

# REPORT OF THE CHURCH BUILDINGS REVIEW GROUP

## Summary

This is the first attempt in many years to undertake a review of the Church of England's stewardship of its church buildings. It is timely since the Church of England has been reviewing many other aspects of its institutional life as part of its *Reform and Renewal* programme. The aim of that programme, to which this report is a contribution, is to enable the Church of England to focus more effectively on securing spiritual and numerical growth and serving the common good.

In Part 1 of this report we have pulled together a wide range of statistics in order to assess the present situation. Some 78% of the Church of England's 15,700 churches are listed. Over 57% of churches are in rural areas, where only 17% of the population lives. 91% of rural churches are listed, compared with 63% in suburban and 55% in urban areas. The Church of England is responsible for around 45% of the grade I listed buildings of England and almost three-quarters of these are in rural areas.

The position varies very considerably from diocese to diocese (see paragraphs 27-35) and the main responsibility both for strategic planning and developing new initiatives must remain within dioceses. We set out a number of recent initiatives (paragraphs 42-45). There can be no one Church of England strategy. But there is a need for national reflection on the challenges given concerns about current trends (paragraphs 49-56).

This needs to start with theology. Part 2 (paragraphs 57-118) explores why neither a 'high view' of place nor a 'low view' will do. It argues that 'churches have a significance much deeper than being just places to meet.' While 'there is an ongoing need to guard against an idolatrous attitude to buildings' it is a 'scriptural truth that place is a fundamental category of human and spiritual experience.' As a result our 'churches ... and our great cathedrals assist in proclaiming the gospel just by being there.'

The primary purpose of churches is and should remain the worship of Almighty God, to be houses of prayer. But that can and needs to be sensitively combined with service to the community. The imaginative adaptation of church buildings for community use in many areas is breathing new life into them.

Part 3 of the report (paragraphs 119-171) starts by setting out (paragraph 121) six general principles which have guided our thinking and then translates these into some specific recommendations. Part 4 (paragraphs 172-207) deals with the way in which various functions carried out at national level might better be organised.

For convenience, the principles are set out and the specific recommendations summarised at Part 5 (paragraphs 208-209). They include proposals to:

- Secure more assured financial support for listed cathedrals and church buildings for the long term
- Change the law to create some specific new flexibilities for parishes and dioceses
- Strengthen diocesan strategic capacity and incorporate building reviews into mission and ministry planning
- Enable individual dioceses and the Church Commissioners to agree arrangements for giving the latter a bigger role in seeking a use for closed buildings
- Establish a single team at Church House on church buildings issues
- Create a new Church Buildings Commission for England that would replace the Church Buildings Council, its Statutory Advisory Committee and the Church Commissioners' Church Buildings (Uses and Disposals) Committee.

We believe that - apart from growing the church - there is no single solution to the challenges posed by our extensive responsibility for part of the nation's historic heritage. But we hope that our report will be a catalyst for discussion around the Church of England and that our specific proposals will commend themselves to those who commissioned this report.

I am enormously grateful to my fellow Review Group members, to all who submitted ideas to us and to the Church House staff who supported us.

**The Right Reverend John Inge**  
**Bishop of Worcester**

**September 2015**

## Introduction

1. We were asked by the Archbishops' Council and the Church Commissioners to conduct this review in the light of the *Optimising the Role of the National Church Institutions* report (GS Misc 1094). Our terms of reference and membership are set out in Appendix 1.
2. GS Misc 1094 noted that the primary mission and ministry of the Church of England is carried out in local communities and that the purpose of work undertaken at national level is to resource that mission and ministry. That work should consist '*of those activities which either, by their nature, can only be done nationally or are most effectively and efficiently done nationally.*'
3. In relation to church buildings the report noted the range of advisory, lobbying, fundraising, development and appellate activities undertaken at national level. It suggested that the present arrangement of work distributed between two staff teams and overseen by several member level bodies might owe more to history than current needs and not necessarily be the best way of managing the creative tension which will always exist in seeing the Church of England's stewardship of some of the finest buildings in the country as both blessing and burden.
4. We were therefore asked to consider '*what functions need to be exercised nationally to advance the mission of the Church of England through its use and stewardship of church buildings and how might they best be carried out.*'
5. We quickly concluded that **we could only approach this question sensibly if we stepped back and surveyed the nature of the opportunities and challenges that the Church of England faces regarding its buildings at this moment in its history.**
6. Fortunately, as a result of work recently undertaken by the Cathedral and Church Buildings Division and English Heritage (now Historic England) we have had access to richer sources of information than have previously been available. These, together with the annual church statistics, have enabled us to produce an overview. It illustrates very vividly just how much the challenges and opportunities vary from diocese to diocese.
7. None of this is surprising but the availability of numbers does give the analysis a sharpness that may previously have been lacking and serves as a warning against national approaches that are insufficiently textured and nuanced. While not intended to be comprehensive, we believe that our analysis can help stimulate a wider and better informed debate on how the Church uses and cares for its buildings, how they promote mission and serve the wider community in a wide variety of contexts, and also on the real challenges they sometimes present.
8. We have conducted our review in the context of the wider programme of *Reform and Renewal* that is now being developed by the Archbishops' Council, the House of Bishops and the Church Commissioners in close discussion with the dioceses. The backdrop to that work is the recognition that the long term decrease in church attendance and increasing age profile of church congregations poses an urgent challenge to the Church of England if it is to be faithful to its vocation to proclaim

the gospel afresh in each generation and maintain a Christian presence in every community.

9. In that context '*the burden of church buildings weighs heavily*' as the Archbishops acknowledged in their report to Synod in January (GS 1976). In the recent consultations around the country this point has been underlined by diocesan representatives in a number of places.
10. The Archbishops' report seems to us, however, right to set the issues around the Church's stewardship of church buildings in the context of the wider challenges around the future of its mission and ministry to the people of England. There is not a church buildings challenge which is distinct from or more serious than the underlying challenge the Church of England faces as a result of gradual but steady decline over recent decades. Indeed, the great majority of church buildings remain well cared for and, by historical standards, in a good state of repair.
11. It would, in our view, be a mistake to focus so much attention on buildings that attention was diverted from the underlying issue which is how to reform and renew the Church of England so that it can be more effective in serving the common good and stimulating spiritual and numerical growth. Moreover, there is - apart from growing the church - no single solution to the challenges posed by our extensive responsibility for part of the nation's historic heritage.
12. Nevertheless, it is, in our view, timely to step back and attempt to take an overview of buildings issues. What are the implications, at this moment in the long history of the Church of England, of both the burden and blessing which our nearly 16,000 places of worship - three quarters of them listed - constitute?
13. Our report is in five parts:
  - An assessment of the present situation
  - A reflection on the relevant theological issues
  - Some principles and proposals
  - Proposals in relation to functions exercised nationally
  - A summary of our recommendations.

## Part 1- the present situation

### An overview

14. The Church of England is responsible for around 16,000 church buildings, including 42 cathedrals in England. This very large number of buildings means that there is a Church of England presence in many communities from which people have to travel to access various other amenities and services.<sup>1</sup>
15. Around three quarters of these buildings are listed (more than half Grade I or Grade II\*). Most church buildings are in rural areas and the proportion that are highly listed is much greater than in urban or suburban areas.<sup>2</sup> Availability of grant aid towards repairs and VAT relief for works to listed buildings may reduce, but does not remove, the significant commitment in looking after them.

	I	II*	II	Ungraded	Total
Urban	200	300	500	900	1,900
Suburban	800	900	1,300	1,800	4,800
Rural	3,200	3,100	1,900	800	9,000
Total	4,300	4,300	3,700	3,400	15,700

16. A majority of church buildings (70%) in rural areas are Grade I or II\*, whereas a minority are in urban (27%) and suburban (36%) areas. Three quarters of Grade I listed church buildings are in rural areas.

---

<sup>1</sup> Examples of the frequency of other major organisations serving the public in England: Post Office branches (8,857); pharmacies (11,500 – UK figure); GP Practices (8,000); primary schools (7,000); secondary schools (3,300). (Various Government statistical sources).

<sup>2</sup> The data in the various tables in this Part comes from a variety of sources held at national level- Statistics for Mission data, Ministry Statistics, Parish Finance Returns and Quinquennial Inspections. Most of the data is submitted by parishes and, after it is checked by dioceses, is available nationally for use in statistical analysis. Information on listing status is held in the CBC's QI database (with listed building data originating largely from Historic England). Every effort has been made to ensure the statistics used are the best available, even though information available nationally is neither complete nor perfect. In some cases estimations have been used to complement the analysis.

	I	II*	II	Ungraded
Urban	12%	15%	29%	45%
Suburban	17%	19%	27%	37%
Rural	36%	34%	21%	9%

*Urban, Suburban and Rural*

17. Although most church buildings are in rural areas, only a sixth of the population and a quarter of the attendance is:

	Church Buildings	Population	Attendance
Urban	12%	25%	20%
Suburban	31%	58%	52%
Rural	57%	17%	28%

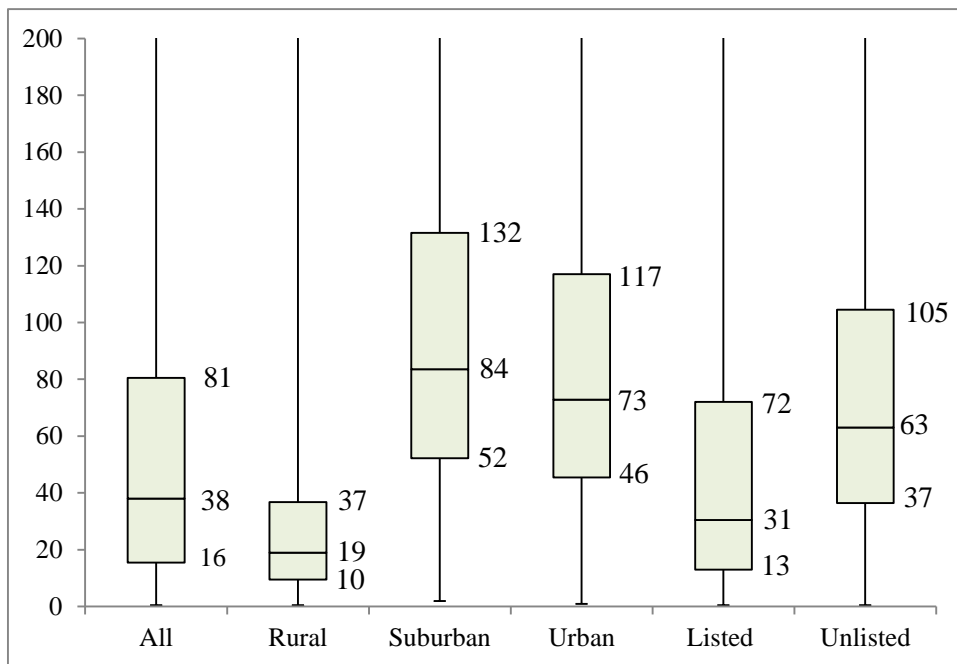
18. The following table facilitates easier comparison of the different area types:

	Population per church building	Attendance per capita	Attendance per building
Urban	7,300	1.4%	103
Suburban	6,600	1.6%	104
Rural	1,000	2.9%	30

19. This highlights another clear distinction between rural areas and the other categories. They have **six or seven** times more buildings per head of population and so have much smaller congregations on average but church attendance per capita is around twice as high in rural areas.

20. Attendance box plots for the differing locations of churches are provided below:

- The boxes give the spread of the central 50% of churches.
- The lines indicate the range of attendance per building.
- The central line indicates the median church in that category – i.e. 50% of churches have larger attendances, 50% have smaller.



21. This illustrates, for example, that in rural areas, 75% of churches have attendance of fewer than 37 people, half fewer than 19, and a quarter fewer than 10. Nationally, a quarter of the 16,000 churches have weekly attendance below 16, and further analysis not shown above indicates that around 2,000 have a weekly attendance below 10. This is not a new phenomenon. But it does mean that very small congregations bear a heavy burden of maintenance even though they may often be able to call on the goodwill and support of others in the village who are not part of the regular worshipping community.

22. Attendance itself is of course but one measure of the significance of church buildings, their contribution to mission and their use by and value to the wider community. This is explored further below.

23. The next table gives a breakdown of the average annual capital expenditure per building (as reported by parishes) in 2013 across different listings and area types. This includes major repairs, but routine repairs and running repairs cannot be disentangled from other operating costs in the financial returns.

	Grade I	Grade II*	Grade II	Ungraded	All Listings
Urban	£34,900	£26,400	£17,200	£10,700	<b>£17,700</b>
Suburban	£18,300	£15,300	£14,900	£11,300	<b>£14,200</b>
Rural	£7,900	£6,200	£5,800	£6,600	<b>£6,800</b>
<b>All Area Types</b>	<b>£11,200</b>	<b>£9,500</b>	<b>£10,600</b>	<b>£10,100</b>	<b>£10,400</b>

24. The average capital expenditure per church building was around £10,000 in 2013. This includes major repair works and building improvement projects. At first glance, the national averages would appear to show that there is no particular trend in the cost between the different heritage grades of church buildings. However, if this trend is examined within each of the area types (urban, suburban, and rural), it is clear that highly listed buildings have a greater capital spend than the average.
25. The main difference is in area type. In more urban areas (where parish budgets are larger due to a higher number of givers per church, and where there are greater opportunities for, e.g., rental income) there is a higher average spend per building than in more rural ones. As the majority of Grade I listed buildings are in rural areas, the national spend does not reflect the increased expenditure on these buildings. The overall figures are a combination of the mix of areas with the varying spend across grades.
26. The total amount of capital spending by parishes was around £157 million in 2013. This represents about one sixth (17%) of total parish expenditure.

### *Statistical Breakdown by Dioceses*

27. Overleaf is a fuller breakdown of key statistical information by dioceses. From the numbers we have found it helpful to identify four loose groupings based on the size of population per church building. Those in green are predominantly rural dioceses with a large number of buildings, generally (though Carlisle is something of an exception) highly listed. Those in orange are the most urban (though some contain rural pockets). The two middle groups are more mixed.
28. Taking this into account, it is unsurprising that dioceses such as Norwich and Exeter in the rural group are pioneering new models of caring for church buildings in such areas, including those around the ‘festival churches’ theme. Several of our recommendations focus on facilitating such models and on reducing burdens on small congregations by introducing greater flexibility in how such buildings can be used and cared for. This builds on the recent changes to facilitate wider use by enabling leases of parts of churches.



