



The Diocese of Southwark

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Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) for the Care of Churches

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RESPONSE TO TAILORED REVIEW OF HISTORIC ENGLAND From Philip Fletcher CBE, Chair of Diocesan Advisory Committee, Diocese of Southwark, Church of England

I write to express our immense gratitude for Historic England (HE)'s current functions and support.

I write with reference to the contribution which HE makes to the conservation of churches as a key part of our national heritage. I am the Chair of Southwark Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC). DACs perform a key role in ensuring that the conditions of the 'Ecclesiastical Exemption' are applied with due rigour to achieve an appropriate balance: conserving the heritage of church buildings whilst enabling their communities to use them both to worship effectively in the 21st Century and for other community purposes.

As a statutory consultee, Historic England's expert advice on schemes involving listed churches is invaluable in guiding the Diocesan Advisory Committee. Casework is handled well in the London & South East Region, in terms of the speed of response and the quality and clarity of the advice given, including a proportionate and pragmatic approach. The free advice given is valued because the owner/developer on church projects is the PCC, which is a charity. So far, we are not aware of any churches using the Enhanced Advisory Services on development proposals.

All churches must use the Faculty process, regardless of their listed status. However, the advice given by the DAC is proportionate to the grade of the listing. The listed status of a church is a useful guide when looking at the degree of change or harm which could be permissible. The newer listing descriptions being produced by HE now are also central to understanding the significance of church buildings. We have started to encourage those churches looking at large schemes to request that their listing descriptions be revised in order to guide their proposals.

As reactions to the fire in Notre Dame de Paris have shown, cathedrals and historic churches are valued not just by those who worship in them week by week, but also by the wider community for their importance in terms of history and aesthetic and artistic excellence. England is fortunate in enjoying a rich heritage of historic churches, a great number in the care of the Church of England as living places of worship, cared for and paid for by their congregations. However, appropriate care is expensive and has put great financial pressure on those congregations. In recognition of their wider community value Government has given assistance of various kinds to encourage effective maintenance and enhancement. These have been much appreciated and long may the VAT Reclaim Scheme continue.

The Taylor Review recommended the appointment of Fabric Support Officers and Community Support Officers in two Dioceses, under HE auspices. This is in addition to the Historic Churches Support Officers, whose salaries are part funded by Historic England. This enables Diocese to appoint a case worker for 3 years to help parishes to take forward conservation and enhancement proposals that fully respect the historic significance of the churches concerned.

At Southwark, the scheme has fully demonstrated its worth. For a very limited financial outlay, the officer has provided Archdeacons (senior clergy with responsibility for oversight of the parishes) and individual parishes with essential advice and training to enable them to safeguard listed church buildings in an efficient way. I am confident that the Taylor Review pilot will provide ample justification to roll the scheme out across England under the auspices of HE.

Our Historic Churches Support Officer has specifically focussed on Heritage at Risk. She has been able to help a number of churches advance their regeneration schemes, successfully apply for funding and improve the condition of their buildings. During her time with us, the number of churches on the Heritage at Risk Register has in fact increased but this is due to increased awareness of the condition of the churches in the Diocese, rather than deteriorating maintenance regimes.

Our parishes have benefitted from the training provided by our Support Officer and our staff have benefitted from training provided by HE. In the last couple of years, they have attended day-long training events relating to: Metal Railings, Mechanical & Electrical Engineering, and Accessibility in historic buildings and the historic environment. These were helpful, good quality training sessions. Our Support Officer has also benefitted from regular meetings with other support officers and the availability of Historic England staff to consult with and to give her advice.

HE's public campaigns are welcomed, often in collaboration with key partners, for example, raising awareness of War Memorials for the WWI Centenary. The provision of quality, in-depth Technical Advice and research into both general and non-specialist guidance on their website is welcomed and well utilised by our staff. Topics of particular use to us have been:

- Major Parish Churches research project
- promoting and researching Twentieth Century Places of Worship
- research/guidance and conference on stained glass
- re-launch of Places of Worship web-pages which provide relevant information for local building owners (PCCs), dioceses and others.

Historic England's advice and support for the work that we do is wide-ranging, multi-faceted and indispensable.

I ask that this letter be taken into account in the tailored review.

Yours sincerely,

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Philip Fletcher CBE
Chair, Diocesan Advisory Committee