

# Protecting Built Heritage: CMS Select Committee Inquiry

## Response from the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance

The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance (HRBA) is grateful for the opportunity to provide evidence to this Inquiry.

*The scope of this submission is listed places of worship in Great Britain, excluding cathedrals. As more than 99% of these buildings are Christian, we will refer to them generically as 'churches'.*

### Summary

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*'Listed places of worship hold great cultural and historical significance, representing some of the nation's finest heritage. They play an important role not only as spiritual centres but also as important local historic assets, much needed community hubs, and visitor destinations. The Government acknowledges the unique challenges involved in maintaining this important element of our national and spiritual heritage'.*

Sir Chris Bryant, MP, Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism<sup>1</sup>

There are something under 20,000 listed churches in England, Scotland and Wales. Unusually for heritage assets, they are important for two reasons.

- First – and obviously – they are important for their heritage value. 'Churches are also of phenomenal artistic and architectural importance. Some of the most beautiful buildings in this country are historic churches.' (Sir Chris Bryant, MP, Westminster Hall debate, 22 January 2025).
- Secondly – and unusually for heritage buildings – they are important for their community role, often in the most disadvantaged communities. '*Churches are community hubs as much as anything else.*' (Sir Chris Bryant, MP, as above).

Furthermore they are more or less unique amongst heritage public buildings in that they are not only cared for by volunteers, but largely funded by them out of their own pockets. However, as churches cannot realistically charge entrance fees, this heritage cannot easily be monetised.

Many congregations are large, growing, active and confident. However on average congregations in traditional denominations are shrinking, as they are in much of the western world. This means that on average there are fewer volunteers per building. In response to this

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from the Minister in reply to a letter from a member of the congregation of a historic church, December 2024.

challenge, there has been much fresh thinking, both from faith groups and civil society. But this is not enough. The problem of the future of our church buildings will not be solved by the action of independent players without government support and co-ordination.

Unlike many European countries, there is a low level of State Support for historic churches, and funding is not guaranteed. There has been a particular difficulty with capital funding, and a consequent reduction in the number of churches coming off the Risk Register. Very recently, the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, which allows VAT to be reclaimed, has been capped.

Our key recommendations are therefore:

- Government should recognise its leadership role. It should work cross-party, with the principal denominations, and with civil society to develop a plan of action for the future of historic church buildings (including cathedrals).
- Until progress can be made toward a zero VAT regime for repair and maintenance of listed properties, the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme should be made permanent, and return to being fully funded without a cap.
- We propose a new capital funding scheme for listed buildings of all faiths and denominations, establishing a recurring fund of at least £50 million per year, with proportionate funding provided for the devolved administrations. The majority of the cost should be covered by the taxpayer, and should be administered in collaboration with relevant organisations in the faith buildings and heritage sector.

## The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance (HRBA)

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The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance (HRBA) brings together those seeking a secure future for historic religious buildings. It is an independently-funded part of the Heritage Alliance.

Our sixty members include organisations who between them own and maintain almost all the listed religious buildings in Great Britain. They include the Church of England, the Church in Wales, the Church of Scotland, the Catholic Church of England and Wales, the Methodist Church, the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the National Churches Trust, and the Churches Conservation Trust.

## Introduction

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*The scope of this submission is listed places of worship in Great Britain, excluding cathedrals. As more than 99% of these buildings are Christian, we will refer to them generically as ‘churches’.*

1. There are about 14,800 listed places of worship in England (see appendix), something under 2,800 in Scotland and an unknown number in Wales, sometimes said to be 3,000 but probably

about half that. This data is taken from the HRBA document, 'Number of listed places of worship', on our website.<sup>2</sup>

2. These are astonishingly large numbers. In England the 14,800 listed churches dwarfs the number of buildings owned by English Heritage and the National Trust, which between them have fewer than one thousand buildings.
3. In each country the majority of listed churches belong to the relevant 'state' church. In England, for example, 83% of listed churches belong to the Church of England. Of highly-listed churches in England – those of Grade I or II\* – some 95% belong to the Church of England. Indeed, almost one half (45%) of England's entire stock of Grade I listed buildings are Church of England churches.

## Why are these buildings important?

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4. These buildings are important for two distinct reasons – heritage value and community value.