Diocese	Population	Area (sq miles)	Number of		Attendance	Population	
			Church Buildings	Stipendiary Clergy		per church building	% Rural Population
Hereford	319,000	1,660	409	92	9,000	780	50%
St.Eds & Ips	659,000	1,440	478	134	16,000	1,379	53%
Norwich	883,000	1,800	640	183	17,000	1,380	36%
Carlisle	496,000	2,480	337	118	14,000	1,472	37%
Salisbury	931,000	2,050	570	192	27,000	1,633	28%
Bath & Wells	923,000	1,610	562	202	22,000	1,642	25%
Lincoln	1,051,000	2,670	631	140	14,000	1,666	52%
Gloucester	644,000	1,140	385	121	18,000	1,673	33%
Truro	540,000	1,390	305	99	11,000	1,770	48%
Exeter	1,148,000	2,580	611	207	23,000	1,879	25%
Ely	743,000	1,510	334	130	17,000	2,225	34%
Peterborough	873,000	1,150	376	139	16,000	2,322	24%
York	1,422,000	2,660	589	194	26,000	2,414	24%
Oxford	2,313,000	2,220	810	380	49,000	2,856	No data
Canterbury	932,000	970	324	125	18,000	2,877	21%
Winchester	1,199,000	1,220	402	161	30,000	2,983	21%
Worcester	869,000	670	275	114	13,000	3,160	21%
Leicester	999,000	840	311	136	14,000	3,212	23%
Derby	1,036,000	1,000	318	146	15,000	3,258	17%
Chichester	1,633,000	1,460	487	274	39,000	3,353	20%
Newcastle	807,000	2,110	237	122	14,000	3,405	5%
Coventry	836,000	690	241	113	15,000	3,469	14%
Southwell	1,111,000	850	305	135	16,000	3,643	28%
Lichfield	2,106,000	1,740	559	288	32,000	3,767	19%
West Yorks	2,693,000	2,840	623	335	39,000	4,323	13%
Portsmouth	768,000	410	171	101	12,000	4,491	11%
St.Albans	1,848,000	1,120	406	241	31,000	4,552	11%
Chester	1,612,000	1,020	349	233	32,000	4,619	No data
Blackburn	1,321,000	880	276	164	25,000	4,786	16%
Guildford	1,032,000	540	215	178	26,000	4,800	19%
Bristol	990,000	470	205	106	15,000	4,829	10%
Rochester	1,312,000	540	264	204	25,000	4,970	14%
Chelmsford	3,060,000	1,530	582	353	38,000	5,258	9%
Durham	1,471,000	990	272	160	19,000	5,408	17%
Sheffield	1,250,000	580	213	139	18,000	5,869	8%
Liverpool	1,570,000	390	243	204	26,000	6,461	10%
Manchester	2,095,000	420	316	224	30,000	6,630	No data
Southwark	2,751,000	320	362	336	38,000	7,599	1%
Birmingham	1,524,000	290	187	155	17,000	8,150	4%
London	4,093,000	280	489	520	76,000	8,370	0%
<b>National</b>	<b>53,863,000</b>	<b>50,530</b>	<b>15712</b>	<b>7,598</b>	<b>953,000</b>	<b>3,428</b>	<b>17%</b>

Diocese	% Grade I	% Grade II*	% Grade II	% Ungraded	Weekly		Buildings
					Attendance per building	Attendance per capita	per stipendiary clergy
Hereford	26%	42%	24%	8%	23	2.9%	4.4
St.Eds & Ips	50%	36%	9%	5%	33	2.4%	3.6
Norwich	49%	40%	5%	6%	26	1.9%	3.5
Carlisle	13%	21%	36%	29%	41	2.8%	2.9
Salisbury	35%	36%	21%	8%	47	2.9%	3.0
Bath & Wells	35%	38%	17%	10%	39	2.4%	2.8
Lincoln	41%	25%	26%	8%	23	1.4%	4.5
Gloucester	36%	34%	20%	10%	46	2.8%	3.2
Truro	45%	25%	16%	14%	37	2.1%	3.1
Exeter	38%	33%	18%	12%	37	2.0%	3.0
Ely	43%	40%	9%	8%	51	2.3%	2.6
Peterborough	41%	41%	9%	9%	42	1.8%	2.7
York	26%	23%	28%	23%	44	1.8%	3.0
Oxford	26%	37%	19%	17%	60	2.1%	2.1
Canterbury	43%	21%	12%	24%	57	2.0%	2.6
Winchester	20%	26%	32%	21%	74	2.5%	2.5
Worcester	19%	32%	25%	24%	46	1.4%	2.4
Leicester	18%	53%	18%	12%	46	1.4%	2.3
Derby	20%	24%	31%	26%	49	1.5%	2.2
Chichester	37%	19%	17%	27%	80	2.4%	1.8
Newcastle	21%	11%	40%	28%	60	1.8%	1.9
Coventry	22%	34%	26%	19%	64	1.8%	2.1
Southwell	34%	23%	22%	21%	53	1.5%	2.3
Lichfield	12%	27%	34%	27%	57	1.5%	1.9
West Yorks	13%	14%	44%	29%	62	1.4%	1.9
Portsmouth	19%	22%	38%	20%	71	1.6%	1.7
St.Albans	33%	24%	20%	23%	76	1.7%	1.7
Chester	11%	18%	40%	31%	91	2.0%	1.5
Blackburn	5%	15%	36%	43%	92	1.9%	1.7
Guildford	14%	20%	30%	36%	120	2.5%	1.2
Bristol	28%	25%	20%	27%	74	1.5%	1.9
Rochester	22%	22%	17%	39%	96	1.9%	1.3
Chelmsford	29%	24%	14%	33%	65	1.2%	1.6
Durham	14%	7%	38%	40%	70	1.3%	1.7
Sheffield	17%	14%	30%	39%	83	1.4%	1.5
Liverpool	5%	10%	30%	55%	106	1.6%	1.2
Manchester	4%	11%	41%	44%	96	1.4%	1.4
Southwark	8%	16%	27%	49%	106	1.4%	1.1
Birmingham	11%	19%	28%	43%	89	1.1%	1.2
London	16%	20%	29%	35%	156	1.9%	0.9
<b>National</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>1.8%</b>	<b>2.1</b>

## *Implications*

29. A number of things stand out from the figures:

- **On average there are 393 church buildings per diocese but this masks a nearly fivefold variance** between Portsmouth (171) and Oxford (810). The size of the population in relation to the number of church buildings varies by a factor of more than 10 as between London and Hereford.
- **Only in London does the number of stipendiary clergy exceed the number of church buildings.** There are a further 18 dioceses where the number of buildings per member of the stipendiary clergy is under two. In Hereford and Lincoln there are more than four church buildings per member of the stipendiary clergy and in seven others (St Eds and Ips, Norwich, Salisbury, Gloucester, Truro, Exeter, and York) between three and four.
- **There are 15 dioceses where weekly worshipping attendance per building averages below 50 people** and of these there are three very rural dioceses - Hereford, Lincoln and Norwich - where the average is below 30. Only in four dioceses (London, Guildford, Liverpool and Southwark) does the average exceed 100.
- **Although the national proportion of church buildings that are unlisted is 22% this masks a very wide spread,** from just 5% in St. Eds & Ipswich (with six other dioceses - Norwich, Salisbury, Hereford, Ely, Lincoln and Peterborough - also being below 10%) to 55% in Liverpool. The five other dioceses with more than 40% of their buildings unlisted (Southwark, Manchester, Blackburn, Birmingham and Durham) contain large and mainly Northern urban areas, indicating that geography, history and economics all have a bearing here.
- **Overall, 54% of the Church of England's churches are grade I or grade II\*listed.** There are 21 dioceses where the majority of church buildings are grade I or grade II\*listed and, of these, **four dioceses where the number exceeds three quarters** (Norwich 89%, St. Eds and Ips 86%, Ely 83%, and Peterborough 82%). **There are only ten dioceses where the proportion of grade I and II\* listed buildings is below a third,** with only Liverpool (15%), Manchester (15%), Blackburn (20%), Durham (21%) and Southwark (24%) being under a quarter.

30. This analysis illustrates that the nature of the issues that each diocese has to weigh when assessing the significance of its church buildings for its mission and ministry strategy varies greatly according to context.

31. In general **the most urban dioceses have the biggest attendance per building** (even though attendance in relation to the population is smaller than in rural areas) **and the fewest heritage related constraints.** The size of the worshipping community means that there are likely to be those who are willing to serve as wardens and on the PCC, thereby exercising responsibility for the care and maintenance of the fabric. In the event that a particular building is no longer needed for regular worship or is too large to be manageable there is a reasonable prospect of being able to find an alternative use for the building or the site, thereby releasing

funds for mission and ministry elsewhere. And another Church of England church will probably be relatively close by.

32. The situation in the most rural dioceses is for the most part very different. On the plus side, the worshipping congregation may well be able to call on a greater level of community support for keeping their most historic building in good repair. As against that, the number of people willing to serve as wardens or PCC members may be very small. The challenge of maintaining regular services when clergy have several buildings to serve is much greater.
33. In addition, if the point comes when a parish church can no longer practicably be kept open for regular worship **there may be little if any realistic possibility of finding an alternative use for the building** given its very high listing and lack of surrounding population to make viable options which are available in more densely populated locations.
34. None of this is new, though the new figures help delineate the situation more sharply. Nor is it new that, within the Church, there remains a spectrum of views ranging from a conviction that stewardship of so many of the country's finest community buildings is a precious opportunity for mission and the pursuit of the beauty of holiness, to a view that the stewardship of buildings is at best a distraction from the work of making disciples and potentially a temptation to idolatry.
35. We suspect that this divergence of convictions, though it is unlikely ever to be resolved, may be less acute than once it was, partly because ours is an era which has rediscovered the importance of symbols and the visual, partly because the wider community use now being made of many church buildings has eroded some of the older distinctions, and partly because of the significant successes in securing new funding streams for listed places of worship.

### **The diversity of church building use**

36. Our 16,000 church buildings are a visible expression of the Christian faith and the Church's continuing presence in local communities across the country, which they serve in many varied ways. The most significant (and most cost - and labour - intensive) of these buildings are of course our cathedrals and 'major churches' – large or very significant buildings which have a high profile and are used by the public for a range of civic, community and cultural purposes, and often with a commercial operation. These 'flagship' buildings demonstrate most visibly the importance of the Church in the life of the Nation.
37. But the majority of church buildings, whatever their scale or status, play a significant part in community life:
  - The 2009 Opinion Research Business Survey showed that **85% of the population visit a church building or place of worship each year.**
  - The recent 'Released for Mission' report states that **54% of Anglican parishes run at least one organised activity to address a social need in their area, including loneliness, homelessness, debt, low income, unemployment or family breakdown.**

- ‘The Church in Action: A National Survey of Church-Led Social Action’ (Church Urban Fund 2015) found that **on average, churches are addressing seven different common social uses, and a third are tackling nine or more. 14% of churches use their premises for food banks, while 81% of churches are involved in food banks in some way, and 22% of churches offer debt or money advice.**
38. Research by the Church Urban Fund shows that **churches are able to provide just as many activities to address social need in rural locations as they are in urban locations**; moreover its analysis of the number of organised activities shows that **there is hardly any variation between the activities provided in listed and unlisted buildings, indicating that listed status is not the perceived barrier to social action.**
39. Efforts continue to ensure proper recognition and support for churches as part of our national heritage with conspicuous success over many years at national level in securing funding streams for listed places of worship, including the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme and special, one-off funding streams for cathedrals and church roofs. Welcome as these are, however, they meet only a small part of the cost of repair and do not specifically address the need for a greater proportion of the burden of caring for church buildings to be shared by local communities as well as more widely. By European standards the Church of England bears an unusually heavy financial burden of maintaining part of the nation’s built heritage.
40. In recent years the Church Buildings Council has increasingly shifted the balance of its own work towards campaigning, advocacy, promotion, support and consultancy, prominent examples of which are the Open and Sustainable campaign and Church Care website. This, together with the on-going simplification of the faculty system, underlines how the national role focusses increasingly on facilitating church buildings to fulfil their mission potential.
41. Similarly, the Church Commissioners’ casework team in relation to closed churches has been professionalised through the provision of more specialist expertise with staff now working from five diocesan offices and is focussed on finding new uses for often very challenging buildings.

### **Current diocesan initiatives**

42. As indicated, a number of rural dioceses are exploring, or have put into place, specific initiatives to tackle the particular building challenges they face, including:
- **Norwich:** is developing a Diocesan Churches Trust to assist church communities with low population density and low congregation numbers. This will be a separate Trust independent of the DBF. Its launch is being grant-aided by the All Churches Trust. Local finance towards the cost of maintenance etc. will include collections from occasional services, PCC fee income and limited reserves where available. It is assumed that no parish share contribution would be sought as part of the benefice allocation.
  - **Exeter:** is developing proposals for two new initiatives, Festival Churches and the Breathing Space project, both aiming to reduce significantly the building-

related time, energy and financial burdens on PCCs of rural churches with small congregations. £0.8m has been approved by the Diocesan Synod with additional funding sought from the Commissioners. An estimated 100 rural churches are earmarked for the project, normally by becoming Festival Churches but with up to 10 working through the Breathing Space project, involving temporarily removing many of the responsibilities for buildings from existing PCCs.

- **Lincoln:** following a diocesan review, its church buildings have been placed into 4 categories: Key Mission Church, Local Mission Church, Festival or Celebration Church and those where there is no obvious future. Benefices are being encouraged to develop mission action plans and bid for diocesan resources which will be linked to such categorisations. Festival churches, for example, would be kept in basic repair with minimal insurance cover compared to other buildings.
43. Our diocesan consultation (see Appendix 2) reveals various buildings-related activities in other dioceses. Some, such as West Yorkshire and the Dales and Winchester, are about to embark on their own reviews, while more developed examples include some urban as well as rural dioceses:
- **Manchester:** has established a task group to develop a strategy for church buildings. Its remit is to consider and recommend a distribution of operational buildings for the future needs of the Church; a buildings' strategy (maintenance, enhancement and disposal); and to consider other issues relevant to effective use of its church estate in the furtherance of mission. This includes rolling out a Mission Action Planning framework which includes local church MAPs with linked deanery MAPs to create an integrated plan, with the use and sustainability of buildings for mission purposes built into the MAP process.
  - **London:** as part of its Capital Vision 2020 strategic plan the diocese is committed to creating or renewing 100 worshipping communities, using Bishops' Mission Orders and Licences under Faculty to encourage new mission initiatives and shared/additional use arrangements for church buildings. It supports entrepreneurial thinking from individual churches and also looks for opportunities to introduce churches to potential partners. While the Diocese undertook a categorisation exercise about ten years ago it no longer regards this as a useful tool for strategic planning.
  - **Oxford:** a New Communities Group is leading work on the provision of church, mission and ministry in new housing areas. Such provision is centring on ministry and housing rather than building new church buildings. Elsewhere a church partnership and planting programme is being developed linking very large city centre evangelical churches with buildings close to capacity with others elsewhere which are under used.
44. Overall these approaches underline that there is no 'one size fits all' solution. But while dioceses are exploring different options, common to most, particularly the more rural dioceses, are the major issues of securing adequate funding and promoting suitable care and maintenance models, which will both be key elements in determining their success and sustainability longer term.

45. Without significant financial resources, the number of churches which can be supported by the Church nationally or at diocesan level in such projects will inevitably be limited in comparison to overall numbers and needs. We believe a significant part of the answer lies in securing widening local community involvement in managing and caring for buildings and promoting greater flexibility in meeting the statutory responsibility of care and maintenance which rests with PCCs.

### **Financial assistance**

46. Some figures for the amount that is spent each year on capital expenditure are given in paragraphs 23-26 above. In view of all the other necessary expenditure that local congregations have to finance out of voluntary giving - contributing to the cost of paid clergy and other church workers, heating, maintaining and insuring churches and church halls, running a range of church and community based activities - the responsibility of caring for so many historic buildings is onerous.

47. A number of charitable trusts, including the National Churches Trust and many other more local bodies and friend organisations, exist to support church buildings. Others, including the Wolfson Foundation and the Pilgrim Trust, have given generously over many years as part of their wider charitable activities. This help is an invaluable encouragement but its scale is inevitably limited.

48. Over recent years the Church of England has been successful in securing additional external assistance for keeping its 12,300 listed buildings in good repair:

- Since 2001 the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme has operated for all denominations and faiths throughout the United Kingdom. It refunds to churches the equivalent of the VAT paid on repairs and other approved building works. Currently **up to £42 million** a year is available through this route. Because it has the largest number of historic buildings the Church of England is the single largest beneficiary.
- The Heritage Lottery Fund provides grants for repairs to listed places of worship (GPOW). Currently **£25 million** is provided each year in England, with a further £5 million available for listed places of worship in the three other parts of the UK. Up to 15% of awards may be spent on development work.
- The First World War Centenary Cathedral Fabric Repair Fund providing **£20 million** was announced in the March 2014 Budget. This has now been allocated to 54 of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Cathedrals in England.
- The Government also announced in 2014 a special Church Roofs Fund, to be managed by the National Heritage Memorial Fund. Initially of £15 million, this was increased in the March 2015 budget by a further £40m. So far £30m in total has been awarded to 504 listed places of worship across the UK, including 372 Church of England church buildings.

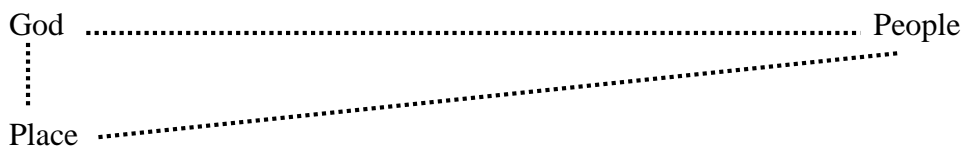
## Concerns about the future

49. Given the considerable achievements of recent years, what drives the anxiety of some that the Church may be approaching a tipping point? Are these concerns well founded and if so what are the policy implications?
50. In the forty years between 1969/70 and 2009/10, the numbers on electoral rolls decreased by 53%, usual Sunday attendance by 46%, stipendiary clergy in post by 47% and church buildings by 11%. Calculating church membership by a mix of usual Sunday attendance (two-thirds) and electoral roll (one-third) produces an average drop in the ratio of members per church building over this period from 96 to 59.
51. Meanwhile, since the 1980s, the average age of Church of England membership has increased very significantly. As set out in the recent presentations to General Synod, even with significant recruitment at the younger age levels over the next couple of decades, the overall level of church membership is likely to go on declining, at least for a while, given the current age profile.
52. This raises questions about sustainability. Will sufficient people be willing to act as church wardens and PCC secretaries and treasurers to enable sparsely attended churches to continue? And will the already very heavy burden on stipendiary clergy in rural areas be sustainable? Is the opportunity cost - human and financial - of sustaining so many buildings too high for the Church's wider missional effectiveness?
53. There is already a good deal of anecdotal evidence that it is difficult to attract clergy to serve in rural communities where they will have responsibility for several church buildings with small congregations. And even where clergy take up these challenging roles, they have to deal not only with finance and planning considerations: the potential impact on their welfare and energy and the opportunity cost of travelling around to sustain a pattern of services can be very high.
54. The number of formal church closures has in fact remained stable at around 20-25 a year over the past 20 years and some of the current diocesan initiatives to use more buildings only for occasional offices and festivals have some potential to help avert a sharp upturn in this number. That said, the underlying challenges are likely to grow unless decline is arrested and reversed.
55. The *Reform and Renewal* programme acknowledges that there can be no single strategy for the Church of England's mission and ministry. Each of the 40 English dioceses, under the leadership of its diocesan bishop, has to develop and own the strategy that is right for its particular context. Similarly for church buildings there cannot be one national strategy.
56. Our approach has been to explore ways in which national staff and member level bodies can better support each of the 40 English dioceses and indeed local clergy, wardens and PCC members in developing and delivering a more strategic and fruitful use of the buildings in their care, while also settling the future of those buildings no longer needed for worship. All this needs to be framed within an authentically Anglican theological framework.

