



The Importance of the English parish church.

**Briefing note for House of Lords Debate
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1. Key Messages

The Church of England is responsible for 16,000 parish churches, 12,500 of which are listed of historic or architectural interest.

‘The parish churches of England are some of the most sparkling jewels in the precious crown that is our historic environment.’

Dr Simon Thurley, Chief Executive of English Heritage.

- The Church of England’s **16,000 parish church buildings** in every community in England are centres of worship, mission and community life. No other body has greater responsibility for England’s built heritage
- One third of these are Grade 1 listed
- A large proportion of the buildings are medieval structures
- **45% of all Grade 1 listed buildings are Church of England church buildings**
- They are self-financing – it is estimated an incredible £115 million annually is raised and spent by local communities on repairs to their parish church buildings. (This nonetheless results in a **£60 million funding gap**, given the English Heritage estimate of required spend on repair and maintenance on church buildings of £175 million.)
- None of this would be possible without the vast array of **volunteers** who work tirelessly in every parish to celebrate our heritage as a living witness to the glory of God
- They contain and display an unparalleled array of **treasures**. Rivalling the collections of the world’s great museums including internationally significant monuments, wall paintings, stained glass, textiles and medieval timberwork.
- An estimated 2/3 parish churches have **churchyards**. Collectively they cover an area equivalent to a small national park and some of the oldest and most significant trees in Britain can be found therein
- Church of England parish churches are a Christian presence in every community. The parish system means the Church serves everyone who lives in the community of which it is part - from rural villages to the inner city, from market towns to outer urban estates – and regardless of creed, colour or

affiliation. Among those under 35 years of age, the ethnic minority proportion of worshippers matches that of the population as a whole – around 15%.

- **Church buildings are important cultural venues.** It is estimated that nearly half of the UK's church buildings are used for arts, music and dance activities
- A 2009 survey has confirmed previous survey results to reveal that 85% of the population visit a church building or place of worship each year for reasons ranging from participating in worship to attending concerts, community events or simply wanting quiet space.

2. Community Use

- Keeping churches open and sustainable at the heart of their communities is vital for their future, but congregations often need help overcoming obstacles in making this happen. The Cathedrals and Church Buildings Division in Church House, has developed options to support congregations and communities in selecting the right legal and funding model to develop their church buildings in order to engage communities as well as their congregations, and to develop their church building for complementary uses and activities in addition to worship.
- 54% of Anglican parishes run at least one organised activity to address a social need in their area including loneliness, homelessness, debt, low income, unemployment or family breakdown [Church Urban Fund 2013]. Many churches run services directly from their church buildings such as winter night shelters, food banks and even community banks.
- Since 2004 the Trussell Trust has launched over 400 foodbanks nationwide, over half within the last two years, and a good number of these have been from within church buildings. St Luke's, Redcliffe Square (Diocese of London), a grade II listed building, runs a foodbank directly from the church each week and during winter months the basement, which has been converted into halls with modern kitchen and bathrooms, is used as a night shelter once a week. Churches are ideal venues for such shelters by virtue of the shelter they offer and their ready supply of potential volunteers.
- During the floods early in 2014, church buildings once again showed their value to their local communities as they became centres for relief efforts and shelters. In the Somerset Levels, the church of St Peter and St Paul, Muchelney (Diocese of Bath and Wells) was used for storing and providing food, acting as a post office and central community hub.
- Church buildings are key locations for supporting **children and young people**. It is estimated that more than half of the UK's church buildings facilitate activities such as nurseries, youth groups and additional activities for young people.
- Church buildings are significant places for **support and counselling**. It is estimated that more than two-fifths of the UK's church buildings are used for

support and counselling services on issues such as homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse, finance and debt, parenting and mental health.

Case Studies:

Waterloo, St John (Diocese of Southwark)

For many years the steps of St John's were used as a gathering point for social drinking. This intimidated users of the building and the general public. With much hard work between the church, the local authority and the police the churchyard was made a controlled drinking zone. The result has released the front of the church for a daytime food court that serves the local community and has made a considerable difference to the perception of the church.

The crypt is used by a variety of organisations such as a mosaic studio that works with pupils excluded from school, a theatre company working with schools and young people and a training orchestra for emerging professional musicians. Three days a week the church is used for orchestral rehearsal – which realises sufficient income to employ a vergger to keep the building open every day.

A chapel for prayer is kept available when the church is open.

Dunwich, St James (Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich)

The Suffolk coastal village of Dunwich attracts visitors walking the coastal path and visiting the nearby ruined friary and leper chapel. The church is kept open daily and a new porch gives visitors the opportunity to see into the building before they enter. Although often unstaffed a sense of welcome is extended with the provision of a kettle and all that is needed to make a warm drink and a leave a donation.

