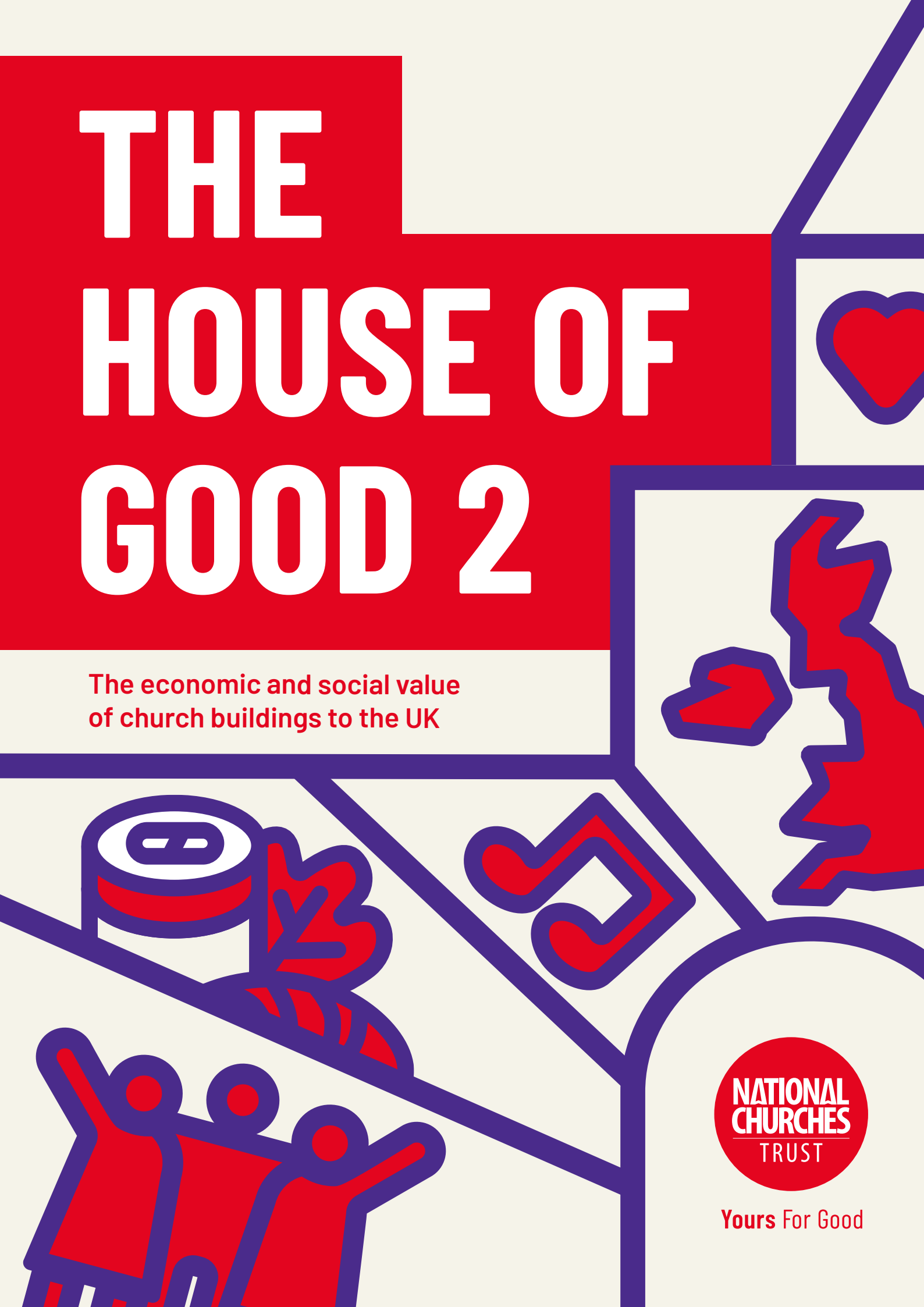
THE HOUSE OF GOOD 2

The economic and social value of church buildings to the UK



NATIONAL CHURCHES TRUST

Yours For Good

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About

National Churches Trust
An independent charity working on the ground in all four nations and supporting churches of all denominations so that church buildings across the UK are well maintained, open to everyone, sustainable and valued.

State of Life
State of Life uses open data, economic analysis and digital technology to evidence social impact and value. This helps organisations demonstrate the difference they make to their funders, partners, volunteers, staff, members, and wider society. Find out more at stateoflife.org

State of Life for the National Churches Trust, London, November 2026

Introduction

We all know churches that run community groups, host concerts, support people with addictions, and open food banks. *The House of Good* series from the National Churches Trust, in partnership with State of Life, uses the Treasury's 'Green Book' methodology to show the economic value generated by these very activities to the local community.

