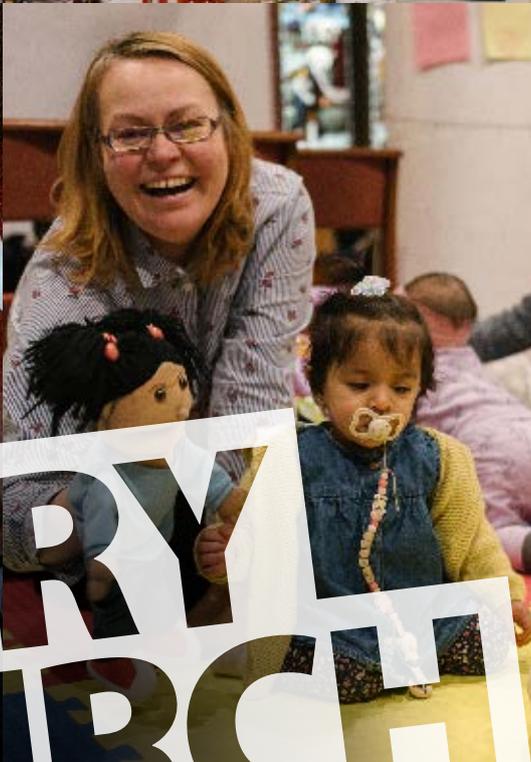




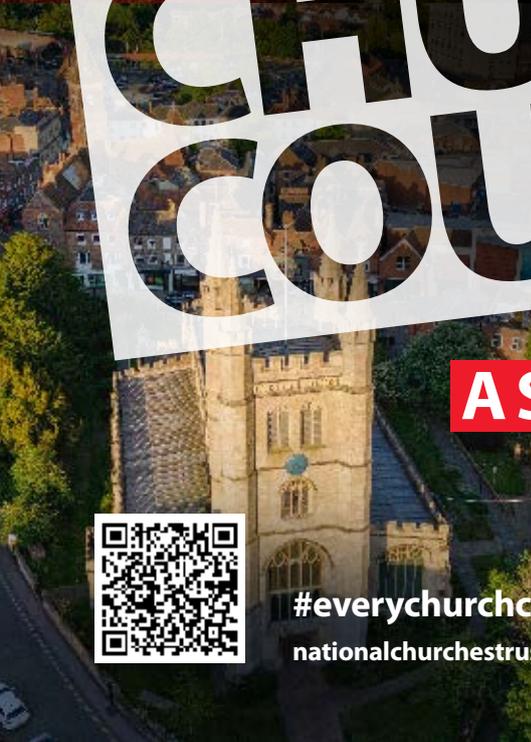
**NATIONAL  
CHURCHES  
TRUST**

**Yours for good.**



# EVERY CHURCH COUNTS

**A SIX POINT PLAN TO SAVE THE  
UK'S CHURCH BUILDINGS**



#everychurchcounts  
nationalchurchestrust.org/everychurchcounts

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# INTRODUCTION

**The United Kingdom has some of the most historic and beautiful churches, chapels and meeting houses to be found anywhere in the world.**

Our church buildings are also much the most important base for voluntary and community activities in Britain - activities of just about every kind but all serving to reduce loneliness and social isolation, build community spirit, and enrich our cultural lives.

For centuries, they have served a wide range of Christian denominations and been a place where life events such as births, marriages and deaths have been marked. They are also where key moments in national and local history are celebrated and commemorated, most recently with the coronation of King Charles III.

**Today our churches are at risk as never before**

20,000 of the UK's church buildings have statutory listed status as being the most important parts of our heritage. And those churches and chapels include nearly half of Britain's most important historic buildings (Grade I or equivalent).

**Heritage at risk**

But there is a desperate shortage of money to look after this heritage. Roofs leak, towers crumble and floors collapse.

As a result, there are over 900 on the Historic England Heritage at Risk Register.

In Wales, about a quarter of historic churches and chapels have closed in the last decade, and just as many are now at risk.

The Church of Scotland – guardian of many of the country's most important buildings – is actively planning the closure of as many as 40% of its churches.

The burden of keeping these buildings open rests almost entirely on congregations – the people who actually attend services. Neither the Government

nor the national denominations provide regular funding for the cost of repairs to church buildings, whatever their significance. The backlog of repairs for the Church of England's churches is at least £1 billion, and the annual need is estimated to be £150 million a year.

The National Churches Trust is the UK-wide charity supporting church buildings of every denomination. We've been doing this for over two hundred years. Last year we were able to help over 250 church building projects with funding of almost £2 million.

Our vision is that church buildings across the UK are well maintained, open to everyone, sustainable and valued. Today, our work is expanding to meet the challenges that lie ahead. But we cannot solve the problem alone.

**Keeping churches open**

Of course, no single actor can fix the problem. That's why what is needed above all is a national plan, drawn up by Government, heritage organisations and the denominations.

'Every Church Counts' offers a blueprint for the future of the UK's church buildings. It sets out ideas which can help keep them open and in use, for the benefit of all.

With 66% of UK adults saying they think that churches are important for society and 68% saying that they are an important part of our heritage and history (according to a December 2023 opinion poll), we are confident that saving the UK's churches for the future has the overwhelming support of the public.