### Heritage value

5. *'The parish churches of this country form, as a body, one of the most remarkable historic monuments which any European nation possesses'*.<sup>3</sup> Listed places of worship form a substantial part of the nation's most important built heritage, stretching back to Saxon times, and more recently representing the work of some of the country's leading architects, both internally and externally. They help create a sense of place and foster local pride. Often, too, their settings provide an oasis of green.
6. Furthermore, they contain an astonishing array of art and sculpture. For example, there are an estimated 8,000 medieval stained glass windows in our churches. The V&A has about 100. Again, the V&A has 15 pieces by John Flaxman, one of England's most important and accessible sculptors. That is a fine collection. But there are twelve times as many items (190) by this sculptor in churches, often in their original position – and personal observation suggests that such tombs and memorials have a lasting fascination to visitors of all ages.<sup>4</sup> Overall, the *'cultural riches are astonishing, not only for their quality and quantity but for their diversity and interest as well ... these buildings effectively form an unsung national museum'*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hrballiance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2025-01-31-number-of-listed-places-of-worship-in-UK.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> A. H. Thompson, *The historical growth of the English parish church*, p. 132.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Harrison, 'Stained glass' in *Change and Decay* (eds. Marcus Binney and Peter Burman), 1977; Paul Williamson, *Medieval and Renaissance Stained Glass in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, 2003; Rupert Gunnis, *Dictionary of British Sculptors, 1660–1851*, second edition, n.d.; Diane Bilbey, *British Sculpture 1470 to 2000*, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> John Goodall, *Parish Church Treasures*, 2015, p. 10.

7. Yet no charge is made for entry, and very large numbers of these buildings are open every day of the week for visitors to walk in as they please.

### **Community value**

8. Churches are centres of community. They provide a place where faith groups can meet and individuals spend time in reflection and prayer (with proven impact on wellbeing). In many cases they make spaces available for local groups to get together. Furthermore, they often supply the base from which congregations and their partners can be active in the community, offering services such as food banks, debt counselling, social prescribing, and support for the lonely and marginalised. Using the Treasury Green Book methodology, the economic and social value of churches to the UK was assessed in the National Churches Trust's *House of Good* report as around £55bn per annum from such activity.<sup>6</sup>
9. In these and other ways – such as being havens of peace and quiet, opening up as cool spaces in exceptionally hot weather and warm spaces in cold weather, and providing green space in an urban environment – the buildings help sustain community life and wellbeing.
10. The sheer scale of this across the country can be hard to grasp. For example, the charity 'Making Music', which has 4,000 music groups in membership, together comprising some 240,000 hobby musicians, estimates that 62% of music groups use churches for regular meetings (e.g. weekly rehearsals) and for performances.<sup>7</sup>
11. The following example, dating from October 2024, is not unusual:

*Methodist church in market town in Lincolnshire, listed Grade II: [We host] a twice weekly Lighthouse Project where warmth, friendship and support are offered together with food parcels and a hot lunch once a week. There is a weekly activity session for pre-school children and weekly Easy Cook courses to provide practical lessons in cooking nutritious cheap meals. U3A, Wildlife Conservation and [a group who] run the local museum and provide a lecture programme meet monthly on the premises. Local orchestras rehearse weekly and various concerts and events are held throughout.*<sup>8</sup>

12. All this is widely understood within government. But we wish particularly to emphasise that this type of community infrastructure is being provided by churches every day in the most deprived and disadvantaged areas.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.houseofgood.nationalchurchestrust.org>

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Eifler, CEO of *Making Music*, personal communication, January 2025.

