilot

In 2015 the Church of England (CofE) published a report and recommendations for improving support for its 16,000 church buildings (see page 6). In April 2016 the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) set up an independent **Review** chaired by Bernard Taylor, reporting to the Chancellor and Secretary of State for DCMS. The Review examined the funding and sustainability of **listed Church of England buildings**, and how they might be conserved for future generations. The report, published in December 2017, included ten recommendations, the last of which was that pilot studies be set up in urban and rural contexts.

DCMS provided £1.8m and **pilot schemes** were set up in Greater Manchester and Suffolk (operating September 2018 – March 2020). Fabric Support and Community Development staff offered help to congregations of **listed buildings of all faiths and denominations** on care of the fabric, community engagement and planning of maintenance. The sum of £1m was available for small maintenance grants of up to £10k, mainly for roofing and rainwater goods, as recommended by the Review. A parallel major grant scheme recommended for larger repairs was not provided due to funding and time constraints.

## Summary of findings

### Key finding

The Review's **principal message** was that the long-term survival of many CofE church buildings would require them to be valued by, and useful to their communities. Where a church building was widely used for a variety of purposes beyond regular worship services, a wider cross-section of its community felt a sense of commitment to its survival.

The Review's **recommendations** focused on five key areas:

### 1. Engagement with communities

Support engagement with communities via a network of Community Development Advisors (CDAs) to help churches enhance community relationships, engage with local initiatives (such as neighbourhood plans) and find ways to make their buildings more available for community use.

### 2. Maintenance and repair

Develop a more strategic approach to maintenance and repair, by creating a network of Fabric Support Officers (FSOs) who would work closely with the CDAs, supporting Parochial Church Councils and others in the strategic planning and execution of major work and regular maintenance.

### 3. Removing legal barriers

Work to remove legal barriers to simplify some of the processes involved in the mixed use and management of buildings, including clarifying whether Local Authorities may spend money on church buildings. This built on work already done by the CofE to simplify processes.

### 4. Financial sustainability

Achieve greater financial sustainability, to reduce reliance on government funding. In the longer term the hope was that this would be achieved by regular maintenance reducing major repair needs, and wider community uses opening up more sources of funding. However, it was recognised that there would always be the need for some government support for major repairs that could not be funded locally.

### 5. Pilot schemes

Use pilot schemes to provide a more accurate picture of appropriate funding levels, and the correct split between the proposed Minor and Major Repair Funds. The pilot study would examine the efficacy of the CDA and FSO posts, and a small, representative Minor Repairs Fund.

## Impact of the project

The evaluation of the pilot (October 2020) clearly identified the value of having face to face support in developing maintenance plans. It demonstrated the real impact of the small grants scheme in encouraging congregations to do urgent but effective minor works.

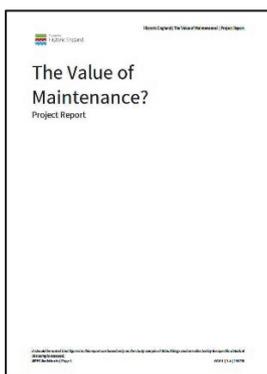
The investment of grants in the pilot areas had a direct impact on the morale of congregations, employment of local craftspeople and the development of longer-term maintenance plans. Increased community engagement brought new volunteers to some places of worship and encouraged congregations to develop wider relationships.

The longer-term impact in terms of Government funding for listed places of worship remains unclear since the Covid-19 pandemic interrupted consideration of the evidence. However, the government's Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (to cover eligible VAT on repairs and maintenance) has been extended to March 2025, a very welcome development.

## Comment

The Taylor Review and subsequent pilot schemes were among the most important projects carried out in the last ten years, not least in demonstrating government's acceptance that it has a part to play. The Review's recommendations helpfully emphasised the social value of places of worship, and the success of the pilot showed that practical support and relatively modest financial assistance are important. However, sustainability will not be achieved without an appropriate major capital grant scheme. It is also disappointing that we still do not know whether Local Authorities may spend money on places of worship for community purposes.

