

Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Protecting built heritage, HC 594

Tuesday 15 July 2025

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Dame Caroline Dinenage (Chair); Mr Bayo Alaba; Zöe Franklin; Damian Hinds; Natasha Irons; Jo Platt; Tom Rutland; Paul Waugh.

Questions 72 - 127

Witnesses

[I](#): Emily Gee, Director for Cathedral and Church Buildings, Church of England; Reverend Paula Griffiths, retired priest, Church of England; Becky Payne, Development Director, Historic Religious Buildings Alliance.

[II](#): Michael Kill, Chief Executive Officer, Night Time Industries Association; Andrew Lovett, Director and Chief Executive, Black Country Living Museum; and Joshua McTaggart, Chief Executive Officer, Theatres Trust.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Emily Gee, Reverend Paula Griffiths and Becky Payne.

Q72 Chair: Welcome to this morning's meeting of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. Our country is unique in the number and the quality of its historic churches. Almost half of our country's most significant buildings are owned by the Church of England. However, the sector has been clear that protecting those buildings can be challenging, especially due to the uncertainty around things like Government support.

Before we begin, I should say that while 99% of the listed places of worship are Christian, we should acknowledge the importance of the built heritage of other faiths and religions as well. When we talk during this Committee meeting today about churches, that will also reflect the Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Buddhist places of worship that are listed and face similar challenges.

For our first panel, we are lucky to be joined by Emily Gee, the director of cathedral and church buildings at the Church of England, by Rev. Paula Griffiths, the former head of the Church of England's church buildings department and now a retired priest, and by Becky Payne, the development director at the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance. You are all welcome. Before we begin, I remind Members to declare any interests before they ask their questions.

Paula, how does the condition of a church affect its ability to support a local community?

Rev. Paula Griffiths: It is very, very important. Every time you go into a church, you immediately get a feel for whether it is looked after, whether it is cared for, whether it is struggling, or whether the congregation has given up—and also, I must say, as a Christian priest, whether it is prayed in and prayed for. A church that is not in good condition has an uphill task. It will have to work so hard to get the money. Fundraising can be fun; it can generate all kinds of activity in community, and that is great, but impossible targets become impossible to cope with, and it can be difficult. If a church has to concentrate purely on fundraising and keeping the rain out, it cannot fulfil its wider purpose. It cannot work with its congregation; it cannot work with its community in the way it has the potential to do, so the condition of the church is vital.

Q73 Chair: Emily, how do a church's religious obligations prevent it from generating revenue? Is there anything that stands in the way of it raising the money it needs?

Emily Gee: I think churches have always fulfilled a number of functions in addition to worship. That is something that we feel comfortable with, and we can see those multiple purposes in a building taking place all the time. As Paula said, there are challenges with fundraising and sometimes



it is quite hard to generate revenue, but there need be no reason that multiple different activities cannot take place in a building.

In fact, we encourage that, and it is important that we bring in other uses, partly because of the crucial social purpose of church buildings. Often, particularly in rural areas, they are the only building around. Even in urban areas, they have an important function in the neighbourhood. Bringing in post offices and other income generating places that are also good for social inclusion, like community cafés, can be really important for the social and public value of the building. We have whole teams that are set up to help churches accommodate those multiple uses—the revenue generation and the worship and community function.

Q74 Chair: Is there anything that stands in the way of churches monetising the tourist interest in the way that the major cathedrals and abbeys do? Are there any obstacles to that?

Emily Gee: Not obstacles, other than people's time and skills. We know that volunteers who keep churches alive have a variety of skillsets. Knowing how to bring in revenue can be the biggest challenge, but we can learn lessons from major churches, and cathedrals in particular, which are hugely important to the civic identity of the place. We know that visitors often flock to cathedrals, and indeed to small parish churches, just to see the extraordinary architectural wonders within them. That could be a good way of bringing in revenue as well as building the public pride and sense of investment in a place.

Rev. Paula Griffiths: I agree with all that, but I want to stress the importance of the church just as a place where people can be quiet and reflect. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, keep their buildings as sacred buildings—they do not have activities within them—but a congregation does a huge amount of social work from the church hall. That is where they will have their food banks and mothers and toddlers groups and help for all kinds of people. They will be doing the social work—the community work—but just not in the building. It is still important and part of their contribution to the community, and to the heritage, because it is based on the church building.

Q75 Chair: Thank you, Paula, for that clarification. Are any of you aware of steps that can be taken to share best practice, knowledge and information in the church and cathedral ecosystem about how best to raise money and do projects and that sort of thing?

Becky Payne: The Church of England has a part of its website called ChurchCare, which has guidance on every single topic around managing, looking after and getting the most out of a church building. In fact, all denominations can refer to that, and other denominations—the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church—have guidance on their websites. There are a host of other organisations. For example, Caring for God's Acre has a huge amount of resources about how churches can get the most out of their churchyards through creating wildlife habitats,



educational centres and so on. The Churches Visitor and Tourism Association has a website on the topic you just mentioned: how to encourage visitors and how to ensure that they get a good experience.

There is a lot of information out there. Part of the problem, perhaps, for an individual congregation is knowing where to start and being able to absorb all the information. That is probably where support officers and staff, Methodist officers and so on can help steer people in the right direction and signpost them. That is the most important thing.

Q76 Chair: Becky, are there any particular challenges—or advantages—when it comes to churches that are in rural communities?

Becky Payne: They have both challenges and advantages. The big challenge is declining congregations, which means fewer volunteers. Many rural churches are having problems at the moment recruiting church wardens, treasurers—all the posts that are required to keep a church going. Declining congregations also means a decline in revenue.

The positive thing about rural churches is that very often they are the last public space left in a small area. In a way, rural churches are learning very fast to try to get the potential. It is all about going out, talking to your communities and asking, “What is it we need? What is missing in this village?” Sometimes it can be a community shop, sometimes it can be a café, sometimes it can be an extra school hall. Whatever it is, it is about going out there and consulting. There is a lot of support out there for rural churches to help them do that, and a lot of them are flourishing.

The real challenge is those churches that are really isolated. There might be one farmhouse and two houses. That is the real challenge, and we have to find a way of helping those churches—there are ideas; they might become festival churches, which we might talk about later—because they really do have a big challenge.

Rev. Paula Griffiths: Becky is absolutely right. In talking about all the organisations that help, she should have mentioned her own organisation, the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance, which is brilliant in sharing information with so many churches and members about what is going on. It is a tremendous help.

Going back to the rural church, very often the church will be the oldest building in the community. It will be the one where the community memory is still very much focused. It will understand its congregation. It will know its community. I lived in London until I was 50 and then I moved out, and I was amazed at the difference. Community is still there in rural areas. There is a continuity of people. They know each other. They support each other. They know their neighbours. It is not a sort of Shakespearean ideal of beautiful shepherdesses, but it is still different and there is something very valuable about that.



They will be looking for what the community needs, and that might well be a mothers and toddlers group. It might just be a coffee morning. It might just be having a system of people popping in on people who cannot get out any longer. It might be something more serious. In the larger towns it will be a food bank and perhaps somewhere for the bereaved or people with mental health difficulties to come. That pure sense of community encourages cohesion and mental wellbeing.

As I was preparing for this session, one person said to me, "The church is the only organisation in this village that pulls people together." It really is the centre of the community. We have another church, a late 19th century tin tabernacle in a small village, that is now becoming a community hub. You will have talks in there, you will have harvest suppers in there, you will have all kinds of picnics outside. It is building the links with the community very strongly.

Becky Payne: Often, the result of that is that people who may not come to church worship will, because they care about the building, be willing and able, if asked, to come and help run activities.

Q77 **Chair:** We are about to come on to volunteers, Becky, don't you worry. Emily, do you have anything to add on this?

Emily Gee: Can I add something about the collaborative nature and how churches, big and small, learn from each other? There are extraordinary networks—my fellow witnesses both touched on those—but the sector is so collaborative and we talk to each other all the time, across different faith groups and denominations, and from major cathedrals through to small parish churches. It is a real strength that we are all working together.

We went to church the other day, St Batholomew's, that was talking about filming. That is one form of income generation. We all know that Bridgerton was filmed in St James's, Piccadilly, for example. That is a good way of bringing in income. They have a member of staff who is expert at that, and she was willing and reaching out to say, "Let me talk to other churches about how to care for the building while bringing in that revenue." That sharing of expertise is a really powerful thing.

We might come to this later, but church building support officers—these new roles—are really upskilling and bringing in those skills, and making connections between churches. Their network is strong. It is actually meeting today in Hereford cathedral. There are about 40 of them getting together, talking about the different things they are doing at a grassroots level in their parishes and dioceses. That is another way of sharing examples of how to do things well that they might not have the skills or the knowledge to do in their place.

Chair: I wonder what the collective noun is for a group of church buildings support officers. Perhaps we will have the answer by the end of the session.



