

Press release: Independent review calls for greater community use to give church buildings a sustainable future

Churches should be opened up for new and different uses by communities to help build a more sustainable future for the buildings, an independent report has recommended.

[The Taylor Review: Sustainability of English Churches and Cathedrals](#) says that congregations should be empowered to involve more local people in enjoying, valuing, using and caring for their churches.

The review panel, chaired by Bernard Taylor and made up of representatives from the Church of England and heritage bodies, was set up last year to find new ways to maintain Church of England buildings and look at the potential for different funding models.

A total of 12,200 Church of England churches are listed and since 1999 there has been £2.6 billion invested in repairs and new build projects, with Government and lottery sources providing £810 million of this investment.

Bernard Taylor, Chairman of the English Churches and Cathedrals Sustainability Review, said:

Church buildings are an important and a much-loved part of our national heritage and form an integral part of our sense of identity and community. However, despite the hard work of many groups and volunteers around the country, they face complex problems of maintenance and repair, and are not always well used and supported.

Increased use and helping communities in their broadest form to see the value and potential of the local church is the key to the church building becoming more self-sustaining and ultimately ensuring its long term survival. The solution must be local and there is no instant solution, but these recommendations represent the next steps towards a more sustainable future for these important buildings.

Heritage Minister John Glen said:

I welcome this report and want to thank Bernard Taylor and the whole panel for their work. Our church buildings are a major part of our heritage and it is vital that they are cared for and

protected. This report has shown how valued these buildings are and how many thousands of volunteers work so hard on their upkeep.

This review is an important first step to building a more sustainable future for thousands of church buildings across the country, and we will look at these recommendations carefully.

The review panel welcomed the work by the Church of England to simplify its processes and make it easier for churches to get consent to share use of their buildings. Guidance is also being prepared by the Church of England to support models of community ownership and responsibility such as the creation of local Trusts and Friends.

The Rt Revd John Inge, Bishop of Worcester and lead bishop on cathedrals and church buildings, said:

I welcome the findings of this Review. Our 16,000 churches are the jewel in the crown of our built heritage. They exist, as they always have done, to serve their communities. This is seen through daily acts of worship, celebrations of the joys of life and commemorations of its sorrows. They are, though, not just places of worship for their communities: they are social hubs for people of all ages, spaces to offer hospitality and vital services to the vulnerable; churches increasingly are the glue in community life.

I have enormous respect for the millions of volunteers and church workers who through the generations have cared for our churches.

The strategy proposed in this report to support these vital buildings will, I pray, help to protect their fabric and equip them to serve anew in the future.

The Review makes clear how churches and cathedrals are vital community assets in need of support nationally. We look forward to working with funding partners to put the proposals into place.

The review panel highlighted the best practice of many churches and of volunteers around the country, with buildings adapted and used for cafes, playgroups, and in some cases NHS and post office services. The panel said it wants to see more innovation of this kind.

It has proposed creating a national network of Community Support Advisers to help churches identify and strengthen wide ranging relationships within their local area. It hopes that through greater community engagement, churches will be used more frequently and can maximise new funding options reflecting this broad community involvement.

Congregations are individually responsible for the care of their own buildings and despite the commitment and hard work of volunteers, the panel found a lack of consistency in the ability of many churches to carry out

routine maintenance and repairs.

The panel has recommended creating a group of 'Fabric Support Officers' who have practical heritage buildings expertise to ensure that all churches have access to high quality advice. It also wants churches to develop annual minor repairs plans. This will mean that repairs can be addressed immediately and prevent the development of more costly major repairs. In addition, it has recommended a rolling ten-year major repairs plan to be prepared and kept up to date so that larger works can be planned and given the best chance of being properly funded.

It has proposed that these recommendations should be tested through pilot schemes in both rural and urban areas.

ENDS

1. Read [Bernard Taylor's blog](#) about the review
2. [The Taylor Review: Sustainability of English Churches and Cathedrals](#) was established in May, 2016.
3. A call for evidence to inform the review received almost 5,800 responses.
4. The panel consists of:
 - Chairman: Bernard Taylor CBE, Chairman of The Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition of 1851
 - Sir Tony Baldry, Chair of the Church Buildings Council
 - Dame Helen Ghosh, Director General of the National Trust
 - Loyd Grossman, Chair of Heritage Alliance
 - Rt Revd Dr John Inge, Bishop of Worcester, Lead Bishop on Church Buildings
 - Sir Simon Jenkins, Trustee Churches Conservation Trust
 - Sir Peter Luff, Heritage Lottery Fund
 - Sir Laurie Magnus, Chairman Historic England
 - Neil Mendoza, Landmark Trust & DCMS Non-Executive Director
 - Very Revd Catherine Ogle, Dean of Winchester
 - Jennie Page, Vice Chair of the Church Buildings Council
 - Alice Perkins, former Chair of the Post Office