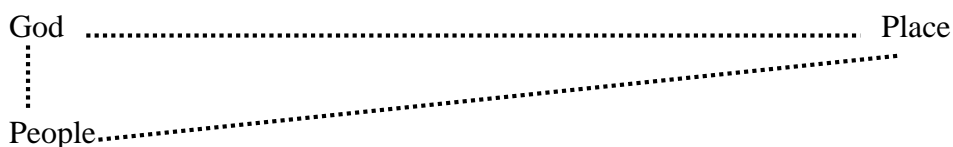


## Part 2- Theological Perspective

57. As noted above, there remains within the Church, ‘a spectrum of views ranging from a conviction that stewardship of so many of the country’s finest community buildings is a precious opportunity for mission and the pursuit of the beauty of holiness to a view that the stewardship of buildings is at best a distraction from the work of making disciples and potentially a temptation to idolatry.’<sup>3</sup> This tension is a theological as well as practical one.
58. There are those who would emphasise that ‘we are those who worship in spirit and in truth’<sup>4</sup>. They would point to the truth that the Church is constituted by people rather than buildings. They would suggest, therefore, that though some of the Church of England’s 16,000 church buildings provide opportunities for mission, a good proportion of them are an encumbrance to mission and should be closed.
59. On the other hand, in Church of England polity some places, notably churches and graveyards, are deemed to be ‘holy’ by virtue of their consecration. This has theological as well as legal significance. Going further, people such as George MacLeod, the founder of the Iona Community, would urge us to recognise ‘thin places’ which are closer to God than others, He described Iona as a ‘thin place’ with only a tissue paper separating the material from the spiritual, seemingly suggesting that this was the case before Christianity was established there. This widens the question from a consideration of buildings to the theological significance of place in general.
60. The latter ‘high view’ of place expressed by Christians like George McLeod is one in which God relates to places and people may get ‘mixed up’ in this relationship, as at Iona. It can be expressed diagrammatically thus:



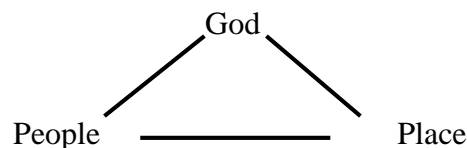
The former approach to place is a ‘low view’ in which God relates to people and places are merely a backdrop to such relationship. It can be expressed diagrammatically thus:



<sup>3</sup> Paragraph 34

<sup>4</sup> John 4.24

61. In what follows it is argued that that, from a Christian point of view, neither of these approaches will do. The former encourages idolatry and seems to suggest that God prefers some parts of the creation to others. The latter does not do justice to the importance of place in the divine scheme of things or in human experience.
62. The scriptures begin with humanity placed in the Garden of Eden, an image which resonates, perhaps, with our deepest dis-placed selves, ‘the laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy’ as T.S. Eliot has it.<sup>5</sup> After the fall, God’s relationship with the chosen people is still associated with place, the Promised Land. One necessarily reads the scriptures with map in hand<sup>6</sup> and through the Old Testament we see a threefold relationship: God’s relationship with the chosen people being centred on the Promised Land. All three were important.
63. This scriptural paradigm can be expressed diagrammatically thus:



64. Moving to the New Testament, it could be argued that Jesus Christ, Lord of space and time, has eliminated attachment to particular places: Jesus is the new Temple<sup>7</sup> and the Promised Land does not have the significance for Christians that it had for the people of Israel. In defining the locus of God’s relations with humanity to be focussed in one particular individual, however, the incarnation asserts the importance of place in a way different from, but no less important than, the Old Testament, initiating an unprecedented celebration of materiality and therefore of place in God’s relations with humanity.

*When God chose to enter the world, it was not in some ethereal generic manner but in a particular family, in a particular town, in a particular country with particular socio-religious practices. Just as Christ “became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14 The Message), so also the people that comprise the local church in the parish are meant to be a tangible expression of God’s love in the everyday reality of life.<sup>8</sup>*

65. As a result, it can be argued from an incarnational perspective that places are the seat of relations or the place of meeting and activity in the interaction between God and the world and, further, that place is therefore a fundamental category of human and spiritual experience. Simone Weil writes that ‘to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to

<sup>5</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘The Four Quartets’ in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 180

<sup>6</sup> B. Lane, ‘Landscape and Spirituality: A Tension Between Place and Placelessness in Christian Thought’ in *The Way Supplement* 73 (1992), 6

<sup>7</sup> John 2.18-22

<sup>8</sup> P. Sparks, T. Soerens and D. Friesen, *The New Parish. How Neighbourhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community* (London: IVP Press, 2014), 24

define.<sup>9</sup> Western civilisation's neglect of the significance of place is one which causes many problems.<sup>10</sup>

66. In contrast, the scriptures take place seriously. Walter Brueggemann, the Old Testament scholar, sums up a biblical approach to place thus:

*In the [Bible] there is no timeless space, but there is also no spaceless time. There is rather storied place, that is a place which has meaning because of the history lodged there. There are stories which have authority because they are located in a place. This means that biblical faith cannot be presented simply as an historical movement indifferent to place which could have happened in one setting as well as another, because it is undeniably fixed in this place with this meaning. And for all its apparent 'spiritualising', the New Testament does not escape this rootage.*<sup>11</sup>

67. The approach of Christians who do not recognise the importance of place perhaps has more to do with post-Enlightenment reductionism than biblical faith.<sup>12</sup> Evangelical Christians are recognising this.<sup>13</sup> When the importance of place is recognised, Christianity becomes a 'powerful source of redemption and repair to the pathologies of extreme mobility, placelessness and ecological destruction that characterise modern life.'<sup>14</sup>
68. As Thomas Torrance points out<sup>15</sup>, the fact that neither we nor God can contract out of space and time necessarily implies the importance of place since it affirms the importance of place and time for God in his relations with us. God relates to people in places. That might be construed as a truism since, as human beings, as we are 'placed' beings. However, the theological significance of this runs deep, as is argued above.
69. The Biblical witness recognises the importance of place and implies that place is vital to the Christian scheme of things and to any spirituality that might flow from it. As Donald Allchin expresses it, 'to speak of spirituality is to speak of that meeting of eternity with time, of heaven with earth; it is to recover a sense of the holiness of matter, the sacredness of this world of space and time when it is known as the place of God's epiphany.'<sup>16</sup>
70. To take things a stage further, the consummation of all things is represented in the Book of Revelation by the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem, a place. This might be taken to suggest that it is our eternal destiny to be 'placed'. It is, to say the least,

---

<sup>9</sup> S.Weil, *The Need for Roots*, translated by A. Willis (New York: Routledge, 1997), 41

<sup>10</sup> See S. Bouma-Prediger and B. Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness. Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008)

<sup>11</sup> W. Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (London: S.P.C.K., 1978), 187

<sup>12</sup> See J. Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 120

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Sparks, Soerens and Friesen (2014)

<sup>14</sup> M. Northcott, *Place, Ecology and the Sacred. The Moral Geography of Sustainable Communities* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 45

<sup>15</sup> T.F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 67

<sup>16</sup> A.M. Allchin, *The World is a Wedding* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978), 20

very difficult for human beings to imagine salvation except in terms of place, as Jesus seems to recognise when he tells his disciples ‘There are many rooms in my Father’s house; if there were not I would have told you. I am going now to prepare a place for you’.<sup>17</sup>

71. If we are to think in terms of a three-way relationship between God, people and place in which all three are important, how is this worked out in particular places, particularly churches? It is argued below that it is helpful to invoke the notion of sacrament in order to understand how places might be deemed ‘holy’ in a theological as well as legal sense.
72. Some would want to confine the term sacrament to what are anachronistically termed ‘Biblical sacraments’ but there is good precedent for widening the use of the term. In the New Testament the word sacrament is always a translation of the Greek *mysterion* and as late as the end of the fourth century in the writings of St Ambrose of Milan the two words ‘sacrament’ and ‘mystery’ are used interchangeably.
73. For St Augustine, in the fifth Century, sacraments and symbols were interchangeable concepts. He described sacraments as ‘visible forms of invisible grace’ and included a wide variety of actions and objects in his list: the kiss of peace, the font of baptism, blessed salt, the Our Father, the ashes of penance.’<sup>18</sup> He was convinced that ‘all organic and inorganic things in nature bear spiritual messages through their distinctive forms and characteristics.’<sup>19</sup>
74. Building on this tradition, William Temple wrote that ‘in the great affirmation that “the word became flesh and we beheld his glory”<sup>20</sup> there is implicit a whole theory of the relation between spirit and matter.’<sup>21</sup> arguing from this premise that ‘the real presence in the Eucharist is a fact, but it is not unique ... No words can exaggerate the reverence due to this divinely appointed means of grace; but it is easy to confine our reverence when we ought to extend it.’<sup>22</sup>
75. In other words, the chosen way of divine self-revelation is in materiality. As Bishop Stephen Sykes puts it, God ‘consecrates not merely humankind but the very stuff of created order. Consistent with an incarnational faith is the sacramentality of the universe.’<sup>23</sup>
76. If there is a noble tradition of extending the notion of sacramentality from the church’s sacraments to the material creation, we must not ignore that there are severe difficulties with such an approach. Is it being suggested that the whole world is ‘sacramental’? Do all material things, all places, speak equally of God? If so, does

---

<sup>17</sup> John 14.3

<sup>18</sup> E. Rees, *Christian Symbols, Ancient Roots* (London: J. Kingsley Publishers, 1992), 14

<sup>19</sup> Rees, (1992), 14

<sup>20</sup> John 1.14

<sup>21</sup> W. Temple, *Nature, Man and God* (London: Macmillan, 1935), xx

<sup>22</sup> Temple, (1935), 478

<sup>23</sup> Unpublished address given by S. Sykes at a conference, *The Holy Place: Mission and Conservation*, Keele University, 25-26 June 1996

that mean that the incarnation simply confirms the creation as it is? If not, what criteria should be used to determine the extent to which they do or do not do so?

77. Timothy Gorringe asserts that there is ‘a deep seated confusion which cuts at the root of sacramental thinking ... (since) if everything is a sign, nothing is.’<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Rowan Williams suggests that to talk of ‘some general principle of the world as ‘naturally’ sacramental or epiphanic: a pot-pourri of Jung, Teilhard de Chardin and a certain kind of anthropology, sometimes evoked as a prelude to sacramental theology, will run the risk of obscuring the fact that signs and symbols are made – even in response to some sense that the world is charged with glory.’<sup>25</sup>
78. To heed these warnings any sacramental theology must begin with *events*. This is true for the church’s sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, whatever material sacramentality might derive from those sacramental events, and it must be equally true of any sacramentality we might encounter elsewhere.
79. How is it possible to start with event as far as place is concerned? As intimated above, examination of the scriptures leads us to expect to experience the numinous not just in a general and undiscerning sense of ‘the heavens telling the glory of God’<sup>26</sup> but in a particular sense and in particular places.
80. For example, Jacob had a dream at ‘a certain place between Beersheba and Haran.’ Jacob wakes from his sleep and says, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it.’ And he was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven.’<sup>27</sup>
81. He erects a building, albeit without a roof, walls and door, and its consecration is not just a libation of oil poured out on the ground but a structure – a human response to significance. The place is consecrated for future generations because of the revelation that has happened there and it becomes a sign to others of the reality of the God who reveals himself, a tradition that has continued in the consecration of countless shrines and holy places since.
82. Other scriptural examples include Moses’ experience at the burning bush<sup>28</sup> and Saul’s experience on the Damascus Road.<sup>29</sup> Though St Paul might not be thought of as someone who would want to emphasise the importance of place, it is noteworthy that, as recorded in Acts, he makes very specific reference to the place where his conversion occurred when speaking about it.<sup>30</sup> It seems it was a crucial factor in that experience.

---

<sup>24</sup> T. Gorringe, ‘Sacraments’ in R. Morgan, (Ed) *The Religion of the Incarnation: Anglican Essays in Commemoration of Lux Mundi* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1989), 168

<sup>25</sup> R. Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 201

<sup>26</sup> Psalm 19.1

<sup>27</sup> Genesis 28, 16-17

<sup>28</sup> Exodus 3

<sup>29</sup> Acts 9, 1-19

<sup>30</sup> Acts 22, 6-8, Acts 26, 12-16

83. Some of the most significant developments in the church's history have been initiated by such moments, which could be termed 'sacramental events': the vision of the Emperor Constantine at the Milvian Bridge,<sup>31</sup> the vision of St Francis at the Church of St Damiano in the early thirteenth century,<sup>32</sup> the warming of the heart of John Wesley at a meeting in Aldersgate Street on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1738.<sup>33</sup>
84. All these experiences could be characterised as 'rents in the opacity of history where God's concrete engagement to change the world becomes visible,' to use Gorrings's phrase.
85. Such experiences are also shared by millions of others, if the work of the Alister Hardy Research Centre is to be believed. Hardy was convinced that the sort of experiences referred to above are much more common than is generally supposed. Determined to test this hypothesis, he amassed a considerable amount of evidence to suggest that such experiences are very frequent. He also found that the places where such events occur are always of importance to the person recounting the experience, for 'repeatedly, it is place which lends structure, contextuality, and vividness of memory to the narrative of spiritual experience.'<sup>34</sup>
86. This is not surprising in view of the scriptural witness referred to above or, indeed, of human experience generally as it is being increasingly understood by social scientists. Anthony Giddens writes that 'the setting of interaction is not some neutral backdrop to events that are unfolding independently in the foreground. 'Locales' enter into the very fabric of interaction in a multiplicity of ways.'<sup>35</sup> The geographer Edward Relph notes that 'through particular encounters and experiences perceptual space is richly differentiated into places, or centres of special personal significance.'<sup>36</sup>
87. Thus any talk of the holiness of place in terms of sacrament must be grounded in event and, consonant with what has been argued above, 'the meanings of places may be rooted in the physical setting and objects and activities, but they are not a property of them – rather they are a property of human intentions and experiences.'<sup>37</sup> If we look at the scriptures, tradition and experience of Christians we find that they are full of such encounters – and in all cases where such an event occurs the *place* of the happening is important and intrinsic to it. Such encounters do

---

<sup>31</sup> Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, I, 26-40. English Translation, with introduction and commentary by A. Cameron and S. Hill *The Life of Constantine* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1999)

<sup>32</sup> The recounting of the story by the 'Three Companions' can be found in many texts, eg A. Mockler, *Francis of Assisi. The Wandering Years* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1976), 79

<sup>33</sup> J. Wesley, in E.L. Janes (ed), *Wesley his own Historian: Illustrations of his Character, Labors and Achievements from his own Diaries* (New York: Carlton and Lanahan, 1870), 46

<sup>34</sup> B. Lane, 'Landscape and Spirituality: A Tension Between Place and Placelessness in Christian Thought' in *The Way Supplement* 73 (1992), 6

<sup>35</sup> P. Cassell, (Ed) *The Giddens Reader* (London: Macmillan, 1993), 19

<sup>36</sup> E. Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), 11

<sup>37</sup> Relph (1976), 47

not lead anywhere unless they are understood within the tradition of believers and part of the role of churches is to facilitate exactly that.

