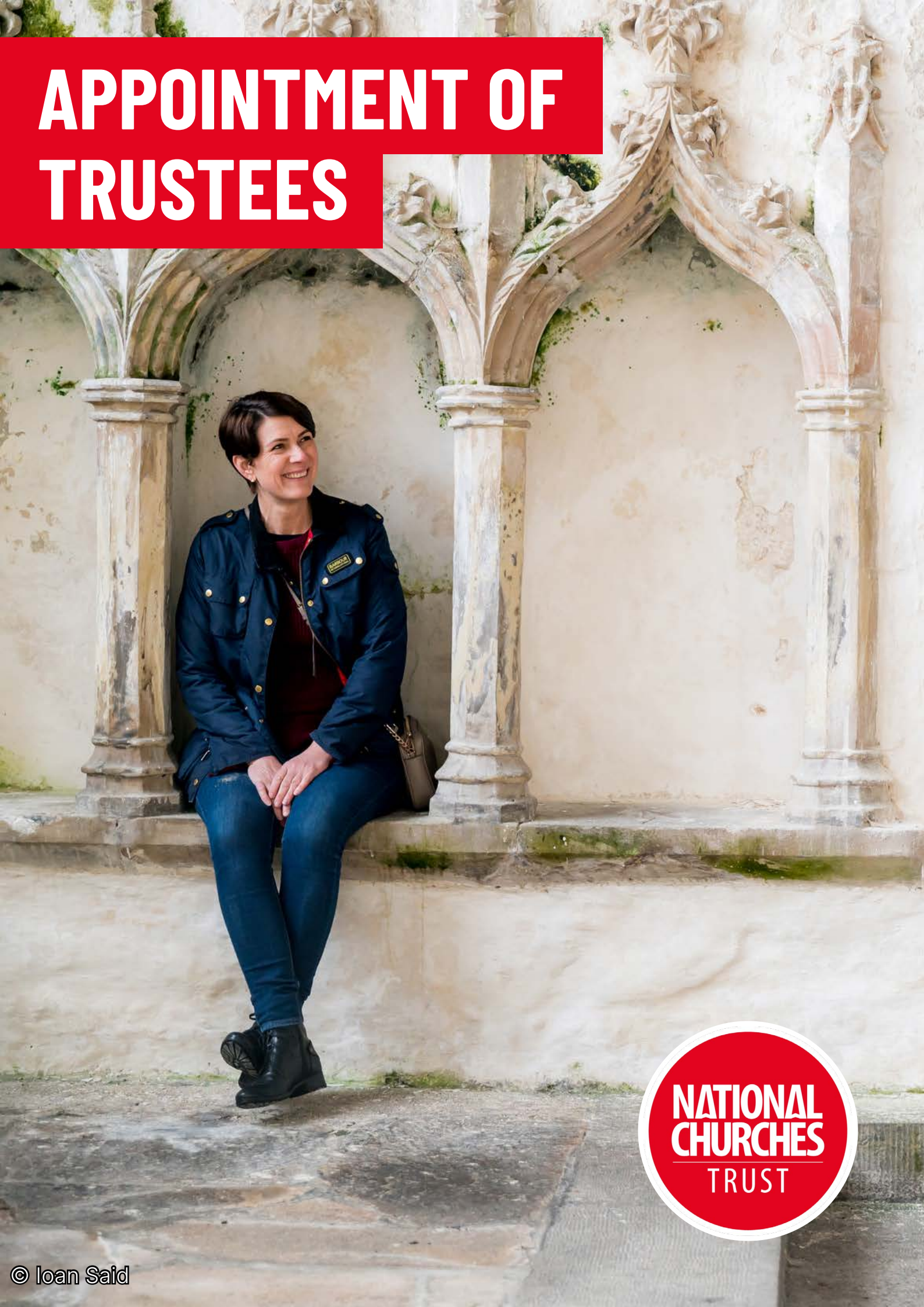
APPOINTMENT OF TRUSTEES



NATIONAL CHURCHES TRUST

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

The future of our churches, chapels and meeting houses is the single biggest challenge facing the heritage of the United Kingdom. It is also a challenge that gets to the heart of questions about the future of our communities, above all those that are more isolated and vulnerable.