Q78 Zöe Franklin: Good morning, everyone. Before we move on to talking a bit more about volunteers, I want to go back to something Dame Caroline raised at the start. The vast majority of listed places of worship are churches, and obviously there is a distinct historic reason for that, but is there active work to encourage non-Christian faith buildings to register their buildings? In particular, is there that forward planning as we move forward in history to ensure that we are recognising non-Christian faith buildings? Becky, can I start with you?

Becky Payne: Sorry, I am not sure I quite understand.

Zöe Franklin: The vast majority of faith buildings in the listed scheme are Christian. What work happens to try to encourage non-Christian faith places of worship to register on the list? Is there active work being done?

Emily Gee: I can pick that up. I used to work in listing at Historic England, so I know that colleagues there are doing a huge amount of research to think about places of worship across the country and their importance to our national story much more collectively. There has been lots of work taking stock of the history of Jewish buildings, for example, and of Muslim buildings, and there is a project looking at Sikh heritage as well. As a collective, we are very alive to the shared significance that all those different places of worship bring to our national story, and to recognising that, potentially through listing or other ways of celebrating their importance.

Flowing from that, thinking about how to manage change effectively in those different buildings is something that, through conservation teams, through the Church of England—we manage a parallel ecclesiastical exemption system. Understanding the significance of those buildings across all different faiths and denominations is something that we are really committed to as a sector. It can be a way of celebrating the special and showing that this place is part of the national story, but also of thinking about how to manage change to allow different functions that are appropriate to that faith or denomination.

Becky Payne: Just to give one example, the Foundation for Jewish Heritage, which is a fairly new organisation, is doing a lot of work supporting individual synagogues. There is one in Merthyr Tydfil. You would not automatically think of a synagogue in Wales, but that synagogue closed. It now has lottery funding to turn it into a Jewish heritage centre, basically to tell the story of Jewish worship and communities in Wales. Last year they had a community day and they had 500 people turn up.

Q79 Zöe Franklin: Fantastic. Thank you. That is a really helpful and interesting answer. Moving on, what role do volunteers play in the protection of historic churches?

Rev. Paula Griffiths: The Church depends upon volunteers, absolutely. There is a huge, dedicated army, but they have a lot to do. It is worth



stressing that a number of clergy these days are volunteers in the sense that they are not paid. They are what is called non-stipendiary or self-supporting. That includes me. Usually, agreeing to do perhaps two days a week and a Sunday, but in practice do a lot more.

The Church is actually run by volunteers. In the Church of England, every church has to have a parochial church council. It should have two church wardens, although it is increasingly difficult to get two church wardens. It needs a secretary, a treasurer and a fabric officer. The demands have increased a lot in recent years. It will now need a safeguarding officer. It is right that the Church should look at safeguarding. That is really quite a stressful position to have. That person might not have been trained, although they might have gone to a few online courses, and they are not a social worker.

A church will also need a health and safety officer and somebody to do risk assessments. It will probably want a choir and an organist. The bigger churches can afford to pay for that; most cannot. It will often want a parish administrator. The bigger churches can pay for that; most cannot. Then, just in terms of looking after people in the community, checking that so-and-so is all right, going to visit so-and-so who has had a stroke and is housebound, all that kind of thing is a huge amount of work. It is done willingly and voluntarily, but it is a huge amount of work.

When it comes to looking after the building, that is also very much for volunteers, with perhaps a fabric officer and church wardens taking on a huge burden, including things like fundraising. Much of the work that a rural church does—that kind of social, community work—is not going to gain money for itself. It is a significant burden.

It is not just the Church that is struggling for volunteers. A couple of generations ago, you would have a number of people in their late 50s or 60s who had perhaps taken early retirement and could spend their time and energy helping with things like this. Now, retirement ages are later and the boundary between work and ordinary life is so much more fluid. It is no longer a case of putting the case down at 5 o'clock. Many people will be on grandparent duty as well. There is real pressure, not just in churches but more generally.

Q80 Zöe Franklin: You have already started touch on this, but, Emily and Becky, can you talk us through a bit more about how the changing size and profile of traditional congregations is impacting parishes' ability to look after their buildings?

Emily Gee: Demographic change is obviously happening in both urban and rural contexts. That does put pressure on volunteers, but it opens up a number of opportunities too. It is worth thinking particularly about net zero, to which the Church of England has an extraordinary commitment and a lot of that is focused on our church buildings. We know how important that is to younger people. There is a big opportunity—and it is something you touched on with the National Trust in your last session—to



bring young people in as potential volunteers. It is great work experience and professional experience, taking on these extraordinary roles that Paula was referring to.

Net zero is one way to potentially bring in even perhaps a non-worshipping audience. We know that churches are a part of an ecosystem, whether it is urban or rural, and lots of people love and value faith buildings, even if they do not worship there. They have a sense of place, to that point about community history and connection and identity with the place. That could be a really good way of bringing people in to volunteer their time and expertise and to gain skills and the wonderful social impact of being part of a community through that. That benefits the building, and it also benefits us as communities.

Becky Payne: Just to re-emphasise that, a building project quite often is a catalyst for bringing people together. All the guidance now, from all the denominations and faith groups, is to talk to people in congregations and say, "Go out into your community and try to see who is there. Who has just retired who used to be an architect or a teacher, who you could encourage to come in?" For most building projects, the congregation will find it difficult to do it by themselves. We say to people, "What you need is a team that hopefully has people from the secular community and your own congregation working together." That can join those two communities together in a very strong way.

I led a small team that did an evaluation of the lottery grants for places of worship scheme, and half of my interviews ended up being counselling sessions, because there was not a team of people; it was just Mrs Jones crying into her coffee at midnight trying to fill in yet another form. A lot of them had been very successful in bringing people in and it had been very cathartic, because people did care about that building.

Q81 **Zöe Franklin:** It is interesting how you talk about that ability to bring people in and get volunteers from beyond the church walls. That sounds fantastic when you have potentially a more affluent community with skills and education that will potentially give you quite a large pool of people. Where you have lower-income communities, I can imagine that it presents a particular set of challenges. Do you have any thoughts on that? Linked to that, when there is not an active religious community around a church building, how do we ensure that that built heritage is protected?

Becky Payne: Dioceses and other denominations know where those churches are that we might put "at risk", and that is where support officers can play a more active role. The lottery will fund a person to come and help a church develop a project. That is a very useful thing that the lottery will do. Sometimes it is just about a church putting their hand up and saying, "We need the support officer to come and help us." It is a problem, because in 2023 one in 20 churches are in a population where there are less than six in the congregation, and a lot those are in quite deprived areas. That comes to about 800 buildings, which may be grade I



or grade II*. I am afraid that I have forgotten the second part of your question.

Q82 Zöe Franklin: You have touched on the lower-income side. Is there anything you want to add on the areas where there is not an active religious community to care for the church? How do we help to ensure that it is protected?

Becky Payne: I suppose, hopefully, people would have been aware of that before it got to that point. That is where we talk about the festival churches model, which basically allows a church not to have the obligation to do, for example, a Sunday service every week. It also opens it up to setting up new management models for working with the community: for instance, bringing in a friends group or another committee—a trust—to look after the building. Churches are encouraged to do that sort of thing before they get to the point where there is no one left. When there is no one left—perhaps I should hand that one over to Emily, but, again, it is about looking at setting up a trust.

I think there are about 2,000 friends groups in existence. They are a very good way of bringing in people from the community who do not wish to partake in the faith activities but are keen to be part of a group. Churches are getting very good now at learning from the secular system about things like setting up social enterprises and community benefit societies to run organisations—cafés, shops and what have you—in their building to share the cost and share the burden of the utility bills. The secular world—people like Stir to Action and co-operatives—are also very keen to help churches. They have been supportive in helping people.

Q83 Tom Rutland: Good morning. I want to ask about funding. Emily, how much do churches contribute financially to the repair of their own buildings?

Emily Gee: That is a really important question. The Church very much plays its part in looking after church buildings at all different levels. The main way that happens is locally, at the grassroots level. That has been the way that churches have been looked after historically—by their own communities; they are owned by the clergy and the local church volunteers.

English parish churches spend over £1 billion per year on church buildings. That is mostly through generous giving and legacies and through some fundraising and grant aid. In 2023, parish churches spent £167 million on building works around the country. Most of that—over £100 million—was on major repairs to church buildings. About half of those projects were above £50,000. That is a huge amount of investment in church buildings coming from local fundraising, local giving to the church, and then grants on top of that.

At a national level, I am in the Church Commissioners and we have started a new programme. We are coming to the end of the first



triennium and, brilliantly, it has now been continued for at least the next nine years. It is called Buildings for Mission, and it is the Church Commissioners investing in both the fabric of buildings through minor repairs and improvement grants—we know that small repairs of up to £20,000 or so are absolutely fundamental to sustaining churches—and the church building support officers that I referred to earlier.