<sup>8</sup> Personal communication from the church, October 2024

## Caring for and funding churches

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13. Churches are more or less unique amongst heritage public buildings in the way they are cared for and funded.
14. **Volunteers are funding the heritage as well as being responsible for it.** Churches are not only cared for by volunteers, but their income relies heavily on voluntary giving. To give some idea of scale, in 2022 the individual congregations of the Church of England raised approaching £400m simply through voluntary giving.<sup>9</sup> Yet congregations have no financial stake in the building. They find themselves inadvertent custodians of national cultural heritage providing benefit to the wider community, but largely paying for it out of their own pockets.
15. **The heritage cannot easily be monetised.** Only a handful of famous destination churches charge for entry. This means that they cannot monetise their heritage interest – most of those visiting to explore the building's heritage do not donate. For similar reasons, churches are not easily able to count the number of visitors they attract, though one realistic estimate (albeit made some time ago) suggested there might be between 10m and 50m visitors to churches per year excluding cathedrals.<sup>10</sup> Broadly in line with this, a recent survey suggested 17% of adults had visited a church as a visitor or tourist during the past year.<sup>11</sup> Local facilities, such as pubs and overnight accommodation, benefit from these visitors. The church doesn't.
16. **No commercial case for promoting tourism.** As a result of not being able to monetise visitors, there is no commercial case for a church to promote general tourism, even if it knows its heritage is attractive. In particular, there is no incentive to invest in any local tourist information initiative. Despite this, the tradition of hospitality and pride in their building does lead many churches to respond positively with their time and enthusiasm when there are local initiatives to attract pilgrims, visitors and tourists. Unfortunately these initiatives have tended to be grant-funded, and to last three years and then fade away, with a legacy website drifting out of date.
17. **Rely on donations for large projects.** Because the heritage value of the building cannot be monetised, and it is normally not possible for congregations to borrow against the value of the building, major projects rely on fund raising. This can be from the congregation, from local well-wishers and from grant-givers.

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<sup>9</sup> Parish Finance Statistic 2022, (Church of England Central Services 2024), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Trevor Cooper, *How do we keep our parish churches?*, 2004, p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> Survey: *Attitudes to church buildings (2023-24)*.

18. As a rule of thumb, any one listed church building will need significant repairs once a generation or less. Smaller repairs are more frequent: in our experience, they tend to be funded from the congregation itself, or with local, relatively informal support. Thus when major repair needs arise, they impose an enormous and unfamiliar fund-raising burden on the congregation.<sup>12</sup> As congregations are not set up with professional staff to run projects, it is typically volunteers from within the congregation who find themselves running major projects. It is known that this can cause considerable strain on the relevant volunteer(s).<sup>13</sup>
19. **Responsibility falling on deprived areas.** Due to demographic change, extremely fine churches can be found in areas of significant deprivation. The financial and organisational burden falls locally, on congregations of limited capacity and income. There is no automatic failsafe to keep these listed buildings watertight and in use. If they become unusable, then all the social infrastructure associated with the building also disappear.
20. **Geographical imbalance in burden of care.** For historical reasons, many listed Anglican churches – often of the very highest heritage importance – are found in places where very small numbers of people live. Thus 20% percent of Church of England parish churches – 3,000 churches – are found in communities where just over one percent of the population live.<sup>14</sup> Until the nineteenth century, when funding of these buildings was through compulsory taxation on land, the number of people hardly mattered.<sup>15</sup> These buildings have managed to make their way through the twentieth century on the voluntary principle, but, as discussed later, with reducing congregations the model is becoming unsustainable.

## Volunteer trends

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21. Many congregations are large, growing, active and confident. However on average congregations in traditional denominations, who occupy most of the listed churches, are shrinking, as is the case in much of the western world.<sup>16</sup> This means there are fewer volunteers. There is a widespread view that we are now reaching a tipping point, exacerbated by the pandemic which brought forward the average decline in numbers.

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<sup>12</sup> For example, discussed in Cooper, *How do we keep our parish churches?*, p. 29

<sup>13</sup> Becky Payne et al, *Evaluation of the Grants for Places of Worship (GPOW) programme*, 2020, passim

<sup>14</sup> Archbishops' Council, personal communication, 2018. The more precise figure is 1.1% of the population.

<sup>15</sup> Mandatory church rates were abolished in 1868; payment of the vicar via tithes (taxes) on agricultural land lingered on until the 1970s.

<sup>16</sup> For congregational size, Trevor Cooper, *Caring for churches and chapels in England: the long view* (2024), pp. 3, 4, 7.