Now, with new data gathered from the dozens of denominations and thousands of individual churches through the National Churches Survey, and using enhanced methodology, we are able to bring you an up-to-date and detailed picture of how churches in every part of the UK are at the frontline of community and social care.

Our new report, *The House of Good 2*, shows how despite rising inflation and a cost-of-living crisis, churches have stepped up to provide even more support to their communities in the last five years. Churches are tackling fragmentation, discord, and polarisation in our society, by bringing people together and delivering lifechanging support.

But for how much longer can this good work continue?

Churches, chapels, and meeting houses are looked after by volunteers, and those volunteers do not get the help or access to funds they need and deserve. After two decades VAT support on repairs to listed churches has been withdrawn. Volunteers will need to find as much as £30 million a year just to pay new tax bills on repairs. The new grant scheme created by the UK Government for England is welcome, but offers less funding, for far fewer churches, and yet more application forms for volunteers to complete.

Even as the money to help look after the buildings dwindles, churches themselves have stepped up, doing more and more each year. But you cannot run a parent and toddler group with a leaking roof or a crumbling tower.

Church buildings across the UK face a crisis – from Scotland, Northern Irleand, and Wales to the impoverished and more remote parts of England. They urgently need more support from the UK Government and from their denominations.

This model of church funding cannot last forever. As more churches close due to their repair needs, we lose their social impact. This social action plays a vital, but often hidden, role in supporting state provision. Once gone, we will realise finally what we have lost.

Churches play a role in every postcode. There needs to be closer working between councils, mayors and churches to build stronger local communities. Keeping heritage in good repair is one part of this; the other is keeping the services offered by churches running. As this report shows, individual churches have increased their charitable action even as funding has grown tighter. But when funding is too tight, they close for good.

Let us act now before it is too late.