Our churches include nearly half our most important historic buildings, listed Grade I or equivalent. They also contain by far the nation's largest collection of art, sculpture and stained glass. At the same time, our churches and chapels play a vital role in helping people up and down the country to survive and to thrive. As well as being the places where people gather to worship, it is these buildings that house food banks, warm spaces, youth groups, choirs, mental health support groups, and countless other local activities. Churches and chapels are present in every community in the land and form a 'National Help Service' that touches the lives of millions, but that is routinely taken for granted by decision makers.

Despite their profound significance, our churches face a very uncertain future. Churches and chapels are closing or being mothballed and the debate about their future is inadequate. In Wales, about a quarter of historic churches have closed in the last ten years, and many more are now in danger. In Scotland, the Church of Scotland is actively planning the closure of as many as 40% of its churches, while in England there are now 976 cathedrals, churches, chapels and meeting houses on Historic England's 2025 Heritage At Risk Register.

The hour is urgent and the need is great. We believe that the future lies in a positive vision for the role these buildings play in our society, bringing both heritage and community to life through practical action.

I can commend to you our small but excellent staff team ably led by Claire Walker, my skilled and dedicated Trustee colleagues and the extraordinary support we enjoy from our partners and volunteers.

If you share the National Churches Trust's vision and believe you have the necessary skills and qualities to be a Trustee on the Board, we very much look forward to receiving your application.

Sir Philip Rutnam, Chair of the Board

ABOUT US

The National Churches Trust exists to support churches, chapels and meeting houses so that they remain at the heart of the communities for which they were built and can continue to play an integral part in all our lives. Churches sit at the heart of our communities, where people gather to worship, find spiritual solace, engage in and benefit from activities and enjoy the rich architectural and historic heritage of these buildings.

We have some 36,000 church buildings in the UK, reaching every community and serving those in need. Working on the ground across all four nations, our mission is to keep the UK's wonderful collection of church buildings open for everyone, sustainable and valued.

For Churches, our 2023-2026 strategy, focuses on three themes, aims to Build Up, Open Up and Speak Up for church buildings, chapels and meeting houses in all four countries of the UK.

Build Up

We seek to build up churches through funding vital maintenance, repairs and development, providing specialist advice, and establishing new resources to train and support the amazing individuals who give their time to look after church buildings.

Open Up

We help churches to open up and become welcoming spaces where communities can be supported and served; churches can be seen as great places for worship and prayer, to visit and explore, and heritage can be experienced and recognised.

Speak Up

We speak up on behalf of churches, helping those in positions of leadership and influence to see the unrivalled role churches play in supporting the wellbeing of the nation.

We also seek to help spread best-practice and ideas that work, learning from those churches which are sustainable, well-maintained and focused on meeting the varied needs of their local community, as well as welcoming visitors from further afield.

We are currently reviewing For Churches and preparing our next five-year strategy which will launch in 2027.

To read more about our current five-year strategy, For Churches, click here.

© Kate Hennessy

"The National Churches Trust does so much to help keep the UK's church buildings open and in good repair. With post offices, shops and even pubs closing, churches are often the only community building left in many parts of the country."

Sir Michael Palin,
Vice-President of
the National Churches Trust

THE CONTEXT

The United Kingdom has some of the most historic and beautiful churches, chapels and meeting houses to be found anywhere in the world. 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 the moments of national and local significance are celebrated and commemorated.

Increasingly too, from food banks to credit unions, the UK's church buildings provide a growing list of essential services for people in urgent need. They are the 'National Help Service' providing the safety net that stops our most vulnerable people falling through the cracks; these buildings are the social glue that keeps our communities together. However, our churches are at risk as never before. Despite their importance, more churches are closing, and many others face a very uncertain future.