22. In Scotland, about 150 Church of Scotland churches have closed in the last year, and about another 250 will close in the next few years (totalling about 25%); for the most part, heritage significance has not played a part in the selection of churches to close.<sup>17</sup> In Wales, 300 Church in Wales churches are expected to close in the next ten years (about 25%)<sup>18</sup> (other commentators have suggested as many as 70% may close).<sup>19</sup>
23. In England there are no firm estimates, but it is telling that in 2023, one in twenty Church of England churches had usual Sunday attendance of six people or fewer. These tiny congregations are responsible for perhaps 800 churches, and will mostly be rural. The smallest 800 churches had larger congregations in 2015 – eight people or fewer, rather than six or fewer – emphasising the impact of the general downward trend.<sup>20</sup> Not surprisingly in rural areas there is now difficulty in finding volunteers to be Treasurer, Secretary or Churchwarden.<sup>21</sup>
24. It is important to appreciate that many church buildings with tiny congregations are still valued by their community, and will often form an important social hub for various events – religious festivals, funerals and weddings, and other occasional one-off events. But the burden of the building is falling on a few shoulders, with the community itself often not being large.
25. In response to the challenge of declining numbers, there has been much fresh thinking and imaginative responses, both from faith groups and civil society. For example in the last fifty or so years, in addition to reductions in the number of paid clergy, organisational simplification within denominations and the exploration of back-office shared services, we have seen:
- The appearance of an estimated 2,000 Friends Groups for individual churches
  - Trusts looking after one or more historic church or churches, including churches used for regular worship
  - Following a campaign by the faith sector, clarification of the law to confirm that Local Councils can financially support the use of places of worship for community purposes
  - The introduction of support officers for groups of churches, to advise and assist
  - Where in line with the congregation's understanding of the proper use of the church, the increased use of the building for appropriate non-religious purposes

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<sup>17</sup> Church of Scotland, personal communication, February 2025

<sup>18</sup> Church in Wales, personal communication, January 2025

<sup>19</sup> Chris Catling, *'The future for places of worship'*, 2020

<sup>20</sup> Church of England, Statistics for Mission, various years.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2024/15-march/features/features/no-churchwardens-and-vacant-pcc-posts-an-investigation-into-the-church-volunteering-crisis>

- For Church of England churches (especially rural churches), an increasing interest in the use of church buildings no longer in routine use as ‘quiet spaces’ or alternatively as ‘festival churches’.
- The active introduction of better heating, loos and kitchen facilities in remoter churches

26. But it is clear that this is not enough. The problem of the future of our church buildings will not be solved by the action of independent players without government support and co-ordination.

## State support for church buildings

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27. Unlike many European countries, there is a low level of State Support for historic churches, and funding is not guaranteed. There is a particular difficulty with capital funding.

### Ring-fenced funding

28. The principle of State Support for churches in use was first accepted in 1977 by Peter Shore, the then Labour Secretary of State for the Environment, who set up a ring-fenced fund for major repair projects to historic churches (cathedrals were excluded from its scope). Ring-fenced funding was available for forty years, from then until 2017. In 2003 the ring-fenced fund was £30m per annum, equivalent to £60m per annum today after allowing for building cost inflation.<sup>22</sup> This funding made a huge difference: it was the bedrock for churches facing major repairs. A ring-fenced scheme for repairs continued to be available in one form or another until closed for applications in early Autumn 2017, grants to the last batch of applicants being paid over the next couple of years. Following 2017, churches applied rather less effectively through an open scheme, and received substantially less than the £30 previously ring-fenced.

29. In England, Historic England (HE) maintains a Heritage at Risk (HAR) register. Something over 6% of the listed places of worship in England were on the register in 2024 (or to put it another way, more than 93% were not), and the most common category, with two-thirds of the cases, was ‘slow decay’, rather than ‘immediate risk’. The point to note, though, is that there been a notable drop in the number coming off the register each year as shown in the table below, and this probably reflects a reduced number of major repairs following the reduction in successful applications for capital funding for repairs.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Using <https://costmodelling.com/construction-indices>

<sup>23</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-at-risk/> The HAR register for places of worship uses different criteria than that for secular buildings, and includes those listed Grade II, so is not comparable.



Number of listed places of worship coming off the HAR register for good reasons, by year	
Year	Number of coming off register
2014	116
2015	114
2016	129
2017	115
2018	117
2019	98
2020	69
2021	50
2022	65
2023	29
2024	23

### One-off State capital funding

30. In recent years there have been other one-off capital funding schemes paid for by the State, notably the two-part Roof Fund and the Covid-era Heritage Stimulus Fund, part of the wider DCMS Culture Recovery Fund. The independent evaluation of the former showed that although the fund was *entirely* dedicated to the repair of the building, and not to community outcomes, it had ‘wider and unintended outcomes’, including increased community activity, with churches being used in new ways; a rekindling of community pride; and increased skills and confidence. In other words, taking away the grinding burden of funding a major repair allowed congregations to use the space more fully and freed them up for better things.<sup>24</sup> Similar results were found with the Heritage Stimulus Fund.<sup>25</sup>

### State funding at present

31. At present the only way the State funds the care of churches in use is through the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (LPWGS), which allows the recovery of VAT spent on repairs and alterations.<sup>26</sup> (For obvious reasons, the very great majority of churches are not VAT registered, so cannot reclaim VAT on expenditure.) The scheme was started in 2021 by Gordon Brown in recognition of the social value of churches. It is funded by DCMS, and has had a Treasury backstop to a maximum of £42m. It operates across the UK. Although in theory open-ended, it is in practice limited by the rate at which needs arise, and the ability of congregations to raise

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<sup>24</sup> Listed Places of Worship Roof Fund Repair Evaluation, pp. 37–42.

