



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Places of Worship Strategy

2013-2018

Introduction

There are approximately 14,500 listed places of worship, including 45% of the nation's grade I historic buildings, mostly mediaeval parish churches. The vast majority were built to the highest standards that the community or patron could afford, and often reflect the wealth based on agriculture, commerce or industry in a particular place'. They provided the framework for national and personal life; baptism, marriage and burial as well as education for the young, comfort for the aged and commemoration for the dead. As such they embody some of the finest design and workmanship, materials and artistry in the country. Their custodianship, and the cost of keeping them, is a responsibility that falls on the shoulders, nationally, of a decreasing and aging number of people. English Heritage regards them as a uniquely significant body of heritage assets. This strategy has been developed to:

1. promote their value as part of England's heritage
2. support the congregations and communities that look after them
3. support creative and viable ways of using them as places of worship or, if no longer needed for that, for some other purpose

The challenge faced by congregations seeking to maintain and manage their historic buildings makes places of worship particularly vulnerable. English Heritage is in a unique position in being the Government's adviser through both the secular and ecclesiastical planning systems. It also has a key role in creating networks to share best practice between statutory and voluntary parts of the sector. Its commitment to partnerships that bring about effective research, strategic understanding and on-the-ground practical developments is of paramount importance in a sector of the historic environment that might otherwise be fragmented through diversity and lack of resource.

The National Heritage Protection Plan (NHPP) forms a framework for heritage protection around a clear set of priorities that resulted from widespread public consultation. It is a significant component of the Corporate Plan 2011-15. Places of worship have a prominent presence throughout the NHPP and the overall commitment across EH to Places of Worship research is substantial and on-going. Such research is vital if guidance, advice and resources are to be based on evidence. This strategy seeks to influence the new NHPP, currently being developed, and recognises issues that places of worship sector partners are likely to raise during the public consultation on the NHPP.

It is equally the case that Places of Worship constitute a considerable part of the workload in all EH areas of work; National Protection and Conservation Department (NPCD) teams deal with many pre-application requests and give formal advice on proposed works. In addition staff are committed through both EH partnership in the Heritage Lottery Fund's (HLF) grants scheme and the Heritage at Risk programme. NPCD staff also set up and monitor Support Officer posts and are consulted about some works to Cathedrals. Designation teams respond both to immediate threats and systematic assessment of places of worship through *Taking Stock* and within National Advice and Information (NAI) the Heritage Crime, Legal, Communications and Government Advice Team (GAT) Places of Worship make considerable demands.

This strategy seeks to acknowledge EH's considerable ongoing commitment to Places of Worship and to articulate this work thematically, although it is spread across a wide range of projects and departments.

English Heritage will focus its resources on:

1. Promoting historic places of worship as part of the national heritage

A large proportion of England's historic assets are places of worship, still in use and held in stewardship by local congregations, their significance and monitoring their condition, whilst enabling their continued use is a key part of English Heritage's role, to be achieved:

- 1.1 by advising HM Govt on designation, conservation, significance and use of places of worship, so that the places of worship perspective is included in its advice regarding future legislation, guidance and policy.
- 1.2 by fulfilling English Heritage's statutory responsibilities under the secular and ecclesiastical planning processes, including providing advice, and guidance.
- 1.3 by promoting use, understanding, enjoyment and engagement with historic places of worship through research, designation and collaborative projects.
- 1.4 by demonstrating the public benefit of historic places of worship through their cultural and economic contribution to local communities in addition to their architectural, archaeological, historical and social significance.
- 1.5 by bringing together different faith groups, voluntary bodies and public sector groups to enhance appreciation, co-operation and knowledge. Widening the supporter base and promotion of wider ownership/responsibility
- 1.6 by seeking to secure HLF and other support for the future

2. Supporting and advising those caring for historic places of worship

The responsibility for the care of historic places of worship rests on a small number of volunteers. Helping them to maintain, develop and celebrate them is a key part of English Heritage's role, to be achieved:

- 2.1 through promotion of effective maintenance and management of repairs for all buildings, particularly those at risk of damage to, or loss of, historic fabric.
- 2.2 by advising on appropriate and justifiable changes to enhance and improve buildings and to accommodate additional uses alongside worship and mission.
- 2.2 through encouragement and development of traditional skills and new training opportunities.

3. Encouraging appropriate new uses for historic places of worship

Not all places of worship are required by faith groups and denominations but they still make an important contribution to the historic, social and communal environment. Working with owners, local authorities and decision-makers to come to pragmatic, viable solutions for their future is a key part of English Heritage's role.

- 3.1 Where religious use cannot be maintained English Heritage will seek to work with faith groups and others, including local authorities, to create strategies for re-use that will protect the significance of the building and ensure a realistic, sustainable future.
- 3.2 In the case of highly significant places of worship that are no longer needed for worship but need to be conserved on behalf of the nation, English Heritage will advise on their significance and offer advice as required.

English Heritage will seek to deliver this strategy by:

1. Focussing its resources on those issues where it can add most value:

- National expertise to address technical problems e.g. heating and lighting, repair of materials, climate change and energy issues.
- Guidance on good practice based on practical experience and sound research e.g. management of change in historic interiors, preventing and dealing with metal theft and coping with bats.
- Local support e.g. providing practical advice and support to local congregations to help them to repair, adapt, and sustain their historic places of worship.
- Places of Worship Support Officers, where local priorities and resources for both partner bodies and English Heritage make such posts possible.

2. Working with partners to promote:

- Strategic assessment of the condition of places of worship e.g. Heritage at Risk and Taking Stock
- The value of places of worship and their need for resources e.g. importance of the continued HLF support of places of worship, value of the Listed Places of Worship Scheme for recovery of VAT and use of ARCH to keep focus on the true cost of heritage crime.
- The importance of regular maintenance and equipping volunteers to do it safely e.g. SPAB Maintenance Co-Operatives Movement
- Accessible information systems to support decision-making e.g. Church Heritage Record (Church of England), Patrimony Committee on-line directory of church buildings (Roman Catholic Church), national Assessment of The Society of Friends' Meeting Houses.

3 Offering guidance in a targeted and timely way:

- As a statutory consultee within the secular planning process and under the Ecclesiastical Exemption. EH will focus resources on responding to pre-application requests for advice from congregations and will follow a clear protocol in engagement with Advisory Committees. A guidance note explaining this engagement is available on www.english-heritage.org.uk
- By developing accessible, evidence based information on heritage assets and their significance e.g. Introductions to Historic Assets (Mosques, Buddhist, Nonconformist and other building types)
- As a result of focussed research programmes into materials, methods and techniques e.g. concrete, protection of historic glazing, fire protection.
- Through publications and engagement with under-represented heritage e.g. publications, workshops, networks.

4 Prioritising research through the National Heritage Protection Plan on:

- Cross-sector concerns e.g. improved understanding and valuing of historic church and chapels interiors, 20th century faith buildings
- Improving understanding of specific faith groups' buildings e.g. Roman Catholic Church, Society of Friends, Nonconformist Chapels
- Scoping and assessing current knowledge of buildings and relevant practices of non-Christian faith groups to develop expertise and enable informed advice and designation.

5. Working with partners to identify new and appropriate uses:

- Through greater recognition of the potential of buildings to be used for worship alongside a wide range of other functions.
- By encouraging suitable new uses for buildings no longer needed for worship so that they can be sustained and maintained.
- Through developing stronger links between English Heritage and faith groups without previous experience of owning and managing such buildings that are seeking to use listed places of worship.

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