**Unofficial transcript: Caroline Dinenage to Big Update, 10 March 2021**

I am so delighted that my first major speaking engagement as Heritage Minister is for the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance. I come to this role fully aware of the massive contribution that listed places of worship make to their communities and indeed to the nation as a whole. It is a feeling shared by my ministerial colleagues at DCMS and of course shared by many members of the public who take great pride in their listed places of worship which are outstanding examples of architecture, craftmanship and often house beautiful works of art along with the history of the communities they serve.

From large towns to rural communities, they provide a strong sense of place and history and it is not surprising that many people form strong attachments to them.

They are primarily places of faith and yet they also provide refuge during tough times. They are also centres of community activities and support hosting meetings and events.

They are often the first to co-ordinate charity relief and can often provide meaningful contacts for the lonely and isolated. This has all been especially true during the coronavirus pandemic. Time and again, we have seen listed places of worship and the people who run them making a massive difference from making phone calls and keeping in contact with vulnerable people to hosting blood donation and testing and vaccination centres, from helping with child support to shopping for food and medicine for those who are shielding. The work you have done under the such challenging conditions has been astounding.

And I think this has highlighted to everyone, the continuing value of faith and the unique buildings to our national life.

It is why we are so proud to have supported listed places of worship throughout the pandemic, particularly through the Culture Recovery Fund. Through various schemes, we have been able to provide nearly £30m in direct grants and through representative bodies.

We are continuing to support the sector during Round 2 funding grants and as mentioned in last week’s budget, as we move out of the pandemic, we are continuing to support your institutions as you re-open and recover.

I am aware of the value you place on the LPWGS and I am genuinely pleased that we have been able to confirm that this will continue until March 2022.

Looking even further into the future, we will continue to work with our partners including the Treasury, MHCLG and Historic England to make sure you are supported for the longer term.

The Taylor Review Pilot which concluded just before Covid have given us a great deal of insight which will inform future decisions on funding and support. And we need your advice and expertise too, so please keep talking to us.

I want to thank the HRBA for their kind invitation to their Big Update and I am so sorry to have not been able to join you, live, through your Zoom conference today. But I hope you’ll have a lively and fruitful discussion.

As we move forward out of the pandemic, I really look forward to meeting you all in person.