<sup>25</sup> 991 Stitches in time, p. 18

<sup>26</sup> It is very rare for Historic England to give grants to places of worship.

funds. In those periods when it was guaranteed for several years ahead, it provided certainty for the applicant, with the money directly flowing through to skilled construction jobs and activity. The cost to the government in the most recent year was £29m.<sup>27</sup>

32. However it was announced on 22 January 2025 that the Scheme would be capped in 2025/26 at £25k per church (the VAT relating to an ex-Vat expenditure of £125k), and the Scheme itself limited to a total expenditure of £23m during the year. It is as yet uncertain whether the LPWGS will continue beyond March 2026.

### **Recent developments for capital funding**

33. Last year (2024) the National Lottery Heritage Fund announced its aspiration to award £85m to individual places of worship apart from cathedrals (and a further £15m for strategic projects), and this has been widely welcomed. Even so, it represents approximately half in real terms of what the State was providing earlier in the century, whilst the need is certainly no less. Furthermore the sum is not ring-fenced: volunteers seeking funds for their churches are in competition for funds with other forms of heritage.

## **Select Committee questions**

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### **Qn. What are the most significant challenges facing owners and operators of built heritage assets, and how are they affecting what those sites can offer?**

34. As should be clear, we believe the most significant challenges for historic churches are
- the reducing number of volunteers caring for historic church buildings and delivering services from them
  - uncertain and inadequate funding
35. These are difficult issues, not amenable to any silver bullet. We believe that DCMS and the Government as a whole should explicitly accept that there is a complex range challenges which need to be addressed to find the most beneficial future for historic churches – for everyone. In particular we would ask the government to reframe its approach to these buildings as ‘helping small volunteer groups provide public goods (heritage goods and social goods)’, and accept that this will require long-term partnerships.

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<sup>27</sup> <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-01-22/debates/1BB8B56E-26D3-45B1-9E0E-A80287596BA7/ListedPlacesOfWorshipScheme>. For background, see House of Commons Library, [VAT and Churches](#) (2025)

36. The challenges will not be met, and the opportunities realised, by parties acting independently. The situation needs government leadership, acting as far as possible in concert with others – in this respect we were encouraged by Sir Chris Bryant’s suggestion during the Westminster Hall debate that he would want to work with MPs on the issues. We would propose, for example, that the Minister of State commissions a review to help shape the future of historic churches – for the benefit of everyone.

**37. Key Recommendation: Government should recognise its leadership role. It should work cross-party, with the principal denominations, and with civil society to develop a plan of action for the future of historic church buildings (including cathedrals).**

**Qn. What can the Government do to make it easier for communities or local businesses to take ownership of historic buildings?**

38. A number of churches no longer required for regular worship have been acquired by local Trusts or other community groups. We believe this may become more common, and that now is the appropriate time to review how well this operates – for example, in the area of eligibility for grants.

39. **Recommendation:** The DCMS should work with the sector to develop an appropriate framework for charitable Trusts caring for historic religious buildings for public benefit.

40. For most denominations, the disposal of the building falls under the relevant charity law. In England and Wales, legal opinion was sought and published by Historic England some years ago on the extent to which obtaining best value on disposal meant that the highest monetary offer should be accepted by the charity. This legal opinion was extremely helpful to the relevant denominations. The Charity Commission has undertaken to write an opinion by later this year on the same question for the Charities Act of 2022. It may be that at the next iteration of Charity Law, these concerns can be taken into account when the amendments are being drafted.

41. The Methodist Church Act 1976 governs sales by the Methodist Church, and places restrictions on how that denomination’s churches can be disposed of. The disposal of buildings by the Church of England is governed by statute.

42. **Recommendation:** The government should review, with the sector, the current regulatory barriers and difficulties to communities taking ownership in those areas where government has a role.