Loughton, St Mary (Diocese of Chelmsford)

St Mary's redevelopment scheme completely opened up the front of the Church onto the busy High Road. Our Cafe faces the High Road and gives direct access into the Church. This really attracts many people and they join our mid-week service and toddler Church service. It has given us an opportunity to listen to many people who are on their own or in need and we have seen many who came in for a coffee becoming involved with the Church and making a commitment to God or re-finding their faith.

Kingston-upon-Thames, All Saints (Diocese of Southwark) is on the market square and is normally open. The church has a ring of bells, and traditionally has not rung on Saturdays to avoid disturbing the traders. On a rare Saturday peal the number of visitors to the church increased significantly and there were no complaints.

Algarkirk, St Peter and St Paul (Diocese of Lincoln)

Our church had been locked everyday, except for Sunday worship, up until the summer of 2012. During the time it was locked the church was visited and seen by nobody outside the small congregation. It suffered vandalism; lead theft; the deterioration of the building and its interior; and the accumulation of clutter around

the church. The parish took the decision to open and since then has welcomed visitors from all over the world; held a Big Clean Up event; established a programme of events and activities to be held in the church; begun using the church for book-swaps as there is no local library; improved the atmosphere in the church immeasurably and embarked upon a huge repair and conservation project.

St George-in-the-East (Diocese of London) is an East End Hawksmoor church, but with a post-Blitz interior with little to steal or vandalise. We are committed to keeping the church open even when unstaffed, and many comments in the visitors' book thank us for this, in comparison with their experience elsewhere: 'an oasis of peace and light' is a typical entry. Despite our inner urban setting, we have fewer problems than when church was locked. Staying open is also an important witness to our Muslim-majority neighbours

All Saints Church in Murston, Sittingbourne (Diocese of Canterbury) is Kent's first community bank to open inside a church. It is run by volunteers and is open each morning. It has been set up in partnership with the local credit union and responds to the Archbishop of Canterbury's call to be more proactive against debt and payday lenders. In addition the parish has opened a small café, and free wifi is available so that customers can spend time there, access pastoral care or make use of wider advice and support such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

3. State of Fabric

According to the National Fabric Survey in 2013 of the quinquennium inspection reports, 90% of all our 16,000 parish churches are in good or fair order.

The National Fabric Survey of June 2013 showed that roofs was the most frequently occurring source of risk to historic fabric of a church, with just over 20% reporting as having "poor" or "very bad" roofs. And the second most frequently occurring source of risk to the historic fabric of a church was gutters and downpipes.

Much work on churches goes to local building firms which fuels local economies and encourages them to employ and train their skilled craftsmen.

4. Funding

- Ten years ago English Heritage has estimated that £175 million was needed to be spent on maintaining parish churches annually. Parish churches are spending £115 million annually on repairs and maintenance. This represents a **funding gap for repairs of at least £60 million**.
- Each parish church is responsible for its own finances. The congregations raise the funds necessary to maintain their buildings and run their activities from a variety of sources.
- On average, **church congregations meet 85% of their repair needs from their own funds**. Where urgent repairs exceed £50,00 this reduces to just over two thirds of the total cost. The completion of such major works therefore relies on attracting other funding.
- Contrary to what many members of the public believe, there is **no core State or Church funding** for parish church buildings.
- Most of what is raised by parish church communities from voluntary giving and from investments necessarily has to go paying clergy through the parish share system. Keeping a historic building in good condition is an additional burden.
- Parish churches have long been active in seeking philanthropic giving. Much has been achieved through the generosity of private and corporate donors, along with grants from English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund. However the need for funds is continuous to ensure the buildings stay open and in good repair.
- Almost no parish churches charge visitors for entry.
- Historic buildings face more expensive maintenance and conservation bills than modern or domestic buildings.

Key sources of external funding:

1. Repair Grants for Places of Worship

Since 2012 the Heritage Lottery Fund has set aside **£25 million per annum for necessary repairs** to listed places of worship. Last year 160 churches received awards. This is oversubscribed by a factor of 2. This scheme is open to all listed places of worship.

