

## NATIONAL CHURCHES TRUST SUBMISSION TO NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND STRATEGY CONSULTATION – 5 SEPTEMBER 2022

### 9. What are the top 2 or 3 changes to heritage you would want to see in 10 years' time? Please focus on the heritage that you are responsible for.\*

Local church buildings (ie parish churches, chapels and meeting houses) are the single largest and most important group of heritage assets in the UK. Many church buildings are listed, with the Church of England alone having responsibility for over 12,000 listed buildings. It is no exaggeration to say that the story of the UK, its architecture and its people can be told through its churches. They are largely available to the public to enjoy their heritage free of charge because the majority are kept open to all. Yet the cost of this tremendous free gift to the British people falls on a small and declining fraction of the population with very little support from public funds. If this benefit is to continue to be available, more help is required.

Local church buildings are also vital community buildings. Open to all, regardless of belief, they provide a very wide range of help to support local people, from food banks to youth clubs and from drug and alcohol counselling to drop-in centres for older people. The economic and social value of this support has been calculated to be worth over £50 billion a year, according to update in 2021 of 'The House of Good' report by the National Churches Trust. <https://www.houseofgood.nationalchurchestrust.org/>

Looked after predominantly by volunteers, and often with limited financial resources, the heritage of church buildings is extremely vulnerable. It was estimated in September 2021, based on available architectural inspections and costed works, that the outstanding capital cost of all repairs over the next five years for just the Church of England's parish churches is close to £1bn, or around £200m a year. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-09-09/45956>

In almost all cases the responsibility for these hugely important buildings rests not on public bodies or national institutions but local volunteers and local clergy, with often minimal resources and training. The role these volunteers play is in truth a living example of community responsibility for heritage (and itself is an ancient model stretching back a thousand years, still alive today). Those looking after what is, perhaps, the greatest collection of historic buildings face many challenges in ensuring they remain in good repair and that their heritage is there for all to use and enjoy not just for today, but for future generations as well.

Therefore, in looking at the top 2 or 3 changes to heritage over the next ten years the following are the most important.

1. A national plan should be in place to ensure that church buildings are consistently funded and properly supported so that their physical fabric is in good condition to enable their long term sustainability. It would be sensible for such a plan to include NLHF funded officers to support churches in developing projects and making applications for funding support.

2. The importance of church buildings as a national heritage asset should be properly recognised and they should be more effectively promoted collectively and individually as a key part of the UK's heritage.

3. Church buildings should be made more sustainable and their carbon footprint reduced through support for measures including adaptation to cope with the effects of climate change, more efficient use of energy and the adoption of green energy.

**10. What would you most like to change in relation to heritage in the next 3-5 years? Please focus on the heritage that you are responsible for.\***

1. There should be an increased level of financial support for church heritage. Since the closure of the dedicated NLHF grant scheme for listed places of worship (GPOW) in 2017, funding for local church buildings such as parish churches has fallen far short of the demand. This imbalance needs to be urgently addressed, either through the reintroduction of ring-fenced funding, or through the adoption of a financial target for the funding of local church heritage (this would need to be in addition to the funding of cathedrals and major churches) that provided consistent year-on-year funding. Because of the number and importance of local church buildings (ie parish churches, chapels and meeting houses) there should be a much more explicit recognition of their importance and a greater share of NLHF funding going to support them.

2. Provision needs to be made for the funding of small repairs and basic maintenance of church buildings to help support and embed good maintenance practice. Pro-active maintenance of church heritage means that less money needs to be spent on major repair projects. The value in particular of timely maintenance to church buildings was shown in a report in 2019 by APEC Architects and Greenwood Projects for Historic England, which researched the value of maintenance and minor repairs to listed places of worship. It concluded that prompt attention to minor repair and maintenance would have slowed the need for major and costly repair needs and resulted in potential financial savings of 15-20% overall.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/923678/Taylor\\_Review\\_Pilot\\_report\\_-Oct20-FINAL-c.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/923678/Taylor_Review_Pilot_report_-Oct20-FINAL-c.pdf)

One of the key ways to help ensure the long term sustainability of church buildings, and to reduce costs overall, would therefore be for funding to be available to allow more churches to carry out small repairs and maintenance. This approach has also been taken by the National Churches Trust through its Gateway Grants and its Preventative Maintenance Micro Grants – as well as through the Trust's NLHF - funded project, Treasure Ireland, in Northern Ireland.

3. The NLHF should work with other heritage bodies, tourism organisations, education providers and local authorities and other relevant organisations to create a better appreciation and understanding of the importance of church buildings to the heritage of the UK, and also of their very significant contribution to local economies. This would include

including including education about historic buildings in the national curriculum and making links between local historic buildings and local schools.

4. An increased support for the training and education in the rare and specialist skills needed for the restoration of historic buildings. Also of course the link between these historic buildings and local schools is important for the future.