'The investment of grants . . . had a direct impact. Increased community engagement brought new volunteers . . . and encouraged congregations to develop wider relationships'



Report published: September 2019

Scope of research:  
England, mostly CofE

Report available at  
<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/value-of-maintenance/>

Videos and toolkit available at  
<https://www.spab.org.uk/campaigning/maintenance-matters>

# The Value of Maintenance?

## Historic England

*Historic England is the government's statutory adviser on the historic environment, championing historic places and helping people to understand, value and care for them.*

## What led to the report

It has long been recognised that regular maintenance is crucial to support the health, performance and sustainability of historic buildings. It is a keystone of conservation practice and good management, but until 2019, there hadn't been any costed analysis to underpin or quantify its value.

Historic England commissioned this research to give more clarity on this topic, and particularly to establish:

- The current estimated repair cost for necessary capital works on a sample of historic places of worship
- What the cost of timely maintenance and minor 'stitch in time' type repairs would have been if they had been done when first identified in the fabric report/s as being necessary
- Whether prompt attention to maintenance and repair issues would have prevented or slowed down the development of major repair needs, or whether those major repairs couldn't have been managed or averted by maintenance

The research examined nearly ninety quinquennial inspections (QIs) from thirty church buildings of various ages, locations, listings and condition, covering a 15-year period.

## Summary of findings

### 1. Impact of delay

Costs were greater for churches that delayed maintenance works, as the deterioration of fabric escalated between QI reports, increasing the repair bill. In well-maintained churches, regular maintenance kept defects manageable and made budgeting for the work easier. If churches reach a critical point of deterioration, costs increase rapidly, and even relatively high, regular, expenditure cannot bring the building back to a stable condition. **Churches undertaking regular maintenance spend less in the long-term.**

### 2. Total cost

The total cost to rectify defects when they were first identified was estimated to be £6.95m. Delaying maintenance saw costs increase to £8.15m. Not tackling the original defect risked consequential problems e.g. a slipped slate leading to sodden roof timbers, and damaged ceilings. What would be a half-day job if tackled at the time can become a five-year major project. So consequential damage added a further £1.8m across the sample.

'Delaying maintenance saw costs increase from £6.95m to £8.15m'

‘When roofs and rainwater goods were regularly maintained, . . . defects were found to deteriorate far slower . . .’

### 3. Roofs and rainwater goods

Defects to roofs and rainwater goods can deteriorate very rapidly between QI reports and delaying their repair caused costs to increase more quickly and significantly. Problems in these areas are the principal cause of consequential defects in masonry and interiors.

When roofs and rainwater goods were regularly maintained, masonry and interior defects were found to deteriorate far slower, allowing issues to be handled in a more programmed manner.

### 4. Size and complexity more important than age

Most churches face the same issues in relation to typical defects and the cost of repair, regardless of their age. The size and complexity of the building is the main issue.

## Impact of the research

The report was shared widely, including with the Ecclesiastical Architects and Surveyors Association, and the Church of England, which also provides guidance and templates for QI reports.

As well as demonstrating the financial implications of not carrying out regular maintenance, the report showed that very often successive QI reports didn't refer back to previous ones. There needed to be improvements in the way that QI reports were used and acted on, to make it easy to monitor what work had been done and what was outstanding.

Consequently, a practical maintenance checklist was developed as part of the Taylor Review Pilot, in partnership with the National Churches Trust and the Society for the Protection of Buildings. Five short videos were produced to help people understand why maintenance matters and how they could check their buildings to identify problems at an early stage.

‘A practical maintenance checklist was developed . . . five short videos were produced . . .’