Those support officers and fabric repairs are coming through a pot of money from the national Church. It is £11 million over a three-year period. As I say, that will continue over the next nine years. That goes from us to dioceses and then they directly fund parishes. There are lots of different ways that the Church is helping to look after its buildings. We know that we need more than that and that we need to work in partnership more collectively, but there is a huge amount of financial investment across the Church in its architecture and heritage.

Q84 Tom Rutland: How has the change to a more competitive system of heritage funding impacted churches?

Emily Gee: Through grant making, do you mean?

Tom Rutland: Yes, or the removal of ringfenced funds, perhaps.

Emily Gee: Oh, I see, since 2017. There was a long period from the '70s through to a few years ago when there was more formal state funding. That recognition of the national importance of churches, and the role that we play collectively with Government funders and the Church in looking after that extraordinary estate and all the social work that it does, was really important.

Since then, there have been different ways. I just mentioned the Church stepping up with Buildings for Mission, but I have to say that there is an enormous number of funders who we value hugely. The biggest player is the National Lottery Heritage Fund. It has recently acknowledged in its strategy that places of worship are a priority again, which is hugely welcome to all of us. It demonstrates the national importance of church buildings from both a heritage and a community perspective. The Heritage Fund has allocated about £100 million for places of worship over the three-year period. We are a third of the way into that now, and it has done grant funding of about £30 million already for churches.

Huge numbers of churches have benefited from that. There is one in the Wirral, in New Brighton, that I was discussing with colleagues the other day, where there has been an investment of about £500,000 from the Heritage Fund in rebuilding the extraordinary Victorian spire. It was good for the building itself—it stopped water pouring in—and great for the congregation, but also good for the extraordinary volume of emergency food provision that they provide in different forms over the course of every week.



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Investing through the Heritage Fund or, indeed, through other funders is a really important way of doing stitch-in-time grants and also more significant repairs like that roof spire to keep buildings fit for community and for mission.

Becky Payne: We put figures in the HRBA submission. Obviously, it is difficult to make a direct correlation, but since 2017, when the heritage lottery grants for places of worship finished, you can see that over the years fewer churches have been taken off the buildings at risk register, which I think is quite important. In 2018, 117 places of worship were removed from the register; in 2024, it was only 23.

The other thing you can see is that since 2017 the amount of money that has gone directly to places of worship has gone down again. In 2018 it was £99 million—no, it can't be million. Anyway, it was very a large figure, which I cannot remember at the moment. By the time we get to 2023, only £9.3 million is going to churches¹. I think they are disadvantaged when they are having to compete with other organisations that often have more professional staff and more resources, so we welcome the National Lottery Heritage Fund's announcement last year that it anticipates that it will be able to give £100 million to places of worship².

We had the Roof Repair Fund and the Heritage Stimulus Fund, which came out during Covid. Both those schemes were literally just about repairs, as Emily said; they were not about community engagement. Community engagement is extremely important, for all the reasons we have mentioned about how it bolsters churches, and we are very grateful, in a way, to the lottery for introducing that into the arena, but the evaluations of those two repair-only schemes showed that just getting the roof mended improved the confidence of the congregation, and they went on to produce a lot of positive social outcomes by being able to do more community benefit.

Rev. Paula Griffiths: What Becky said is absolutely right. "You have to have a home before you can be hospitable." That is a quote from John Sentamu, who was Archbishop of York. If you have a building in good condition, you can do all kinds of things with it to help your community.

It is great to hear how much money there is around. Despite all the good work that goes on, sometimes it is difficult to get that message down to parishes. The really strong thing about the grant scheme that we had

¹ Note by witness: To clarify: In 2018-19, £42 million was provided to England, £1.4 million to Scotland, £1.7 million to Wales and £900,000 to Northern Ireland. By the time we get to 2022-23, £9.3 million was provided to England, £20,000 to Scotland, £1.4 million to Wales and £611,000 to Northern Ireland.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-05/183848>

² Note by witness: £85m to individual places of worship and £15m for strategic projects over the next three years.



before 2017 was that it accepted that maintaining a historic building—a historic church, in this case—was a good thing in itself. You did not have to prove it. You did not have to say that you were doing lots of other marvellous things for your community. It was accepted that by doing that you were preserving something very important for the community, for the present and for the future.

There are lots of grant givers around. It can be quite a battle for parishes to think, “Who do we go to? Whose criteria do we fit into? How do we juggle this? How do we deal with these different application forms? How do we deal with these different timescales?” Certainty and simplicity are so important.

Q85 Tom Rutland: Thank you. I can see the quote about needing a home before it can be hospitable making it into the report. Finally, and briefly, how can the way that churches funding is applied for and distributed be changed to make it more effective?

Becky Payne: I suppose one way is making the application process easier. We have always asked if there could be one application form across all these different organisations. That is a little bit of a dream, because we know that all funders have their own objectives and their own reasons for wanting to give money.

At the moment, the lottery has a large grant scheme and a small grant scheme, which is very useful, but there is something to be said about what the cap is for small grants. £250,000 does not always pay for a modest roof repair. One thing that we asked in one of our recommendations was that the Government looked at previous evaluations of all grant schemes, and one of them might be about where the cap for small grants should be set. Moving into the large grant, especially if you are at the bottom of the cap, can be extremely arduous.

Emily Gee: In your last session Camilla Finlay talked about the importance of early funding—seed funding—to help think about the right way to do a project, particularly with more complex work. We would support that early investment for larger projects to really understand the building and what is the right thing for that project. Sometimes I think churches potentially feel the pressure to take on something that is a bit overwhelming. The Heritage Fund is encouraging them to think about capacity, and perhaps doing a small series of smaller grants to build confidence and to fit with the principle that small maintenance and repairs is the best way of keeping churches sound for their community work.

The other thing I will mention, which might be considered in thinking creatively about future funding, is match funding. We have a programme at the Church of England called Give To Go Green, which provides match funding for carbon-reducing projects. That could be a good way of delivering funding differently for fabric repairs as well, because it



encourages local giving, and that can be a really good, incentivising way of building a larger pot and bringing the community in.

Rev. Paula Griffiths: I agree with all that. It is important to be able to incentivise. On the question of a common application form, it is quite right that each grant giver has its own objectives, but if there were even one common page that said, "This is the church. This is what we want. This is what it is going to cost," that would at least help a little bit in simplifying the procedure.

Q86 Jo Platt: I want to talk more specifically about the listed places of worship grant scheme. Becky, we know it has been effective for the sector, but following the cap on grants for individual churches, what kinds of projects will the scheme no longer be able to fund?

Becky Payne: It is difficult to be particular in the sense of saying which projects, but the projects that are currently losing out are those that were already in train or were about to start. We came across a Methodist church the other day that has to find another £400,000. When you have been fundraising for five or six years, that is a headache. A lot of projects are being reduced and having to be phased.

Basically, what it comes down to is that each church can only apply to reclaim the VAT on £125,000-worth of work for the next year. That is not a lot of money when we are talking about a big church project. It is also going to put off churches that are beginning to think about a project. In a funny way, the listed places of worship grant scheme gave you an automatic sum of money in your bank account. Okay, you would not get it until works had started, but you knew you were going to get 20% back, and you could tell people that: "We've already got this amount of money. That's our starting block." It is almost more about the impact it is going to have on churches thinking about doing projects.

Q87 Jo Platt: Emily, obviously, the scheme's cap has affected churches currently undertaking projects. What is the impact of that?

Emily Gee: Confidence and continuity of funding is crucial for all historic buildings, but particularly for churches, which rely on volunteers who are perhaps learning the skills themselves. Having the confidence that there will be funding there is crucial.

We have quantified the impact as much as we can. We have reached out to all dioceses. Our returns show that there are about 260 churches or cathedrals that have projects either on the go now or about to start in the next year or so. We know that most of those—over 200—are affected by the cap. That means they have projects that are over £125,000-worth of work. That is immediately putting a pressure on them to go back and find extra funding.

We know that between now and the end of the year there are about 40 projects of £2 million or more. As Becky said, each of those communities has to go back and find an extra £400,000, which, in a community that



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has already stretched itself to the limit of fundraising, has a really big implication for them. It is a big pressure. We know anecdotally that projects are already starting to be scaled back or, indeed, abandoned. It is all quite live at the moment and “anxiety” is a word that people use quite a lot when they write to us.

We cannot say exactly which projects have stopped yet, but there are a lot that are in panic mode: “How am I going to do this when I have committed financially to the project?” We know that that has a knock-on impact for craft skills, which we might talk about later, because small businesses are lined up to do this work and now people are not quite sure if it is going to happen. That has a big impact on the wider craft skills sector. It also has an impact on match funding. The listed places of worship grant scheme has, brilliantly, been able to be used as match funding for other schemes, so that puts pressure on ways to generate other funding.

