

# The Heritage Alliance

from **The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance**  
*an independently-funded group within The Heritage Alliance*

We bring together those working for a secure future  
for historic religious buildings

Protect and Prepare, Office for Security and Counter Terrorism  
5th Floor NE, Peel Building,  
Home Office, 2 Marsham Street,  
London, SW1P 4DF

5-11 Lavington Street,  
London SE1 0NZ

T:0207 233 0500 F: 0207 233 0600  
Mail@theheritagealliance.org.uk  
www.theheritagealliance.org.uk

By email 1 July 2021  
Copy: DCMS, Historic England, The Charity Commission

Dear Protect and Prepare Team

I am responding on behalf of the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance (HRBA) to your **consultation on Protect and Prepare**.

HRBA is an independently funded group within the Heritage Alliance, which is the largest alliance of heritage interests in the UK, set up to promote the central role of the non-Government movement in the heritage sector. HRBA's particular role is to bring together those working for a secure future for historic religious buildings. Our staff and members possess extensive expertise in using and maintaining historic religious buildings.

HRBA's membership is drawn from across the nation, and includes a broad range of organisations that have an interest in, and responsibility for, historic religious buildings. Our corporate membership includes faith groups at both national and regional levels, amenity societies, grant-making organisations and architectural firms, as well as individual congregations and professionals working in the sector. Overall the members of the HRBA include those who between them own and maintain almost all the 20,000 listed religious buildings in England, Scotland and Wales.

These buildings are used and cared for by volunteers, and managed by Trustees or similar, often with no staff except a cleric (often responsible for multiple buildings). In many cases there are relatively small numbers of volunteers meeting in large historic buildings. As explained below, we are extremely concerned that the current proposals for Protect and Prepare are not only disproportionate (because based on venue size) but the unintended consequences will significantly reduce the viability of these volunteer groups, putting at risk the widely-acknowledged social and community roles they perform, and doing permanent damage to an important part of the country's heritage.

We would be happy to discuss these issues further.

Charlotte Dodgeon  
Policy Director, HRBA  
*An independently-funded group within the Heritage Alliance*  
email: [hrb@theheritagealliance.org.uk](mailto:hrb@theheritagealliance.org.uk)  
web: [www.hrballiance.org.uk](http://www.hrballiance.org.uk)

Our members are non-government, voluntary and private organisations that promote, conserve, study and involve the public in our heritage.

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**Historic Religious Buildings Alliance**  
**Response to PROTECT Consultation**  
**1 July 2021**

**1. Introduction**

The UK has a large number of places of worship of all faiths and denominations. For example, there are some 450 Synagogues in the UK, more than 1500 mosques, approaching 200 Hindu places of worship and about 300 gurdwaras. Research carried out for The National Churches Trust showed that there are some 40,000 Christian churches across the UK. Of these religious buildings, some 20,000 are listed.

The Martyn's Law proposal applies to venues with a capacity of 100 persons or more. It requires that every venue that hosts any event to which the public have access on payment or otherwise, should have at least 25% of their staff CT Awareness Trained. In addition, it is proposed that every such venue should have at least 1 on-duty manager who has received the relevant ACT Awareness Training Course (ACT Operational and/or ACT Strategic).

Our response to the consultation is focused on two key areas, based on our understanding of how historic religious buildings are used, the type of events that take place within them, and their typical personnel structures.

The two areas are:

- the proposal to use capacity as the criterion for determining whether a Protect Duty applies to a public venue
- the potential cost and wider resource impact on the volunteers who operate these particular venues

On this occasion, we are not responding on behalf of Anglican cathedrals, where specific factors are at play, and who have responded through the Association of English Cathedrals (one of our members).

Our comments are generic to all faith groups.

**2. Venue capacity as criterion**

Most places of worship are publicly accessible spaces, allowing the public in for acts of corporate worship.

**The majority of the more than 40,000 places of worship in the UK are in premises that have the spatial capacity for accommodating over 100 people.** This is because the majority are Christian churches that were built in a time when church attendance was at considerably higher levels than today.

**Despite the capacity of the buildings, the vast majority of places of worship have fewer than 100 people in attendance.** Some have far fewer. For example, the Church of England alone has about 2,000 congregations of ten people or less meeting on a Sunday. In most congregations, more or less the same people meet week after week, and know and recognise each other. These small congregations meeting in large buildings are especially frequent in rural areas, but are not uncommon in urban areas.

In addition, many thousands of churches have traditionally been places open to all for private prayer and reflection (this

is especially true, for example, of the Catholic Church and the Church of England). Often an open church will not be actively monitored, and the number of people present at any one time will be very small – smaller, for example, than would be found in a bus queue.

