

Summary of the Taylor Review: Sustainability of Churches and Cathedrals

The HRBA issued a summary of the above report's contents to recipients of its newsletter shortly after the report was published on 20 December 2017. The summary is reproduced below, lightly edited and with a small amount of additional material.

1. As was known from its Terms of Reference, the scope is strictly limited to Church of England buildings in England. The report deals almost entirely with parish churches and similar; it makes a recommendation that a separate exercise should be set up for cathedrals, as they are so different from parish churches (page 37).

2. The report emphasises the need for a more strategic approach to funding so that best value is achieved from any investment made (page 17). The report proposes in the short and medium term at least that there should be a central Minor Repairs Fund and also a Major Repairs Fund provided by Government (page 18). The relationship of these proposed new Funds to the Listed Places of Worship Grant (LPOW) Scheme is not clear, but the present funding for the LPOW scheme may be being included in the total tentatively proposed for the two new Funds (pages 18, 36). The report appears to contain no assessment of the impact or effectiveness of the current LPOW scheme.

3a. At the heart of the report lies the belief that reliance on external funding can be reduced by increased community use of the buildings. This will increase income for each parish and enlarge the stakeholder base, which will thus reduce the need for external funding. Greater community engagement should be encouraged by a national network of Community Support Advisers (pages 10, 15, 17, 29).

3b. The report is explicit that it focuses primarily on sustainability via wider community use through increased facilities. It is accepted that sustainability through such increased community use will not be applicable to some churches in very rural areas, and these 'non-viable' churches may therefore need to close and many will not be taken up by the Churches Conservation Trust (page 23). There is no estimate of the number of such non-viable churches or their heritage significance.

4a. The report sees the need for more strategic planning of maintenance and repairs, with more timely execution of minor repairs. It therefore proposes dioceses keep a central list of repair plans for all churches over a rolling ten years, and provide help to parishes in planning and carrying these out. It is proposed this is done by Fabric Support Officers in dioceses. Fabric Support Officers will monitor whether churches were keeping up to date with their plans.

4b. A decision will be made by an unspecified body on which churches should be given funds from the Minor and Major Repairs Funds, taking advice from Fabric Support Officers for Minor Repairs, and both them and Community Support Advisers for Major Repairs. The decision will be made using 'stringent criteria', which are not stated, though money will only be provided when local funding options are exhausted. The pilot schemes (see below) will determine eligibility criteria for use of the Funds (pages 15-16, 17, 18, 20, 32-3, 35). The report is unequivocal (page 21) that it believes that for all places of worship the need for public funding of maintenance and repair should be judged on the historic value of the building.

5. As far as we have noticed, there is no discussion of a different model of sustainability, represented by the report produced earlier in the year which demonstrated the effectiveness of the Roof Repair Fund both in repairing church buildings and increasing community activity, the latter an unintended but welcome consequence.
6. The report contains a recommendation that Government should take steps to clarify or ensure that local authorities (such as parish councils) can legally put money into church buildings, given the current uncertainty on the matter (pages 31-32).
7. The Review Panel decided not to consider alternative management models for churches (pages 22-23), though commenting that the Church's current consideration of these aligns well with the recommendations of the Review (pages 27-28), and assuming that Community Support Advisers will be able to give advice on them (page 31). Alternative models also receive a passing mention when discussing closure (page 23).
8. The Report recommends that the Government should fund a two or three year pilot of these ideas, by funding Community Support Advisers and Fabric Support Officers in two areas, and that the pilot should include a trial Minor Repairs Fund (but not a trial Major Repairs Fund) - the intention is that the pilot should provide a firmer evidence base for going forward (pages 18-19, 37-38).
9. The Review does not cover places of worship of non-CofE faith groups, and acknowledges that its proposal for finding funding through increased community use will not be possible for all faith groups. It recommends Government should engage with these groups (page 21).
10. Appendix 5 of the report has a description of State Support for religious buildings in other countries of the European Union (pages 63-67), and this is glancingly referred to in the body of the report (p.22).

The report is at

http://www.hrballiance.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2016/04/Taylor_Review_Final.pdf

Contact: hrbchair@theheritagealliance.org.uk

HRBA, www.hrballiance.org.uk