There was a really poignant comment from Liverpool diocese in its submission, which talked about the benefit of the listed places of worship grant scheme for investing in churches and the community benefit that could ease pressure on other social services elsewhere. Of course, the disbenefit of reducing the listed places of worship grant scheme is that, as they put it, “VAT relief for a listed church is also often VAT relief for a food pantry, youth work and mental health groups.” The social impact, as well as the fabric deterioration impacts, are really pressing and concerning.

Becky Payne: It is worth saying that in 2001, when Gordon Brown introduced it, it was because of the social benefit that churches give.

Rev. Paula Griffiths: The introduction of a cap so quickly felt very brutal. Our big church had planned a significant lighting scheme, for health and safety and to reduce carbon significantly. We had got to the stage of having a design, having got the faculty, and just going out to tenders—and bang comes the cap. Immediately the VAT bill goes up by £30,000 and somehow you have to bridge that gap.

We have another smaller church that has taken eight years on a project to get the fabric in good order and now to do a toilet and servery and, again, bang comes the cap and they are looking at having to raise another £15,000, which is hard work for a small village. The inevitable result of a cap will be that projects take longer, because you have to plan and fundraise for longer, so things will not happen so quickly and maintenance overall will go down.

Q88 **Chair:** Presumably, if something has been delayed and there is urgency about it, that makes the maintenance costs even higher.

Rev. Paula Griffiths: Absolutely. It is a really vicious circle.

Q89 **Jo Platt:** On the impact, we have talked about rural and more deprived



areas. Is there evidence that that is happening in those particular areas, as we know they are the areas that are going to struggle?

Rev. Paula Griffiths: Yes.

Emily Gee: It really is across the board. There are different types of impacts in small rural communities, as Paula was saying, and an urban area or a deprived area, but they are felt equally. There is a sense that cathedrals are big, grand buildings and they have big fundraising infrastructures. Some do, but they still struggle. It is the same issue at a completely different scale. Some of our cathedrals, which sustain all sorts of things—tourism, the economy, civic pride—are also under pressure from that. Just the cost of the regular cycle of annual maintenance at a cathedral far surpasses a parish church, but it is the same problem at different scales.

Rev. Paula Griffiths: That is right most of the time, but you do have some parish churches that are of cathedral scale but without the same resources. Those must not be forgotten.

Q90 **Damian Hinds:** I am blessed with a number of Churches Conservation Trust churches in my constituency. We have a fantastic grand church in Privett and then tiny churches in Priors Dean and Preston Candover. They all have issues. The large one, in particular, will have issues with the cap and would like to see it removed, but they also get great general upkeep and great community involvement—and of course the trust itself. They are also restricted quite severely in their use as a consecrated place.

This inquiry is about protecting built heritage, but I just wonder what it is that we are ultimately trying to preserve. There is a buzz phrase around Government at the moment: “intangible heritage assets”. Some might say that Christianity, or religious observation in general, is the biggest intangible heritage asset in the world. I just wonder what you think is the right balance between preserving the building and preserving what happens, and has always happened, in that building.

You mentioned the festival model, which I would be interested to hear a little more about. Is there anything restricting the growth of that? Also, do you have someone working on business development for weddings? People spend very large amounts of money to go to secular venues for a pretty wedding. You have some of the best backdrops in the world. One hates to use the word “monetise”, but I just wonder if you are getting the most out of them. That was a long question—forgive me.

Emily Gee: On the point about intangible heritage and what we are protecting, if I am allowed to say “all of it”, then I think that is the case, really. A lot of people go to churches and places of worship to worship. That is their fundamental purpose and there is still a thriving tradition of that across the country. That is very much a part, and it is so connected with the architecture of the place—so many of the internal fittings that we have a brilliant grant to help restore, and the beautiful things like stained



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glass and fittings in churches, which are there historically to aid worship, but are also there for people to come and admire.

We know that lots of people come and look at churches because they are beautiful, even if they are not there to worship. Everyone has a sense of peace and solitude, whether they are of Christian faith or not. You go into these extraordinary buildings and you cannot help but be awed by their architectural beauty, and by that sense of respecting the hands that built it—our ancestors who made the place. All of that wraps up to a package of why churches are so important. The intangible traditions of liturgy, of evensong—my son sings evensong five times a week. There is the sense of that being an intangible heritage that can be protected. That is why people go. It is absolutely accepted that it is both the fabric and the action of the place and just the way it makes you feel when you are in it.

In terms of different ways of using the buildings, there are lots of creative models out there and there is not one-size-fits-all. We all have to be really collaborative and work together with the community in that place and with the building and think what is best for that place. It might be a festival church model. It might be that they go into vesting in the Churches Conservation Trust. It might be that there are some other creative ideas. There are proposals going under scrutiny in Synod at the moment through the Mission and Pastoral Measure on thinking about whether, in a fallow period, if a church is a bit down on its luck community-wise but does not want to close, there is a way of managing that through different combinations of trusts. There are lots of different models and we need to be really creative about working out what is best for that building and for the people of that place.

Rev. Paula Griffiths: I am a trustee of the Association of Festival Churches, so in a sense I am declaring an interest. It certainly has helped a number of churches to think about their place within the community, to involve other members of the community, and to do less but do it better. They have to do at least six services a year. They can do more; they are not stopped from doing more. The Churches Conservation Trust is a bit of a different matter, but these Festival churches are still churches in use that are working with their communities, trying to think about their own unique selling point.

There is one in Norfolk, which is a very isolated church. There is an old airfield in the parish that has a very active veterans group, and the church has made links with that group and is doing a lot of work with them. There is a group of churches in Shropshire where the number of people attending has gone up from 40 a year to perhaps 265 a year by better working with the community.

In terms of intangible heritage, I will read you a few comments taken at random from the visitors' book in our big church, which I looked at last Wednesday. "Beautiful church. Wonderful sense of God's presence here." "A beautifully peaceful and thought creating church." "Very lovely church.



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Organ playing, very atmospheric." "Beautiful colours used on the stained glass." "Has the wow factor, but also peaceful." "Thank you for this holy place." There was also a rather sad but poignant comment: "I wish I lived closer!"

This sense of being able to go in, the art, the music that goes on in churches—Emily referred to choral evensong. We see this in our big church, which has some very far-sighted legacies to give little scholarships to young children to become choristers, and scholarships to teenagers to learn the organ. You will see choral evensong. We had a new motet only last Sunday sung by the choir. The composer was there. The person who had written the words was there. You have these little nine-year-olds up to people in their 80s taking part in making music. That is something very, very special. The craft we have talked about: the stained glass, the bells and bell playing, and so on.

- Q91 **Damian Hinds:** Bayo is going to come on to exactly those crafts in one moment, but before he does—it may have sounded like a flippant question, but it wasn't, really—is someone actively marketing C of E weddings? I realise that individual parishes and individual vicars deal with wedding applications the whole time, but is there this idea of trying to—I am trying to avoid a crass phrase—have more of them?

Becky Payne: Things like Bridgerton and Downton Abbey do a lot of our work for us.

Damian Hinds: That was a gift, yes.

Becky Payne: There has to be a balance between making it a commercial enterprise, because marriage is a solemn thing, but one thing that churches are doing is saying—this happens for funerals as well—"Don't go somewhere else to have your reception or your wake. We've got the west end of the church, with a 'wow' interior. We can lay it on." Churches are being inventive, but a lot of TV and film is doing the job for us. As of recently in the Church of England, you can get married in almost any church, if you so choose—

Rev. Paula Griffiths: You have to build a connection.

Becky Payne: But you have to build a connection, yes.

Damian Hinds: And you have to know about them. That was more my point.

- Q92 **Chair:** Before we go to Bayo, can I put a couple of quick-fire questions to you, Emily? Going back to the listed places of worship grant scheme, we talked about how some projects were not able to be concluded because there is not sufficient money. If you had to choose between a smaller number of churches but a bigger amount of money, or a bigger number of churches and a smaller amount of money, which would better?



Emily Gee: Gosh, that is an interesting question. I think removing the cap would ease the anxiety immediately. I know that a great percentage—DCMS carefully worked it out—of churches are submitting grant requests for lower than that, but it is the small number of really important situations above that which is the concern. I would choose removal of the cap, so that there was no cap.

Q93 **Chair:** But if the cap has to remain in place, would you advocate raising the cap but reducing the number that can apply?

Emily Gee: It is first come first served at the moment. It is quite hard to predict in a given year how many will apply, so I am not sure how reducing the number would help, but I think raising the cap so that there was a higher amount that one could claim would certainly have an advantage for larger projects.

Q94 **Chair:** How do you think the continued uncertainty about the scheme's future impacts its efficacy?

Emily Gee: That is fundamental to it, actually, because of this point about the need for a sustained funding programme for churches, in particular. Projects take so long to plan, fundraise for and get permissions for, so if people know that it is going to be done on a year-by-year basis and that they will always be waiting to hear, I think the number of projects will drop off, and that will have a huge impact on the fabric of our churches. We know that doing small stitch-in-time repairs is what keeps them going. People might be able to hold off on a major roof project, but if we hold off on those small maintenance projects, it will cost a huge amount of money to do later, because you will be replacing rather than repairing, and, as we know, it will have a big impact on all that social action work, because you cannot really have a food bank if there is water pouring in.