So, let's take the long view, and act together to make sure these astonishing historic, purposeful places remain in good repair, welcoming and useful for generations to come.



Sir Philip Rutnam KCB, Chair



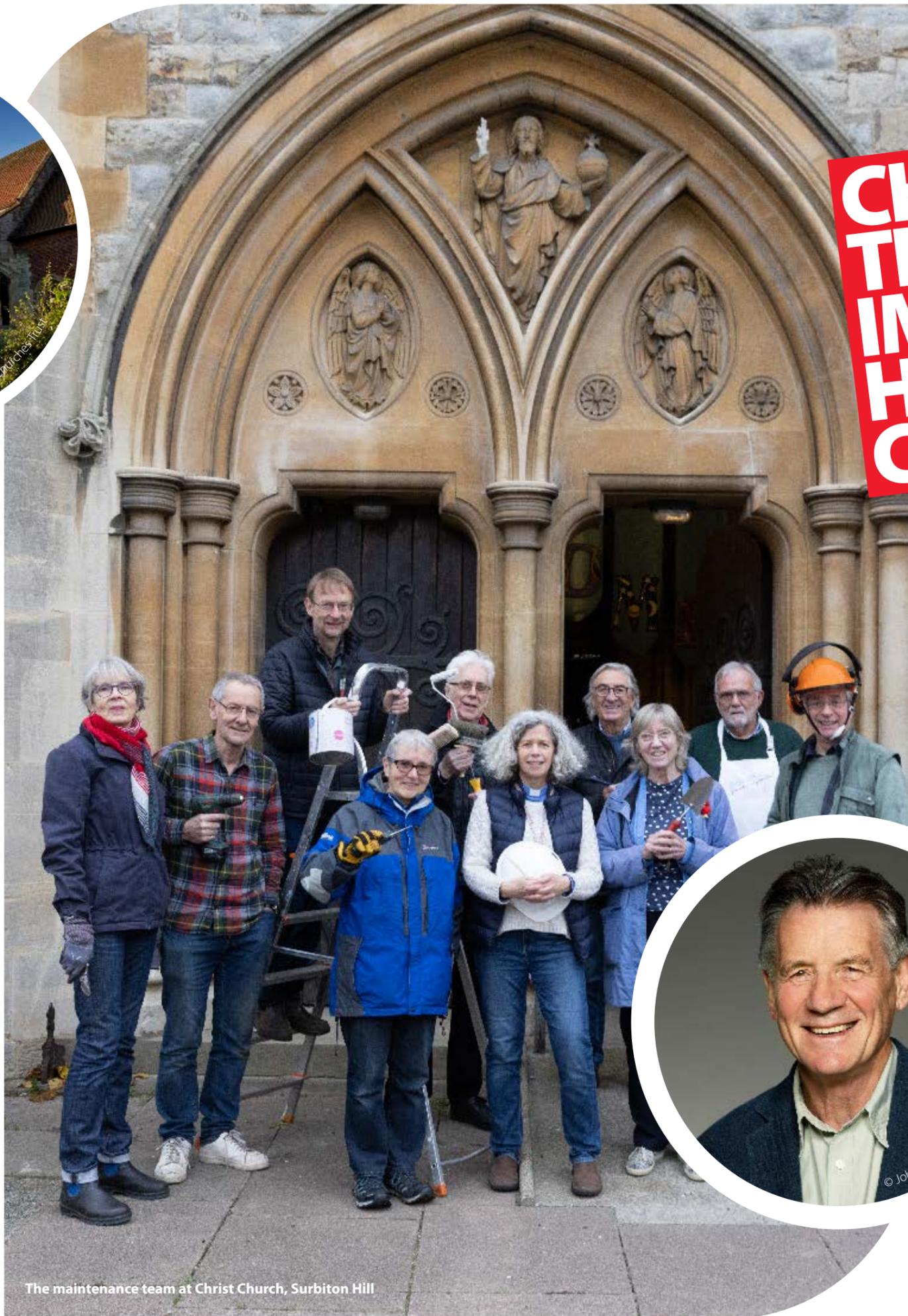
Claire Walker, Chief Executive

# CHURCHES AT RISK

St Nicholas church, Newbury, Berkshire



St Lawrence, Bardney, Lincolnshire



The maintenance team at Christ Church, Surbiton Hill

© Andy Sillett

# CHURCHES – THE UK'S MOST IMPORTANT HERITAGE CHALLENGE

## SAVING BEAUTIFUL HERITAGE

**Churches, chapels and meeting houses are some of the UK's most important heritage. There are almost 20,000 listed churches, chapels and meeting houses in the UK that are open for worship.**

There were 943 places of worship on the Historic England Heritage at Risk Register in 2023, an increase of 24 over the previous year. 29 were removed but 53 more were added.

Significantly, while churches account for just five per cent of listed buildings in England (all grades), around half of the very best listed buildings (those listed at Grade I) are churches.

In England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, churches are key to what makes many landscapes beautiful and are also important to the visual identity of towns and cities, helping to reinforce local identity and creating a sense of place.

