

Press release: Pilot scheme launched to help build sustainable future for listed places of worship

A new scheme to help build a sustainable future for listed places of worship will be piloted in urban and rural areas in England, Heritage Minister Michael Ellis announced today.

Expert advisors will work with listed buildings used by all faiths and denominations in Manchester and Suffolk to increase community engagement and vital heritage management skills.

The projects, expected to begin in early autumn, will receive a total of £1.8 million over the next two years.

Eligible listed places of worship in the pilot areas will be able to access a £500,000 minor repairs fund.

The Taylor Review: Sustainability of English Churches and Cathedrals, which was published in December 2017, called for greater community use of Church of England buildings to help congregations raise income to pay for their upkeep.

This new pilot scheme extends this support to all faiths or denominations in order to help worshippers better care for and protect their listed buildings.

Fabric support officers will work within the two areas to provide high quality advice and develop maintenance and repair plans. These will ensure that routine repairs can be addressed immediately and prevent the development of more costly problems.

Community support advisors will work with the custodians of listed places of worship to identify and strengthen relationships within their local area and develop greater community partnerships.

Heritage Minister Michael Ellis said: "Britain has an incredible array of historic buildings important to all faiths which tell the story of our shared history and our communities. However the costs of caring for and protecting many listed places of worship can be prohibitive and lead many to fall into disrepair.

"The innovative pilots I am announcing today will help unlock the community potential of these buildings and provide practical guidance so they can be preserved for future generations."

Deborah Lamb, Deputy Chief Executive of Historic England, said:

"We are delighted that the Government is funding a new project to support the volunteers who care for historic places of worship. Buildings that are well looked after help to enrich the lives of people across England. They are

special spaces to visit and can be enjoyed by anyone, whether for worship or not.

“We know that keeping these buildings in good repair can be a challenge for congregations so we are excited by the potential of this pilot scheme, and look forward to playing our part in its success.”

Bishop of Worcester, the Rt Revd Dr John Inge said: “Church buildings have always been a crucial part of the community life of this nation and the majority of them provide one or more form of social outreach or community facilities. In working with the government on reviewing their long-term sustainability, it has been gratifying to hear many stories of churches that understand their Christian mission in terms of service to the community.

“These pilots will model a new type of partnership between the Church and the Government, investing in people and buildings side-by-side to ensure churches are able to continue to fulfil this function, whilst growing new opportunities to serve the people of England.”

Notes to editors: Funding will be available across different faiths and denominations. The support officers will be based with the Church of England diocese of Manchester and St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.