Q95 **Mr Alaba:** Morning, all. I want to ask about specialist heritage skills. Paula, you mentioned community memory, which I thought was beautifully put; Emily, you spoke about the fabric and community groups and festival churches; and Becky, you spoke about community engagement and national importance. What specialist construction skills are required to protect historic churches?

Becky Payne: One of the wonderful things about churches is they are the supreme example of all sorts of arts and crafts. It is not just the external stonework. If you think about stained glass windows, carvings on the pews and the pulpit, tapestries and so on, there are all sorts of specialist skills. The trouble is that all these things cost more and more, but at the same time we are dealing with best value for money. Somehow, we have to try to reconcile those two things. There are a lot of specialist people—goldsmiths, silversmiths, tapestry people, stained glass window people—who are keeping going those skills that have been there since medieval times.



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It takes an awful lot to keep a church going, and that is why they are listed. The fixtures and fittings, as Emily said, are just as important. I went to St Jude on the Hill up by Golders Green and every single surface of that church is covered in a wall painting. They are just embarking on a restoration programme, and they are starting in the Lady Chapel. Fortunately for them, they are working with the Courtauld Institute who are using this project as a training exercise to train up new conservators. That is a brilliant way to make that project happen. What happens in the Lady Chapel will inform what happens for the rest.

The other thing I should say is that St Paul's Cathedral has two vacancies at the moment. It is advertising for a stonemason apprenticeship and a woodwork apprenticeship. That is brilliant. Others do it as well; it just happens that those vacancies are around at the moment if you want to apply. That again is the church itself looking to train in those special skills.

Emily Gee: It is an extraordinary balanced ecosystem. The sustainability of traditional craft skills is vital to the sustainability of church buildings and vice versa. They are so dependent on each other. The number of church buildings that exist almost keeps the craft sector going. However, we know that there are threats to the longevity of a number of those really specialist skills, for quite complex reasons, but partly because it is difficult to get young people into those areas. We know that encouraging people into those skills is really important, but so is having the right apprenticeship opportunity for them to go with. We know that apprenticeships work well for large businesses but, as we discussed earlier, so many of the craft and conservation skills businesses are tiny micro businesses and, particularly the with uncertainty about the listed places of worship grant scheme and the knock-on impact for projects, that does not make them feel confident about taking on an apprentice.

We need to look at different models. We are using some of our Heritage Fund funding to fund bursaries for a stained glass conservation programme at the University of Swansea. That is a contribution to that ecosystem to keep the stained glass tradition alive, as one example, but there are huge numbers of different really specialist skills. They are themselves, thinking about intangible heritage, really important to our national story, and it is about keeping those trades alive.

There is the lovely phrase, "If you see it, you can be it." There have been great articles about young women stonemasons working at Gloucester Cathedral and York Minster. If you see something, you might think, "Gosh, that might be a viable route for me," and then you find that this whole extraordinary world opens up. It is encouraging that, so that we can keep these buildings alive and think about the economic and training way to enable that.

Rev. Paula Griffiths: I want to mention a couple of other crafts in churches that are a little bit on the skids now. There is only one bell



foundry left in the country, in Loughborough. Until about 10 years ago—maybe a bit longer—there was one in London, too, and earlier there were others, but now there is only one. There is a special relevance about that, because in our big church, which has 12 bells, the seventh one cracked. It was first made in 1797. The one bell foundry left has taken that material, recast it and brought it back ready to be hung again. What would have happened if that bell foundry were not still there?

There are only a few stained glass makers left. They are on the Heritage Crafts Endangered List. Only 10 wall painting conservator firms are listed on the Building Conservation Directory. The numbers of organ builders and organ maintainers are reducing. All these things are very important, and it is absolutely right to try to get the apprenticeships and the knowledge and to keep those crafts alive.

Q96 Mr Alaba: You have touched on my next question, regarding how easy it is to find heritage skills. Emily, you spoke about the apprenticeships and the different models. How hard is it and what do you think we should be doing?

Emily Gee: There are a number of institutions that are focusing on this. Again, thinking about collaboration, the Cathedrals' Workshop Fellowship brings together 12 Anglican cathedrals to work together on getting the right skills in the right places. As institutions there is an endless supply of work that they need doing. Paula mentioned the Wren Centre at St Paul's Cathedral. Chester is also doing a lot, building on its civic identity, on training people who can then do craft skills at historic buildings around the city in other ways. Working within an ecosystem is really important.

Then, as I say, it is about thinking about different models from apprenticeships and whether we can have Government support for bursaries to encourage post-16 opportunities in different skills for young people. It is about everyone playing their part to develop a system that will allow a long, sustained trajectory of support for craft skills.

Q97 Mr Alaba: Becky, how do changes to the funding of historic churches impact specialist craftspeople? I know we have touched on that slightly.

Becky Payne: Basically, if works are not being done to churches, those people are not going to have jobs. That is the basic fact of the matter. The other thing, I suppose, is grant funders understanding that to repair a stained glass window does need an expert and it will cost more money, and it should not always be based on the cheapest tender. There are architects and conservators who know this stuff backwards. They know how to repair these things, what skills are required and to what standard. We have to be aware that that costs money.

Q98 Mr Alaba: Is there anything else that you want to say about incentives to try to engage more investment in specialist training? Do you have any other pointers?



Becky Payne: Some of the City & Guilds do already but a lot more of them could be encouraged to run courses. There is a lot of work out there for them. I used the wonderful example of St Jude on the Hill using students to do the work, and therefore training them and getting them to embark on that. That is a good connection to be made. I cannot see how, going into St Jude on the Hill, you would fail to be inspired as a trainee student to be given the chance to work on such a glorious piece of art.

Emily Gee: The Church of England is helping to fund that project in partnership with the Courtauld Institute, and we are doing that with funding we have from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. It is all part of that ecosystem, building the training in, and the funding is so important. The listed places of worship grant scheme is one of the answers to this as well. That allows the projects to happen, which then helps to perpetuate the craft skill. Another one would be incentivising the use of traditional skills and materials through grant or tax schemes. Encouraging things to be done in a conservation-minded way helps to grow and build sustainability into the sector.

Becky Payne: And just encourage apprenticeships and support businesses that want to take on apprentices. The lottery does a good job of allowing projects to require apprentices to work on the project, and that is another good way that it can happen.

Q99 **Chair:** Does the apprenticeship levy work for heritage skills? We have heard from other parts of the creative industries, for example, that the apprenticeship levy is just not fit for purpose for the way that their businesses are structured. Do you have similar issues with the apprenticeship levy in the heritage sector?

Emily Gee: I think it is the same, in that it works well for large businesses that have the infrastructure to allow them to access it. It is much harder for smaller businesses. We have a church building officer apprentice in our team, and of the church building support officers we mentioned earlier, about five are doing an apprentice scheme through Strode College in Somerset. That is using the levy, but it is mostly for larger organisations.

Q100 **Chair:** It seems to me that where there are niche skills, you almost need to bring lots of organisations together to capitalise on that. You are kind of in a vicious circle, because these skills become very niche and hard to find, and therefore they become expensive, and then it is difficult to afford them, so the work gets put off.

Emily Gee: Yes, but there is no shortage of the things that they need to preserve.

Q101 **Chair:** Exactly right, so if you had more people in the sector—more people with the artisan skills to do the work—the cost of it would not be quite so punitive and therefore more work would be happening and so on. In order to nail the skills issue, which comes up across a lot of the



different heritage sectors, presumably the people who are doing the stonework or the metalwork in churches could do it in other listed heritage buildings. Who needs to co-ordinate that? Who needs to bring all that together in preserving, maintaining and promoting those kinds of really niche heritage skills?

Emily Gee: Again, it is that collaborative ecosystem. There is a heritage skills network, which our colleagues are very much a part of, and that is a great way of bringing people together and thinking about the finance and the training and the skills need. There are existing networks that we can use. The Church of England is a big player in that, of course, given the scale of the number of buildings, but it is working with the institutions that are providing the funding and the businesses that are hosting apprentices, and then also with the large conglomerations of cathedrals that I mentioned, like the Cathedrals' Workshop Fellowships. It is a network of those together.

Q102 **Chair:** Does there need to be somebody overarching that saying, "This is what we need to do to ensure that we have enough stonemasons and other workers"? Is there someone who casts an eye over that and stewards it forward into the future?

Emily Gee: Yes, the heritage skills network that we all plug into is probably the overarching body for it.

Chair: Very good. Thank you all for your time this morning. It has been great to speak to you all and we are really grateful for you coming in to see us.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Michael Kill, Andrew Lovett and Joshua McTaggart.