88. There remains, however, a further question. If the sacramentality of place is to be rooted in event and relationship, how can 'holy places' be established across time? David Brown and Ann Loades point out that baptism is the beginning of a movement of the Spirit, that in sacramental absolution there is 'a dynamic of movement, the initiating of a process which carries a forgiven past into the promise of a transformed future.' Thus, 'a divinely initiated movement lies at the heart of those acts commonly identified as sacramental.'<sup>38</sup> That being so, it must be right to expect a similar pattern of movement in any wider application of the notion.<sup>39</sup>
89. They go on to suggest that space and time can be 'given a new definition (a new 'measure'), and as a result they can now help advance us on the sacramental process towards our life's transformation. The co-ordinates we adopt are no longer our own, but those given by God, and so make it possible for us to share more deeply in a God-centred perception of the world.'<sup>40</sup> In the Eucharist, we begin with event and look to transformation of the elements and people involved in the celebration. If we are talking about holy places the transformation will be associated with the place and the Christian community associated with it.
90. This was something the early Christians who established *martyria* (literally, 'the place itself bears witness') knew well. A place becomes associated with holy person or events and this is how a location can become, in Eliot's words, 'a place where prayer has been valid.'<sup>41</sup> The story of St Wilfred has been associated with Ripon Cathedral since he founded it in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century and his monks took his body back there after his death in Oundle in 710.
91. In the same way Cuthbert's story is associated with Durham, Wulfstan's with Worcester, and Etheldreda's with Ely. As Donald Allchin puts it:

*There is a geography of holy places, the places where the saints have dwelt, Oxford and Athos, Canterbury and Cernica, St David's and Zagorsk; places whose beauty has been revealed by lives which have been open to God in such a way as to show that this world is not a system closed upon itself. These are places whose power persists through centuries of indifference and neglect to be revealed again when men are ready for it, places which display the potential holiness of all this earth which man has loved so much yet so much ravaged.<sup>42</sup>*

92. Similarly, the faithfulness of countless ordinary men and women down the ages is built into the story of our parish churches where they have offered worship. The manner in which this occurs will be the result of a complicated relationship between God, people and place. It is striking that the notion of places retaining an identity

---

<sup>38</sup> D. Brown and A. Loades (Eds), *The Sense of the Sacramental* (London: S.P.C.K., 1995), 2

<sup>39</sup> Brown and Loades (1995), 42

<sup>40</sup> Brown and Loades (1995), 3

<sup>41</sup> 'The Four Quartets' in Eliot (1969), 192

<sup>42</sup> Allchin (1978), 20

across time often seems to be more readily embraced from a secular than a Christian perspective. The philosopher Edward Casey tells us that ‘time and history, the diachronic media of culture, are so deeply inscribed in places as to be inseparable from them – as inseparable as the bodies that sustain these same places and carry the culture located in them.’<sup>43</sup>

93. The sociologist E.V. Walker writes that ‘place has no feelings apart from human experience there. But a place is a location of experience. It evokes and organises memories, images, feelings, sentiments, meanings, and the work of imagination. The feelings of a place are indeed the mental projections of individuals, but they come from collective experience and do not happen anywhere else. They belong to the place.’<sup>44</sup>
94. The geographer Edward Relph suggests that places are ‘constructed in our memories and affections through repeated encounters and complex associations’<sup>45</sup> and ‘place experiences are necessarily time-deepened and memory qualified.’<sup>46</sup> Each of these comments confirms a relational view of place that makes it inseparable from the individuals and communities that are associated with it and ‘tell its story’.
95. Such words from secular scholars should encourage us to remember that much of the power of a particular place, associated with its past, will not be mediated by ‘conscious reflection’ but by a much more integrated attention of the sort mediated by sacrament and symbol. There is, after all our attempts to clarify, a mystery associated with the power of places which is better articulated by poetry than rational argument.
96. We can, however, be clear, with Douglas Davies, that when sacralisation of a place occurs, ‘the dimension of history becomes added to personal identity and individual experience, giving a place particular cultural significance and making it very sacred.’<sup>47</sup>
97. This is why people ‘cling with such obstinate tenacity to positions once adopted; and a sacred position remains holy even when it has been long neglected ... The consciousness of the sacred character of the locality that has once been chosen is, therefore, always retained.’<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> E. Casey in S. Feld, and K.H. Basso, *Senses of Place* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), 44

<sup>44</sup> E.V. Walker, *Placeways: A Theory of the Human Environment* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 21

<sup>45</sup> E. Relph in R. Mugerauer and D. Seamon (Eds) *Dwelling, Place and Environment: Towards a Phenomenology of Person and World*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 26

<sup>46</sup> Mugerauer and Seamon (1989), 26

<sup>47</sup> D. Davies, ‘Christianity’ in J. Holm and J. Bowker (Eds) *Sacred Place* (London: Pinter, 1994), 53

<sup>48</sup> G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (ET) (Gloucester, Massachusetts: P. Smith, 1967), 393



98. That is why churches are places ‘where prayer has been valid’ or, as Eliot expresses it elsewhere:

*For the blood of Thy martyrs and saints  
Shall enrich the earth, shall create holy places.  
For wherever a saint has dwelt, wherever a martyr has given his  
blood for the blood of Christ,  
There is holy ground, and the sanctity shall not depart from it  
Though armies trample over it, though sightseers come with  
guide books looking over it...<sup>49</sup>*

99. Thus churches have a significance much deeper than being just places to meet. They stand as a witness to the fact that this world is not a system closed upon itself and, as such, can help those who feel rootless to find their true identity, as children of God. They contain multiple symbolic reminders of the fact that our most significant place of belonging should be the body of Christ, in which we are called to find our true home and security. The story of others’ encounters with the living God associated with church buildings can help people to make sense of their own experience within the Christian drama of salvation.
100. Our attitude to cathedrals and churches should be a bit like our attitude to Sundays. It’s not that Sundays and churches are nearer to God or more excellent: they are fractions, set apart to represent the truth that all time and space are God’s. The part is consecrated, not instead of the whole, but on behalf of the whole. This is the sense in which churches should be ‘sacramental’.
101. They are not, of course, the only place where people can perceive the presence of God. They can, however, help us to experience the presence of God in all places and recognise that the creation is charged with the glory of God.
102. Though there is an ongoing need to guard against an idolatrous attitude to buildings for ‘here we have no abiding city’<sup>50</sup>, we need to recognise the scriptural truth that place is a fundamental category of human and spiritual experience and that churches, operating ‘sacramentally’, can help us to see through the material to the spiritual. As George Herbert puts it:

*A man that looks on glass  
On it may stay his eye;  
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,  
And then the heaven espy.*

103. ‘Through’ is the sacramental preposition. We can come to God only ‘through’ Jesus Christ, the ultimate sacrament. The power of sacramental signs in daily life is easily recognised. Exactly why the bunch of flowers should nearly always do the trick, why we can almost hear them speak the words ‘I am sorry’ or ‘I love you’, is a

---

<sup>49</sup> ‘Murder in the Cathedral’ in Eliot (1971), 281

<sup>50</sup> Hebrews 13.14

mystery, but it works.<sup>51</sup> Churches have the capacity to speak of the living God revealed in Christ.

104. Our churches – and the Church of England alone has over 16,000 of them - and our great cathedrals, assist in proclaiming the gospel just by being there. Their very existence is quite literally significant, pointing to a reality beyond themselves. If the heavens declare the glory of God, the skyline of our country is dotted with towers and spires which point heavenwards to witness to the fact that this world is not a system closed to itself.
105. The distinguished anthropologist David Harvey writes that ‘it is correct to argue that the social preservation of religion as a major institution within secular societies has been in part won through the successful creation, protection and nurturing of symbolic places.’<sup>52</sup> If large numbers of our churches were to be closed the message sent out to our society would, presumably, be that the Christian faith has had its day in this land.

106. As Sarah Coakley observes:

*‘The Church is not a building.’ That is most certainly true. But buildings in which ‘prayer has been valid’ are more like people than stone or brick, because of their vibrant association with the folk we and others have loved. They are not so much haunted as ‘thin’ to another world in which past, present and future converge. And when, as in the parish system in England, each such building holds the memories of a particular geographical community, it is well to be aware of its remaining symbolic power – even if it now seems neglected, under-used or actively vandalised.*<sup>53</sup>

107. Thus, though the building is not the church, it speaks of the character and reality of the church in a profound and vital way. It can help to root the community in its faith, nurture its prophetic witness, and draw it to its destination. Sacred places ‘encapsulate a vision of ultimate value in human existence.’<sup>54</sup> Only when it does this is a relationship between God, people and place properly maintained and will it speak as an effective sign.

108. W.H.Dillistone writes:

*The sense of place can enrich and deepen human sensibilities. The symbol celebrating a particular place can bring together past and present in living relationship and strengthen hope for the future. It can stir the hearts of all kinds and conditions of people to realise that the living God has made himself known to in judgement and in grace. At the same time, unhappily, the symbol can be*

---

<sup>51</sup> R. Giles, *Re-Pitching the Tent. Re-ordering the Church Building for Worship and Mission in the New Millennium* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1995), 57

<sup>52</sup> D. Harvey, ‘From Space to Place and Back Again: Reflections on the Condition of Postmodernity’ in J. Bird et al (eds) *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change* (London: Routledge, 1993), 23

<sup>53</sup> S. Coakley in S. Wells and S. Coakley, *Praying for England. Priestly Presence in Contemporary Culture* (London: Continuum, 2008), 12

<sup>54</sup> P. Sheldrake, *The Spiritual City. Theology, Place, and the Urban* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 130

*made to turn in upon itself, to become defined and concentrated within its original limits. The symbol then becomes a monument. It may still provoke admiration. It in no way leads to the worship of the living God.*<sup>55</sup>

109. Dillistone's warning serves as an appropriate antidote to what has been argued above. There are some church buildings which 'no way lead to the worship of the living God'. Of those, a proportion should probably be closed. This report does not try to avoid that reality though it should be borne in mind that closing churches will not put a stop to negative messages being sent out by them. The empty or abandoned church is 'such a powerful image that it may actively contribute to negative ideas about the church.'<sup>56</sup>
110. In the majority of cases, however, we can avoid churches becoming redundant or museums by allowing them to live and breathe. This will often mean re-ordering and adapting in a manner which is sensitive to their heritage to enable the life of contemporary worshipping Christians and service of the community.<sup>57</sup>
111. One of the reasons why a number of churches have become more like museums is possibly a lack of awareness that both parts of our Lord's summary of the Law have repercussions for churches, as they do for disciples. The first purpose of churches, as with human beings, is to worship God and churches generally do reasonably well on the first Great Commandment.
112. The record is not always so good with the second, to love our neighbour. As it applies to churches, it implies that they should be vibrant centres of service to the community. Traditionally, churches were at the heart of the communities in which they stand, in both a human and geographical sense. Over the years, however, a pietism has crept in which has tended to exclude everything but public worship from them, all other activity being transferred to other places – halls and community centres, etc. Far too many churches remain locked and stand like mausoleums except when open for worship and are increasingly marginal to the life of the communities they exist to serve. They remain oases of calm but unavailable.
113. The picture is far from hopeless. There is a rising wave of imaginative adaptation of church buildings for community use which has breathed new life into them. An increasing number, like St Giles's, Langford, near Chelmsford, now house a village shop or post office; many, like St Stephen's in Redditch, are home to a food bank. Some, like St Mary's in Ashford, Kent, have been reordered to become community arts venues as well as places of worship.

---

<sup>55</sup> F.W. Dillistone, *Traditional Symbols and the Contemporary World* (London: Epworth, 1973), 87

<sup>56</sup> W. Whyte, *The Ethics of the Empty Church: Anglicanism's Need for a Theology of Architecture*. (Journal of Anglican Studies, 2015). Available at <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=9820931&fulltextType=RA&fileId=S1740355315000108>. (Accessed on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2015).

<sup>57</sup> See Ioannis Poullos, *The Past in the Present. A Living Heritage Approach* (London: Ubiquity Press, 2014). N. Walter and A. Mottram, *Buildings for Mission* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2015).

114. The examples are myriad and should serve as an inspiration. New and ever more imaginative schemes are constantly springing up: All Saints in Murston, Sittingbourne, is the first to host a community bank.

115. As the report entitled *Building Faith in our Future* put it, churches are:

*a major contributor to social capital, providing a physical base where people can meet and be supported, practically, emotionally and spiritually – expressing the church’s unending concern to recognise all humanity as neighbours. Day in, day out, church buildings host groups of all types and all age ranges, from toddlers upwards, reaching many who lack confidence to find self-worth elsewhere.*<sup>58</sup>

116. Some churches will need to be closed but this report argues that the mood music should be of moving to a mind-set of seeking to realise their potential rather than too easily characterising them as a ‘burden’. Sir Roy Strong advocates ‘giving the church building back to the local community, albeit with safeguards for worship.... Change has been the life-blood of the country church through the ages. Adaptation will be more important than preservation’.<sup>59</sup> Their primary purpose, the worship of Almighty God, to be houses of prayer, needs to be sensitively combined with that of service to the community.

117. What is argued above could be summed up by saying that churches can and do bear witness and we should do all we can to facilitate that happening. If all our churches were properly to embody a commitment to both the first and second Great Commandments they would, like *martyria*, witness effectively to the faith they were built to embody. Doing so, they would enable people to make connections: connections between the Christian faith, the building which symbolises that faith, and people’s experience, religious and otherwise.

118. When this ‘triangle of engagement’<sup>60</sup> functions a church building can, in the words of Richard Giles:

*tell the story of creation, of the self-inflicted pain of disobedience; of slavery, exile, and estrangement; of wandering and helplessness; of waiting and longing; of rescue in the person of Jesus, showing us for the first time what it means to be truly human. It can go on to tell the story of that particular group of people who meet regularly within its walls to encounter the living Lord and to grow in faith and love. It can leave the visitor with something to chew on, something to make them think that perhaps there is something in this Christianity lark after all, if this particular group of people can tell their story with such pride and vigour.*<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Church Heritage Forum, *Building Faith in our Future* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004), 8

<sup>59</sup> R. Strong, *A Little History of the English Country Church* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007)

<sup>60</sup> A term coined by Canon Alan Hargrave of Ely Cathedral

<sup>61</sup> Giles (1995), 64

## Part 3- Some Proposals

119. In the light of this extended theological reflection, the assessment of the current situation in Part 1, the more than 50 responses received to a short Survey questionnaire sent to Bishops, Archdeacons and Diocesan Secretaries and contributions in person from representatives of the Church's Rural Affairs Group, the Churches Conservation Trust and the Friends of Friendless Churches (see Appendix 2 for a summary of the matters raised) we have sought to identify some general principles.
120. From these flow some proposals. A number builds on ideas which are already being tried out in some places. Some will require legislation. We were also specifically asked to look at the present range of work being undertaken by members and staff at national level to support parishes and dioceses; our conclusions and proposals in that area are set out in Part 4.

### Some Principles

121. Our general principles are these:
- **For so long as a building has a contribution to make to the mission of the Church of England and remains open for worship, the legal responsibility for it should normally remain at parish level, and where that is not possible, at diocesan level. Local ownership - in every sense of the word - is generally to be preferred to other alternatives, not least because it will continue to facilitate wider community support for what is often the most significant historical building in the locality.**
  - **What is understood by 'open for worship' has evolved over time depending on local contexts and will need to evolve further for some buildings over the coming years. Legislation needs to facilitate this.**
  - **More generally, the overall legislative framework governing the use and management of church buildings needs to be simpler, less prescriptive and less burdensome for laity and clergy. There needs to be more flexibility to reflect the wide diversity of local situations.**
  - **Dioceses need to integrate thinking about their church buildings with their mission and ministry planning. Regular diocesan strategic reviews, taking account of diocesan and deanery plans, Mission Action Plans and parish audits are important for ensuring that buildings issues are given their proper weight - neither dominating nor being overlooked or regarded as a specialist subject.**
  - **Over the centuries it has never been either possible or desirable to retain all church buildings. There have always been and will continue to be**

**circumstances where closure is the right option. In those cases the process needs to be managed sensitively but efficiently, with more focused effort than now on seeking alternative uses.**

- **The work undertaken nationally to support parishes and dioceses in their stewardship of buildings needs to be reshaped at member and staff level to provide a sharper focus, pool expertise, share best practice, facilitate greater strategic thinking and provide constructive challenge to dioceses..**

### **Supporting innovative uses of church buildings**

122. Paragraphs 42-45 and the second section of Appendix 2 set out some examples of new approaches that are being tried out in a variety of places, rural as well as urban. The imaginative and sensitive re-ordering of buildings, including many that are highly listed, has **enabled churches to continue to be places of worship while also hosting** village shops, post offices, food banks, community and digital hubs, school space and arts venues. The Churches Conservation Trust's 'champing' scheme (using some CCT churches to provide overnight stay on walking holidays) also illustrates the scope for innovation in relation to closed buildings.
123. Developing innovative business models has enabled open churches to be used more extensively as positive assets for the work of mission, outreach and contributing to the common good. Every local situation is different but we do not believe that the developments undertaken so far have exhausted the range of possibilities.
124. One key role for the national level of the church is to share information and good practice about what has been tried and found to work. It can also help to create greater flexibility by making some of the present legislative framework less prescriptive (we come to specific examples below).