Sir Philip Rutnam
Chair

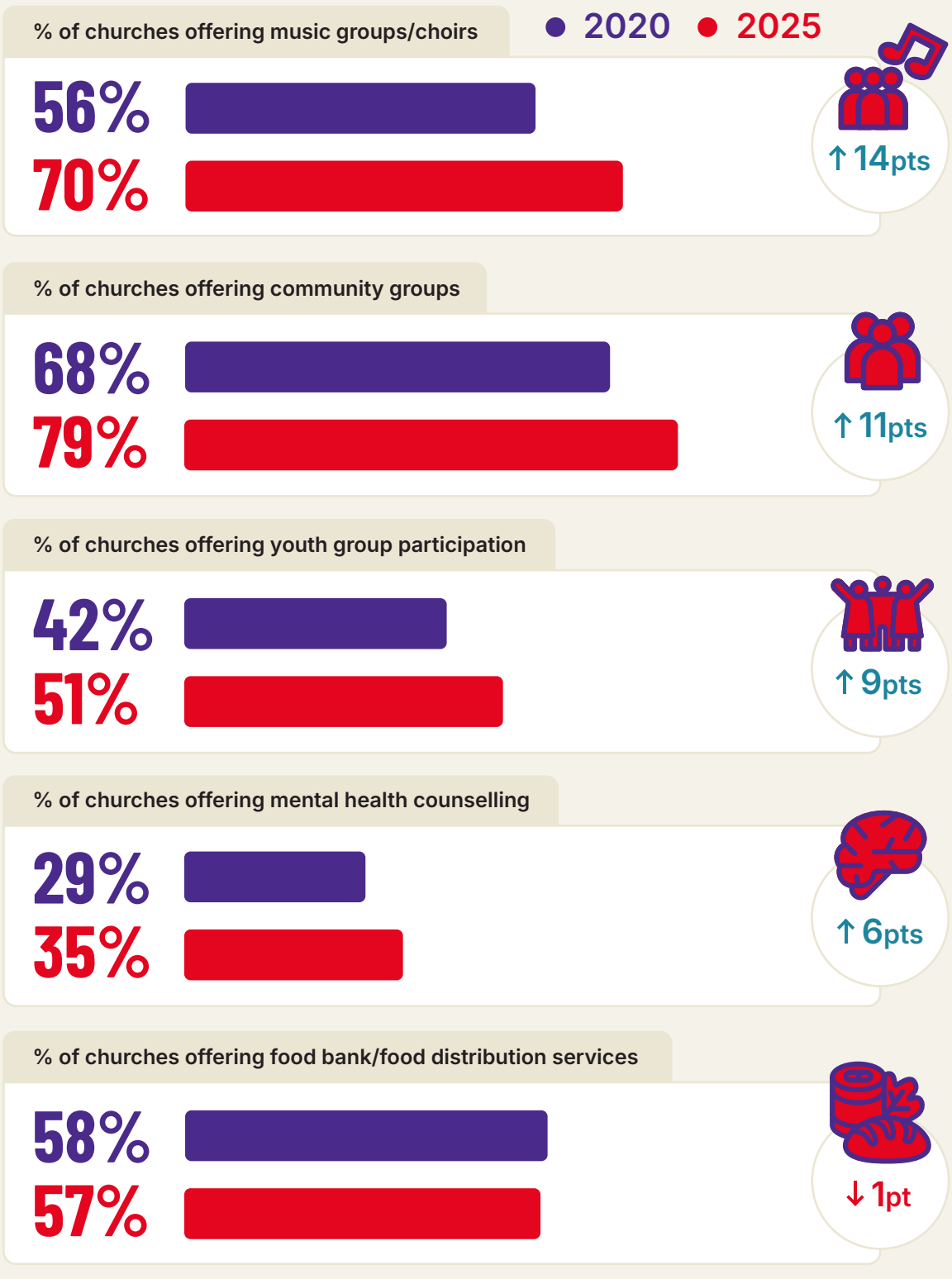


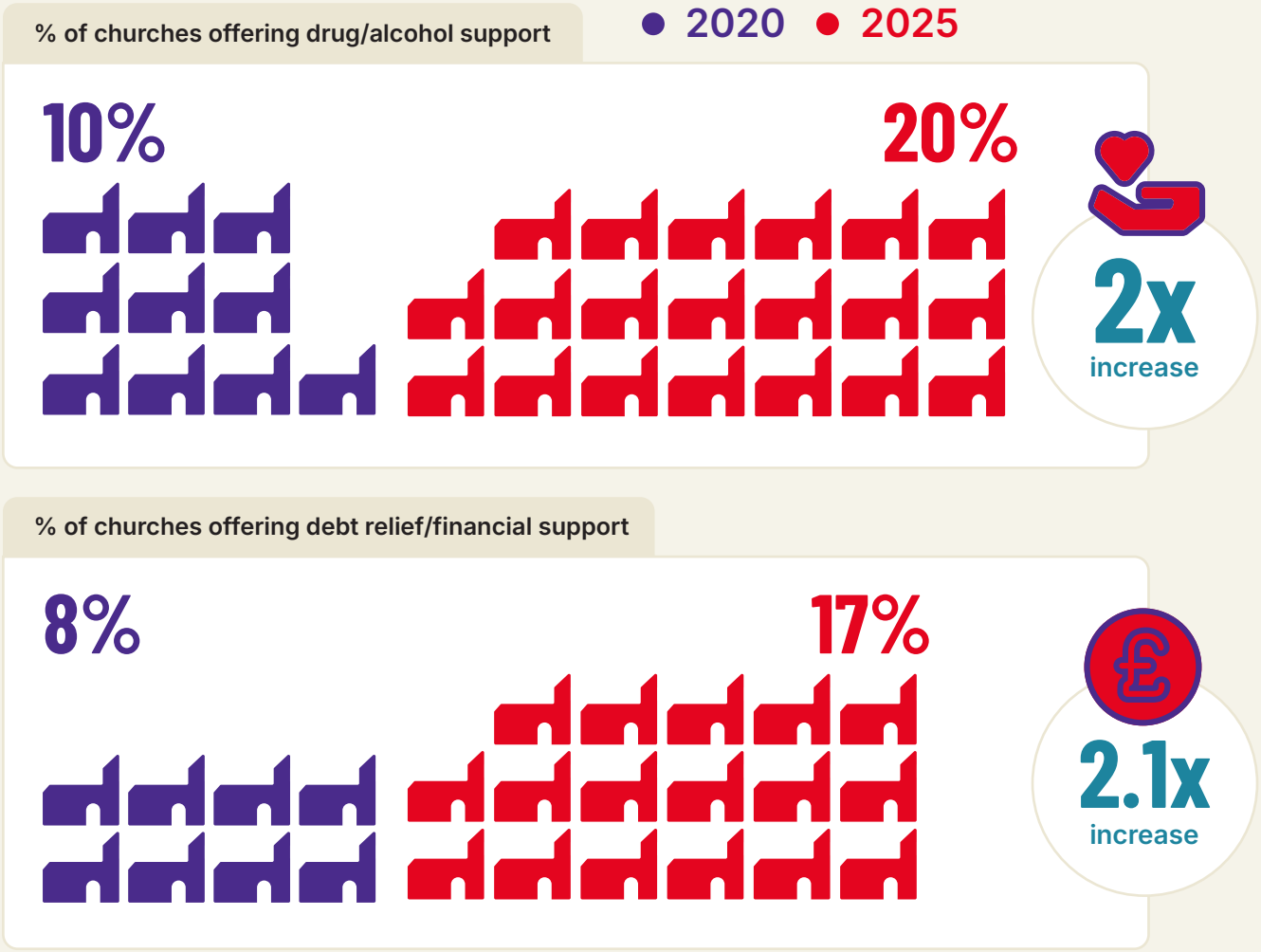
Claire Walker
Chief Executive

Photos: Mike Swift, UK Government

Community engagement in churches

Churches are increasingly active in supporting local communities





Expanding need, expanding care

Our research has been able to demonstrate that between 2020 and 2025-26, the proportion of churches that report offering community services has increased dramatically.