Chair: For our second panel this morning, we will be looking at the buildings that underpin many of our cultural organisations. It can often be difficult for groups focused on their creative work to protect the historic theatres, museums and music venues that they are entrusted with. To talk about this today, we are joined by Andrew Lovett, who is the director and chief executive of the Black Country Living Museum—so the steward of not only the "Peaky Blinders" film set but also a fantastic fish and chip shop—Joshua McTaggart, the chief executive of the Theatres Trust—some of our most iconic cultural venues are in theatres, so he has a lot on his plate—and Michael Kill, chief executive of the Night Time Industries Association. Part of the idea for this session came when the Committee held a roundtable event at the Drumsheds in Tottenham, organised in conjunction with the Night Time Industries Association, where we saw and discussed some of the different ways that cultural sites are treated and protected. In many ways it is Michael's fault that we are all here today, so he has to take responsibility for that. I am really grateful to all of you for joining us this morning. I will pass to Paul for the



first question.

Q103 **Paul Waugh:** As the Chair said, we are really interested in your experience of operating in and maintaining historic buildings and the relationship between the creative sector and the built heritage sector. I will ask each of you in turn, just to set out the lie of the land, what proportion of your sector operates in listed buildings.

Joshua McTaggart: We estimate that of the 1,200 or so theatres that we believe there are in the country—and there needs to be better investment in data about all cultural infrastructure to make sure this is accurate—about 40% to 50% are in listed buildings, not just purpose-built theatre spaces but churches and other community spaces that have been repurposed to be performance spaces.

Michael Kill: Proportionally—there are no clear, accurate figures—data that has come from us and Music Venue Trust estimate it at about 20% to 30%. There tend to be two categories: the pre-war industrial buildings and repurposed warehouses, now housing music and performance spaces, and the post-war modernist buildings with architectural and cultural relevance—1960s social clubs, LGBTQ+ spaces and so on. To be honest, there is no central encompassing data, so I still believe that we are understating that position and that many have fewer protections than they should have.

Q104 **Paul Waugh:** Andrew, what are the biggest challenges of operating in a so-called heritage site? Some people think it might be a bit of an albatross around their neck and they would rather have a brand-new build. Others think it is an opportunity. What is your take on that?

Andrew Lovett: Before I answer that, I will add to those stats. Thinking of the Arts Council's national portfolio organisations, of which there are just under 1,000, we estimate that between a quarter and a third are in listed buildings, but I agree with Mike. There are 3,000 museums in the country and it is quite difficult to get a grasp on which are in historic buildings.

On balance, the great issue for museums is being able to carve out sufficient money for programming, collections care, public programming—all those things that face the public and draw them in—from the amount of money that needs to go into looking after the heritage asset they are in. There will be some museum directors that, as you intimated, say, "I wish I was in a brand-new building and didn't have to worry about it," but my sense is that most see being in a heritage building as a big asset and part of the brand of their organisation. But it is about carving out enough money for the public-facing stuff as opposed to just maintaining the building.

Q105 **Paul Waugh:** Michael, is there a way in which sometimes being a historic building can inspire contemporary art and contemporary creativity?



Michael Kill: Without a doubt. To give an example, the cultural history of a venue directly shapes programming and attracts performers. Places like the Brixton Academy and the 100 Club are really important premises and benchmarks of—I suppose the big word for this is “value”. Artists often adapt their sets and reflect the venue’s legacy. Venues such as the Hacienda historically, and Heaven in London, have inspired many generations through different ownership pathways. Such venues are almost living archives, which I think is the important piece to understand, capturing the evolution of creative movements such as punk, acid house, grime and queer performance culture. They are really important, and in modern-day, contemporary cultural heritage, I think they are seen by people as an important asset for the UK.

Paul Waugh: Can I ask you the same question, Joshua?

Joshua McTaggart: A number of theatre buildings are multi-use. I think of the cultural history of the Roundhouse in Camden or the former lido Tropicana in my home town of Weston-super-Mare, which is now a performance space and has been used for installations. It is also thinking about how local communities feed into those spaces and respond to the history. The Tropicana is a place that people hold dear to their hearts and they want to feed into the local performances. Although people know the Roundhouse as a gig venue, it also has a theatre space and a huge youth programme, inspiring young people in Camden and from around London. There is something about the heritage and history of those buildings feeding into the contemporary performance opportunities. Thinking about the local communities that are engaging with those spaces, and may have engaged with them in a previous form, is key.

Q106 **Paul Waugh:** Is it the case for you all that a sense of local pride and a sense of place is crucial to attracting local audiences—that, no matter what show you are putting on, that building is part of their community?

Andrew Lovett: Definitely. My kind of museum, an industrial museum, was described unflatteringly as coming from the primordial slime of the museum world, but the community was the champion for my museum and many industrial museums across the country. They could see heritage being lost and they wanted to take things into their own hands and save it. I think you are right.

Michael Kill: The cultural and social value within communities is becoming more and more important in terms of balance. Communities are a real benchmark when we talk about high streets, where these businesses are situated and what they represent. Experiences, memories and shifts in cultural movement all become a really important part of where people hook their local identity on and where communities build businesses and a proposition that is a really important message and narrative UK-wide, whether in city or town, and globally. The important part here is that it builds community value, not only internally but from an international base.



Joshua McTaggart: With your previous panel you talked about local communities being involved in governance and leadership. I know we will touch on this later, but governance is one of the biggest challenges for cultural spaces, especially those that are smaller or mid-scale and do not necessarily have the core funding. It is thinking about local pride but also local people taking leadership opportunities on boards or whatever the legal structure is to manage those spaces. That is a key opportunity for the future of our heritage spaces for cultural use.

Q107 **Natasha Irons:** Thanks so much for coming today. I am going to talk a bit about the impact of funding on these spaces. Compared with the funding for creative projects, how much funding is available to maintain a venue's infrastructure?

Andrew Lovett: I will start with a bit on museums. The obvious and really new bit of funding is called MEND. It has been passported to the Arts Council to administer. In its current form it is on round 5 and it is £25 million, with grants from £50,000 up to £5 million. I would be a big advocate for increasing that pot. Also, as was talked about by colleagues on the first panel, having certainty and a commitment that "this is a good idea and we're not going to let it drop off a cliff" is so hugely important, particularly if you are asking applicants to get to fairly advanced RIBA stages. That is quite a complicated commitment for a lot of organisations, so it is about looking ahead and saying, "We think this is a good scheme. We are going to let it run and hopefully put more money into it." It is hugely oversubscribed, which tells you the need that is out there, but also, as people have come to know the scheme and trusted in it, the applications are starting to roll in much more frequently.

Q108 **Natasha Irons:** Would you say that the biggest impact of the MEND fund is that it has provided certainty and clarity for people?

Andrew Lovett: Yes, but it is also stuff that is not terribly sexy. It was described unflatteringly as "bogs and basins". Because it is very much like that, it is really clear for the organisations. We could spend another hour talking about the heritage lottery fund and the impact of that on historic buildings, particularly museums.

Joshua McTaggart: HVAC is not sexy until you end up in a heatwave. From a theatre perspective, we have buildings that are less than a decade old and buildings that hundreds of years old. A building starts to decline immediately it is built and there was a big push from lottery funding for new buildings around the turn of the millennium. Those buildings are now 25 years old and unfortunately the HVAC systems—the ventilation and other aspects—have a 25-year lifespan. There is a number of theatres that you might consider new with challenging capital needs.

The short answer to your question is not enough money, but that is not a useful response to think about where investment needs to come. To give you some figures and data, when we did a study in 2021, which obviously



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was during the pandemic, there was an estimated need of £1.1 billion. That is to level the playing field slightly but would not go far enough. We believe that it would cost about £10 million to £11 million to bring an average 600-seat theatre to a contemporary standard and future-proof it, especially moving towards net zero.

There is another issue: it should not just be about funding; it should be about how we support the business models of these organisations so that they can run surpluses to invest in their capital expenditure. There will not be enough Government or other investment to go around, so how do we think about other ways of organisations—or landlords, if a landlord is operating the building—building up the capital pot so that we have business models that are supported and capital investment that can be put in? Businesses are struggling to run a balanced budget, let alone build up the surpluses needed to invest in capital, which is why Arts Council funding and the creative foundations fund that was announced by DCMS are so key but will be oversubscribed because of the business model strain.

Q109 Natasha Irons: Do you think that the creative foundations fund will sufficiently address creative organisations' infrastructure needs? Do you think that it will be enough to cover the issues that you have with infrastructure? Is it a step in the right direction? There is always more that can be done, but do you think it will be helpful?

Michael Kill: I will give you a bit of an overview on funding and then come to that. There is a notable disparity between funding available for creative projects and for venue infrastructure, in particular. Public funding from bodies like Arts Council England supports performance and programming, but funding for capital works, building repair and heritage sensitive adaptations, which is important, is limited and inaccessible for many. Our industry are really poor at picking up these things. They almost feel like it is separate funding and not for them because of the narrative presented.