### **Wider support from the community**

125. The prime responsibility for maintaining church buildings will continue to remain with church members. But over recent decades there has been an increasing recognition that the Church of England cannot be expected to shoulder the burden of caring for many of the country's most important buildings - including 45% of those listed grade I - without significant, ongoing help.
126. This help will need to continue to take a number of forms:
- A willingness by the wider community - individuals, local authorities, charitable trusts - to contribute to special appeals when significant sums of money have to be raised for repairs or for major developments
  - An acceptance by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic England that the listed places of worship of the Church of England are there for the benefit of the whole community and that helping to keep them in good repair for future generations is in the public interest
  - An acknowledgement by Government that these buildings are everyone's heritage and that funding streams such as the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme need to be sustained for the long term.

127. The Church of England can be grateful for the significant help that has been provided in a variety of ways over recent years, as paragraphs 46-47 make clear. What is required now is some assurance that this help will be sustained. **Early confirmation that the listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme will continue at a realistic level of funding beyond next April is the most immediate need.**
128. **Thereafter we believe that Church and Government representatives should explore ways in which more assured support for listed cathedrals and church buildings can be provided for the long term** so that the clergy and lay people responsible for them do not have to spend disproportionate time, energy and resource on fabric issues to the detriment of their wider mission and ministry, and so that the future of these buildings, which are everyone's heritage, can be assured.

### **Creating more possibilities**

#### *Additional models for funding, managing and maintaining buildings*

129. For the reason given in our first principle **we continue to attach importance to local ownership of church buildings which are still open for worship.** The downsides of possible alternatives seem to us to be decisive. But **there is, in our view, scope for promoting new, creative models for managing and caring for church buildings generally which will reduce administrative burdens on clergy and PCCs as well as draw in broader expertise and resources.** These should also complement growing flexibility in mission and ministry provision more generally.
130. Most churches (and churchyards) vest in the incumbent of a benefice in his or her corporate capacity. Under the Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956, the care, maintenance and insurance liability is the statutory responsibility of the PCC. Such liability can only be transferred if the building is formally closed (when the Diocesan Board of Finance automatically assumes 'ownership' and responsibility for care and maintenance).
131. Many church buildings are managed effectively by PCCs, and this is likely to remain the predominant model in use, but there is already some existing scope to pursue other arrangements where desirable. While the PCC's legal liability for care and maintenance cannot currently be transferred, it can contract out its day to day management to, for example, a local trust.
132. In terms of possible supplementary arrangements, differing capacities and dynamics at work suggest the desirability of a range of new models bringing in additional support and responsibility in caring for buildings, potentially operating at a local, diocesan or national level:
- **Local:** community trusts or parish councils
  - **Diocesan:** separately established diocesan building trusts
  - **National:** a body such as the Churches Conservation Trust providing a management service.

133. In order to facilitate such models and provide as much flexibility as possible we **recommend an amendment to the Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956, enabling the PCC – with diocesan consent –formally to transfer its care and maintenance liability to another body, with that body’s agreement.**
134. The ‘ownership’ or vesting of the property in the incumbent would be unaffected by such arrangements. In our view it is more fruitful to focus on the care and maintenance liability rather than on ‘ownership’ issues, given that ‘ownership’ of church buildings is restricted and usually only becomes relevant in circumstances where there is some dealing with the land. There will also need to be provision for the possibility of terminating such arrangements in the event that circumstances necessitate this.
135. While such a solution will not be readily available for every church building in need of assistance, it does offer an opportunity for more creative engagement with local communities while also simplifying arrangements for diocesan-led initiatives and trusts, or for any nationally based arrangements.
136. We recognise that the viability of such models is very much tied to the availability and willingness of relevant groups or bodies to assume greater responsibility for church buildings, and for the requisite financial resources to support such a transfer. Nor will this address the concerns of those who believe that the Church has too many buildings to be sustainable and should not strive to keep them all open. However, where desirable and feasible, this does provide a further means to draw in wider interests in caring for church buildings which serve local communities, while also freeing up clergy and congregations to focus on mission and ministry.
137. Work has already been undertaken recently by Trevor Cooper,<sup>62</sup> among others, on researching the work of trusts in caring for church buildings (albeit a number of these have been closed for regular worship). The Church Buildings Council should identify and share good practice on additional models for local management of church buildings in use as these emerge.
138. Much has already been done, and is being done, to provide greater legal flexibility in the use of church buildings. For example, it is now possible to lease part of an ‘open’ church, allowing for cultural, communal and commercial use of parts while the building remains in use for worship. This benefits urban as well as rural churches, for example providing community space alongside worship space in large urban Victorian churches and bringing in new income streams. An outline of the existing legal models relating to the use of open church buildings is provided in Annex 3. **This merits wide dissemination.**
139. However, it is clear that too much of the burden for managing and maintaining church buildings can fall on clergy and congregations, diverting energy and resources from mission and other parish priorities. This is particularly so in multi-parish benefices in sparsely populated rural areas, where it is not unusual for clergy to be responsible for a large number of church buildings.

---

<sup>62</sup> T. Cooper, ‘*For Public Benefit: Churches Cared for by Trusts*’ (Ecclesiology Today, 2014)



140. Our recommendations promote a variety of potential alternative models of care and maintenance, designed to facilitate diocesan initiatives where already in hand and, where not, provide possible solutions to address individual benefice and parish needs. These are designed to be permissive and part of an enabling framework, but will only prosper with the willing participation and support of local communities or with the support of diocesan or other resources.

### *Organisational and Governance Structures*

141. Some churches, particularly in sparsely populated rural areas, struggle to attract sufficient officers and PCC members. The challenges faced by multi-parish benefices, including the numbers of both church officers and meetings this can necessitate, can be daunting, and was identified as an area for further review in both the recent Simplification Group and Rural Affairs Group Reports<sup>63</sup> to General Synod. The potential impact on the welfare and energy of clergy who are responsible for several church buildings (sometimes more than twelve) is a particular issue.
142. We note that it is intended that the next stage of the Simplification Agenda will focus on reducing ‘red tape’ for benefices and parishes as well as revisiting arrangements for teams and groups.
143. *Released for Mission: Growing the Rural Church* further encouraged multi-church groups to improve their own systems for managing administration, which might include administrative posts shared across a number of benefices or a deanery, and addressing financial management, accounting, building and churchyard management issues. This could provide another potential prototype for managing buildings more economically and effectively.
144. **We welcome the proposed further work on parish and benefice structures as described above, but also note the existing scope to promote different organisational arrangements which could relieve pressures on both clergy and laity:** for example a single parish, multi-church benefice, with a single PCC, might offer a more coherent structure than a multi-parish benefice operating with several separate PCCs.
145. In a rural area this might, for example, consist of one PCC and, say, eight church wardens allocated specific, specialist responsibilities, such as for safeguarding or for building maintenance, and working across the benefice as a whole. Already permissible, this provides a relatively simple structure addressing multiple needs, and could include those relating to church buildings. Possible reluctance arising from a fear of loss of identity, or of inhibiting fundraising for particular churches, could be addressed by utilising restricted funds for individual buildings.
146. The Simplification Group further recommended a statutory presumption in favour of proposals implementing an agreed deanery plan validated by the DMPC unless material considerations dictate otherwise. Proposed guidance on preparing deanery

---

<sup>63</sup> Report of the Simplification Task Group (GS 1980) (2015); *Released for Mission: Growing the Rural Church* (GS Misc 1092) (2015)

plans for mission and growth should highlight the need to address church buildings issues in such plans alongside other mission and ministry considerations.

### *Festival Churches*

147. The notion of ‘Festival Churches’ is gaining currency in rural areas, focussing on holding occasional offices and major seasonal services rather than regular worship in church buildings with relatively low attendance. **The Simplification Group has already proposed amending Canon B 14A to enable the Bishop to permit the use of a church building only for occasional services in order to facilitate this.**
148. **We endorse this proposal.** We believe it could help relieve some of the pressures and time constraints on clergy and congregations where buildings are not needed for regular Sunday worship but have a continuing role in the life of the Church.
149. However, we recognise that this will not of itself address key issues such as on-going responsibility for repair, maintenance and insurance. While, for some, relaxing the requirements on holding services will provide the flexibility needed, operating ‘Festival Churches’ without appropriate arrangements in place to care for the buildings risks simply storing up problems for the longer term.
150. A building in poor condition which appears to be closed (even or perhaps especially if it is legally open) may give the impression of decline, retreat and failure. ‘Mothballing’ as has been variously mooted in recent years is very likely to lead to this state and is not an option we would support. The solution is not to lock the door and walk away without a sustainable management and use policy: this reduces the use and value of the asset and indeed creates a progressive liability (often effectively as an uncontrolled ruin) and may also alienate the local community.
151. It will be important therefore for parishes where buildings are designated ‘Festival Churches’ to have proper care arrangements in place and also to adjust and be proud of what they can achieve. We note and would support the recommendation by the Rural Affairs Group that the Church Buildings Council and Mission and Public Affairs Council carry out further work on the role of ‘festival churches’, including how mission and evangelism will be developed in communities with a ‘festival church’.
152. A grouping such as an Association of Festival Churches could also help the CBC in identifying and exchanging best practice on caring for these buildings, while the proposals set out below are also intended to assist wider support for maintaining ‘Festival Churches’ as well as other church buildings.

### *Encouraging Strategic Reviews*

153. A Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee has a duty under Section 3(3) (d) of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 to maintain an overview of matters relating to church buildings in the diocese and their use (other than those within the jurisdiction of the consistory court or functions of the Diocesan Advisory Committee). The consultation responses highlighted that many, but not all, dioceses have been doing significant strategic thinking around church buildings, including

undertaking building reviews and also preparing strategies for their future support and management.

154. **We recognise and support the role of regular diocesan church building reviews or audits. Such reviews should not be undertaken in isolation, but wherever possible should be an integral part of diocesan and deanery Mission Action Planning for growth and should be updated at appropriate intervals, perhaps every five years.** These should also provide a context for decisions being taken on individual buildings and their future use.
155. However, we are aware that the strategic capacity and resources available at diocesan level to deal with buildings issues are variable. Some have benefitted from access to Support Officers for Historic Places of Worship, an initiative facilitated by Historic England, which has provided 50% of the costs of such a post for three years.
156. While some dioceses have subsequently cut these posts when the initial funding assistance has ended, we endorse the continuing value of such appointments in assessing and realising the potential of church buildings. Given the importance of buildings both as enablers of and, in some circumstances, obstacles to mission, **dioceses need to see the strategic importance of investment to address buildings issues, drawing in as much outside help as can be secured.**

#### *Closing Church Buildings*

157. Notwithstanding our proposals to facilitate churches remaining in use, **we recognise that there will be a continuing need for some to close.** The Simplification Report recommends streamlining the process of parish reorganisation (which includes church closure) to speed up and shorten the consultation process.
158. Combined with the Church Commissioners' own review of their public hearing process for contested proposals, this is likely to address concerns that where proposals to close a church building are agreed by the Bishop, the resulting process should be shorter, less complex and more easily manageable, with potentially fewer public hearings. In any event we note that the majority of closures do not attract objections.
159. One suggestion made was that contested closures might be considered locally by Diocesan Chancellors. Given that closure proposals are often pursued as part of more extensive benefice and parish reorganisation, separating these out would be problematic and we were not persuaded that such matters should be brought within the jurisdiction of the Consistory Court.
160. Since 1969 the futures of just over 1,900 church buildings or sites of former church buildings have been settled under what is now the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 (including 68 closed under pre 1969 legislation and 94 sites of churches demolished other than under the Measure). Over the last 20 years the rate of closures has been very stable, at around 20-25 per annum.

161. New uses have been found for the majority of buildings, and between 2000 and 2014 suitable uses were found for over three-quarters of all closed churches. In the event such uses cannot be found the Commissioners decide between the remaining alternatives of preservation by the Churches Conservation Trust or demolition.
162. Managing the closed churches function is not a priority for many dioceses, in terms of time and resources, particularly if they have only one or two closures every few years. While some dioceses manage the function very well (typically urban dioceses such as London and Manchester where there are relatively fewer difficulties in finding suitable uses and potentially unlocking some financial return), others struggle. It is not unusual for six to twelve months, or even longer, to lapse before the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee charged with use seeking takes any action, which may necessitate an extended use seeking period before a building's future is settled.
163. Use-seeking is often resource intensive. It is not possible to create the specialisms needed in each diocese to deal with the often complex planning and related issues which arise when dealing with challenging, historic buildings. Nevertheless sales receipts for closed churches (generating more than £16 million over the last ten years) demonstrate that these are often assets which can generate resources for redistribution to the Church and investment in mission.
164. Additionally, evidence shows that an initial outlay in achieving planning permission and listed building consent up front can both secure new uses and result in a better financial return to the Church. While the bulk of closed churches in recent years have been either unlisted or Grade II, there are some more highly listed churches for which suitable uses have been found.
165. Our view is that **while church buildings should, on closure, continue to vest in DBFs for care and maintenance, there should be greater flexibility to bring focus and expertise to the use seeking process from the outset.**
166. The Church Commissioners have built up a small specialist professional resource for dealing with closed churches casework, with staff regionally deployed in Diocesan Offices in Leeds, Liverpool, Birmingham, St Albans and Salisbury. **We propose that any diocese should be able to opt into an arrangement to transfer all their use-seeking functions for closed church buildings to the Commissioners, with the latter's consent.**
167. This would be financed partly by adjusting the ratio on the apportionment of net sale proceeds as between the diocese concerned (currently two-thirds goes to the Diocesan Pastoral Account) and the Commissioners (who currently receive the other third towards funding the Church's share of the Churches Conservation Trust and the Closed Church Buildings Support Account).
168. We regard this as a modest but useful reform, which is not prescriptive but will create additional options. It is consistent with the 'mixed economy' approach adopted elsewhere in the Simplification Group Report (to enable dioceses to ask the Commissioners to deal with scheme drafting and publication on their behalf).

169. It should benefit those dioceses without the capacity to deal with particularly challenging closed church buildings, or the resultant planning and heritage issues, freeing them up to focus on mission and growth. It could also potentially generate additional funding for the living Church by applying specialist skills and resources where needed.
170. Other proposals have already been made to reduce the length of the use-seeking process. We note that the Simplification Group has recommended removal of the requirement for statutory public consultation on proposals for alternative uses for closed churches (except where there are burials within the building or churchyard). It argued that such consultation predated wider public involvement in the planning system and to a significant extent now duplicated the statutory planning process, noting that matters raised were often primarily of a planning nature, such as the impact of traffic and noise upon residential areas.
171. **Together we hope these proposals will address concerns regarding the sometimes lengthy process of dealing with such buildings and help speed up the process.**

## Part 4 -National Functions for Church Buildings

172. **The current national arrangements for dealing with church buildings are complex**, involving several bodies, some statutory and others not, carrying out a range of advisory, advocacy and adjudicatory functions (see Appendix 4). They include :
- The Archbishops' Council
  - Church Commissioners
  - The Church Buildings Council (CBC)
  - The Church Buildings (Uses & Disposals) Committee of the Commissioners
  - The Statutory Advisory Committee on Closed and Closing Churches (SAC)
  - The Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England (CFCE)
173. These are all bodies created by statute though they are of varying kinds and have a range of functions. The Archbishops' Council and the Commissioners are bodies corporate which can hold assets and employ staff. The Council has a general advocacy and policy role in relation to church buildings and acts as the managing employer for the staff who support the Church Buildings Council and the Cathedrals Fabric Commission. Those bodies provide expert advice to church and cathedrals, in the case of the CFCE exercise certain statutory planning powers and in both cases seek to champion the role of church and cathedral buildings and promote their sustainability.
174. The Statutory Advisory Committee is a committee of the CBC. It has the role of providing expert and authoritative advice to the Commissioners and the Churches Conservation Trust on the heritage value of church buildings that are being considered for possible closure or following closure.
175. The Church Commissioners have a range of powers and responsibilities in relation to the closure of church buildings and their subsequent use and disposal. They contribute, with the agreement of the Synod, to the funding of the Churches Conservation Trust. They also have chancel repair liability in relation to a significant number of churches (and help financially those cathedrals with the same liability). Their responsibilities in relation to closed churches are exercised through their Church Buildings (Uses & Disposals) Committee.
176. The Commissioners also have a range of statutory responsibilities in connection with proposals from dioceses for pastoral reorganisation. These are exercised at member level by delegation from the Board of Governors to its Pastoral Committee. The staff supporting the Pastoral Committee work within the same department as those who work on the uses and disposal of closed buildings. The functions are distinct. In the past decade only 15% of the pastoral schemes have involved the closure of a church building.
177. In addition to the six bodies listed above there is the Churches Conservation Trust (see below), part funded from Government, part from the Commissioners, and from funding they raise from other sources. The CCT is a charity, established under church legislation but sitting at one remove from the National Church Institutions.

It owns 347 historic Anglican churches which have been closed but remain consecrated buildings and are available for occasional worship as well as other uses.