**“ Right now, many church buildings are in danger of closure. ‘Every Church Counts’ proposes a range of ways in which the future of the UK’s churches, chapels and meeting houses can be secured.**

*More and more churches are adapting to the needs of their communities, providing not just spiritual comfort but a range of valuable services to local people such as foodbanks and warm spaces and helping to combat the scourge of loneliness.*

*Churches are also a vital part of the UK’s history and we need to act now to prevent the loss of tremendously important local heritage.*

*If you care as much about the future of these much-loved buildings as I do, you’ll find that the National Churches Trust’s ‘Every Church Counts’ offers a way forward for these wonderful buildings.* ”



© John Swannell

**Sir Michael Palin CBE**

Vice President, National Churches Trust

**3,500 churches  
have closed  
in the last  
10 years**

Source: Brierley Research

**“Fury at plans to close  
Christ Church”**

Brent and Kilburn Times, 24 October 2023

**“Powys church to  
close after more  
than 150 years”**

Powys County Times, 20 April 2023

**“Final village church  
service brings 800 years  
of worship to an end”**

Hornsea and Holderness Gazette, 2 February 2023

**“Up to 700 churches  
predicted to close  
across Scotland”**

The Scotsman, 11th November 2023

**“Church of England  
parishes close at  
a record rate”**

The Daily Telegraph, 2 September 2023

## WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

1

### **Support for heroic volunteers**

A network of professional support officers covering the whole of the UK needs to be created to help the volunteers, including clergy, who look after church buildings. This support could also cover buildings belonging to other faiths. More centrally provided services that churches can opt into could also help.

2

### **Our National Help Service**

Government should ask all local authorities and public bodies such as the NHS to engage with faith groups and make more use of churches and church halls to host public and community services, helping to upgrade facilities where needed.

3

### **Funding to save priceless heritage**

To help keep the UK's churches open and serving local people and to save their heritage for the future, additional ringfenced annual public funding of at least £50 million is required for major repairs, with proportionate funding provided for the devolved administrations. A national matched funding scheme would help incentivise charitable donations and private philanthropy.

4

### **On the visitor map**

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport, working with the main national tourism organisations, should commission a national study into how to make more of the unrivalled heritage of the UK's churches.

5

### **Churches open for all**

Church buildings need to be regularly open outside worship times to fulfil their potential in the life of communities, within the limit of what is right for the local area.

6

### **Making change happen**

Urgent action is needed by Government, heritage organisations and denominations. This needs co-ordination and leadership. Long-term change will also require more advocacy and evidence: everyone who uses, loves or supports church buildings has a role to play.

Church for sale in Shortwood near Nailsworth, Gloucestershire UK

© Adrian Sherratt / Alamy Stock Photo



1

# SUPPORT FOR HEROIC VOLUNTEERS

**"Almost every local church is looked after by volunteers who are responsible for the future of the UK's greatest collection of historic buildings and their contents."**

St Macartan (Forth Chapel), Augher, County Tyrone, Northern Ireland

Maintenance of the beautiful and historic church of St Macartan (Forth Chapel), set in an early Irish ringfort in Augher, County Tyrone in Northern Ireland, is very important to the parish. They work to keep the church open and in good repair throughout the year.

***"We have so much pride in St Macartan's given its age and history. As a community and a parish we have a duty to maintain and conserve this beautiful church."***

**Many of the UK's historic buildings, such as those owned by the National Trust and other heritage organisations, as well as privately owned properties open to the public, are looked after by paid staff. However, almost every local church, chapel and meeting house is looked after by volunteers. It is these people who are responsible for the future of the UK's greatest collection of historic buildings and their contents.**

Often these volunteers, many of whom are older, lack professional training in building maintenance or fundraising. So do most clergy, some of whom find themselves responsible for multiple historic church buildings. The level of support they get from their national denomination or at the regional or diocesan level varies tremendously.

As a result, dealing with even simple problems such as clearing gutters or replacing slipped tiles can be delayed or not done at all. But the day-to-day care and maintenance of church buildings is crucial to their future. As William Morris said in 1877, those entrusted with old buildings need 'to stave off decay by daily care.'

Recent evidence shows that not looking after church buildings today can lead to much higher costs tomorrow, a true case of a 'stitch in time'<sup>(1)</sup>. Regular maintenance is also an important way to reduce carbon emissions as it reduces draughts, improves energy performance and ensures that heat stays in.

Keeping church buildings in good repair so that they can continue to be used for worship and community activity is one way in which to reduce the carbon emissions from new construction. Carbon has already been emitted to build churches and continuing use means no new emissions are produced.

***"A body of willing volunteers must be available to deal with day to day issues of caring for churches. Without these people the building and its funding cannot but be neglected and fall into disrepair."***

National Churches Trust Consultation, August 2023

© Mid Ulster Council



Dusting a tomb at St Mary's Priory church, Abergavenny, Monmouthshire

© David G / Stockimo / Alamy Stock Photo

## WHAT WE ARE DOING

- 1 Thanks to a £1.9m grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), from 2023 – 2026, our new 'Cherish' project will help churches and chapels in Scotland, Wales and the North West of England through the placement of dedicated support officers. This builds on Treasure Ireland, our NLHF supported project in Northern Ireland.
- 2 Our National Church Awards – the 'BAFTAs for churches' – celebrate the UK's churches from the beautiful buildings to the dedicated volunteers who keep them open and serving local people.
- 3 We provide an increasing curriculum of online and in person training to support the people who look after church buildings.