The UK has a cost-of-living crisis, leaving communities, families, and individuals in need of support. As need rises, churches are stepping up to fill the gap. Drug and alcohol support has **doubled** in only five years. Debt counselling and financial advice has also **doubled**.

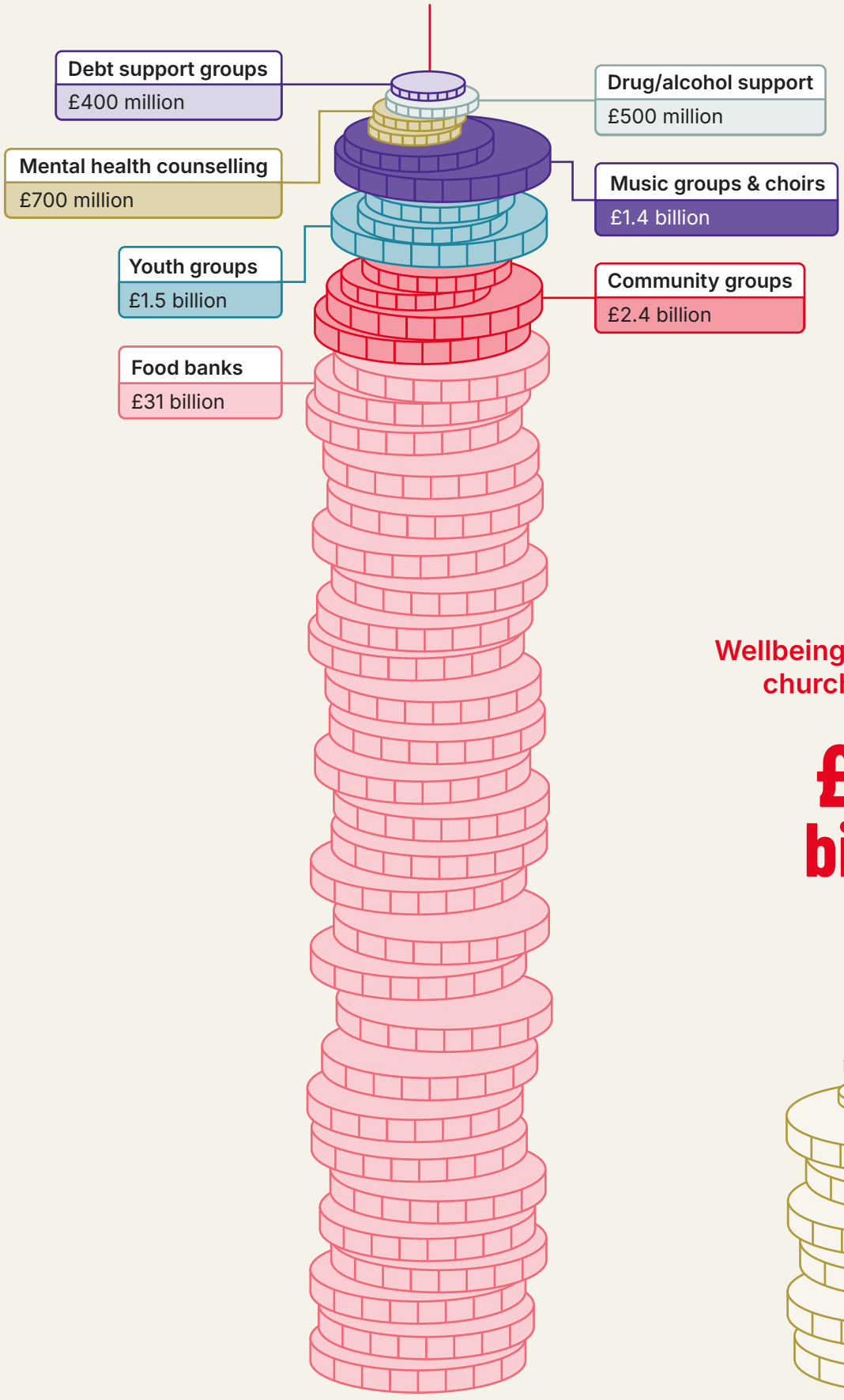


Yet churches are closing, and also report greater repair needs and struggles with volunteers. This suggests that these communities are working against the odds to provide care.

