

Church buildings and the 2017 General Election

A briefing for supporters of the National Churches Trust

During the General Election campaign, if Prospective Parliamentary Candidates or canvassers from political parties come to your door or phone you, or you have an opportunity to attend a public meeting, do take the opportunity to say why you think church buildings are important and need support.



For example, you could mention some of the following points:

“Churches, chapels and meeting houses are a vital part of the UK’s heritage.”

There are around 42,000 churches, chapels and meeting houses in the UK. They are unmatched for history, architecture and sheer variety anywhere else in the world.

Churches are the UK’s single most important category of historic buildings, with 12,500 of the Church of England’s church buildings listed and 45% of all England’s Grade I listed buildings cathedrals and churches. There are also large numbers of listed churches and chapels in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

“Churches, chapels and meeting houses are important for local communities.”

Church buildings play a vital role in activities for the benefit of the wider community. It is estimated that nearly 90% of churches are used for community purposes as well as for regular worship. They are used as venues for concerts and art exhibitions, by playgroups, for social events for elderly or isolated people and also by MPs and Councillors for their surgeries. In fact, many polling stations are located in church buildings!

“Local people fund church repairs.”

Many people think that the Church of England pays for the upkeep of the UK’s church buildings. But it is actually up to parishes themselves to raise the money needed to repair a leaking roof or fix a crumbling spire. The cost of repairing a church roof often costs over £250,000, a very large sum for an inner city church or a small rural parish. The sum of money needed to repair all of the UK’s churches could be well over £1 billion.

Here are some questions you may want to consider asking:

1. Do you and your party think there should be Government funding for church repairs?

The UK’s churches will always require funding from a variety of sources to pay for repairs and new facilities. That’s partly because of the costs involved in looking after historic buildings.

A Government funded Roof Repair Fund of £55 million was made available in 2015-2016 to fund urgent roof repairs. The Fund was substantially oversubscribed, indicating there is a need for more, rather than less, funding to ensure the long term survival of the UK’s precious heritage of church buildings.

Are you and your party in favour of similar Government support for church buildings?

2. How could the Heritage Lottery Fund do more to help churches?

From September 2017, the Heritage Lottery Fund’s (HLF) Grants for Places of Worship programme will close to new applications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (the programme may continue in Scotland, as it is a joint initiative with Historic Environment Scotland).

This will be the first time since 1977 that there will be no dedicated funding available for church repairs from Government or a Government heritage agency.

Taking into account the national importance of church buildings, would you and your party support the re-instatement of an HLF dedicated fund for church buildings?

Our opinion poll shows support for church buildings

If you want supporting evidence, you may want to refer to the National Churches Trust's December 2016 ComRes opinion poll.

This showed that four in five Britons (83%) agree that the UK's churches, chapels and meeting houses are an important part of the UK's heritage and history. The poll also showed that 57% of British adults believe it is the government's responsibility to help to fund repairs. More information about the poll is on our website: www.nationalchurchestrust.org/2017poll.

How can I contact my candidates?

In person: When candidates or canvassers phone you or come to your door, have the suggested questions ready to ask them.

At a local hustings meeting: Find out where hustings meetings are taking place by looking in your local paper.

Through the media: Use this briefing to help write an open letter to your local candidate and send it to your local paper or call your local radio station. They often hold phone in programmes around election time and want questions from listeners.

On social media: You could tweet your questions to candidates.

What next:

Please let us know what your candidates told you. Email policy@nationalchurchestrust.org.

The National Churches Trust

You may want to tell your Prospective Parliamentary Candidates about the work of the National Churches Trust. We are the independent, national charity dedicated to supporting and promoting church buildings of all Christian denominations across the UK.

Thanks to the help of our supporters, in the last ten years, we have provided over 1,600 grants worth over £15 million to help places of worship in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, including both listed and unlisted buildings.

The National Churches Trust also helps places of worship by providing support and advice to the people who look after church buildings.

If you need any more information please contact:

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UK Registered Charity No: 1119845

May 2017

As a registered charity, the National Churches Trust fully supports and complies with charity law and regulations covering elections in the UK. Highlighting the cause of church buildings and the value they provide to communities is part of our charitable purposes. This resource is to assist supporters should they wish to engage local parliamentary candidates ahead of the 2017 General Election, not to influence voters for or against a particular party, candidate or category of candidates.