178. Like much else in the Church of England **the present profusion of statutory bodies owes more to history than to a considered over-view of what is needed.** In addition **the existence in Church House of two staff teams each responsible for particular functions in relation to church buildings and each under separate line management does not seem to us to be optimal.**
179. As we have noted earlier in this report, there are necessarily tensions to be managed and balances to be struck in relation to the Church of England's stewardship of its buildings. But this does not provide a sufficient justification for the present complexity and dispersion of effort at member and staff level. We therefore recommend change at both levels.
180. Currently there are 33 staff working in the two departments. The Church Buildings Division of the Archbishops' Council has 15 staff headed by Janet Gough. The Pastoral and Closed Churches department of the Church Commissioners, headed by Paul Lewis, has 20 staff, of which 8 are engaged on buildings related work (5 located regionally), 4 on pastoral reorganisation and 5 on chancel repair liability (of whom 3 are concerned with land registration issues).
181. Both sets of staff include specialists (planners and surveyors, and those in conservation, architecture and the environment) with a focus on church buildings. While each team has its own particular responsibilities, both sets of staff operate in the same dioceses and over time may both be involved with issues concerning the same church building. Currently one of the teams has staff based in the regions while the other does not, though it has encouraged dioceses, with support from Historic England, to appoint their own Support Officers for Historic Places of Worship.
182. It seems to us that **bringing together within a single staff team the work both of championing open and sustainable church buildings and handling sensitively and professionally the processes around church closure, including the use and disposal of closed churches buildings, would have a number of advantages:**
  - It would usefully bring expertise together in one place, create new synergies and make it easier to take an overview of relative priorities.
  - It would create the potential to offer an improved, more seamless service to dioceses on buildings issues.
  - While there is probably only limited duplication between the work of the two teams there is certainly scope for streamlining some processes, which will be easier to assess if all the work is held within one team.
183. **We therefore recommend that those staff involved in all aspects of church buildings, including cathedrals and chancels are brought together to form a single staff team.** While there has historically been some synergy between the work on pastoral reorganisation and closure of church buildings there is potentially

far greater synergy between the work of the two staff teams currently working on church buildings.

184. We are aware that there are now many teams within Church House which support several member level bodies, including a number which provide advice to and do work on behalf of both the Church Commissioners and the Archbishops' Council. Arrangements are in place to ensure that, on the rare occasions when there is a potential conflict of interest or role between two member level bodies, each can receive the distinct and professional advice that it needs.
185. We believe that the advantages of holding expertise about church buildings issues within a single team outweigh any theoretical disadvantages and that it will be relatively straightforward to manage such conflicts of interest as might, very occasionally, arise.
186. We do not see any intrinsic difficulty about separating out the team that supports pastoral reorganisation from that dealing with alternative uses for closed buildings though quite how best the former should fit within the Commissioners' management structures is not something that we have seen as within our remit to consider. It will clearly be important to retain close communication between those involved in the minority of proposed pastoral schemes that involve church closure and the new, integrated, church buildings team. We would recommend that if possible they should be located in close proximity.
187. We have not seen it as part of our task to go into the detail of how the change would be achieved and over what sort of period. But while structural change at member level (see below) will, if agreed, inevitably take some time, given the legal processes to be gone through, **we would hope that the creation of a single church buildings team could be achieved within a matter of months** with the relevant staff (excluding those working regionally) brought together in one location within Church House.
188. We do not see the creation of a single staffing team as dependent on any changes to member level bodies. There is nevertheless a question whether, at member level as at staff level, a greater strategic focus would be secured if the present distribution of responsibilities was less fragmented.
189. Of the six bodies listed above there will clearly continue to be an Archbishops' Council and a Board of Governors of the Church Commissioners, each with a wide range of responsibilities in relation to the welfare of the Church of England. We also believe that the role and focus of the Cathedral Fabrics Commission, with its specific determinative powers in relation to proposals submitted by cathedrals, are sufficiently distinct for the Commission to continue as a body in its own right. It should continue to be supported, as now, by staff who are embedded in a larger staff team involved with church buildings as well as cathedrals.
190. **We do not recommend any change in the responsibilities of the Commissioners in relation to buildings issues.** There was some discussion of this in the 1990s at the time of the Turnbull Report when it was suggested that the Commissioners should focus entirely on investment issues. The National Institutions Measure 1998 contained an enabling power for certain Commissioner responsibilities to be



transferred, without the need for fresh primary legislation, from the Commissioners to the Council or to any other body.

191. No transfer has, however, been made in relation to church buildings issues. The underlying consideration is that while in principle the Commissioners' powers to make schemes could be transferred elsewhere in practice they are bound up with responsibilities in relation to money and property which can only be exercised by a body corporate. The Church Buildings Council is not such a body and we see no case for making it one. The Archbishops' Council is a body corporate but it is not evident what would be gained by transferring to it these additional responsibilities.
192. The question that we have explored is whether it is helpful to have three other entities with responsibilities in relation to church buildings- the Church Buildings Council, its Statutory Advisory Committee and the Commissioners' Church Buildings (Uses and Disposals) Committee. Each has its own responsibilities, membership and pattern of meeting. The Church Buildings Council has 24 members of whom 8 also serve on the Statutory Advisory Committee. The Commissioners' Church Buildings (Uses and Disposals) Committee has 10 members.
193. There are a number of considerations which suggest to us that **there would be advantage in having a single body, which could provide greater focus and more strategic thinking than is possible under the present more fragmented arrangements:**
  - The responsibility for taking an oversight of the Church of England's stewardship of its buildings, providing specialist advice to parishes and dioceses, taking certain decisions that can only be taken nationally and engaging on behalf of the Church of England with Government and other national agencies is arguably too important to be dispersed among several bodies.
  - Just as a single staff team will bring expertise together in one place and enable a more synoptic view to be taken of priorities and resource allocation so, at member level, there are clear advantages in making it easier for a strategic view to be taken.
  - In the spirit of simplification having three member level groups with a combined membership of 34 looks less attractive than having a single statutory member level body and with a membership of perhaps 10-15.
  - To the extent that there are tensions to be managed between closing churches and trying to keep them open and between heritage issues and wider considerations of mission it may be better to manage them creatively within a single body than having separate bodies each with a distinctive orientation. We do not believe such inherent conflicts of interest or divergence of task exist as to necessitate retaining distinct entities.
  - The process by which the Commissioners seek advice from the Statutory Advisory Committee before making a pastoral (church buildings disposal)

scheme is a modified version of what was designed in the 1960s when the former Advisory Board for Redundant Churches was created. By framing the relevant statutory responsibilities in the right way it ought to be possible to ensure that church buildings that need to be preserved in the interests of the nation and the Church of England are, without maintaining quite such an elaborate and prescriptive process.

194. We accept that further detailed work will be needed on the legislative changes needed to deliver an orderly transition. One particular issue that will need attention is the fact that the new body (which might perhaps be called **the Church Buildings Commission for England**) would, for some purposes, be acting as a committee of the Church Commissioners for England.
195. It will be important that the Church Commissioners can establish policy or other parameters within which the body will need to operate when it is acting on its behalf. These, together with the membership and voting arrangements within the new body, will need to provide the Church Commissioners with assurance that, as now with the Church Buildings (Uses & Disposals) Committee, their financial and other interests could not be overridden by a majority vote of non-Commissioners.
196. We are not proposing any change in the relationship between the Church Commissioners and the Archbishops' Council nor are we suggesting that the new Commission should simply be seen as a committee of the Commissioners. It would be a new statutory body (like the Cathedral Fabrics Commission and like the present Church Buildings Council, which would cease to exist) with its own responsibilities.
197. Consistently with the Church of England's present emphasis on simplification we suggest that the functions of the new Commission should be expressed in quite broad and general terms on the face of the legislation rather than going into the sort of detail that until recently was normal in church legislation (see for example sections 55 and 56 of and schedule 4 to the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007 which established the Church Buildings Council).
198. These functions should include:
  - **Promoting the sustainable care and use of churches to advance the mission of the Church of England.**
  - **Providing advice throughout the Church of England on all issues relating to church buildings, with particular reference to conservation and development.**
  - **Overseeing the process for managing the aftermath of church closures.**
199. The responsibilities of the Commissioners' Pastoral Committee would remain unchanged. The Churches Conservation Trust and its funding relationship with the Commissioners would also be unaffected. We propose no change in relation to the Commissioners' chancel repair responsibilities (which arise from property inherited by the Commissioners rather than from any of their statutory functions in relation to church buildings).

200. We have not sought to work through in detail the membership arrangements for the new Commission. These will need to be set out in the new legislation (with provision for subsequent amendment by order in case changes are needed in the light of experience). As with most other national church bodies there will be value in having a mix of elected and appointed members.
201. We have suggested above a possible membership of perhaps 10-15. This reduction from the present combined membership of 34 does not mean that the Church will not need to continue to have access to the wide range of specialist advisory expertise which is currently generously provided by those who serve on the various bodies. What it means is that business will need to be done in a rather different and less labour intensive way, as has already happened with a number of other church bodies (to take just one example, the Church of England's educational charity, the National Society recently reduced the size of its trustee body from nearly 30 to 12).
202. As noted above, the creation of a new integrated staff team can - and in our view - should be achieved within a matter of months, whereas legislation will be needed to establish the new Commission. Realistically the earliest date for introducing the requisite Measure is probably July 2016, which means that it is likely to be 2018 before all the synodical and parliamentary processes are completed.
203. We would hope, however, that the Chairs of the Church Buildings Council and of the Church Buildings (Uses & Disposals) Committee of the Commissioners would work together from 2016 on an orderly transitional plan and secure as much synergy between the two bodies as is possible, pending the creation of the new Commission.

#### ***Churches Conservation Trust***

204. The Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) plays an invaluable role caring for, currently, 347 closed church buildings of high significance for which no suitable alternative use could be found. These remain consecrated churches available for occasional worship with the consent of the Bishop.
205. In recent years the CCT has moved from its former practice of managing its buildings from the centre, to a regionally based model focussed more on local partnerships. It has also, on a small-scale, invested resources in regeneration and preventative work, including providing practical support in community engagement, business development and confidence building for parishes and local communities, complementing other similar initiatives in place. The CCT sees this as adding value to its core functions, even though it will inevitably only be a small part of its work.
206. In the context of successive cuts in its Government funding and concerns regarding its ability to take on a significant number of new vestings in the future, this slight shift in its role is understandable.
207. The CCT has sought a minor legislative amendment to facilitate this work by providing an explicit power to assist in managing churches in use but, given that it is already able to do this through its trading arm, we did not consider such a change was necessary. However, we support the recommendation of the Simplification

Group to simplify the legislative provisions regarding the CCT's membership, which offer another example of how primary legislation is generally overly prescriptive with regards to the membership and constitutions of statutory bodies.

## **Part five- Summary of Recommendations**

208. We commend the following principles regarding the use and stewardship of church buildings which have informed our work and proposals :

- **For so long as a building has a contribution to make to the mission of the Church of England and remains open for worship, the legal responsibility for it should normally remain at parish level, and where that is not possible, at diocesan level. Local ownership- in every sense of the word- is generally to be preferred to other alternatives, not least because it will continue to facilitate wider community support for what is often the most significant historical building in the locality.**
- **What is understood by ‘open for worship’ has evolved over time depending on local contexts and will need to evolve further for some buildings over the coming years. Legislation needs to facilitate this.**
- **More generally, the overall legislative framework governing the use and management of church buildings needs to be simpler, less prescriptive and less burdensome for laity and clergy. There needs to be more flexibility to reflect the wide diversity of local situations.**
- **Dioceses need to integrate thinking about their church buildings with their mission and ministry planning. Regular diocesan strategic reviews, taking account of diocesan and deanery plans, mission action plans and parish audits are important for ensuring that buildings issues are given their proper weight- neither dominating nor being overlooked or regarded as a specialist subject.**
- **Over the centuries it has never been either possible or desirable to retain all church buildings. There have always been and will continue to be circumstances where closure is the right option. In those cases the process needs to be managed sensitively but efficiently, with more focused effort than now on seeking alternative uses.**
- **The work undertaken nationally to support parishes and dioceses in their stewardship of buildings needs to be reshaped at member and staff level to provide a sharper focus, pool expertise and facilitate greater strategic thinking.**

209. In the light of these we offer the following specific recommendations:

1. **Church and Government representatives should explore ways in which more assured financial support for listed cathedrals and church buildings can be provided for in the long term. (Paragraphs 46-48 and 125-128).**
2. **In order to facilitate new, creative models of managing and caring for buildings and free up clergy and laity for mission and ministry the Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956 should be amended**

to enable a PCC - with diocesan consent - to formally transfer its care and maintenance liability to another body. (Paragraphs 129-136).

3. **Guidance on legal models relating to the use of open church buildings should be more widely disseminated in order to promote good practice in enabling such wider use. (Paragraph 137-140 and Appendix 3).**
4. **The next phase of the Simplification Agenda, in looking to reduce ‘red tape’ affecting parish and benefice structure and organisation, should, as proposed, review governance requirements with a view to relieving pressures on clergy and laity and freeing up energy and resources for mission. (Paragraphs 141-146).**
5. **The Simplification Group’s recommendation to amend Canon B 14A to facilitate ‘Festival Churches’, while proposing further work on their role and how mission and evangelism are developed in the surrounding communities, should be implemented. Additionally, the Church Buildings Council should work with dioceses pioneering this concept to identify and promote good practice in caring for such buildings. A grouping such as an Association of Festival Churches may also offer a beneficial means of supporting such initiatives. (Paragraphs 147-152).**
6. **Regular diocesan church building reviews or audits should be incorporated into each diocese’s vision and strategy, as well as forming an integral part of deanery Mission Action Planning. Dioceses need to see the strategic importance of investment to address buildings issues, drawing in as much outside help as can be secured. (Paragraphs 153-156).**
7. **While closed church buildings should continue to vest in Diocesan Boards of Finance until their future is settled, any Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee should be able to transfer all of their use-seeking functions for closed churches to the Church Commissioners, with the latter’s consent. (Paragraphs 157-171).**
8. **Staff in Church House involved in all aspects of church buildings including cathedrals and chancels should be brought together to form a single staff team, with the relevant staff (excluding those working regionally) based in one location within Church House. (Paragraphs 172-188).**
9. **A new statutory Commission (perhaps entitled the Church Buildings Commission for England) should be established to take an oversight of the Church of England’s stewardship of its church buildings and enable a more strategic view to be taken of priorities and resource allocation. This would replace the present Church Buildings Council including its Statutory Advisory Committee, and the Church Commissioners’ Church**

**Buildings (Uses and Disposals) Committee. While no changes in the responsibilities of the Church Commissioners in relation to church buildings issues are proposed, the new body, for some purposes, would act as a committee of the Commissioners. (Paragraphs 183-203).**

- 10. The current powers and responsibilities of the Churches Conservation Trust work well and should not be changed. (Paragraphs 204-207).**

## **Appendices**

1. Terms of Reference and Membership
2. Consultation and Taking Evidence
3. Legal Agreements for the Use of Open Church Buildings
4. Current Roles of various National Bodies regarding Church Buildings



### Terms of Reference and Membership

The Group's terms of reference were:

'To consider what functions need to be exercised nationally to advance the mission of the Church of England through its use and stewardship of church buildings and how they might best be carried out.

In making its assessment and recommendations the Group should review the current role, objectives and relationship of the two NCI staff teams- the Church Buildings Division and the members of the Pastoral and Closed Churches Department engaged with the closure of church buildings- and the member level bodies they serve- , the Archbishops' Council, Church Commissioners (including its Pastoral and Closed Churches Committees), Church Buildings Council, the Statutory Advisory Committee and the Cathedrals Fabric Commission. The Group should also consider the role played by the Churches Conservation Trust.'

The Group's Membership was:

**The Rt Revd John Inge, Bishop of Worcester** (lead bishop for cathedrals and church buildings) (Chair)

**The Rt Hon Sir Tony Baldry** (Church Buildings Council Chair; former Second Church Estates Commissioner)

**James Halsall** (DAC Secretary for the Diocese of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich)

**The Venerable Christine Hardman** (Archbishops' Council member)

**Andrew Mackie** (Third Church Estates Commissioner; Chair of Pastoral and Church Buildings (Uses and Disposals) Committees)

**Jennie Page CBE** (Vice Chair of the Cathedrals Fabric Commission)

**Ian Watmore** (Church Commissioner and member of the Church Buildings (Uses and Disposals) Committee).

Staff:

Andrew Brown (Secretary & Chief Executive, Church Commissioners),  
William Fittall (Secretary General, Archbishops' Council),  
Janet Gough (Director of the Cathedrals and Church Buildings Division)  
Paul Lewis (Pastoral and Closed Churches Secretary, Church Commissioners).

Supported by:

Alexander McGregor (Deputy Legal Adviser)

Saira Salimi (Deputy Official Solicitor)

Tom Conway (Strategy Officer (Analyst), Strategy and Development Unit)

Andrea Mulkeen (Secretary to the Group).