Photo: Natasha Hirst

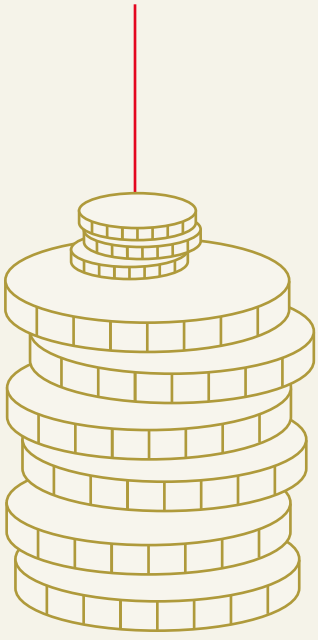
Wellbeing value of community care

£37.9 billion



Wellbeing value of weekly church attendance

£9.7 billion



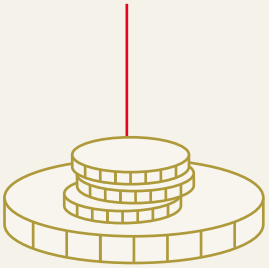
£52 BILLION

The economic and social value of church buildings to the UK

The total economic and social value that church buildings create in the UK is estimated at between £44 - 60 billion annually. Our updated approach is broadly in line with our previous estimate. The full breakdown of value is listed below, using our midpoint estimate of £52 billion.[2]

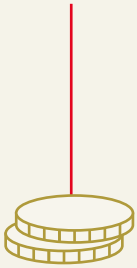
Economic value of church expenditure

£2 billion



Replacement cost of volunteering

£1.2 billion



Wellbeing value of volunteering

£900 million



Heritage visitor value

£800 million



2 Total value is £52.48 billion, presented as £52 billion in headline figures. Components are rounded to the nearest £100 million, so they may not sum to the headline total.

Summary of key findings and numbers

The economic and social value of church buildings

Our research shows that UK church buildings generate an estimated **£44 billion to £60 billion** in social and economic value each year. Our updated figure is broadly in line with our previous estimate in 2020 of £55 billion.

Putting it into perspective

- To put this in context, the annual social value created by churches exceeds the entire UK national social care budget (£35 billion) and far surpasses total NHS spending on mental health (£16 billion).
- Churches act as a vital first step and last. **Without their preventative support, public spending and pressure on healthcare and local government would likely be much higher.** Likewise, they work where other avenues have failed, such as through running food banks.

The House of Good 2: An updated estimate

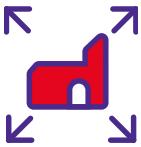
- Our 2026 report introduces a more robust and precise approach, backed by data from our recent National Churches Survey of over 3,000 churches, and incorporates new areas that make up the full picture of their social value. For the first time, we are including an estimate of the wellbeing value of heritage.
- We have refined our methodology to focus on the value derived from regular participation, applied new methodologies, and uprated our core wellbeing values in line with inflation.
- Compared to the previous report, The House of Good 2 incorporates a larger range of community care services. It has been prepared on the basis of an expanded National Churches Trust Survey along with new analysis of national data, which has improved our modelling of social benefit.

The House of Good: Revolutionary research



- Pioneered in 2020-21 by the National Churches Trust and State of Life, the original 'The House of Good' study estimated that church buildings contribute £55 billion annually to the UK, through spending, volunteer wellbeing, and social action.
- Further work, The House of Good: Health, has indicated that church activities reduce costs to the NHS by around £8.4 billion a year.
- We have since made it easy for churches to their own social impact through an accessible social value estimator 'The House of Good: Local', designed to be easy and quick to use; to date, the tool has been used by hundreds of local churches.

Provision is expanding in churches



- Despite wider socio-economic challenges, frontline church services have expanded since 2020. For example, provision of drug and alcohol support and financial debt advice has doubled in just five years.
- Today, nearly 80% of churches run community groups and 57% provide help to food distribution networks, reinforcing their role as indispensable frontline support networks.

Food banks: An Important source of value



Food distribution and food banks remain one of the single most impactful services provided by churches. We have taken care to try and capture this portion of value effectively, triangulating different data sources to gauge impact across the UK.

The tip of the iceberg



Our headline figure is conservative. We capture only a part of the impact of churches, excluding unmeasured programs like homelessness support and healthy living interventions. Long-term societal trends are also not captured, such as the benefits of keeping people out of hospital and preventing reoffending. Accounting for indirect effects such as child wellbeing through food banks and target weighting for vulnerable populations could increase the estimated social value even further.

Case Study

Ararat Baptist Church



Ararat Baptist Church
Cardiff, Glamorgan

Ararat Baptist Church was founded in 1824 and named after the slight rise on which it stands, recalling Mount Ararat in the Book of Genesis.