Fitting new stained glass window panel with a First World War theme



© David G / Stockimo / Alamy Stock Photo

# 1 SUPPORT FOR HEROIC VOLUNTEERS

## WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

**A network of professional support officers covering the whole of the UK needs to be created to help the people who look after church buildings and churchyards. Such a network should work across all denominations, so avoiding unnecessary duplication of effort. This support could also cover buildings belonging to other faiths.**

The volunteers who help to keep the UK's church buildings in good condition need expert advice and often additional support on maintenance, capital repairs, fundraising, and widening the range of uses.

One of the key recommendations of the 2017 Taylor Review into the sustainability of Church of England churches was the need for more professional support. Pilots have successfully tested new approaches<sup>(2)</sup>.

Help is already provided in some parts of the UK. Historic England assists with the costs of employing support officers and the Church of England is increasing the number of its Diocesan Church Support Officers. But the help available is patchy and does not cover all parts of the country. Most diocesan support officers are on short-term contracts and it is unclear if funding will be available for their extension.

More online resources and training and a linked church heritage qualification could bring support into the digital age and attract new people. Equally, more centrally provided services that churches can opt into could also help.

Thousands of people are actively involved in looking after the UK's heritage including canals and waterways, heritage railways and historic houses. Given the right support more people can get involved in helping churches as well.

**ACTION: Denominations and heritage bodies**



Cutting the grass in the churchyard at St Mary's church, Whitby, North Yorkshire

© Mark Richardson / Alamy Stock Photo

2

# OUR NATIONAL HELP SERVICE

**"The social and economic value provided to the UK by church buildings is at least £55 billion a year."**

Pop Up Pantry at St Stephen's church, Bradford

Some 20 years ago St Stephen's church in Bradford was scheduled for demolition. But thanks to the hard work of Revd Jimmy Hinton, a new vicar, it was kept open.

***"The church is now thriving, with refugee groups, a job club, drop-in support groups, a children's clothes bank, and much, much more. Most of the people in the area are from a Pakistani Muslim background, but everyone," says Revd Jimmy, "calls it our church."***



A musician rehearsing in St Andrew's church, Presteigne

**Like St Stephen's church, throughout the UK many local churches, chapels and meeting houses help communities survive and thrive. Churches are often the first to respond to local need. Thanks to the amazing work of many thousands of volunteers, day in day out, they are the UK's National Help Service. They also play a vital role at moments of local and national emergency such as storms and flooding, or support to people fleeing wars.**

Thanks to the support provided for local people – from food banks to mental health care and from youth clubs to drug and alcohol counselling – the social and economic value provided to the UK by church buildings is at least £55 billion a year – that's roughly twice as much as the total spend on adult social care by local authorities<sup>(3)</sup>.

Churches are also venues for a wide range of cultural activities, including bell ringing, concerts by choirs and orchestras, exhibitions and performances; many are also polling stations for local and general elections.

The Bloom Report, 'Does Government do God?', an independent review commissioned by the Government and published in 2023, identified at least 22 community activities that take place in churches and other places of worship<sup>(4)</sup>.

In recent years, large numbers of community buildings have closed; churches are well placed to be used by local councils and other local community services. Whilst not every church or chapel can become a community hub, there are many church buildings with spare capacity that could be used to benefit local communities.

***"By opening up faith buildings for other purposes and encouraging many more people to use them, there is more chance of being able to preserve the building."***

National Churches Trust Consultation, August 2023

© St Stephen's church



Foodbank at Trinity church, Colindale, London

## WHAT WE ARE DOING

- 1 *House of Good – Local. We are developing a toolkit that will allow churches to measure their economic and social value and show local communities, councils and other key stakeholders their contribution to local life.*
- 2 *Our grants for modern facilities, such as loos, kitchens and serveries, allow churches to run or host a wide range of community activities.*
- 3 *We are carrying out new research to quantify the important role played by churches in supporting volunteers and providing local support and other activities.*

**66%**  
of UK adults agree that churches, chapels and meeting houses are important for society  
Savanta poll, December 2023

Little Dots Playgroup at St Stephen's church, Bradford



Night shelter at Sacred Heart church, Tamworth

# 2 OUR NATIONAL HELP SERVICE

© St Stephen's church

## WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

**Government should ask all local authorities and public bodies such as the NHS and Government departments to engage with faith groups and make more use of churches and church halls to host community services, helping to upgrade facilities where needed.**

There are 38,500 church buildings in the UK. That compares to 3,700 public libraries, 11,600 post offices, and 8,100 GP surgeries. There is a church in almost every village with many more in our towns and cities.

More church buildings can be included in the planning and delivery of a wide range of local services, hosting NHS surgeries, job clubs and advice centres. Social prescribing by GPs, nurses and other primary care professionals can signpost more people to health and wellbeing services already run in churches. Community businesses can also find a home in church buildings.