2. Additionally church buildings can apply to other HLF funds

Since April 2013 HLF has made the following awards to parish churches:

- Last month one parish church, Bath Abbey, a 'Greater Church' was awarded one of the six major national awards. Bath Abbey received initial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a £10 million bid for its Footprint project, a transformative programme of capital works, interpretation, collections care and sustainable energy. Development funding of £389,000 has also been awarded to help progress plans to secure a full grant at a later date.
- A first round pass of £620,000 to St Giles PCC, Newcastle-under-Lyme for a heritage churchyard project - The St Giles Heritage Churchyard Project will transform an overdeveloped, unsightly space, that invites anti-social behaviours, into a useable attractively landscaped and interpreted space that compliments the heritage townscape and Parish Church.
- A first round pass of £1.4m to Algarkirk PCC to conserve the Grade I church and open up it up to more visitors - The project will repair the church; conserve its important Victorian interior decoration and stained glass; and create a multitude of learning opportunities for every visitor to the church.
- Following completion, a programme of heritage skills workshops, interpretation and a local history research facility will be established. An accessible lavatory, kitchenette and café will also be installed; the electrical and heating systems will be renewed; and a project officer employed to help the PCC, in partnership with others, to make Algarkirk a premier heritage destination in the Boston region.
- A first round pass of £1,047,000 to the PCC of the Parish of Hempsted with St Mary de Lode and St Mary de Crypt, Gloucester to repair and adapt the church and schoolroom - The project aims to repair and conserve the church and schoolroom and convert them for use as a spiritual/cultural/educational facility and community building to improve people's understanding, enjoyment and appreciation of the history, ecclesiastic and scholastic heritage of the site. It will continue to be a functioning place of worship.
- A first round pass of £1.8m to St Peter's, Bethnal Green to restore, conserve and regenerate the Grade II Victorian Church for use as an Enterprise Centre for four business uses - The redevelopment of St Peter's Bethnal Green will restore and open up a historic church building and crypt, located in a deprived part of London's East End. Access will be improved and space adapted to serve the growing church and community.
- A first round pass of £432,100 to St John's Church, Sharow, Nr Ripon for a project to provide enhanced access to St John's Church, protect its heritage, widen the activity programme and improve the heritage offer – a project to undertake restoration works at the Church, encourage wider engagement with its heritage and enhance its facilities to accommodate an expanded programme of heritage and other events.

- A first round pass of £512,000 to St Helen's PCC, Ashby-de-la-Zouch for a project that aims to ensure the future of the site through introducing new interpretation and the renovation and extension of the existing church.
- There are also a number of other smaller grants to projects that involve the conservation of bells, monuments, organs and other historic furnishings through HLF's Our Heritage programme.

3. Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (£42 million per annum) Treasury and DCMS

With the introduction of VAT on all alterations as well as repairs to listed church buildings, the Cathedral and Church Buildings Division persuaded the Government to increase the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme from £12 million annually to £42 million. This ensures fundraising for the essential works to listed parish churches is not taxed. It is administered by DCMS who at our request are moving towards awarding grants online.

4. Other sources of funding from national and local grant making trusts.

Working with funders like the Wolfson Foundation and Pilgrim Trust, the **Cathedral and Church Buildings Division runs annual grants programmes** for:

- Conservation of historic furnishings and artworks in parish churches.
2013: £189,950 awarded in grants to 97 parishes
- Repairs to Grade I and Grade II* listed parish churches
2013: £412,000 awarded in grants to 88 parishes
- From time to time we source and administer other funds e.g. in 2012 the one-off capital grant of £781,000 from DCMS to improve facilities (e.g. heating, lavatories and kitchens) in listed parish churches resulting in 88 grants to parishes in every diocese, awarded to parish churches in some of the most deprived parts of the country.

5. The Cathedral and Church Buildings Division's 100 Church Treasures Campaign

The Cathedral and Church Buildings Division has identified 100 artworks at risk of permanent damage and loss. The aim is to raise £3 million to protect an important part of the nation's heritage (this will only address a fraction of the church treasures). Since the launch in October 2013 at Westminster Abbey over £300,000 has been donated and pledged, and conservation work on projects has commenced.

5. How the Government can help

Targeted funding (such as for **roofs and gutters and gutterclear programmes**) would be the most effective contribution to ensuring the future of parish church buildings. A one-off and relatively modest fund would deliver a lasting legacy for around 80 places of worship.

Other ideas:

- To encourage agencies such as Visit England to include parish churches in their campaigns and initiatives. Church visits are estimated to be worth at least £350 million a year to the tourism economy. Cathedrals and parish churches are the most visited of all buildings, attracting some 31 million visitors, excluding worshippers, per annum.
- To provide a brown heritage 'historic church' sign to all rural and out of the way parish churches (Department of Communities and Local Government - DCLG).
- Help to install Wi-Fi in all churches (DCLG). This would assist parish churches in providing professional services to all who seek help in a church. It would also enable the Church to extend the excellent smart phone based apps with tours of the special parts of their buildings voiced by the incumbent and congregation to all who visit at whatever time they visit.
- A national Heritage Memorial Fund for Church Treasures would secure a safe future for the priceless contents of parish churches.

Cathedral and Church Buildings Division
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