## Comment

The importance of regular maintenance and its role in preventing further repair problems has long been championed by heritage bodies, and has been a recurrent concern for those involved with historic places of worship. For the first time, this report provides quantifiable evidence of the financial benefit in carrying out regular maintenance on places of worship, and the cost implications if maintenance is not prioritised. The production of the videos and the maintenance checklist will make the topic much more accessible to congregations. However, despite numerous projects, all individually of value, we still lack an integrated approach to the maintenance of historic churches, despite the issue being identified seventy years ago.



Report published: February 2020

Scope of report: England, CofE

Report available at  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/church-buildings-council/how-we-manage-our-buildings/struggling-churches-research>

‘Churches in the most deprived parishes were far more likely to struggle, and to close’

# Struggling, Closed & Closing churches

## Church Buildings Council, Church of England

*The Church Buildings Council is a statutory body of the Church of England.*

### What led to the report

The Church Buildings Council (CBC) advises English dioceses and the Church Commissioners on churches that are being considered for closure or going through the closure process. The core of its advice is a report assessing the significance of the church building, its furnishings and the churchyard, and exploring the scope for a sustainable future in continued worship use.

In 2019, the CBC carried out research on what prompted parishes to consider closure and made churches vulnerable in the first place. It looked for patterns in the cases in recent years and whether those coming forward were part of a strategic approach on the part of the diocese or driven by local factors only. The research was intended to shed light on what characterised ‘struggling churches’ with a view to considering ways in which the Council and other agencies might help parishes before their predicament becomes severe and how the Council’s remit to foster open and sustainable churches might be better fulfilled. It also sought to understand how far its reports were useful to various bodies with a role in the closure process so that the existing service could be improved.

### Summary of findings

There were six key findings in the research.

#### 1. Location

Struggling churches were more prevalent in the north of England and London than in the Midlands and the south. Small dioceses (in terms of number of churches) seemed to fare better than the rest.

#### 2. Size of parish

The largest parishes produce disproportionately more struggling churches and closures, especially in parishes that have several churches. Parishes with more than 10,000 people per church rarely consider closure or close.

#### 3. Deprivation

There was a clear link between deprivation and closure. Churches in the most deprived parishes were far more likely to struggle, and to close.

#### 4. Urban vs rural

There was no conclusive data, but it did appear that urban churches were more likely to struggle than rural ones.

‘The higher the listing grade, the less likely it was that a church would struggle’

## 5. Listing

The higher the listing grade, the less likely it was that a church would struggle. Grade II churches were being considered for closure at a much faster rate than I/II\* churches, and unlisted churches at an even higher rate.

## 6. Date of building

Victorian and Edwardian churches formed just over half the caseload of struggling churches. Medieval churches made up a fifth, modern churches slightly less. The proportions were broadly the same for actual closures.

## Recommendations

On the back of these findings, the report made a number of recommendations:

- Improve the sharing and consistency of data within the National Church Institutions;
- Carry out further research, especially the relationship of struggling churches to deprivation;
- Engage earlier with struggling churches to explore options for sustainable worship use;
- Engage earlier with dioceses in cases which go on to trigger the statutory closure process;
- Encourage greater take-up of strategic review tools at diocesan or deanery level;
- Improve the understanding of CBC’s service on struggling churches amongst users and stakeholders;
- Streamline parts of the process, including the use of the Church Heritage Record, and involve others in the gathering of information and the preparation of reports.

## Impact of the project

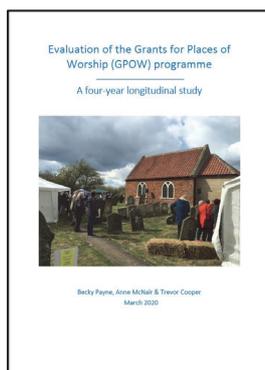
The report received some coverage at the time, particularly the link between deprivation and church closures.

The research helped the CBC develop the idea of the ‘struggling church’. It now offers advice at an earlier stage, and has produced new guidance on the topic. The research also helped the CBC identify possible adaptations and improvements to the statutory process and ways of working. Finally, the report has also established where more work is needed to understand the root causes of struggling churches, as opposed to short-term triggers.