**Qn. How effective are the current funding and finance models for built heritage? What should long-term public funding for the sector look like?**

43. Given their volunteer-based funding, churches need predictability and access to funds to support major repairs. There is also, we believe, room for innovation in funding, not explored in this submission.

44. The LPWGS provides the necessary baseline predictability. It has the further advantages of being straightforward, incentivising the desired behaviour, allowing local prioritisation, and encouraging local philanthropy as donors know that none of their money will go in tax. It is widely seen as fair. It has the further advantage of effectively matching the zero rate of VAT which is applied to demolition/rebuild of listed properties, thus not privileging the latter. A continued cap would, however, mitigate against all those advantages.

**45. Key Recommendation: Until progress can be made toward a zero VAT regime for repair and maintenance of listed properties, the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme should be made permanent, and return to being fully funded without a cap.**

46. The earlier discussion demonstrated the need for capital funding. This needs to be ring-fenced, and easy for volunteers to apply for, based on heritage need. We believe it is largely the role of the State to provide this support, though it may be that other partners, such as the NLHF, can play a part.

**47. Key recommendation: We propose a new capital funding scheme for listed buildings of all faiths and denominations, establishing a recurring fund of at least £50 million per year, with proportionate funding provided for the devolved administrations. The majority of the cost should be covered by the taxpayer, and should be administered in collaboration with relevant organisations in the faith buildings and heritage sector.**

48. We and others have been struck by the success of the model of distribution used by the Heritage Stimulus Fund, and suggest this can be built upon. We also note how the evaluation of various capital funds shows they often draw in other money, and that even capital funds dedicated entirely to building work have positive social consequences.

49. **Recommendation:** Government and partners should assess what can be learnt from previous capital funding schemes to design the most effective capital repairs funding scheme(s) for listed buildings of all denominations and faiths.

**Qn. What role does built heritage play in the regeneration of local areas and in contributing to economic growth and community identity?**

50. The Faith Covenant launched by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society in 2014 set out principles for how Local Authorities could work effectively with Faith Groups, and a number of local authorities have since signed up to it.<sup>28</sup> Latterly the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the role of churches at the heart of communities, showing how they were effective in maintaining contact with vulnerable and isolated groups. New partnerships between local authorities and faith groups emerged, often based on faith groups long-term presence in the community. It has since been suggested that government and faith communities should develop more integrated ways of working.<sup>29</sup>
51. **Recommendation:** The Government should work with denominations to establish the value of churches in providing community infrastructure, and consider how this might best be leveraged.
52. Cultural and heritage tourism is popular. In the year ending March 2023, 67% of adults in England reported having visited a heritage site.<sup>30</sup> Globally it is a large segment of the tourism market and fast growing.<sup>31</sup> Churches are already tourist destinations, with millions of visitors each year, but as explained earlier, there is no commercial incentive for them to join together to market their heritage assets, because they cannot monetise them. A national approach is needed to maximise the economic potential of these unsurpassed yet under-utilised heritage assets.
53. **Recommendation:** The DCMS should commission a national study, working with the Visitor Economy Advisory Council, to make the most of the unique heritage of the UK's historic churches.

**Qn. What are the financial, regulatory and practical barriers to preserving built heritage?**

54. The principal barrier is funding for church buildings, and this has been dealt with above.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.faithandsociety.org/covenant/>

<sup>29</sup> See the research papers summarised in Charlotte Dodgeon, Sustaining historic churches: what does recent research tell us? (2022), 20–24.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/participation-survey-2022-23-annual-publication/main-report-for-the-participation-survey-april-2022-to-march-2023>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/heritage-tourism-market-report>

55. We wish to emphasise the key role played by Historic England as a facilitator and innovator. For example currently or in recent years:

- developing and co-funding the idea of 'Support Officers'
- setting up and running the Heritage at Risk Register
- developing a new online tool for all faith groups to help develop Statements of Significance and Need
- commissioning research on Major Parish Churches
- commissioning research on the value of maintenance for historic churches

56. We hope DCMS will be able to fund Historic England in a way which enables it to continue this type of work.

**Qn. What policies would ensure the UK workforce has the right skills to maintain our heritage assets?**

57. One key policy is to ensure there is sustained, long-term demand, sufficient to draw people into the crafts and allow existing craftsmen to invest in training. A steady stream of capital funding over a significant period would help to keep demand and supply dynamics in balance, and reduce inflationary pressures. Our recommendations for public funding align with this.

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