One way to bring this about is through better relationships on the ground, such as faith officers employed by local councils or through including faith representatives on the boards of Town Centre Area Action Plans. This will also help to encourage dialogue between faiths.

Some churches lack up to date facilities, such as loos and kitchens. Often these are buildings in deprived areas. Investment to improve the infrastructure of church buildings by local councils and other public bodies can enable more to host community services and activities. For example, the Community Facilities Programme capital grant scheme operated by the Welsh Government provides funding to improve community facilities in buildings which are well used by local people<sup>(5)</sup>.

The Faith Covenant, an initiative of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society<sup>(6)</sup>, provides a good framework to promote open, practical working and its use is growing. More local authorities should adopt the covenant.

**ACTION: Government (UK and devolved), local authorities, public bodies**

3

# SAVING PRICELESS HERITAGE

**“Without financial support from Government, more and more churches will close.”**

All Saints' church, Burstwick, East Riding of Yorkshire

On 1st February 2023, parishioners gathered in All Saints' Church, Burstwick, in the East Riding of Yorkshire, for the last service before the 800-year-old building closed for good. The Grade I listed church dates from the 13th century but was forced to shut its doors as it proved too difficult to find the £250,000 needed to pay for urgent repairs, including roof repairs.

**“We had people in tears, we have had a lot of emotion, it was just really, really sad, it's been the heritage of the village for over 800 years.”**

**All Saints' is one of an increasing number of historic churches that are being forced to close because they cannot find the money needed to keep their building windproof and watertight. Climate change is causing more problems for church buildings as existing roofs, gutters and downpipes cannot cope with more frequent and heavier rainfall.**

The backlog for repairs to church buildings belonging to the Church of England alone is at least £1 billion, with the average annual cost for maintenance and repairs to parish churches estimated at £150 million<sup>(7)</sup>. The problems of funding are often greatest in the very places where need is also most acute – coastal towns, former industrial areas, and the most deprived parts of our cities.

There are 943 places of worship on the 2023 Historic England Heritage at Risk Register, an increase of 24 since 2022<sup>(8)</sup>. Many others are in a perilous condition in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Although many congregations raise much of the money needed to pay for repairs themselves, it is not realistic for the cost of major work to rest solely on local shoulders. Unlike European countries, in the UK, the Government does not provide any regular funding for repairs to church buildings.

State aid for historic churches was introduced in 1977. These grants made a major impact: by 2004 they were worth about £50 million a year (in today's money). Ringfenced grants for churches continued in various forms for the next 40 years until 2017.

At present, many churches can benefit from being able to claim back the VAT incurred on repairs. This refund of tax is not available to unlisted churches.

Without regular financial support from Government, and more funding from heritage organisations, denominations and philanthropic trusts, more and more churches will close if they cannot pay for repairs. This will mean an uncertain future for precious buildings, symbols of hope and continuity, and the loss of the community support they provide.

**“Church communities care deeply for their buildings but simply do not have the resources to repair or maintain them without external funding, particularly in the more deprived areas of the country.”**

National Churches Trust Consultation, August 2023

©Jonathan Sumption/Alamy Stock Photo



Fixing the roof at All Saints' Church, Park Road, Barry

© CMH Images / Alamy Stock Photo

# 3 SAVING PRICELESS HERITAGE

## WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

To help keep the UK's churches open and serving local people and to save their heritage for the future, additional ringfenced annual public funding of at least £50 million is required for major repairs, with proportionate funding provided for the devolved administrations. A national matched funding scheme would help incentivise charitable donations.

Additional public funding would be ringfenced for places of worship and available consistently year on year in a similar way to the successful Grants for Places of Worship scheme, run by the National Lottery Heritage Fund until 2017. The funding should be available in a way that meets the needs of churches and chapels, which are often very small organisations.

In Scotland and Wales, this funding would also be available to safeguard the heritage of the growing number of church buildings that are owned by their local communities.

It is also vital that the Listed Places of Worship Grants Scheme, which allows listed churches to reclaim the VAT on repairs, is extended beyond 2025 as soon as possible to allow churches to plan future projects with certainty over future financial need.

Saving church buildings makes financial sense. 'The House of Good' report, published by the National Churches Trust in 2021, evidenced that for every pound invested in church buildings, HM Treasury Green Book calculations show there is a social return on investment of £16<sup>(9)</sup>.

Church repairs also create jobs and help maintain and develop specialist skills of value to the wider construction and heritage sectors. Since 2021 the Heritage Building Skills programme (including Historic Environment Advice Assistant Higher Apprenticeships, run by Historic England) provides opportunities to safeguard vital church and heritage building skills<sup>(10)</sup>.

There is also an opportunity to generate more private donations through tax relief or other financial incentives. In France, President Macron recently launched a plan to provide €200 million for repairs to historic churches over four years, with new tax incentives that effectively quadruple the value of private giving<sup>(11)</sup>. In the UK, ways to increase private giving to church buildings could include a state matched funding scheme, with the value of donations doubled.