‘the report has also established where more work is needed to understand the root causes of struggling churches’

## Comment

This research broke new ground, and within the Church of England has helped focus support for struggling parishes, assisting the ongoing conversation about why some churches struggle, and the potential for solutions short of formal closure. A broader study is now needed to provide a more holistic understanding of what causes churches to struggle, widening the net to include a range of non-building related factors such as congregational capacity and financial pressures.



Report produced: March 2020

Scope of report: UK, mix of faith groups

Report available at <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/about/insight/evaluation>

*‘In a little over 20% of cases, the GPOW grant was instrumental in allowing the continued use of a place of worship which might otherwise have closed or never re-opened’*

# Evaluation of the Grants for Places of Worship (GPOW) Programme

## National Lottery Heritage Fund

*The National Lottery Heritage Fund (formerly the Heritage Lottery Fund) is the largest dedicated grant funder of the UK’s heritage.*

## What led to the report

In 2015 the Heritage Lottery Fund (predecessor to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (‘the Heritage Fund’) commissioned an Evaluation of the Grants for Places of Worship (GPOW) programme for urgent major repairs to places of worship. The programme invested in major repairs to listed places of worship across the UK, totalling some £30m per annum. Despite the subsequent closure of the GPOW programme in 2017, it was agreed that the study would continue as planned, as the Heritage Fund felt that the Evaluation was ‘relevant to the question of how best to support places of worship (POWs) now and in the future’.

The evaluation was a four-year longitudinal study, focusing on sixty places of worship at key milestones during and after their GPOW project. For comparative purposes, the Evaluation included a further ten POWs which had had their initial GPOW application rejected.

One objective for the Evaluation was to track the achievements of a sample of projects over their lifetimes to see how well they achieved the project aims originally described in their application and thus **how well they achieved the GPOW Programme outcomes**.

The other objective was to establish **how effectively the Programme outcomes were maintained** after the project ended. These desired GPOW Programme outcomes were:

- Heritage will be in better condition
- More people and a wider range of people will have engaged with heritage

## Summary of findings

### 1. Condition of heritage

The initial catalyst for the projects was the need for urgent major repair, and for most places of worship, repairing their building remained the fundamental concern.

In the great majority of cases, the place of worship was left in a better condition as a result of the GPOW project. In a little over 20% of cases, the GPOW grant was instrumental in allowing the continued use of a place of worship which might otherwise have closed or never re-opened.

In the majority of cases, a degree of routine maintenance of the POW is now planned.

‘About three-quarters of places of worship delivered at least 75% of their GPOW community engagement activities’

Most of the POWs are already undertaking or have plans or aspirations to undertake further capital projects. Generally there was good skills transfer. However, about 40% of project leaders, who are mostly volunteers, are not willing to continue, and in just under half these cases, no successor has been found. One third of the projects have subsequently mentored a similar project in another POW.

In about one third of cases, more people (usually one or two) came on board to help the congregation with future projects.

## 2. Engagement with heritage

About three-quarters of places of worship delivered at least 75% of their GPOW community engagement activities. Smaller congregations found it harder to deliver all their activities, the number of which bore little or no relation to the size of the grant or the size of the congregation.

In some cases, the GPOW grant had allowed existing community use to continue. In the great majority of other cases, GPOW meant that congregations looking after the POWs increased their heritage engagement activities, or the use of the building by the wider community. Some two-thirds of the places of worship intended to carry on at the same level of community engagement, or do more.

## 3. Other

The full report includes findings on:

- sources of funding;
- the people managing the projects;
- how GPOW applicants reacted to rejection of their application;
- what factors tended to affect the likelihood of success for a project.