## Consultation and Taking Evidence

### Consultation Survey

*To inform our work we conducted a brief SurveyMonkey consultation of Bishops, Archdeacons and Diocesan Secretaries; some 52 responses were received. Key points raised in the five broad areas outlined are summarised below and drawn on within the main body of the Report.*

#### **1. Extent to which the use of parish churches and places of worship has been taken into account in Mission Planning**

*'Buildings can be a burden or a valuable resource (or both at the same time).'*

*'... no meaningful strategy could address church growth without taking the issues of buildings into account.'*

*'Buildings are a wonderful servant of mission but a burdensome master. How does your plan address the burden of buildings in your area and help to realise their potential for mission?' [Question to be addressed in deanery plans in one diocese].*

Many dioceses identify church buildings as a major resource in each community and a significant factor in community cohesion - with parishes encouraged to build local strategic partnerships and view and use their buildings flexibly, - while they vary in how far they have developed strategies for buildings which complement the diocesan strategy for growth numerically and in the depth of discipleship. Some dioceses are considering the use of buildings as part of proposed collaborative mission and ministry units, seeing them as both a resource and – sometimes – a cost burden. There is a recognition that questions about ministry, mission and maintenance cannot easily be separated from questions about historic buildings and the opportunities and challenges they present.

Examples provided of mission planning focussing on activity at various levels included:

- Diocesan strategic plans including planning for buildings, sometimes facilitated by deploying Places of Worship Support Officers part funded by Historic England.
- Diocesan surveys of parishes regarding challenges and opportunities offered by buildings.
- Categorisation of churches, e.g. as 'mission' or 'festival' churches.
- Deaneries expected to consider the viability and use of buildings when drawing up their deanery plans.
- Mission communities carrying out buildings audits to discover how best they may enable work of mission and ministry in their area and assessing budgetary implications.
- Parishes being encouraged to identify Growth Action Planning goals including missional use of buildings.
- Use of toolkits to assist parishes in creative use of their buildings.
- Promoting united alternate worship patterns in church buildings between parishes in united benefices

- Church plants where there are declining congregations.
- Installation of facilities or improvement of church buildings as a priority in enabling parishes to be better positioned to achieve missional growth.

## 2. Other examples of how dioceses have been thinking strategically about church buildings lately?

There are variations in terms of adopting more top-down or bottom-up approaches, including regarding the possibility of closures, but several recent exercises involve a strategic approach to church building issues:

- A number of dioceses have specially appointed posts helping to address buildings' issues, including Bath & Wells (PT Church Use and Visitors Adviser); Chelmsford (PT Strategic Buildings Adviser); Chester, Hereford, Liverpool, Manchester, Worcester (HE/DBF funded Heritage Support Officers); Chichester (2 Parish Development Officers); Southwark: temporary project manager to help support parish building projects; Leicester (Archdeacons' Project Officer); West Yorkshire & the Dales (Buildings for Mission Adviser under Strategic Development Funding);
- **Bristol:** Longer term aim to develop categories of church buildings using their recently developed Church Buildings Review Toolkit. Also planning for possible church plants by other Anglican churches into closed buildings.
- **Canterbury:** recognise likely to lose some church buildings in resourcing growth strategies.
- **Chelmsford:** looking at ways to develop buildings especially in terms of pilgrimage and spirituality. *Barking* - beginning to delineate between mission centres/community buildings/ festival churches, which will impact on resourcing. *Colchester* - Area Mission and Pastoral Committee has funded feasibility studies, with several churches subsequently installing new facilities etc. Any more strategic thinking about buildings tends to come from bottom up (parish or deanery).
- **Chester:** have Church Buildings Development Officer. Planning is largely on case by case basis and response to local need and expectation rather than to conform to a central strategy.
- **Chichester:** working party reviewing response to new housing developments. Buildings alone not best response to challenge but can be important element.
- **Coventry:** Involved in discussions with CCT on innovative ways to keep church buildings open. Splitting traditional DAC Secretary role into two. One PT post will support the Archdeacon Pastor, primarily as resource for parishes in terms of building projects and conservation and developing plans for use of church buildings in furtherance of mission and ministry; the other will be a traditional office-based role focussing on faculty process, advice etc.
- **Exeter:** Church Buildings Strategy Committee developing two linked initiatives of 'Festival Churches' and 'Breathing Space' to alleviate burden of maintaining (predominantly rural) churches and release energy and resources for mission.
- **Leicester:** Project Officer helping parishes think strategically about buildings with a view to them being better resources for mission, with training events and workshops. Churches can apply to Diocesan Capital Fund for grants to develop their buildings – to be eligible they must demonstrate that the proposed capital work will enhance mission of the church. Considering categorising buildings and have looked at Lincoln model.

- **Lincoln:** Produced reports in 2013 on condition of church buildings and future strategy. Parishes had been invited to categorise their buildings – 70% categorised them as a ‘mission church’ and they will be supported by church buildings team in grant applications etc. Work beginning on what characteristics of a ‘festival church’ might be.
- **London:** Strategic Development Team dedicated to Capital Vision 2020, diocesan strategic plan, places church buildings at its centre, encouraging them to be open, used creatively and to support new worshipping communities and fresh expressions by existing worshipping communities. In recent years has preferred retaining ownership of church buildings, planting/sharing as necessary to make them a financially sustainable means of retaining high profile mission presence in all communities.
- **Manchester:** Currently engaged on Strategic Review including Task Group to develop specific strategy for all buildings (focussing initially on church buildings but will look at other property holdings). Conducting a baseline analysis of all operational buildings in diocese with view to recommending a distribution of operational buildings for future needs of church and a buildings strategy (maintenance, enhancement and disposal).
- **Norwich:** launched Diocesan Churches Trust as way forward for parishes with both low population and low attendance; churches would be leased to Trust, releasing time, resources, energy for mission.
- **Oxford:** *Oxford area* - New Communities Group leads work on provision of church, mission and ministry in new housing areas. Provision centring on ministry and housing rather than building new church buildings. Elsewhere church partnership and planting programme being developed (in Oxford city 3 very large evangelical churches where buildings used close to capacity while others elsewhere under used); *Buckingham* - Area Dean for Rural Mission and Development includes consideration of buildings, also looking to appoint Church Buildings Officer.
- **Sheffield:** HE review of building condition a useful wake-up call and provides a mechanism for some decision-making.
- **Southwark:** diocesan ‘Strategy for Ministry’ recognises closure may be necessary on occasion. Developing a strategic approach to church buildings and interested in exploring more about theology of place. Adopted idea of ‘salt’ and ‘light’ buildings (former serving very local communities, the latter more prominently situated with wider catchment).
- **St Albans:** Analysis of parishes’ MAPs with a building related priority in 2013 concluded that most were already in touch with DAC for advice on taking forward proposals.
- **Truro:** to date not thinking strategically about buildings.
- **West Yorkshire & the Dales:** beginning audit of church buildings. Have looked at viability of churches on ‘Churches at Risk Register’.
- **Winchester:** about to embark on review of church buildings at diocesan level. Not yet determined approach although categorising buildings may be helpful.
- **Worcester:** categorising buildings and working with HE on buildings at risk. PCC asset management plans are a condition of diocesan loans for building work.
- **York:** Rural Mission Task and Finish Group looking at strategy for how buildings can better serve Diocesan vision as congregational hubs, festival churches, community hubs, shared ecumenical buildings etc.

### 3. How church buildings help or hinder achieving Quinquennial Goals

*“This is about worship, welcome and hospitality and how we occupy the space within the building and use it for missional purpose.”*

*“The building has significance to the community as a sacred space where its collective memory and spiritual heritage is expressed – but also, the community has significance for the well-being of the building.”*

*“Without a vision for the church as an asset it is bound to become an energy sapping burden.”*

*“Gifts, resources and energies are too precious to waste on inappropriate buildings and wrong locations”.*

Several respondents underline the value of church buildings in contributing to the common good through the range of community activities they host, while also highlighting the reliance on local leadership, vision and strategy this entails. The issue of presence is seen as crucial to the credibility of the Church as a partner with the secular world. In many areas the church building is the last shared space available to the community and potentially a means of connecting with the local population, but must be allowed to be a living, flexible space in order to fulfil such a role. Church buildings are also seen as holy places of pilgrimage, where shared history and memory converge, and whose spiritual and evangelistic significance should not be underestimated.

Others consider that the value of church buildings as an asset is subject to their condition, location, size, versatility and viability, and that they help achieve Quinquennial goals so long as they're seen as a servant of mission and not its master. The energy and resources they consume and the limitations sometimes placed on adaptation can be seen to hinder mission. A number of respondents believe buildings can present a challenge to Re-Imagining Ministry, notably where strategic discussions revert to maintenance of and dependence upon existing or historical patterns of ministry, but they can also provide a location where imaginative new ventures such as Messy Church can take place.

In terms of changes to facilitate achieving the Quinquennial goals, suggestions include:

- Central resourcing and more direct support in building community partnerships around church buildings.
- Flexibility in designation of church and other buildings as places of worship, parish foci, centres for ministry.
- Further streamlining and of the faculty procedure and simplification of process for closure and disposal, especially where there is only a very small number of objectors.
- An increase in paid benefice administrators to ease the burden for Churchwardens and PCCs, and developing a benefice wide approach to managing and using buildings.
- Facilitating shared use of buildings ecumenically.
- As part of their training (IME 4-7) make curates aware of developmental possibilities of church buildings and facilities.
  
- Encourage parishes to see what other have done elsewhere – helps them pick up good practice, learn from others' mistakes and be bold in their plans.
- Parishes should think strategically about their whole building stock, including halls or church centres, and develop the potential of these other buildings for mission.
- Involving the wider community in the care of churches.

#### **4. Role of National Church Institutions – Examples of helpful or unhelpful involvement with buildings? Additional support needed to help optimise the potential of church buildings?**

Examples of helpful involvement include:

- Lobbying for funding including roof repair fund.
- Metal theft initiative.
- Parish Resource grants information and Churchcare and Shrinking the Footprint websites.
- Development of online faculty system.
- Full Pastoral Committee process led to significant breakthrough in how parish managed two buildings.
- Help in securing new uses through discussions with local planning authority.
- NCI staff expertise both in CBC, and Commissioners' Pastoral and Closed Churches Department – helpful in faculty and Mission and Pastoral Measure casework.
- Work of Churches Conservation Trust.

Examples of unhelpful involvement include:

- NCIs need healthier and more robust discussion with heritage bodies about strategic mission of Church.
- Sometimes a lack of entrepreneurial attitude.
- National requirements can be seen as attempt to be too controlling from centre and overly onerous e.g. CBC opposing developments on occasions, and Commissioners being over-pedantic in some closed churches cases.
- The faculty system can seem to give greater weight to the building than the mission of the Church and intervention of CBC on occasion unhelpful and still comes across as conservation body; duplicating work already done at diocesan level.
- Closing church buildings is a long, cumbersome process which can be held up by a small number of objectors; sometimes Commissioners more concerned to ensure letter of law adhered to than enable parish to achieve its aims.

Possible areas for additional support:

- A national app for church wardens.
- Further simplification of faculty system.
- Lobbying Government for additional funding.
- Building development officers for every diocese, or a national scheme for providing diocesan fundraising officers or officers for groups of dioceses, funded by the National Church to draw down grants and bring in additional funding.
- Additional Church funding for creative mission or educational purposes; for church adaptations and e.g. festival churches.
- Simplification programme should make it easier to move clergy who have become stuck and are limiting realisation of potential vested in buildings.
- Increasing local knowledge and capacity around asset management, care, maintenance and development of buildings and compatibility of community use and mission.
- Sharing good practice and case studies between dioceses.
- A national solution for redundant churches rather than vesting them in the local DBF.
- Greater devolution of decision making on future of non-viable buildings.

## **Other issues**

*“What is needed is not an imposed strategy from Head Office but a cultural change at local level.”*

Additional views expressed range from those who believe that so long as churches are ticking over they should continue to be allowed to do so, to one archdeacon who fears that the Church is on the edge of a precipice which will see beginning in the next decade a massive programme of disposal and redundancy of buildings, for which the Church needs to be geared up on a much more organised and professional basis.

## **Other Evidence**

The Group also heard oral evidence on behalf of:

### ***Rural Affairs Group of General Synod***

Rt Revd James Bell, Bishop of Knaresborough (Chair)

Canon Dr Jill Hopkinson (National Rural Officer)

This focussed on the highly significant role played by church buildings in serving rural communities, promoting the case for a national vision of church buildings as places of hospitality and welcome and their importance to Christian witness and mission.

Five specific recommendations were made on behalf of the Group:

- A nationally promoted scheme to provide composting toilets for every church building without running water (and where this was too expensive or impractical to provide).
- Extension of the *Inspired* model to provide Place of Worship Support Officers through a partnership between the CBC, Historic England and others to give skilled help to congregations to sustain and develop church buildings as tools for mission.
- Each diocese should conduct a review of its portfolio of church buildings to identify how each one can be used creatively as a tool for mission.
- The Church Buildings Council and Mission and Public Affairs Council should carry out a thorough review of the role and purpose of festival churches, including how mission and evangelism will be developed in the communities where a church has become a festival church.
- The Church Commissioners with the Church Buildings Council should undertake a project to explore models and routes for funding for the employment of appropriately skilled officers (for benefice, deanery or diocese in conjunction with ecumenical partners), who could then assist volunteers with the day to day management of church buildings and exercise the legal functions pertaining to the maintenance of buildings and graveyards.

### ***The Churches Conservation Trust***

Jane Weeks (Deputy Chair)

Crispin Truman (Chief Executive)

- CCT currently cares for around 350 closed churches through its London HQ and 3 Regional Offices in Bristol, Leeds and Cambridge. Places a particular focus on a cost effective volunteer development model (around 1,700 volunteers at present).
- Closed CCT churches and parish churches face similar challenges in seeking greater community engagement and multi-use although PCCs often worked in isolation.
- Looking forward 10-15 years, recognises its ability to take on new buildings is limited; sees this as only one part of solution for dealing with historic church buildings. Scope for a lower level of community support and business development. Ownership vehicle is secondary: using building is a key issue before management and ownership concerns.
- The CCT sees potential danger in the diocesan trust model, if it meant freezing buildings in aspic by concentrating on a maintenance model, without some people investment. Some parishes are buying into the expertise of its small regeneration team through the CCT's recently set up trading arm.
- It hopes to work more with open churches, utilising the testing ground of managing its own sites and volunteering, and also skills in acting as project manager and broker between a church and its local community where needed.
- Perceived independence attracts particular audiences/money and bring in new partners.
- The CCT is stretched and would not wish to grow too large: advantages in being a relatively small organisation, but some scope for an expanded role. If it had additional resources it might subdivide its very large SE regional team, but main scaling up with any extra resources would be to provide consultancy to parishes or dioceses through service contracts.
- De-vesting buildings explored where achievable to help secure long-term sustainability.

### *The Friends of Friendless Churches*

Matthew Saunders (Director)

Richard Halsey (Trustee)

- FoFC owns around 40 closed church buildings in England and Wales (in Wales, operating as an equivalent to the CCT, funded by CADW and the Church of Wales; in England it relies on donations and some grants). Its role in England is complementary to the CCT (caring for 'lesser', usually Grade II, closed churches).
- FoFC carries out Quinquennial Inspections on its buildings. Just under half now have Friends groups providing oversight and assistance, some carry out maintenance themselves, enabling FoFC itself to act more as a guardian trustee.
- Some have occasional acts of worship.
- There are advantages in being a trust of a certain size: dispersing responsibility too much could be problematic and the smaller the body, particularly if caring for a single building, the greater the reliance on individuals and lack of economies of scale (FoFC was able to negotiate a favourable bulk insurance premium to insure 47 buildings).
- As a small largely volunteer-led organisation it is light-footed in approach. Its Trustees each assume unofficial oversight of a small number of buildings. Going forward its Director would focus on strategy with an officer undertaking regular visits etc.
- To take on more churches the FoFC would need additional resourcing. Growth might impact on its nimbleness; it is difficult to assess its optimum size.