Around 120 people attend the main Sunday morning service, and the church has nearly 200 members. Work with children forms a big part of church life. Holiday clubs at Easter and in the summer draw 110 to 120 children, mostly from the local community, and the church also runs Messy Church sessions. Every Tuesday, around 50 people aged 50+ come to the luncheon club for a two-course hot meal, followed by tea and coffee, priced at just £5. Before lunch, 20 to 30 people attend a more traditional half-hour service and sing familiar hymns. Professional orchestras and choirs also use the building for concerts and rehearsals.

Much of Ararat's social action grows out of the church's day-to-day use of the buildings. Members regularly collect food for Cardiff Foodbank and are currently collecting clothes for Gobaith, a charity that supports people in need in the Valleys. The church also runs a non-profit café from 10am to 2pm, Monday to Friday, and on Saturday mornings. Each Friday the café is run by a group of young people with learning difficulties who are part of a Social Enterprise called Miss Tilleys. The café welcomes everyone and gives staff and volunteers a chance to get to know people from the local area. It holds about 60 people and usually fills up, with queues forming during the week. A welcome desk next to the café opens six days a week and sells cards, diaries and other items.

The adjoining community centre has nine rooms, and local groups regularly hire six of them throughout the day. Groups run include Boxercise, Pilates, Tai chi, Elder Fit, Fit-4-You, Boys' Brigade, Girls' Brigade, and Italian and French classes. The church runs some activities, while independent groups organise others. Alongside worship and church activities, this steady programme keeps the buildings busy and brings in up to 1000 people from the surrounding community over the course of a typical week.

Vaughan Williams from the church commented,

> **"Our Mission statement is, 'Bringing the heart of the community into the Church, and taking the heart of the Church into the Community.'"**

Photo: Vaughan Williams

METHODOLOGY

The House of Good 2

A new approach

The first House of Good report in 2020 was groundbreaking. Now, with new methodologies and new categories of data, The House of Good 2 presents an even more comprehensive picture of the social value of church buildings across the UK. In 2026, we present a new, better approach to encapsulate their impact now. So what's changed?



A new survey

- **Current data**
  Our new estimate draws on evidence from the 2025 National Churches Survey, which collected data from over 3,000 churches across the UK. This large sample size with extensive questioning gives us a strong picture of church communities in the UK.

- **More activities**
  The 2025 National Churches Trust survey has expanded the scope of activities for us to value. We previously covered food banks, mental health counselling, drug/alcohol support, and youth groups, and alongside those measures, we also collected data on music groups, community groups, and debt support services. An enhanced set of services gives us an enhanced understanding of churches' role in supporting their communities.

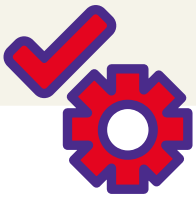
- **A focus on regularity of engagement**
  In wellbeing economics research, the benefits of participation are driven primarily by consistent engagement rather than intermittent use. In the 2025 survey, therefore, we focused on regular participation (at least monthly) for most of our services, rather than yearly attendance as we did with the first House of Good. While this has meant that the average footfall statistic decreases, we can be more confident that community engagement generates genuine benefits.



An updated evidence base

- **Updated wellbeing data**
  Many of our values are estimated by exploring the link between participation in a given activity and wellbeing – in particular, life satisfaction. Since 2021, there is even more data covering these activities. In particular, we draw on evidence from Understanding Society. With these new data, we can update our methods to better understand how participation drives improved outcomes.

- **Updated heritage guidance**
  A brand-new part of our valuation is related to the heritage value of churches. Places of worship are heritage assets, making up an enormously important part of the built historic environment, and generate a flow of benefits for the community. In the UK, over 20,000 churches are listed buildings – more than half. And, in England 45% of all the Grade I listed buildings are churches. In the past few years, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and Historic England[1] have begun to embed a Culture and Heritage Capital Approach to guide the economic valuation of these assets. We have drawn on this new guidance to attempt to capture this important impact.



A refined methodology

- **New assumptions**
  The underlying principles of our methodology make several important assumptions that govern the final figures. As part of this research in 2026, we have undertaken a full review of our previous methodology and made some key changes. These updates generate an accurate representation of the true impact that churches create.

- **New WELLBY value**
  We monetise the wellbeing value of a church's activity using the WELLBY (Wellbeing adjusted life year). This measure has been endorsed by HM Treasury since 2021 in their Green Book supplementary guidance on wellbeing for valuing non-market impacts.[2] One WELLBY represents an increase of one point of life satisfaction on a scale from 0 - 10 for one person, over one year, and is valued at £13,000 in 2019 prices. To account for inflation, we now apply a WELLBY value in 2025 prices. This is set at around £16,800.

- **Rising provision**
  While these data suggest that the proportion of churches offering services has increased, our total social value figure may be lower. This may be partly driven by the fact that our valuation focuses on regular engagement (per month) for the majority of these services, rather than per year. The change in methodology has likely reduced the number of people that are captured in our valuation, but as described above, means we can be more confident that engagement leads to genuine benefits.