There is no long-term strategic national or government funding to help church buildings stay open and in good repair. As a respected voice in the sector, we are playing a leadership role in making the case for co-ordinated, sustained support from the Government, heritage organisations, denominations and wider civil society.

OUR IMPACT

We've helped keep over 2,000 churches and chapels open, in good repair and supporting local people since 2007.

In 2025 we launched and published an up to date survey of the UK's church buildings, the National Churches Survey. To read this and find links to our other research click here.

We also worked in partnership with the Churches Conservation Trust, the King's Foundation and the Victoria and Albert Museum to produce Great Expectations – a one-day symposium at the V&A in London on the challenges facing the UK's places of worship To read about it and listen to some of the presentations click here.

In addition:

- We awarded £2.6 million in 2025 for urgent repairs and the installation of facilities like kitchens and toilets.
- 12 churches and chapels were removed from the Heritage at Risk Register in 2025, with the support of our grants and advice.
- 3,096 church volunteers, leaders and staff attended our online and in-person training events.

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GOVERNANCE

The National Churches Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee. It owes its origins to the Historic Churches Preservation Trust which was set up in 1953 to help repair churches following the earlier years of war damage and economic depression. We have a governing Board of Trustees (currently 11) which is committed to maintaining the highest standards of corporate governance.

Trustees, all of whom are non-executive and unremunerated except for the reimbursement of essential expenses, are drawn from diverse backgrounds. They bring a broad range of relevant experience and skills to Board discussions. New Trustees are recommended for appointment by the existing Trustees on the advice of the Nominations Committee. The appointment of Trustees is subject to ratification by the charity's Joint Presidents, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York.

Click here to read the profiles of our existing Trustees.

There are three committees of the Board, on one or more of which a new Trustee may be invited to serve:

- Risk & Audit (chaired by the Treasurer), which reviews audit activities, our investment portfolio, the risk and control framework, the effectiveness of our processes and the annual report and statutory accounts. They meet two to three times a year.
- Grants (chaired by a delegated Trustee), which considers and recommends applications from churches for grants. This committee meets three times a year and also includes external, independent specialists who volunteer to use their expertise on an ongoing basis.
- Nominations (chaired by the Chair), which recommends the appointment and re-appointment of Trustees, maintains an overview of the process of induction for new Trustees and ensures that there are appropriate succession plans in place for the Chair, Treasurer and Chief Executive. They meet before each Trustees meeting.

There is a clear distinction between the oversight role of the Board and the responsibility of senior management for the day-to-day running of the organisation. Matters such as policy and strategic plans are prepared by senior management for consideration and approval by the Board.

© Andy Sillett

THE ROLE

The role of a Trustee is to:

- provide strategic leadership and advice in line with the Charity's strategic plan and objectives;
- use their knowledge, skills and experience to ensure that the National Churches Trust achieves its charitable objectives;
- be an ambassador for the National Churches Trust in the public arena, with the ability to effectively represent the National Churches Trust in their sphere of influence.

TRUSTEE PROFILE:
Sarah Stewart OBE DL

"Churches tell so many fascinating stories and play a vital role for so many of our local communities.

Initially, I thought my lack of religious faith would be a barrier to engagement with the National Churches Trust, but I found people of faith and none working together effectively.

The role of Trustee has been so rewarding. I feel as though my skills and experience are being used to support such a worthy cause. It has also deepened my understanding of the crisis facing this part of our nation's heritage.

The work has been so varied. I have supported the team on various initiatives, assessed the impact of some of our grants, judged entries for the National Church Awards and attended major events in historic churches and the House of Lords."

© Mike Swift

TERM OF APPOINTMENT

A Trustee is appointed for a term of five years extendable by mutual agreement for one further term of five years up to a maximum continuous period of 10 years. The role is unpaid but reasonable expenses are reimbursed.