**ACTION: Government (UK and devolved), heritage bodies, philanthropists**



© National Churches Trust

## WHAT WE ARE DOING

- 1 Through our grants scheme, since 1953, we have given over £130 million (in today's money) to churches belonging to all the main denominations in the UK.
- 2 In 2023-2024 thanks to the generosity of a heritage philanthropist, we are raising £1 million in a matched funding scheme to help 18 'Last Chance Churches'.
- 3 Our new 'Cherish' programme, in partnership with the National Lottery Heritage Fund, will provide £900,000 of grants for church buildings in Scotland, Wales and the North West of England over the next three years.

**68%**  
of UK adults agree that **churches, chapels and meeting houses** are an important part of the UK's heritage and history

Savanta poll, December 2023

Church maintenance work

4

# ON THE VISITOR MAP

**"Making more of their history and heritage can transform the future of the UK's local churches and also local economies."**

A new stained glass window in St John the Baptist church, Scampton

St John the Baptist church in Scampton, Lincolnshire sits one mile from RAF Scampton where the Dambusters Squadron was formed. The church has created a new RAF chapel, including a specially commissioned stained glass window, in memory of fallen servicemen and other personnel from the base.

***"The church has around 1,000 visitors a year, with numbers expected to increase substantially now that a restoration project to improve the visitor experience has been completed."***

**St John the Baptist is one of an increasing number of churches making the most of their unique local history. The UK's local churches form some of our most important heritage. They contain the UK's largest collection of art, sculpture and stained glass.**

New and exciting initiatives are already helping to put churches more firmly on the visitor map.

In Wales, more than 1,500 miles of pilgrimage trails featuring hundreds of churches and chapels are part of the Visit Wales offer. In Northern Ireland, a growing interest in church heritage is leading to a renewed interest in its rich history of stained glass. Champing™, (camping overnight in beautiful historic churches) is also increasing in popularity since it was launched in 2015 by the Churches Conservation Trust.

Making more of their history and heritage can transform the future of the UK's local churches and also boost local jobs.

Tourism is one of the most important sectors in the UK economy. In 2021 the value of day visits to heritage sites in England was £5.5 billion<sup>(12)</sup>.

For international visitors, Visit Britain found that 78% of people selected 'exploring history and heritage' as an important driver in selecting any international destination for a break or holiday<sup>(13)</sup>.

***"These are places of huge historical and cultural significance. They are part of our UK heritage which belongs to us all."***

National Churches Trust Consultation, August 2023

© Matt Limb OBE / Alamy Stock Photo

# 4 ON THE VISITOR MAP

© Peter Lopeman / Alamy Stock Photo

## WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

**A new national strategy is needed to boost visitors to historic churches – world class heritage in every corner of the country that is free to enter. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport, working with the main national tourism organisations, should commission a national study into how to make more of the unrivalled heritage of the UK's churches.**

This would provide new ideas and practical solutions to enable churches to be better promoted to UK and overseas visitors by national and local tourist organisations. It could also spread the benefits brought by visitors into new locations, sustaining local economies.

There are thousands of amazing churches in wonderful locations. The sheer variety, beauty and history of the UK's churches allows UK and overseas visitors to learn more about our history and culture.

In France, Belgium, Italy and Spain many groups of historic churches have been designated UNESCO World Heritage Sites. This highly visible brand helps drive tourism. Many of the UK's churches and chapels are of similar importance and deserve similar branding, for example the wool churches of Norfolk and Suffolk, the towers of Somerset, or the early Christian sites of Wales and northern Britain.

Our amazing shared heritage of local churches and their incredibly rich architecture and history, dating back well over 1,000 years, needs to be celebrated through a national exhibition involving all four nations of the UK with a linked national Open Churches Day.

**ACTION: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport, national tourist organisations**



St John the Baptist church, High Toynton, Lincolnshire



St Mary's church, Horncastle, Lincolnshire

Tourists visiting the Italian Chapel, Lamb Holm, Orkney

## WHAT WE ARE DOING

- 1 *The Explore Churches pages on our website offer a digital entry point to over 3,500 churches, chapels and meeting houses around the UK.*
- 2 *In Northern Ireland, our Treasure Ireland project is helping put churches and chapels on the tourist map by developing church heritage trails and experiences.*
- 3 *Our Great Church Visitor Count is obtaining new data on visitor numbers to show how important visits to churches are for local tourism.*



5

# 5 CHURCHES OPEN FOR ALL

**"Knowing that a church is being used by visitors increases security by deterring thieves or vandals."**

St Saeren's church, Llanynys, Wales

St Saeren's Church in Llanynys, Ruthin, Wales is never locked or even closed. The church is in the Vale of Clwyd in the beautiful Denbighshire countryside.

***"If we're not open how could people come in? Churches are there to be a sanctuary and a safe space for anyone and everyone whenever they come, and in whatever frame of mind."***

**Like St Saeren's church, many churches have an open-door policy allowing people to enter throughout the week for prayer and spiritual reflection, sightseeing or to use the wide range of community support that so often takes place in church buildings.**

But there are still many others that are only open for very limited hours or just for holding religious services. The latest figures from the 'key holder' app for church visiting show that although two thirds of the 15,580 churches it has on its system are open during the week, one third remain locked<sup>(14)</sup>.