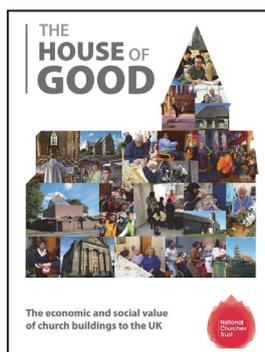
## Impact of the project

Before the project was completed the Heritage Fund had moved to a single set of grant schemes covering all types of heritage, rather than the previous arrangement whereby pots of money were allocated to different classes of heritage via different schemes. Thus the report’s impact lies in the increased understanding it brings of how places of worship respond to major capital grant programmes. As a result of the evaluation, grantees under the Grants for Heritage programme are now encouraged to employ staff or consultants for activities, the costs of which can be covered by the grant.

## Comment

*Disclosure: two of the three consultants who wrote the GPOW evaluation are closely involved with the work of HRBA*

This study explored the dynamics of major repair projects in places of worship and is important for its mix of quantitative and qualitative analysis over an extended time period (four years). The evidence strongly suggested that, despite high levels of local commitment, without appropriate external funding much major repair work would not get done.



Report published: October 2020

Updated: second half of 2021

Scope of report: UK, churches of all denominations

Original report, update, and supporting videos available at [www.houseofgood.nationalchurches-trust.org/](http://www.houseofgood.nationalchurches-trust.org/)

**‘For every £10 invested in church buildings there is a Social Return on Investment of at least £37.40’**

# The House of Good: the Economic and Social Value of Church Buildings to the UK

## *The National Churches Trust*

*The National Churches Trust is the charity dedicated to supporting places of worship of historic, architectural and community value open for worship throughout the UK*

## What led to the report

The National Churches Trust (NCT) frequently heard the phrase, ‘churches are so valuable’ being used in the sector, but what was really meant by that? It was struck by the paucity of hard evidence about the financial value of places of worship, and wanted to address this, and obtain evidence of the economic impact of places of worship at local and national level.

The ‘House of Good’ research was an entirely new piece of work, intended to be a useful advocacy tool for church leaders and the wider heritage sector to use with government. By using the latest methods for calculating economic value, it was hoped to arrive at a monetary valuation that was HM Treasury Green Book compliant. There were three key aims:

- The work would confirm that the return on investment in church buildings is huge.
- It would provide clear evidence to show to DCMS, HM Treasury and other parts of Government that funding churches is consistent with Government investment decision making.
- It would influence the 2020 Comprehensive Spending Review.

## Summary of findings

The 2020 House of Good report showed that the overall social and economic value of church buildings is at least £12.4 billion annually; roughly equal to the total NHS spending in England on mental health in 2018.

For every £10 invested in church buildings there is a Social Return on Investment of at least £37.40.

The NCT analysis shows that the UK’s church buildings house:

- food banks providing £7bn worth of services per year
- mental health services worth £900m per year
- £400m in youth services per year
- £127m in addiction services every year

There were three findings relating to **market value** (activities or resources where a cash value can readily be given, such as volunteer time) and three to **social and welfare value** (benefits such as health or happiness). A further section explored the impact of **Covid-19**.

‘The direct economic value created by running, staffing and hiring our church buildings equated to £1.4bn per year’

## 1. Market Value

- The direct economic value created by running, staffing and hiring out church buildings equated to **£1.4bn per year**. This figure includes employment costs, repairs, and general running costs. It also includes income from tourism, and donations.
- Replacing the social and community services provided in church buildings would cost **£200m per year**. These services include food banks, youth groups, addiction support, and counselling and mental health services.
- The average congregation provides over **214** volunteer hours per month. Providing this level of volunteering by staff paid at the National Living Wage (£8.21 since April 2019) would cost **£21,080 per year** for the volunteer activity at a church. Altogether, the value of volunteer hours would cost **£850m per year**.

## 2. Non-market value

Overall, the non-market value was over **£9.8bn** per year comprising a well-being value to volunteers of **£165m per year**, a value to people who benefit from social and community services of **£8.3bn per year** (**£7bn** of this total is generated by foodbanks) and a well-being value from attending church services of **£1.4bn** per year

‘Overall, the non-market value was over £9.8bn per year’

## 3. Covid-19 Response

Many churches adapted or even extended the support they provided during lockdown, including telephone befriending, delivering groceries, online support groups and worship services. **89%** of churches continued providing some form of support to their communities.