## **11. How can the Heritage Fund play a role in those changes?\***

1. Many churches have expressed concern to the National Churches Trust about the complexity of the application process for grants from the NHLF. This is particularly the case for small, often rural churches, which have small congregations and which lack professional expertise in fundraising and making grant applications. Ways should be sought to address these concerns, which might include:

Ensuring greater support from the NLHF for applications made by churches (including training, advice, 1-to-1 support, development funding).

Simplifying the application process.

The NLHF working more closely and/or in partnership with other organisations with specialist expertise in church heritage to manage the grant-making process for this heritage sector. (Some churches have expressed the view that due to religious objections to gambling they would be happy to access lottery funds via an intermediary but not directly from the NLHF – arrangements of this kind would support the heritage of these churches and improve the reach and diversity of impact of lottery funds.)

2. Examining whether the requirements for additional community engagement linked to NLHF grants and the associated diversity targets have a negative impact on the ability of local churches to succeed in obtaining grants from the NLHF. For example, churches from some denominations, including those belonging to the Roman Catholic Church, regard pretty much the whole of the church building as a sacred space and therefore cannot adapt the building to cater for community engagement activities. The number of such churches applying to the NLHF is likely to be low as they consider it unlikely that they will obtain funding for safeguarding their heritage.

Equally, some churches are situated in areas of the country that are not fully representative of the diversity of the UK's population as a whole. Ways should therefore be found to set diversity targets appropriately, allowing all churches to access funding, regardless of the demographics of any particular geographic area.

Value also needs to be attributed to the way that churches support the community through the large number of volunteer roles played by the people involved with church buildings (PCC members, flower arrangers, welcomers, fundraisers, members of the choir, cleaners, maintenance teams, churchyard teams etc). Churches also do much to combat loneliness –

for example, being able to turn up at a service each week, or take a seat in the choir, or benefit from the community services run at a church is immensely important to many local people who would otherwise be isolated.

The very fact that historic churches are open for anyone to walk in and appreciate, is just as valuable as having a state of the art heritage centre.

3. Where NLHF funding is linked to greater community engagement, some churches have expressed concern that existing community services run by volunteers in church buildings, such as foodbanks, youth clubs, counselling services, should be more fully taken into account. The updated The House of Good Report (2020-2021) showed that churches contribute over £50 billion to the UK each year through the social and economic benefits they deliver to local communities. Every £1 invested in a church building has a return of over £16.

**12. Beyond funding, what other support can the Heritage Fund provide that would achieve those changes? Examples include consultant support, sharing best practice across organisations, cohort learning and/or building partnerships with other funders.**

All of these support ideas have potential benefits. The principles should be that the NLHF should (a) always harness the expertise of others with specialist knowledge and experience in each heritage sectors; (b) make it easier for those seeking funding who lack experience or the resources to make use of professional advice to get support from the NLHF or from others; and (c) make available small amounts of funding for churches to do development work / hire consultants/fundraisers/project professionals to help in the early stages of a project.

**13. Tell us what you think about our existing priorities for heritage (landscape and nature, community heritage and heritage at risk) and our current funding approach as set out in our Strategic Funding Framework 2019-2024?**

The priority of focussing on heritage at risk is of great benefit. This allows decisions to be made on church buildings based on an objective measure. However, only England has a regularly updated and publicly accessible At Risk register.

## **14 Objectives**

Ensure a better future for the UK's heritage  
**Neither agree nor disagree**

Ensure heritage is a source of inspiration and enrichment  
**Agree**

Ensure heritage is for everyone

**Agree strongly**

Ensure heritage is valued, resilient and sustainable

**Agree strongly**

Ensure heritage enables people and places to thrive

**Agree strongly**

Ensure local economies are strengthened through heritage

**Agree**

### **Additional comments**

A better future for the UK's heritage' is a laudable objective. However, in relation to built heritage it lacks the specificity of the existing objective of 'We will continue to bring heritage into better condition'. There is therefore a risk that the new objective could be interpreted to mean that less priority would be given to the funding of the repair of buildings, and in particular of church buildings. This would have a negative impact on national heritage.

'Local economies are strengthened through heritage' is again hard to argue against. However, there should be some mention of people and society along the lines 'Local economies and communities are strengthened through heritage'. In relation to church buildings, The 2021 update to The House of Good report showed that their economic and social contribution to society is worth at least £50 billion a year.

More generally, in recent years there has been an emphasis on the contribution that the public and private sectors can make to improving wellbeing. Recognition of this specific societal good somewhere in the six objectives would be a positive addition.

The importance of heritage in contributing to national and local identity and helping people to understand national, regional and local history. Local churches have stood witness to, and participated in, history for well over a thousand years. Churches not only contribute to the built heritage of a locality and of our cities, towns and villages, but also to their identities as a community. Churches also become places of memories and celebrations for families and local groups, often being the most substantial records of local history, both written and in stone.

The word sustainable is open to a number of meanings and it would be an advantage to clarify its definition for for the NLHF.