Regardless of its heritage status, a locked church sends a signal that it is not interested in the wider world, making dialogue difficult with local people and visitors who may want to support or engage with it in many ways.

There is nothing more frustrating than for a visitor to be unable to get into a church for peace, reflection or prayer or to see for themselves the architecture and history they have read about online or in a guidebook.

Sometimes churches are concerned that opening their building will lead to vandalism, theft or anti-social behaviour. Yet Ecclesiastical, the main insurer of Church of England churches, encourages them to be open. When asked whether churches should be kept locked at all times, their answer is no; knowing that a church is being used by visitors increases security by deterring thieves or vandals.

***"Stop locking them during the day so that people can visit to discover the history or admire the architecture, or just sit and quietly reflect."***

National Churches Trust Consultation, August 2023

© St Saeren's church

# 5 CHURCHES OPEN FOR ALL

UK Churches / Alamy Stock Photo



Closed church door



**More than half of UK adults (54%) visited a church in the past year**

Savanta poll, December 2023

St Nicholas church, East Dereham, Norfolk

## WHAT WE ARE DOING

- 1 Our grant conditions ask that churches are open for 100 days each year, in addition to days when they are open for worship.
- 2 Our training helps churches to realise the benefits of being open regularly to help articulate mission and to allow the local community and visitors to use and enjoy the building.
- 3 In November 2023, 45 churches spread right across the UK, the winners and finalists from our National Church Awards, took part in a special open day, with their doors unlocked, ready for visitors to explore their beautiful buildings.

## WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

**Church buildings need to be regularly open outside worship times to fulfil their potential in the life of communities, within the limit of what is right for the local area. Although this decision needs to be made by individual churches, denominations can help make this possible.**

If church buildings are to receive public funding for repairs, they should play an active part in society as open buildings, thereby demonstrating their public good. This can be encouraged by funders and denominations, showing churches the positive difference this makes.

Some public and private funders already make it a condition of a grant award that churches they support are open for additional days each year, on top of when they are open for worship. Taking account of local circumstances, such a policy should be adopted by more funders.

Many churches can be open seven days a week. But if it is not possible for a church to be open every day, information about access, or how to obtain the key, needs to be provided online as well as at the church.

**ACTION: Local churches, funders, denominations**



© National Churches Trust



© National Churches Trust

Left: St Tanwg's church, Llandanwg, Gwynedd

Right: St John the Baptist church, Penymynydd, Flintshire

6

# MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

**"Promoting the many success stories about church buildings means they can be seen as assets and not burdens."**

St Marylebone church in London has a history stretching back nearly 900 years and is everything a church can be. Serving a diverse community, it is renowned for musical and liturgical excellence. It houses an NHS Surgery and the St Marylebone Healing and Counselling Centre.

***"St Marylebone tries to be a place for everyone, open 365 days a year and at the heart of the central London community which bears its name."***

**St Marylebone is a wonderful example of a UK church open both for worship and for serving local people in many amazing ways. Like many of the UK's 38,500 churches, chapels and meeting houses, it is a remarkable success story which needs to be celebrated.**

Promoting the many success stories about the heritage, use and continuing importance of church buildings means they can be seen as assets and not burdens.

Making data and information about church buildings more widely available for policy makers is also needed so that they can play a key part in the future of villages, towns and cities.

At present, it is often very difficult to find information covering all the UK's 38,500 church buildings. Unlike other important heritage or economic sectors,

such as historic houses or tourism, this can mean that the contribution of places of worship is undervalued.

For example, although the number of people visiting cathedrals each year is readily available, apart from data on the number of people attending religious services, there is little information on the number of people who use local churches for community support services or as visitors or tourists.

There is also a need for more consistent data showing changes in the fabric of church buildings.

***"If central Government is involved it will open a national debate which might spotlight the parlous state of the great historic fabric of our churches."***

National Churches Trust Consultation, August 2023

St Marylebone Parish church

© Lois Gobe / Alamy Stock Photo



Playing guitar at the Church of God of Prophecy in London

## WHAT WE ARE DOING

- 1 Our Annual State of the Churches Opinion Poll provides data about public attitudes to church buildings, their use and funding.
- 2 We work together with national heritage bodies, denominations and other church building charities such as the Churches Conservation Trust and Historic Churches Scotland to keep churches open and in use.
- 3 Our membership scheme for churches provides valuable information about their work and condition and our Friends membership is growing the number of people who can actively support church buildings.



St Mary's church, Horncastle, Lincolnshire



St Hywyn's church, Aberdaron, Gwynedd

# 6 MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

## WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

**Urgent action is needed by Government, heritage organisations and denominations. This needs co-ordination and leadership. Long-term change will also require more advocacy and evidence: everyone who uses, loves or supports church buildings has a role to play.**

Pioneering work by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is helping to establish an agreed economic approach for valuing cultural heritage assets, including church buildings, and the benefits they provide to people and businesses<sup>(15)</sup>.

Estimating future funding needs is a key priority. Many listed church buildings are already regularly inspected through the Quinquennial Inspection system. But there are questions about the consistency of QIs, and the information that is collected.

We also need a better debate about long-term models for buildings that cannot be kept in use by denominations.