With things like the creative foundations fund, there are barriers for smaller venues as well, such as high match funding. There is an urgent need for infrastructure support, which is really important. But our biggest issue at the moment is a lack of knowledge within our sector of what is available to them. I have discussed with some of my colleagues here that sometimes it is down to industries that are very good at accessing those grants. We saw during the pandemic that a lot of clubs and venues, especially the smaller businesses, were not used to applying for grants in certain ways, so they did not have the facility to understand how that was presented. There was a lot of adaptation by Arts Council England to change the way that it approached it to make it more accessible, but a lot of this is about knowledge and the narrative presented to the broader industry, from our perspective. For a lot of them out there, there is funding available but they are just unaware of it.

Q110 Natasha Irons: What do you think could be done to raise awareness and



lower the barriers to entry in applying for these things? What do you think would be helpful?

Michael Kill: We need to broaden the understanding of modern or contemporary heritage. By doing that we open the doors. I had a meeting with Historic England and we spoke about it in the context of things having to be 30 years old and over. Some of this is about creating a narrative that shows accessibility. The worry we have at the moment is that the narrative feels like a very closed door to contemporary culture or younger businesses or movements.

I will give you an example. Berlin and Germany have looked at techno as something to protect in terms of cultural heritage, and places like Berghain are protected and have a reduced taxation position. The very clear narrative presented by UNESCO in Germany lowered the barriers for people considering the opportunities within grant funding. There is a lot of work to be done in terms of hearts and minds and the industry understanding what is available to them. I think that at the moment they feel it is a closed door.

Joshua McTaggart: On the creative foundations fund, we are very supportive of the programme but we have fed back to DCMS that the threshold for the current funding round this year is RIBA stage 3, which means that your design team is in place and basically you have an oven-ready capital project. We are trying to support the sector to get ahead of that so that when funding comes, they are ready, but what we need—and it is in the spending review—is the commitment to capital over the next four years. How can organisations, especially smaller ones that do not have big inbuilt fundraising teams or capital project teams, plan the project they want to do in 2027 or 2028? Getting clarity on that now is really useful, because if you are at RIBA stage 3, it is likely that you will go ahead with your project, and then you are trying to fundraise at the same time. We need a longer-term capital lead-in, which I think is what you were referencing, especially for organisations that are applying for grants without a fundraising team.

At the trust and in previous roles, I have run small grant programmes for economic impact assessments of £5,000, £10,000, £15,000 and £20,000 for small works, and we have had big national portfolio organisations applying for that because the funding is so tight. We need to be really clear that there are certain funding pots that are for smaller organisations. That is not to say that our big NPOs are not doing incredible work and do not need the money, but it is about being really clear on where the need is. There is need across the country, but how do we make sure it is not just the Arts Council England priority places or other priority places in other nations? Where is the data that leads us to look at investment rather than seeing it as a grant? Until the data is in place about our cultural deserts and transport infrastructure for people in rural areas to access culture, I do not think we will make the best investment choices around these grants.



Andrew Lovett: I want to underline thoroughly Joshua's comments about sustainability of organisations and the need not to be squeamish about making profits and surpluses for organisations. The investment will go in for buildings, but if you do not have a sustainable, lively, good business model, you are arguably throwing money down the drain to an extent. I want to underline Joshua's point about sustainable business models for the cultural sector, including museums.

Joshua McTaggart: Capital projects are not a silver bullet. I have led two capital projects in two cultural organisations and where we succeeded was in making sure that the business model and the governance structures matched up with the capital plans. People work very hard in the theatre sector, but surprisingly it is often the case that the business model does not meet the needs of a new building.

Q111 **Natasha Irons:** Josh, you mentioned RIBA stage 3 and how you get funding for people to get to that stage in the process. What should Government be thinking about in that space? Should they be coming forward with other funds that you think would be helpful?

Joshua McTaggart: I do not want to be a broken record, but governance is so key. You heard it in your earlier session on church spaces. So many small and medium-sized spaces outside of big cities are run by trustees who are local volunteers. Trustees are legally liable for a space and are financially liable, and I do not think you can compare volunteering as a trustee with volunteering in a community centre or a food bank. I have raised this with the Charity Commission. We need to really bed in what it means to be a trustee, especially if you are owning or operating a building, and how we can support those trustees, who are giving up time and energy and often sleepless nights to try to either reopen or keep open a cultural space.

We are talking a lot about investing in buildings—I know we will talk maybe about buildings versus organisations and art—but we need to make sure we are investing in the people who are running those buildings and the skillset required for that and for running a capital project, which is a different skillset. Those things cost less than the tens of millions that are required to go into a building, but we should think about who are the directors of capital projects of the future, and the future architects and surveyors who understand the needs of cultural buildings—museums, music spaces—which are different from residential properties. Investing in that wider skillset is key.

Q112 **Jo Platt:** I will declare an interest: I managed a cultural asset—a grade II* listed mill—during my sabbatical years before I was re-elected. I am not going to speak about my woes and challenges, which I very much recognise from your answers. Josh, how will the removal of Theatres Trust as a statutory planning consultee impact your ability to protect theatres?



Joshua McTaggart: For context in case any Members do not know, there is coming down the line—I believe MHCLG has told us this is soon to happen—a consultation on the current position on statutory consultee status for Theatres Trust, the Gardens Trust and Sport England. They are the only three of the 25, I think it is, statutory consultees being reviewed. It is interesting to note that they are all DCMS statutory consultees or relate to public spaces, green spaces and cultural provision. That is just an objective observation.

Q113 **Jo Platt:** Why do you think that is?

Joshua McTaggart: I think that potentially there is a misunderstanding of what our organisations do. Pulling from the press release from MHCLG, we heard about cricket balls being the reason that a development did not happen. I think that perhaps there is a misunderstanding of what Theatres Trust is. We were founded almost 50 years ago by an Act of Parliament to protect every theatre in this country, or promote the better protection of theatres for the benefit of the nation. We are not about keeping old buildings open or stopping the building of houses. We are there to make sure every person, wherever they are in this country, has access to cultural provision on their doorstep and within an accessible distance from their home.

That is what we do in our current role in the planning system. We are required—we are legally obligated—to respond to any planning application related to a theatre building. I have an incredible team of experts—I will put it on the parliamentary record—who work diligently hard reviewing every planning application and making sure that the local planning authority, which might not have the in-house expertise on certain technical equipment or spaces, has the understanding to make sure that we are building or retrofitting theatres so that they are fit for the future.

They are also making sure that development that happens does not have a negative impact on residential buildings. Of our few hundred applications across the last three years, less than 10% have had anything to do with residential buildings. It is normally about the agent of change principle: do we want to be building residential accommodation next to the late night get-in space where you will have vans dropping off technical equipment and people loading out, ultimately impacting the business model, because there will be noise complaints? That is the role that Theatres Trust plays.

I do not have a full understanding of why Theatres Trust has been singled out. We have been working with MHCLG in preparation for the consultation. I am told it is fully a consultation and no decisions have been made. I am happy to share with the Committee our proposals that have been submitted in confidence, which we will be publicly proposing when the full questions are out.



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The Theatres Trust Act is an incredible piece of legislation that we believe is unique to this country. We should be really proud of it and of the role my organisation plays in making sure that there are theatres on everyone's doorstep that they can engage with. I do not need to make the case that cultural provision is life-changing for people, and if we start to see local theatres close, that is at risk and that will be cultural vandalism.

Q114 **Chair:** Josh, it is notable to me that the three consultees named in the Government's proposals are all organisations that come under DCMS's remit: Gardens Trust, Theatres Trust, Sport England.

Joshua McTaggart: Just for the record, Gardens Trust is not an arm's length body but Sport England is, but I think we can agree that gardens sit within culture.

Q115 **Chair:** Yes, under the DCMS umbrella. It worries me. Does it worry you that DCMS is not sufficiently advocating for the sectors that it is supposed to be promoting and representing?

Joshua McTaggart: As an arm's length body, I have to be very careful about what I say, but I want to believe that DCMS is advocating for cultural organisations behind closed doors and with the Prime Minister. I do believe the Secretary of State understands the role that culture plays in our communities. There is a real opportunity to think about how culture is not just about cultural provision. It is about planning. It is about infrastructure. It is about investment. It is about the talent pipeline. It is about arts education in our schools. The issue here is that DCMS should be advocating, but we should be looking cross-Departments. I encourage this Committee to not just hold DCMS accountable—I know that is what you do—but think about all the other intersections with cultural provision.

I am hopeful that in working closely with the Government in our role as an arm's length body, we can advocate for what the future of the planning system can be. Statutory consultee is one lever, but there are a number of levers. There is listed building consent and talking about what other assets should be listed. There is the ability to make the national planning policy framework more robust and rigorous. We should be holding local authorities accountable for local plans that include culture; every local authority should be expected to have a cultural plan that feeds into its local plan. There is a way to hold local government accountable, as well as national Government, and I expect to see that advocated for. I look forward to the opportunity to engage with a data-led, rigorous process with MHCLG around the statutory consultee status.