1 www.historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/research/towards-better-valuation-culture-and-heritage-capital-approach/
2 www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-book-supplementary-guidance-wellbeing

Scope

Association isn't causation

Our analysis draws on wellbeing estimates that account for observable differences between participants and non-participants, but it is likely that unobserved factors remain. For example, people who join a certain community group may differ in unmeasured ways to those who don't. Our evidence is robust but not experimental.

Value transfer

Our estimates are based on value transfers from national studies to a local context. For example, we estimated the average value of taking part in music groups and choirs, but the actual benefit of any single activity in a given church may be higher or lower.

National Churches Trust survey sample

While the larger sample of churches in the latest survey is an improvement from the previous years, at approximately 10% of all buildings, it may not perfectly represent the entire landscape across the UK. For example, churches who respond to the survey may be the most committed or engaged buildings in their communities, meaning that their provision and attendance could be higher than most. This would suggest that the average value from this sample may be slightly larger than the true average across the country.



Survey changes

There were important changes to the National Churches Trust survey from 2020 to 2025 that mean that we cannot understand changes in attendance as clearly. For example, shifting our community care questions from yearly to monthly attendance means we can't track whether footfall has increased or decreased over this time period.

Data

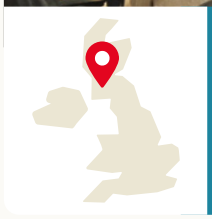
Our findings can only be as complete as the answers people provide.To keep our results comparable with earlier years, we have followed the same approach as in previous analysis. The findings therefore rest on a strong base overall, though for some questions they draw on a smaller share of answers.

Photo: Karen Hind

Case Study

Irvine Valley Parish Church





Irvine Valley Parish Church
Galston
East Ayrshire

Irvine Valley Parish Church is a Church of Scotland congregation serving Galston, Newmilns and Darvel in East Ayrshire. It was formed on 1 July 2024 through the union of three churches, each rooted in one of the valley's small towns.

Together, the churches have a combined congregation of around 650 people and are deeply committed to serving their wider community. They provide friendship, practical support and social connection through monthly lunches, dementia support, addiction and mental health groups, community choirs, parent-and-toddler sessions and activities for children and young people.

A wide range of groups and activities bring people of all ages together, promoting wellbeing and tackling isolation. Craft and sewing groups support local and international charities, while the Guilds, Women's Group and LiFT (Young Persons Guild) provide opportunities for fellowship. Exercise classes, including NHS-led sessions and Flexercise, encourage healthy living, while a monthly entertainment event for isolated local people has been running for over 20 years.

Practical support for those in need is also central to the church's work. Weekly Foodshare, foodbank collections, support for East Ayrshire Churches' Homelessness Action (EACHa) and toiletry donations to the local hospital provide help to vulnerable people. Seasonal charitable giving includes the Blythswood Shoe Box Appeal, Night Before Christmas Campaign and Christmas Gift Service for children and vulnerable adults, alongside support for the Christingle Charity.

Vanda McTaggart, who has the legal and administrative role of Session Clerk in Irvine Valley Parish, said:

> **"A church is so much more than a building – it's a place where people come together, friendships grow, and everyone can find a welcome. At Irvine Valley Parish Church (IVPC), we are delighted to see our buildings serving our local community, offering connection, support and a sense of belonging, especially to those who may be struggling or feeling forgotten. Our Mission Statement says it all: 'Loving and serving the Irvine Valley, we are an inclusive church sharing God's love for all.' Churches do so much more than many people realise, and at IVPC, we want our buildings to be places of welcome, hope and belonging, where everyone feels valued and part of our community."**

Photo: Irvine Parish Council

Case Study

Whitefield Methodist Church





Whitefield Methodist Church
Unsworth, Lancashire

The Methodists have had a base in Whitefield since 1876, when the centre section of the present church was built. A hall was added in 1953 to the existing schoolrooms, now converted to a small hall, and two toilet blocks followed in the 1970s. Whitefield Methodist Church will mark its 150th anniversary this year.

Much of the church's social action began with listening and being open, asking what was needed by the local community. By 2014, the Thursday toddler group was jampacked and there were requests to open on other days. The solution was to create the Oasis Centre with a soft play area and a small café serving good quality tea and coffee at prices people could manage. Demand meant more and more days had to be added.

A grant enabled the church to employ a Children's and Families Worker, and by 2019 something was happening every day of the week, from children's birthday parties, to Oasis sessions on five weekday mornings, along with other community groups using the space throughout the week. Now, the old schoolrooms and halls are rarely empty. The church's attention has not been limited to families with young children. Research revealed profound loneliness among local people over 50, so they started 'afternoon tea' sessions on the first and third Tuesday of each month. It offered a gentle way for people to meet and for pastoral care to happen naturally, often with those who had no connection to Sunday worship. 'Dignifying Dementia' uses the church on Thursday afternoons, along with eight other community organisations like the Whitefield Horticultural Society, and Citizens Advice surgeries.