## LEGAL AGREEMENTS FOR THE USE OF OPEN CHURCH BUILDINGS

1. There are currently two legal models under which rights in relation to an open church building can be conferred on a person or body. One is a contractual licence; the other is a lease. Both models involve conferring legally enforceable rights on the other party to the arrangement. The rights in question will include a right to use the building, or part of the building, for specified purposes.
2. The party on whom the rights are conferred will normally undertake certain obligations, for example as to the payment of a licence fee or rent, keeping the part of the building in question in repair, and using the premises only in ways that are consistent with the status of the building as a consecrated church.
3. The parties to a contractual licence or a lease are normally the incumbent, the parochial church council and the party being granted rights in relation to the building. The incumbent will normally need to be a party because the property in the church and churchyard is vested in the incumbent in right of his or her office. The parochial church council will normally be a party because the licence fee or rent will be payable to the council and because the council has certain statutory obligations concerned with the maintenance and care of the church building.
4. There are important distinctions between a licence and a lease. A licence is simply a permission which makes it lawful for the licensee to do what would otherwise be an act of trespass. A formal licence takes the form of a contract between the owner – i.e. the incumbent – and the licensee, and any other interested party such as the PCC. Such a licence can be used to confer permission on the licensee to use a church building in a particular way in return for payment or for undertaking other obligations. But a licence does not confer any property interest on the licensee. The incumbent continues in possession of the entire church and can use it in any way he or she would normally be able to do so, provided that use does not interfere with what the licensee has been permitted to do under the contract.
5. A lease, by contrast, confers on the lessee exclusive possession of the leased premises. A lessee has a property interest and has the rights of a landowner. A lessee of a church can exclude the incumbent and anyone else he or she chooses from the leased premises.
6. Although the incumbent (in his or her corporate capacity) will normally be the person who grants the licence or the lease, the incumbent cannot do so except under the authority of a faculty. That is for a number of reasons. First it is because although the property in the church and churchyard is vested in the incumbent in right of his or her office, it is subject to the control of the Ordinary (in the person of the chancellor as judge of the consistory court). Secondly, a consecrated church cannot lawfully be used for secular purposes except under the authority of a faculty. Thirdly, so far as leases are concerned, there are

statutory provisions which require the incumbent to obtain a faculty to authorise the grant of a lease.

7. That means that before a licence or a lease can be entered into, it is necessary to submit a petition to the consistory court and to obtain a faculty. The petition will normally be accompanied by a draft of the proposed licence or lease.
8. There are no special statutory provisions which govern the exercise of the faculty jurisdiction to authorise the grant of a licence. But the court cannot grant a faculty for a licence to use a church in a way which would be inconsistent with its status as a consecrated building as such use would be unlawful. Provided that the proposed use is consistent with the church's consecrated status, the court has a discretion whether to grant a faculty. The court will wish to be satisfied that if the licence is granted the building will continue to be a church and that the proposed use will not prevent its use as a church when it is required for that purpose – which will not merely be on Sundays but also, for example, for the occasional offices.
9. A lease of a church cannot be granted except under the relevant provisions of section 68 of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011. The relevant provisions were originally introduced by the Pastoral (Amendment) Measure 2006. The aim of that Measure was to facilitate alternative use of churches in cases in which parishes found that, if such use were to be possible, the intended user group needed to have a lease of the part of the church in question, rather than merely a licence. In many cases this would be because a lease was required to enable the user group to secure financial support from one or more public funding bodies (this being a common requirement of a number of such bodies). The purpose of the Measure was not to provide a mechanism for transferring responsibility for the maintenance of church buildings away from the PCC and a lease under section 68 is not an apt means for doing so. (See further below.)
10. Section 68 of the 2011 Measure empowers the consistory court, in its discretion, to grant a faculty authorising the incumbent to grant a lease. But this is subject to two overriding requirements. The lease must be of part only of a church: it is not possible to grant a lease in respect of the whole church. Moreover, the church building, taken as a whole, must continue to be used primarily as a place of worship after the lease is granted.
11. One reason for imposing these requirements was that the grant of a lease under faculty was not intended as an alternative means of effectively closing a church for regular public worship and appropriating it to other uses.
12. A further reason, of some practical importance, was that if the building as a whole ceased to be used primarily as a place of worship, it would cease to benefit from the ecclesiastical exemption from listed building control. The result of that would be that the church became subject to secular control in addition to the faculty jurisdiction.

13. The requirement that the church building, taken as whole, must continue to be used primarily as a place of worship means that it is not possible to grant a lease of most of a church to be used for purposes not amounting to worship, leaving only a small part – e.g. the chancel – available to be used for worship. The premises as a whole would not then be used primarily as a place of worship.
14. Nor is it possible to grant a lease which requires the lessee to vacate the leased part of the church at certain times of the week, e.g. Sunday mornings, so that it is available to the incumbent for worship during those times. Such an arrangement would not amount to a grant to the lessee of exclusive possession of the relevant part of the church. The arrangement could not, therefore, be a lease as a matter of law. It would in fact be only a licence, irrespective of the label the parties chose to attach to it.
15. Neither a licence nor a lease can relieve the PCC of its statutory maintenance obligations in respect of a church. While a licensee or a lessee can assume certain obligations in respect of carrying out repairs and other maintenance, it remains the statutory duty of the PCC to ensure that any necessary work is done. If a licensee or lessee had undertaken such obligations but had not in fact carried them out – whether because it lacked the means to do so or for any other reason – it would be the responsibility of the PCC to have the work carried out.
16. Neither a licence nor a lease is likely to provide a useful legal framework for an arrangement under which a friends group or other local trust supports the maintenance of a church building. A model under which the trust makes grants to the PCC or a model under which the trustees are constituted a special committee of the PCC with delegated functions relating to the maintenance of the building are more likely to provide a suitable legal framework. A licence or a lease might be granted to the trust as an ancillary aspect of the overall arrangement, for example so that the trust could have office space or display space in the church. But it is difficult to see what would be achieved by, for example, granting a licence or lease of 45% of the church building to the trust where the real purpose of the agreement was to provide for the maintenance of the building as a whole to be managed by the trust.
17. A licence or a lease is, however, likely to be useful where a post office or some other community facility which is not run by the church is to operate from the church building. A lease will be particularly suitable where the operator of the facility needs to lay out money on making alterations to the building or in acquiring plant and fittings. A lease will give the operator, and bodies who consider making grants to the operator, a substantial degree security because the operator, as a lessee, will have the rights of a landowner in respect of the relevant part of the church throughout the term of the lease.

Alexander McGregor  
Deputy Legal Adviser

## Current Roles of the Two Church House-Based Departments and the Bodies which they serve

### The Archbishops' Council's Cathedrals & Church Buildings Division (CCB)

CCB is responsible for national policy on buildings still used for worship.

Broadly, it

- maintains relations between Church, State and local bodies on buildings issues;
- 'owns' the vision of getting the best use out of the buildings and;
- provides resources and training (e.g. ChurchCare, Churchart and Shrinking the Footprint websites) to help parishes care for their buildings; and
- campaigns (e.g. on VAT relief, metal theft and damage by bats), modernises (e.g. Faculty Simplification and the online system) and raises significant funds for church buildings (£75 for cathedral and church repairs from Government in last 12 months).

More specifically, CCB staff support three statutory bodies:-

1. The **Church Buildings Council** is a statutory body created by the Dioceses Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007 (amended 2011).

It advises chancellors, dioceses and parishes on faculty applications, and gives advice on re-orderings, extensions, conservation works, security, liturgical change and opening to visitors. It distributes conservation grants, produces guidance/ holds conferences on care of buildings, contents and churchyards, and advises the Church Commissioners on proposals for closures.

It is, from April 2015, chaired by Sir Tony Baldry and it has not more than 23 other members, three of them elected by General Synod, 18 appointed by the Archbishops following nomination from either the Archbishops' Council, Chairs and Secretaries of DACs, Cathedrals Fabric Commission or the Secretary of State. (The current full membership is listed at Annex 1).

It meets approximately 6 to 7 times per year and its Secretary is Janet Gough.

2. The **Statutory Advisory Committee** on Closed and Closing Churches is a statutory committee of the Church Buildings Council, established by the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007.

It provides independent advice on heritage matters relating to closed and closing churches and advises the Commissioners and the CCT on heritage matters relating to church closure including alternative use, preservation, and demolition.

It is chaired by the CBC chair and has seven other members, four nominated by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and three appointed by the CBC. All its

members are appointed from among the members of the CBC (the current full membership is listed at Annex 2). Its Secretary is Janet Gough.

3. The **Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England** is the statutory national body overseeing works to English cathedrals under the Care of Cathedrals Measure 2011. Its approval (or in some cases that of the local Fabric Advisory Committee) is required for works which would affect the architectural, archaeological, artistic or historic character of the cathedral or its historically important contents, and it offers advice, publishes guidance and runs conferences and training events for cathedrals. Unlike the previous two bodies, which are advisory, this body also has regulatory functions.

It has 24 members – including experts in liturgy, architecture, archaeology, engineering – appointed by the Archbishops. Some appointments are made on the nomination of, or following consultation with, other (professional and Church) bodies including the Archbishops' Council, House of Bishops, Deans Conference, Church Commissioners, Historic England and others. Its full current membership is listed at Annex 3.

It meets approximately 6-7 times per year and its Secretary is Janet Gough.

### **Policy work**

In recent years the CCB division has devoted less time to regulation and supporting the statutory bodies and more on enabling work outside those structures, including:-

- helping parishes through simplification of the faculty process;
- developing and disseminating knowledge and best practice relating to the maintenance, development and enjoyment of cathedral and church buildings;
- operating ChurchCare (the main source of advice and grants) and social media presence;
- campaigning (e.g. on VAT relief, metal theft, damage by bats), responding to government consultations and engaging with government, church and heritage sector on issues affecting churches;
- securing significant funding from the Treasury and helping other parts of the church with their bids for funding; and
- producing for dioceses reports on the significance of a building whose closure is proposed, helping it avoid closure or find alternative use.

### **Staffing**

At the time of writing, the department has 14 staff, led by Director Janet Gough.

In addition to the Director's Executive Assistant, there are two staff working on cathedrals, four on churches, three on conservation, development and fundraising, and three on major projects and the online faculty system.

Its budget for 2015 is £909k.

## **The Church Commissioners' Pastoral and Closed Churches Department**

This department comprises two divisions, the Pastoral Division supporting the Pastoral Committee and the 'Closed Churches Division' supporting the Church Buildings (Uses & Disposals) Committee.

The department supports the casework, quasi-judicial and advisory elements of the two committees' work as follows:-

1. The **Pastoral Committee** is not a statutory body in its own right but is a delegated Committee of the Church Commissioners' Board. Under the Mission & Pastoral Measure 2011 it advises dioceses on scheme preparation, validates dioceses' schemes for parish reorganisation and disposal of parsonage, churchyards and other land, and drafting and publishing bishops' proposals for church building closures. Where schemes attract objections, it also adjudicates in public hearing and can either approve or reject schemes or return them to the bishop for reconsideration. Representors may (subject to obtaining leave) appeal to the Privy Council against the Commissioners' decisions. Under the Endowments & Glebe Measure 1976 and the Parsonages Measure of 1938 and 1947, the Committee hears objections to dioceses' proposals for sale of glebe land or parsonages respectively. (The Committee's role in parsonage matters was greatly reduced by devolution to dioceses, in 2000, of the power to deal with transaction although it still decides on transactions where criteria are not met and adjudicates where there are objections.) Staff also administer the Commissioners' inherited liabilities for the repair and maintenance of chancels across the country and the 'deserted spouses' and (now closed) clergy housing loan schemes.

The Committee is chaired by the Third Church Estates Commissioner (currently Andrew Mackie) and also comprises two diocesan bishops, four other clergy, four lay people, any other people appointed by the Commissioners' Board of Governors and one person nominated by the Archbishops' Council's Remunerations and Conditions of Service Committee. (Its current full membership is shown at Annex 4.)

It schedules ten meetings per year but the caseload varies (typically between 10 and 30 cases heard each year) and meetings are often cancelled; occasionally extra meetings are arranged. Its Secretary is Paul Lewis.

2. The **Church Buildings (Uses & Disposals) Committee** is a statutory committee under the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 and is appointed by the Commissioners' Board to act for it in determining the future of buildings already closed to regular public worship (it plays no role in closure – that's the Pastoral Committee's role). It seeks new uses in conjunction with dioceses and, if these are considered suitable by the Commissioners, they prepare and publish draft schemes to give effect to such uses and enable disposal of the building. Staff undertake local consultation and the Committee considers objections in public hearing (about eight cases heard per year) where it might approve, reject or amend proposals. Its decisions are challengeable in the High Court (two applications for leave to appeal have been made in recent years). If suitable use cannot be found within two years, the Committee under the legislation has to decide between vesting in the CCT and demolition except where there a proposal for demolition of a listed building, in which case it is referred to the Secretary of State. The Commissioners are responsible for

apportioning proceeds from the sale of closed church buildings which in part funds the Church's share of financing the CCT. The Division also manages an account which helps maintain buildings pending the settlement of their future, secures planning and other consents and promotes good practice in the use of the Mission and Pastoral Measure.

It is chaired by the Third Church Estates Commissioner (Andrew Mackie) and also comprises four clergy members, four lay members, one member appointed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and anyone else appointed by the Board. It must contain a majority of Commissioners. The current full membership is shown at Annex 5.

Ten meetings are arranged each year so that representations can be dealt with expeditiously but typically it meets about six times a year. Most years the Committee visits a diocese for two or three days in June to familiarise itself with cases and issues.

Its Secretary is Paul Lewis.

## **Staffing**

The department is led by Paul Lewis and, at the time of writing, has 19 other staff.

The Pastoral Division has 9 staff, 4 in the Pastoral team managed by Peter Wagon and 5 in the Chancels team managed by Alan Guthrie-Jones (including two temporary staff working on land registration and deeds of indemnity to parishes). The Closed Churches Division has 8 staff managed by Jeremy Tipping. He and two support staff are based at Church House and 5 professional caseworkers are regionally based. There is also a Policy Officer who works across both divisions and a PA/Secretary.

The department's total budget for 2015 is £1.4m, of which staff costs comprise £1.2m.

## **Church Buildings Council membership**

### Chair

Rt Hon Sir Tony Baldry

### **Elected by General Synod**

Dr John F Beal

Revd Tony Redman

Ven Tim Barker

### **Appointed by the Archbishops on nomination of Appointments Committee**

Tim Allen

Ven Michael Everitt

Revd Canon Steven Saxby

Henry Russell OBE

Marcus Chantrey

Sarah Quail

Dr James Bettley

### **Appointed by the Archbishops on nomination of the Council**

Revd Canon Michael Ainsworth

Geraldine O'Farrell

Alan Thurlow

### **Appointed by the Archbishops on nomination of the Chairmen and Secretaries of the DACs**

Revd Canon Nigel Cooper

Sylvia Johnson

Geoffrey Hunter

### **Appointed by the Archbishops on nomination of the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England**

Louise Bainbridge

### **Appointed by the Archbishops on nomination of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport**

Quinton Carroll

Valerie Owen

Dr Hilary Taylor

Brian Foxley

### **Up to two co-opted members to reflect special interests**

Dr Neil Moat

Polly Meynell



## **Statutory Advisory Committee on Closed and Closing Churches membership**

### Chair

Rt Hon Sir Tony Baldry

### **Other members (all members of the CBC)**

Quinton Carroll

Brian Foxley

Dr Neil Moat

Valerie Owen

Dr James Bettley

Dr Hilary Taylor

Dr Alan Thurlow

## **Cathedral Fabric Commission for England membership**

### Chair

Dame Fiona Reynolds

### **Other members (and their appointing/electing/ nominating body)**

Jennie Page CBE (Archbishops' Council and Deans Conference)

Rt Revd Stephen Platten (House of Bishops)

Very Revd Peter Atkinson (Deans Conference)

Very Revd James Atwell (Deans Conference)

Dr Robyn Pender (Church Buildings Council)

Judith Leigh (Church Buildings Council)

Nicola Coldstream (Church Buildings Council)

Ulrike Knox (RIBA)

Nicholas Rank (RIBA + RICS)

Richard Carr-Archer (EASA)

Geoffrey Clifton (ISE + ICE)

John Carter RA (Royal Academy)

Dickon Robinson (Secretary of State/ DCMS)

Carol Pyrah (English Heritage)

David Baker OBE (CBA and Society of Antiquaries)

Revd Canon Christopher Irvine (Liturgical Commission)

Revd Canon Jeremy Davis (Liturgical Commission)

Dr William McVicker (Royal School of Church Music)

Tim Allen (General Synod)

Canon Peter Bruinvels (General Synod)

Mary Durlacher (General Synod)

Revd Canon Perran Gay (General Synod)

## **Church Commissioners' Pastoral Committee membership**

### Chair

Andrew Mackie, Third Church Estates Commissioner

### **Other members**

Rt Revd David Walker

Rt Revd Tim Thornton

Very Revd Jonathan Greener

Revd Canon Bob Baker

Revd Canon Stephen Evans

Ven Penny Driver

Canon Peter Bruinvels

Julia Flack

Susan Pope

## **Church Commissioners' Church Buildings (Uses & Disposals) Committee membership**

### Chair

Andrew Mackie

### **Other members**

Revd Stephen Trott

Revd Canon Bob Baker

Revd Canon Peter Cavanagh

Revd Simon Talbott

Ian Watmore

April Alexander

John Steel

Sally Muggeridge

Margaret Davies (DCMS nominee)