### **Priorities.**

#### **15 Place**

**We expect to be doing more to prioritise and invest in places that have a greater need, opportunity and/or potential for heritage. What information should help us shape that emphasis? Select the three that are most important to you. [Select 3]**

- **heritage needs**
- **social and economic needs**
- **opportunities for the Heritage Fund to align with other funders and partners**

- the potential of heritage in an area

- readiness of a place for partnership and investment (for example: existing delivery networks, stakeholders, etc)

- low levels of engagement with heritage, especially among under-served groups

other (please state

### **Approaches to funding**

**16. We currently deliver the majority of our funding through our open programmes, National Lottery Grants for Heritage. Looking ahead, we are planning to make larger scale investments and direct some funding to issues or types of heritage where there is a strategic need.**

**Do you agree we should invest at a larger scale (over £5million) where our investment will have a greater impact?**

- **yes**

- no

don't know

Yes, very much so. There is benefit in the NLHF playing the strategic role, and working with partners on the delivery of its strategy and of funding.

A shift towards a more 'strategic' approach that awards larger amounts to issues and is not based on open rounds is highly sensible and would provide a solution to dealing with specific types, or groups of heritage, that is At Risk and is agreed to be nationally and locally important.

Investing at a larger scale could of course mean investing in large single projects, but for the purpose of this question, it is interpreted as being investment in specific types, or groups of heritage ie local church buildings.

So, for example, strategic funding of £10 million could be allocated to church buildings – but this could be made up of a large number of individual small awards. In such a scenario, to avoid overburdening the NLHF, the administration of this funding could be done in partnership with national, regional or local partners such as the National Churches Trust.

More generally, the assumption that greater impact results from investing at a larger scale in single projects may be false, unless there is clarity about what 'greater impact' actually means. Providing more, smaller investments to a greater number of projects may in fact

produce a greater impact as it can benefit more, and a greater diversity of, heritage. In relation to church buildings, many small local churches do not require large amounts of funding. The sheer scale of need for local churches, including over 900 on the latest Historic England Heritage at Risk register, shows that much more could be done to direct funding towards ensuring a better future for this heritage sector. Recent experience at the National Churches Trust has shown an increase in demand for funding for projects costing under £100,000.

**17. The cost of living crisis and rising inflation are resulting in increased costs for many heritage projects. Thinking about what would most benefit the heritage you support, what balance should we strike between investing in existing funded projects and supporting new projects over the next three years?**

- keep the balance as it is currently
- **re-balance to increase support for existing projects**
- re-balance to increase investment in new projects
- none of the above (please specify below)
- don't know

Please provide any comments you want to add to your response above.

It would seem to be important to ensure that existing projects are able to be completed.

### **Partnerships**

**18. We are looking to deliver our objectives both through our existing investment mechanisms (Lottery funding and Grant in Aid) and, where appropriate, through more partnership work with other organisations.**

**How do you think the Heritage Fund will need to change about how we work to shift from grant giver to partner? What organisations, or types of organisation, would you like to see us work in partnership with?**

It is important that the NLHF, both at the national and regional level, works closely with church organisations, other heritage bodies with responsibility for church buildings, and umbrella bodies such as the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance to ensure that its staff have a good and up-to-date understanding of the issues facing church heritage.

More joint working with the National Lottery Community Fund would be beneficial – this could result in the NLHF being the main funder for work to maintain and repair the fabric of church buildings while the NLCH funds community facilities.

In terms of the balance between being a grant giver and a partner, and as indicated above, there would be a number of benefits from the NLHF reducing the administrative burdens of managing grants across its portfolio by moving to greater partnership working. In the case of church buildings, the experience of the National Churches Trust in its managing of funding from the Cultural Recovery Fund, and in its Treasure Ireland project in Northern Ireland, shows a number of advantages to this approach. These include the provision of in-depth

understanding of the needs of the people managing church building projects and a 100% focus on church heritage as opposed to a broader pan-heritage approach.

### **Environmental sustainability**

**19. Our current approach to environmental sustainability is that we expect all applicants – regardless of heritage type or project size – to tell us how they will limit any potential damage to the environment and how they will make a positive environmental impact, particularly for nature. We expect funded projects' environmental sustainability actions to be proportionate to the level of grant, meaning the larger the grant, the more we expect.**

**Please tell us your views on how we can strengthen our current approach to environmental sustainability. What are the most important things we can do to support projects to reduce their carbon footprint?**

Include provision for funding in projects for improving heating systems, installing PV, improving insulation and other ways of reducing the carbon footprint of churches. The Church of England estimated in 2021 that there is still significant scope for churches to install cleaner technologies to reduce their carbon impacts, with just one per cent of churches presently having installed solar panels. This sort of project, especially insulation, needs to be undertaken under the close supervision of a qualified conservation architect. The risks to the built heritage of inappropriate insulation are significant.

The study also found that if all churches switched to a renewable electricity tariff, the estimated total net carbon footprint for church buildings would be 22 per cent smaller.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/one-year-church-moves-forward-carbon-reduction-target>