A small number of historic churches no longer used for regular worship are today looked after by the Churches Conservation Trust, the Friends of Friendless Churches, Addoldai Cymru (Welsh Religious Buildings Trust) and Historic Churches Scotland. But there is a limit to how many church buildings these organisations can manage without substantially greater funding.

If a congregation is no longer viable, community ownership through a local or regional trust is another way which could ensure the survival of churches as open buildings, perhaps with a worship space used by a range of denominations. Moving to community ownership should be a default option for church buildings.

Guidance from denominations, such as the support being provided by the Church of England to its 'struggling' churches, can help to bring about a sustainable future for more of them. In some cases, new Christian communities can also bring new life to a church building.

**ACTION: All**

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# WHAT THE PUBLIC TOLD US

Lochailort church in the west Highlands of Scotland

***“Churches are one of the few things in all their guises that have survived for a thousand years and more. They are a thread through all our history and all our lives, irrespective of particular religion or none.”***

National Churches Trust Consultation, August 2023

© Joe Dunckley/Alamy Stock Photo

**In August 2023, we asked 650 people who help to look after church buildings and those interested in their future what they thought were the most important issues facing church buildings in the UK.**

The key things they told us were:

- **More funding for the repair of church buildings is urgently needed.**
- **More volunteers are needed to look after church buildings.**
- **More use should be made of church buildings by local organisations and for a broad range of purposes.**
- **Churches are one of the few local buildings left that promote a sense of community.**
- **More clergy are needed to keep churches open and in use.**
- **Churches face growing financial pressures, including high insurance costs, with smaller congregations unable to find the money needed.**

***“Our local shopkeeper is Iranian and came here as a student. When he had no money and was alone in a foreign land, he said he went into a church in Birmingham for solace.”***

National Churches Trust Consultation, August 2023

## KEY FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR CHURCH BUILDINGS

*Recently, there has been more recognition of the importance of funding the precious heritage of our church buildings.*

*In England, in 2021, the Government's COVID recovery Heritage Stimulus Fund, a one-off scheme administered by Historic England, supported urgent repairs for major works at over 200 places of worship.*

*In its new strategy, The National Lottery Heritage Fund has saving heritage as one of its four investment principles and more funding for local church buildings is expected<sup>(16)</sup>.*

*And through its new Buildings for Mission programme, the Church of England is providing £6.2 million for minor repairs and maintenance improvements and £2.8 million for Church Buildings Support Officers<sup>(17)</sup>. However, most other denominations lack the required financial resources to support their buildings in this way.*

*The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, introduced in 2002, allows many churches, chapels and meeting houses to reclaim the VAT on repairs.*

*The scheme is currently guaranteed until 2025. It is very important that certainty about extending the scheme is provided as soon as possible so that churches planning and undertaking repair projects can accurately estimate costs.*

*In 2023, the Government made an amendment to the Local Government Act 1894 with the aim of clarifying that there is nothing to prevent parish councils from funding churches and other places of worship. This will allow more local funding of church buildings.*



Repairs at Malton Methodist church, Malton, Yorkshire

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**At the National Churches Trust, we are doing everything that we can to support church buildings in need. You can help us be here for every church building – and the people and communities who rely on them. To support our 'Every Church Counts' manifesto you can:**

### **1. Contact your MP**

Your MP is there to represent you in Parliament, so it's important that they know that churches and their future matter to you.

There are different ways you can tell your MP that you care about the future of churches. You can:

- Send them an email
- Invite them to your church
- Arrange a meeting

The Write to Them website has full information about how to contact your MP and other elected representatives.

[www.writetothem.com](http://www.writetothem.com)

### **2. Share this publication with others.**

Please visit [www.nationalchurchestrust.org/everychurchcounts](http://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/everychurchcounts) to download copies. If you would like a printed copy, please contact us at [info@nationalchurchestrust.org](mailto:info@nationalchurchestrust.org)

### **3. Share your story.**

If you are involved in running a church we want to hear from you about the good that you're doing across your community. Share your stories using the hashtag **#EveryChurchCounts** or contact us at [info@nationalchurchestrust.org](mailto:info@nationalchurchestrust.org)

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## **Yours** for good.

*We want to keep churches open and in use. Available to all.*

*Churches, chapels and meeting houses are impressive, exciting and surprising places.*

*We believe these important buildings should be loved and supported.*

*Whether people are seeking quiet reflection, access to critical community services, a warm welcome, a place to worship or pray, or a space to explore.*

*Working together with churches of all the denominations across all four nations of the UK, we help to maintain these wonderful historic buildings to keep them thriving today and tomorrow.*

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# IF YOU WANT TO SUPPORT CHURCHES

### **BECOME A FRIEND.**

As a Friend of the National Churches Trust, you'll help us protect even more church buildings. Choose from individual, joint or lifetime membership.

**nationalchurchestrust.org/membership**

### **MAKE A DONATION**

A one-off or monthly gift will fund community facilities and essential maintenance – and ensure more church buildings remain at the heart of their local communities.

**nationalchurchestrust.org/donate**

### **STAY CONNECTED**

Sign up for our e-newsletter and find us on social media to see more about how we're saving the UK's church buildings.

**nationalchurchestrust.org/enews**