**We conclude that the capacity of a place of worship is a very poor indicator of risk, and using a breakpoint capacity of 100 is disproportionate and inappropriate, and is a poor allocation of national resources.**

There is a similar disproportionality with using a venue capacity of 100 as a criterion for ‘secular’ premises attached to, or otherwise owned by, faith groups – these might generically be classed as meeting rooms and halls. We understand that ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) will respond to your consultation on behalf of village halls, and many of the points they will raise will also apply to the similar premises owned by faith groups.

### **3. Cost and resource burden, impact on volunteers, pressure on charity Trustees**

The overall language of the consultation document tends to lean towards a commercial and business understanding of organisations operating in publicly accessible locations.

However, when it comes to places of worship, the great majority do not have the resources for paid staff, except (usually but not always) for a cleric. Indeed, many thousands share a cleric with other congregations. The majority of functions are carried out by volunteers, with responsibility lying with voluntary Trustees or the equivalent. (Most places of worship are organised as charities.)

Of course, a tiny number of places of worship are prime visitor attractions in their own right, hosting a wide range of events in a large capacity building. Such places as St Martin in the Fields, or St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol or Holy Trinity, Stratford upon Avon attract a large number of visitors each year (around 750,000 in the case of St Martin in the Fields). They operate in a manner that is consistent with secular destination venues, following best practice guidance for health and safety, staff training, management practices etc. They are no doubt already engaging with security issues relating to terrorism, and will take fully into account any future obligations.

But the typical congregation is small, reliant on volunteers, with virtually no paid staff, and is the responsibility of voluntary Trustees. Often little or no income is generated from the premises, except that freely given from the pockets of attendees.

For these reasons, we believe that those measures described as “no or low cost” would in fact prove onerous. To begin with, it will require volunteers to give up spare time for the training.

Furthermore, whilst we welcome the notion that some of this training might be provided free via the ACT e-learning product, we would note that access to online resources is by no means universal, either by virtue of poor or almost non-existent internet provision (especially in rural areas), or through a low level of use of digital media (ie not everyone has broadband, nor is computer use universal amongst the volunteer demographic).

Additionally, there are very real practical difficulties in organising a band of dispersed and frequently changing

volunteers to communicate and operationalise appropriate risk assessments. We see particular difficulties in ensuring that someone is always on duty when the building is open.

Additional physical security measures may be beyond the financial reach of some congregations, many of whom already use their limited funds to keep their historic building in good condition.

We fear also that these new duties will be reflected in increased insurance premiums against the new liabilities. Furthermore, insurers may play safe, and demand more than the bare minimum from congregations, particularly given the uncertainty about what is required of volunteers in the absence of paid staff.

Given the extra work, and the risk felt by Trustees and similar of getting something wrong, we think it likely that the number of people volunteering to take on these roles will fall. This will exacerbate an already deteriorating situation, and will add to post-Covid pressures.

Rather than face these costs and burdens, which many volunteer congregations will think are disproportionate, we think it likely that some congregations will close down their building except for one or two hours per week when public services are being held. Some of the smaller ones may decide to shut up shop altogether. These unintended consequences would thus reverse long-term public policy to maintain and increase access to the country's heritage of listed places of worship by encouraging and supporting the congregations who care for them. It would be a win for terrorism.

**We conclude that, for a high proportion of congregations – which are run by volunteers with the responsibility being held by volunteer Trustees or equivalent – the proposed mitigations and training will increase costs disproportionately, will prove onerous to implement, will discourage volunteering and Trusteeship, and are likely to cause the closure of some buildings, including important heritage buildings. This would be a win for terrorism.**

#### **4. Conclusion**

We agree that the terrorist attacks that have made the headlines over the past few years, many in very crowded places, mean that it is important to consider what can be done to reduce the likelihood, or mitigate the impact of, any future events. In this context we note that emerging evidence from recent attacks show that it is the poor implementation of security policy which has been the issue, not a lack of existing obligations on the part of the venue or organiser.

Given the nature of the majority of listed places of worship in terms of their large physical size and high capacity, compared very often to a much smaller number of actual users, our belief is that the proposals as they stand are quite out of proportion to the risk. A much more nuanced approach is needed. There is also a real risk of a serious unintended consequence – the partial or complete closure of listed buildings currently accessible to the public, reversing long-term public policy in this area. This would be a win for terrorism.

Charlotte Dodgeon  
Policy Director, HRBA  
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web: [www.hrballiance.org.uk](http://www.hrballiance.org.uk)