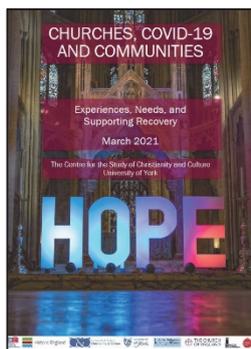
**75%** of respondents felt closing their church during lockdown had a negative impact on the community. **64%** of respondents felt churches would become even more important within their communities due to Covid-19.

## Impact of the project

The NCT believe that the House of Good report has been transformative. It succeeded in making Government and others take both them and the sector more seriously, and, among other things, helped secure Cultural Recovery Fund money. Subsequent changes in the Green Book valuation methodology have increased the valuation figures to over £50 billion.

## Comment

This is a ground breaking report. The role that places of worship play in contributing to their communities has long been recognised within the sector, but the value of the full range of activities provided by those using these buildings had never been quantified and given an equivalent financial value. The report has enabled places of worship to improve the reach and effectiveness of their advocacy work, and to make a strong case for support to a wider range of funding bodies than before.



Report published: March 2021

Scope of report: UK, All Christian denominations

Report available at <https://churchesandcovid.org/>

‘The data clearly demonstrated the vital role that places of worship had been playing in meeting the additional needs triggered by the pandemic’

## Churches, Covid-19 and Communities: Experiences, Needs and Supporting Recovery

*The Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture, University of York*

*Christianity and Culture is a leading multi-disciplinary research centre.*

### What led to the research

One catalyst for this research was a growing awareness of the impact on churches’ ability to deliver an everyday ‘National Wellbeing Service’ resulting from Covid-19 restrictions on church buildings and activities. A second catalyst was the recognition that the pandemic was creating vast additional need, not least amongst many not previously considered especially vulnerable. The aim was to inform national and local guidance, decision-making, and planning for recovery, and supply evidence for Government of the importance of churches and the activities they sustain to the wellbeing of communities across the country.

An initial survey (September–October 2020) sought to map the extensive impact of Covid restrictions on the wellbeing of individuals and communities. This data, reinforced by case studies, also highlighted the many creative responses made by churches to the challenges of caring for congregations and the wider community. A second survey (February–March 2021) identified the support churches require to play a key role in national recovery and the ‘levelling up’ programme.

The Report was published in March 2021 as *Churches, Covid-19 and Communities: Experiences, Needs, and Supporting Recovery*. It contains a twenty-page appendix collating related research and reports by others, and a ‘healthcheck’ for churches.

## Summary of findings and recommendations

### 1. Initial survey

The key findings of the original research data were summarised under three main headings:

- Provision of social care
- Buildings, well-being, place-making and heritage; and
- Supporting grief and loss

The data clearly demonstrated the vital role that places of worship had been playing in meeting the additional needs triggered by the pandemic, and that they had been extremely creative in finding new ways of working. This included using online methods to maintain contact with vulnerable groups they had previously been supporting, and setting up space within churchyards to enable people to have a place to remember loved ones who had died.

It was equally clear that locking or restricting access to churches during the pandemic caused great distress and anger, particularly amongst non-members who felt shut out of churches in their hour of need.

‘Policy and decision-makers need to better recognise the contribution made by church buildings and associated green spaces’

‘It is critical that churches have the financial means necessary to make and keep them fit for purpose’

‘Church ministers should be allowed to operate as key workers’

## 2. Recommendations from second survey

The second survey made the following recommendations:

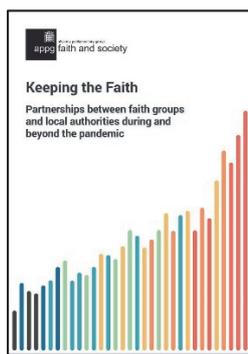
1. Policy and decision-makers need to better recognise the contribution made by church buildings and associated green spaces to the wellbeing of the whole community. Funding and support is needed to address the multiple roles of church buildings as places of worship and spirituality, spaces of shared heritage, and community hubs.
2. Every effort should be made to keep church buildings open to support emergency social care, mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing, and other community benefits. Closure should be a last resort.
3. It is critical that churches have the financial means necessary to make and keep them fit for purpose in a context of increasing need.
4. Churches and other places of worship need clear, up-to-date guidance on Covid-19 which local communities can confidently interpret and implement for their own situation. Government guidance should be informed by wider consultation and transmitted to denominations in a timely, simple, and easily applied form.
5. Churches need better training and support for enhanced partnership working.
6. There needs to be greater flexibility in the regulations for provision of weddings and funerals and keeping churches open for private grieving. Church ministers should be allowed to operate as key workers in the community, with greater investment in hospital chaplaincy to support patients and NHS staff.
7. There should be consultation with grassroots practitioners, clarification and simplification of policy and guidance, and more effective channels of information dissemination; so churches can fully support recovery and wellbeing, even in the event of further waves of virus transmission.

## Impact

The report’s findings were presented across the church sector and have had a practical impact. They have also fed into decision-making by the Church of England and informed submissions to Government. As a result of the findings, a new online portal is being developed to support churches in future mission, community care, and use of buildings.

## Comment

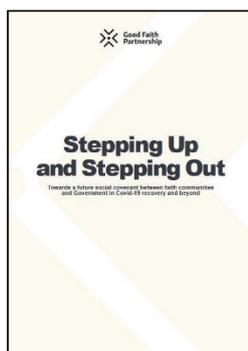
The community value of places of worship came into sharp focus during the Covid-19 pandemic: the dismay voiced by many at their closure speaks volumes for their importance. In addition to the immediate practical impact of this report, and the slow-burn policy impact, the ‘healthcheck’ and the future online portal will be a continuing valuable resources for churches. Finally, the report’s collation of research carried out by others on the community impact of churches and the effect of Covid-19 is of considerable interest.



*Keeping the Faith*: undated, published late 2020 or early 2021

Scope of report: UK, all faith groups

Report available at <https://www.faihandandsociety.org/>



*Stepping Up and Stepping Out*: published June 2021

Scope of report: UK (assumed), all faith groups

Available at <https://goodfaith.org.uk/work>

‘The ability of faith groups [to meet emergency needs] . . . was often based on long-term presence in the community’

## Partnership between Faith Groups and the State: two reports

### About the two reports

The first of these reports, *Keeping the Faith*, was by the **All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Faith and Society**. It looked at previous research previously to explore the changing nature of partnerships between local authorities and faith groups and faith-based organisations in the context of responses to Covid-19. Most of the findings were factual, but it also looked at what the implications might be for future policy.

The second of the two reports, *Stepping Up and Stepping Out*, was written by **The Good Faith Foundation**. This investigated the pivotal role of faith communities in supporting the vulnerable during the first fifteen months of the Covid-19 crisis. The research comprised a quantitative survey of all faith communities, followed by executive interviews with senior leaders from across faith traditions. The report made a number of recommendations on the relationship between faith groups and the State.

### Summary of findings and recommendations

#### Findings and policy implications (*Keeping the Faith*)

1. There was an overwhelming endorsement and appreciation of faith-based social engagement in response to the pandemic.
2. New partnerships between local authorities and faith groups were characterised by the interplay between deepening *relationships*, a willingness to share *resources and innovation* and a shared commitment to developing a more inclusive framework for considering *future strategy*.
3. The partnerships primarily worked in directly meeting emergency needs, such as food poverty, shielding and self-isolation, mental health and wellbeing. Faith groups distributed information to vulnerable groups and acted as a signpost for other goods and services offered by local authorities.
4. The ability of faith groups to do this was often based on long-term presence in the community and being a key member and facilitator of pre-existing relationships and networks.
5. **Implication**: There was an expectation the work would continue, and expand to other areas of partnership between local authorities in areas such as homelessness, debt counselling, and education, as the pandemic entered the prolonged recovery phase.
6. Anxieties about working with faith groups highlighted in previous reports (eg proselytization, socially conservative) seemed largely reduced.
7. **Implication**: Could ‘the new normal’ be a permanent space of trust, collaboration and innovation with implications for the way that both sectors work?