TIME COMMITMENT

The total time commitment required of a Trustee is currently likely to equate to approximately 10-12 days per annum.

This includes:

- Preparing for and participating in the four Board meetings;
- serving on one other committee which includes Risk and Audit, Grants and Nominations committees;
- being prepared to attend and support National Churches Trust events;
- supporting directors in certain projects, initiatives or areas in which they have specialist skills, knowledge or experience.

MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES OF A TRUSTEE

Strategy

- Take part in formulating and regularly reviewing the National Churches Trust's strategic aims and objectives.
- Monitor and review the National Churches Trust's performance against the strategic aims and ensure that all activities fall within the Charity's stated objects and that it is carrying out its purposes for the public benefit.
- Contribute where appropriate specific skills, knowledge and experience in support of the National Churches Trust's operations and fundraising, financial and administrative activities.

Policy

- Ensure that the National Churches Trust functions within the legal, risk and regulatory framework of UK charity law and strives to achieve best practice in governance.
- Ensure the financial stability of the National Churches Trust and manage its resources responsibly.
- Uphold the fiduciary duty invested in the position, undertaking duties in the best interests of the National Churches Trust.
- Be adequately informed about the work of the National Churches Trust.

Practice

- Regularly attend and adequately prepare for meetings of the Trustee Board and any committees and Away Days.
- Participate in seminars offered for the benefit of Trustees and undertake training.
- As appropriate, promote awareness of the National Churches Trust to third parties.
- Perform such other tasks as may be requested from time to time by the Board of Trustees, the Chair and the Chief Executive.
- Respect and observe in practice the distinction between the duties of Trustees and those of the senior staff.

PERSON PROFILE

We appreciate the rich diversity of our Trustees and staff and seek to create a culture where everyone develops and fulfils their potential. We recognise the immense value of different perspectives brought by those with varied backgrounds, characteristics and life experiences.

We particularly welcome applications from underrepresented sections of the community and those based outside London and the South East of England. We are currently specifically seeking candidates from Wales (Welsh speakers desirable but not essential).

Following an audit of board skills we are looking to appoint one Trustee for Wales. Ideally with experience in the following specialist areas:

- Policy, advocacy and public affairs and an understanding of governmental practices.
- Communications: first-hand experience of how the media operate and in-depth understanding of how to communicate effectively with different audiences.

In addition to these specific areas of professional experience we seek individuals who also have the following experiences, qualities and skills:

- A track record of successful organisational and strategic leadership and good judgement.
- A strong understanding and acceptance of the legal duties, liabilities and responsibilities of Trustees and clarity on the difference between governance and management functions.
- An ability to speak one's mind, challenge constructively and the confidence to engage and contribute in areas outside your specialism.
- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills, able to both empower and challenge supportively.
- An ability to work well as part of a diverse team of Trustees and in support of the Executive Team.
- An ability and willingness to represent the National Churches Trust in an ambassadorial capacity and to draw on your personal contacts and networks for the benefit of the charity.
- An understanding of, commitment to and enthusiasm for the National Churches Trust and its work.
- Sufficient time to be able to make an effective contribution.

HOW TO APPLY

Applications should be sent by email to our CEO Claire Walker at:
claire.walker@nationalchurchestrust.org

The closing date for applications is **Monday 30 November 2026 at 12 noon**.

Your application should comprise:

- A CV including a full employment history showing more significant Executive and Non-Executive positions.
- Responsibilities held and relevant achievements.
- A covering letter of not more than one and a half pages summarising your motivation and reasons for being interested in a Trustee position at the National Churches Trust.
- Daytime, evening and/or mobile telephone numbers (to be used with discretion).

The Process

Informal discussions with longlisted candidates will be held either by telephone or online ahead of shortlisted candidates being invited to an interview in the National Churches Trust's Westminster office (dates TBC).

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Registered Charity (No. 1119845)

NATIONAL CHURCHES TRUST

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