Revd Sally Thornton said:

> **"We're thrilled that Whitefield Methodist Church has moved from being a largely invisible presence to becoming a vibrant, welcoming part of our local community. With a footfall of over 26,000 people last year, our doors are open, our building is buzzing with life, and people who might never have set foot in a church are finding friendship, support, a sense of belonging and a place where they matter."**

In a community marked by inequality and loneliness, Whitefield Methodist Church has become a place where people can find help and a second chance.

Photo: David Dixon

Case Study

St Laurence, Chorley



St Laurence
Chorley, Lancashire

The Grade II* listed Anglican church of St Laurence in Chorley, Lancashire, is the oldest building in the town with over 800 years of history; likewise it has been at the heart of the community for centuries, continuing to the present day. The tower of St Laurence is late medieval and much of the church dates to rebuildings by the Victorians and Edwardians.

160 people volunteer at St Laurence's, yet the church still struggles to meet local demand. Services offered at the church are varied and busy: cancer cafés, mental health and bereavement support, arts and crafts, history groups, and money management courses.

Volunteers also staff 'Open Table', a 24/7 'food hotline' with referrals from the local council to deliver emergency parcels in the area. Many of these volunteers have been trained by a specialist charity on suicide prevention after it had been noticed how many of those accessing services were in need of this specific help.

As is common to many churches, half of the volunteers are not members of the church or its congregation. They are simply local people making use of a vital resource in their community, and keen to offer their support.

> **"We need this building. It lends itself so well to worship life, to community life, to spiritual life, it is here and it does so much," one of the volunteers told us.**
>
> **"We can point you in the direction of what else you might need, like debt counselling... and hopefully make lives better."**

Photo: The Saltways

Conclusion



Where do you turn if you don't have the money for your child's next meal?

What if NHS waiting times mean you can't access support for a drug or alcohol addiction?

Where do you meet people if isolated and alone?

Where can you hear world-class concerts for free?

Where else does all of the above happen in beautiful ancient buildings full of stained glass and sculpture and funded by the donations of volunteers?

Churches.

Churches, chapels, and meeting houses are everywhere, open for all, and step in where the state is failing. They are the safety net beneath the safety net. And their contribution to the functioning of national life and the happiness of the UK is severely underrated.

Our research has shown the vast charitable good churches provide every day, which goes unreported and unsung. Volunteers in churches just get on with it, without fanfare.

But they are making a difference of between **£44 billion and £60 billion a year**. This good can be lost. Churches are closing. They need our support: we can no longer take them for granted.

Photo: Adam Glennon

What's next

Churches are our most important set of historic buildings, in a country with a remarkable inheritance of historic buildings. They have reflected almost every movement and style of architecture in the British Isles, and include masterpieces from the medieval to the postmodern.

As this report has shown, churches are also remarkable for all the good they do, every day of the year, for the most isolated and vulnerable. This is a network of close to 38,500 charities, 20,000 of them in listed buildings, staffed by volunteers, run with their donations, and there for anyone. We have taken this good for granted for too long, and if we do not act, it will be lost: at first slowly, then all too quickly.

There are two simple actions.

1. The requirement for listed places of worship to bear the cost of VAT on repairs should be reversed. These buildings should benefit from the same relief as museums and galleries which do not pay VAT on their buildings if these are open to the public free of charge. This will free up huge amounts to spend on social good, and, most importantly, dramatically improve morale among volunteers.

2. A bigger, better grant scheme should be made available, widening the criteria used in the government's new Places of Worship Renewal Fund and inviting matched funding. We want to see support available not just in England, but in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. We want to see denominations, government, and private philanthropy join to solve this crisis. Together it can be achieved.

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NATIONAL CHURCHES TRUST

Yours For Good

About the National Churches Trust

Churches, chapels and meeting houses aren't just places of worship. They're the heart of our communities, the glue that binds people together. Filled with food banks, parent and toddler groups, mental health services and warm spaces, churches everywhere serve local people and boost the wellbeing of our nation.

But churches are at risk. Many are falling into disrepair. And once the doors close, they rarely reopen. As a society we can't afford to lose churches. We need leaders like you to join with the National Churches Trust, to speak up for churches, preserve our precious heritage and help these vital community spaces survive.



We speak up
Church buildings are valued and supported



We build up
Churches are well maintained, adaptable and in good repair



We open up
Churches are sustainable, open and welcoming

Contact us

Contact us at **ben.sims@nationalchurchestrust.org**
if you would like to discuss this report or arrange a meeting.

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NATIONAL CHURCHES TRUST

Yours For Good

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