‘There was a clear commitment to develop partnership working in new ways in the future’

‘The Government should create a social covenant with faith communities, to be overseen by a newly appointed Faiths Commissioner’

8. New digital spaces of interaction and co-ordination have emerged that lead to flatter hierarchies and more inclusive tables with higher levels of diversity and participation.

9. **Implication:** There was a clear commitment to develop partnership working in new ways in the future. This implied a shift from softer forms of partnership to also include more innovative and intentional forms of strategic co-production.

10. **Implication:** This shift would require strategic resourcing, a new leadership mindset and active support of localised grassroots initiatives that reach across traditional barriers. Could the ‘new normal’ be fashioned into a permanent and transformative adjustment rather than simply a quick fix?

### Some recommendations (*Stepping Up and Stepping Out*)

1. The Government should create a social covenant with faith communities, to be overseen by a newly appointed Faiths Commissioner, with the support of an Expert Panel of Faith Leaders. This would build on the powerful partnerships built during the Covid-19 crisis, increase the social impact of faith-based organisations and transform local communities.

2. Government and faith communities should develop more integrated ways of working, including joint creation of policies and programmes that enabled faith communities to play a greater role in community life and reduce pressure on public services.

3. Government and faith leaders should foster a culture of co-creation to enable faith groups, government agencies and other sectors to identify the social challenges that faith communities have a unique capacity to engage with and respond to, and to improve communication between government/policy makers and faith groups to enhance decision making.

4. Government should commit further funding and continue to develop procurement strategies to harness the contribution of faith groups, build capacity in faith communities and deliver greater impact across communities.

5. Faith communities and the Government should conduct further research together and separately, to identify areas where active collaboration between faiths and the state can deliver the most positive outcomes in our communities and country.

## Comment

These two reports, one from a parliamentary group and one from the perspective of faith communities, bring into sharp focus the value of faith groups during the Covid-19 Pandemic, and particularly the initial lockdowns in 2020. Will this lead to what the APPG calls ‘a new normal’ of co-operation between faith groups and State? – the Good Faith Foundation thinks this requires an intentional covenant. It is very encouraging to see the value of the contribution of faith communities and places of worship being recognised, but it is vital that the needs of the buildings at their heart are not forgotten.

### **Online repository of reports**

The HRBA maintains an online repository of reports, at:

<https://www.hrballiance.org.uk/resources/policy-documents-etc/general-repository/>

### **Advice and guidance on developing church buildings**

This publications deals with research reports. For advice and guidance on managing and developing church buildings, see the HRBA web page 'Help and advice', which has links to a number of useful sources of information:

<https://www.hrballiance.org.uk/resources/help-advice/>



# Historic Religious Buildings Alliance

*a group within the Heritage Alliance*

**The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance brings together those working for a secure future for historic religious buildings.**

The HRBA is an independently-funded group within The Heritage Alliance. This is the biggest alliance of heritage interests in the UK and was set up to promote the central role of the non-Government movement in the heritage sector.

We are independent of any faith group or individual heritage body. Since our foundation in 2008 we have built up an enviable reputation as a trustworthy and fact-based advocate for the future of historic churches and other places of worship.

We provide briefings to members on matters of mutual interest and help them share information and best practice with each other, and move toward a common mind on the issues of the day. We engage directly with a much larger constituency through our newsletter, public meetings, website and publications.

**Views expressed in the publications of the HRBA are those of the author, not of the HRBA or The Heritage Alliance, nor any individual or body associated with them.**

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