Q116 **Chair:** But DCMS needs to be not just advocating for you, but actively explaining to other Government Departments the issues that impact you.

Joshua McTaggart: That is what I hope will be happening, and I am confident that that is what is happening. I think having the opportunity to talk about this—obviously, the consultation is not yet live, but I hope that



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DCMS has been given the evidence by us and other stat cons around the role we play, and the Local Government Association, as well as the developers, the consultants and the theatre operators and managers who benefit from our role in planning. I look forward to that data being published in one place so that we can look at the data that leads to these decisions.

Chair: I will hand back to Jo.

Jo Platt: Michael, you wanted to follow on from that.

Michael Kill: As I am sure most of you are aware through either MVT or the NTIA, we believe that this is an important part of representation to truly value. When we talk about the narrative that we discussed earlier and accessibility, being a statutory consultee and looking at music venues and clubs and spaces—the night-time economy—in terms of that contemporary cultural element is a really important part of it. We should be expanding it. The expertise is out there. We should use that expertise in the organisations that deal with that direct engagement with culture at risk spaces—specialists in inside noise mitigation, late licensing, venue design. All these things sit within our wheelhouse, and I would without a doubt really fight to retain that consultative position but also expand it so that there is a true value under a broader spectrum of contemporary culture, which I do not think is present at the moment. I ask the Committee to consider whether this is something that should be expanded.

In answer to your question about whether DCMS is doing enough to represent, in terms of contemporary culture, I do not think it is at the moment. More work needs to be done and this is part of it. Agent of change is a really important part, as is heritage protections that extend beyond businesses that are over 30 years old and are not just about architectural look and feel but about real, important identity pieces around culture in the UK. For me, this is an opportunity to expand that, not restrict it. There is a concern that this consultative position may draw down on that, and that is a real fear for us moving forward.

Joshua McTaggart: We may build houses, but are we building homes in places people want to live?

Andrew Lovett: I do not think we should be afraid of diverse and expert opinion.

Q117 **Jo Platt:** No, exactly. Josh, you mentioned that Sport England is advocating for a more refined consultee role. Have you considered specific ways to reform rather than remove your role?

Joshua McTaggart: We have been thinking very hard, at board level and with the experts in my team who are registered town planners, both on the board and at staff level, and we have a list of recommendations



around not just removal but reform or additions, which I can share with the Committee afterwards rather than going into detail now.

Q118 **Jo Platt:** We are talking about the Theatres Trust but, as Michael has alluded to, this applies to the whole of the creative and cultural sector.

Joshua McTaggart: Agreed. The Theatres Trust obviously has a very specific legislative remit, but we talk internally a lot about cultural infrastructure. Although we have the Theatres Trust public body, we also operate our charitable fund, which exists as a separate legal entity. That means we can be more expansive and inclusive with our definition of a contemporary theatre space. A number of the spaces—I referenced the Roundhouse earlier—have gig venues, community venues and other venues within them.

I am relatively new in post, but we are starting at team level and board level to think about how we make sure that our definition of theatre is really inclusive for what it means in 2025 and beyond. Our recommendations around the national planning policy framework are more expansive than just theatre spaces but, in terms of the legislation around statutory consultee, we are making recommendations around our specific role.

Q119 **Jo Platt:** We will look forward to receiving that. The Government are proposing this because of councils' and developers' frustrations with the consultee system. What other improvements can be made? Have you any further suggestions?

Andrew Lovett: Maybe a little bit more pragmatic and flexible an approach from planning officers to specific decisions would be welcome. The alternative is that heritage buildings are not developed, become derelict and do not become an asset for the community. I am an advocate for a little bit more flexibility from planning officers and a bit more of a pragmatic approach, to see something worthwhile happening rather than dying in a ditch about their own particular discipline.

Michael Kill: I go back to this whole point that we have got to want to do business. At the moment, we are going through a process with the Licensing Act and planning should be similar. We need to be enabling and permissive. These cultural spaces are vitally important, so we need to build infrastructure that is pro-culture and pro-value of culture, particularly on a local level.

We have an inordinate amount of challenges—agent of change being administered in the right way to protect spaces is vitally important—but we need to be more expansive in recognising contemporary and modern culture in what it is. We have almost stood still historically. I had a meeting with Historic England leading up to this, and even they felt quite static in the way that it is represented and recognising the difference and the broader scope that is not being addressed.



The big thing for us is that we need to readdress that at grassroots and start to build on a more enabling and permissive planning and licensing structure to move forward, which takes into account agent of change as primary legislation, which we hope will come forward. However, like you say, it is a battle and we need to get it to a point where they understand that contemporary culture is valued, is important and globally is seen as an important impetus for people coming to the UK.

Q120 Chair: Very quickly, Josh—we do not have a huge amount of time—your ears should have been burning when the Morecambe Winter Gardens came in, because they really praised your support for theatres. They said it was “immense”, which is quite a ringing endorsement. If you could put it in a nutshell, what lessons could be learned from the way that you help theatre operators and the governance that they are having to negotiate?

Joshua McTaggart: I just want it on the record that Claire Appleby, our head of theatre buildings, and Siân Eagar, who runs our Resilient Theatres: Resilient Communities programme, as well as Tom Clarke, who leads our planning advice, are incredible experts.

To answer your question, it is not the trust; it is individuals within the trust who have worked diligently for a number of years with those people. I heard a comment from the earlier panel about phone calls with people crying into cups of tea, and that is true. A lot of the work we do is around time spent with people as they navigate really challenging systems. It is people who are managing buildings. It is people who are bringing buildings back to life. It is people who are making these buildings cultural destinations.

Vanessa is an incredible advocate for the Morecambe Winter Gardens. To put it in context, they received a £22,000 grant from the trust in 2019 for some governance review and training. That was six years ago. That helped them on the path towards securing almost £5 million from funders. Again, to my point earlier about governance, it is those small grants at the beginning, to do the economic impact assessment or to establish yourself as a trust or some form of community interest company that the Theatres Trust works really closely with, that are hard to come by. Also, working with marginalised communities in places that are not big cities where the funds do not always go is key. Theatres Trust has always advocated for the underdog. I watched back Vanessa’s conversation and I am proud of the organisation I lead and the team, but that means we need to invest in sector support as much as the sector itself.

Q121 Paul Waugh: We are trying to look a bit more at the relationship between the listed building system and the wider sense of culture in Britain. Michael, do you think the listing system takes into account enough counterculture and the sort of contemporary culture that you want to promote?



Michael Kill: Simply, no. We have to start to understand what modern cultural heritage is. When you break it down, what does it refer to? We talk about spaces of lived experience, protest, expression and community solidarity. That word “community” is always harbouring in this, but sites that are shaped by youth culture, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ communities—and artistic experimentation I think is a really nice way of rounding it off.

At present, the protection mechanisms are very fragmented and limited. Local heritage listing by Historic England remains underused and inconsistently applied. We need to work out a way forward that actually designates those two channels. For us, historic heritage and cultural heritage should be two separate channels and two different recognitions. We would like to see things moving forward like that so that we can adapt and are not restricted by the historic heritage element. Modern-day contemporary culture is just very different, and it is not as easy from an architectural perspective or a building use perspective to be housed within the constraints and frameworks that exist at the moment.

Q122 **Paul Waugh:** Does Historic England just not get it at the moment? It seems to have a perception that a famous band having performed somewhere when they were up and coming is not good enough for recognising a building, even though it might attract people from across the world to look at the first place someone gigged, for example.

Michael Kill: I think it is recognised; I just think it is limited by the framework that it works within. This is why I say we need to be a bit more expansive and considered and a bit more pragmatic in our approach. Like everything, our industry moves at a very fast pace. If I explained what happens today within our sector, in terms of music, fashion and people, by the start of next year it would have changed. The fluidity of heritage protection teams has to consider that, hence the reason for drawing a separate channel that looks at cultural heritage so that it has the fluidity to consider the moving patterns of movements, LGBTQ+, music, fashion, people—those sorts of things. That is vitally important, but we need that additional vehicle, because the rigidity of historic heritage does not work for that.

Joshua McTaggart: Caroline, you and I were at Historic England’s 10th anniversary last week. It does a brilliant job at being a contemporary organisation that preserves the heritage history of this country. We have some cases of theatres that have had David Bowie, Richard Attenborough or Morecambe and Wise, but that is not a reason to historically list a building around its architecture. I would say that Historic England is doing its job, and therefore we need to think about the more intangible cultural heritage of these spaces. I know that some of the Committee visited the Southbank Centre. There is a regular debate as to whether it should be listed as a 20th century building. What are we doing with architectural listing that prevents spaces from being contemporary spaces?



A number of campaigners think about accessibility and specifically ableism within the sector. We are at risk of preserving architectural heritage that in turn keeps the full population out of our buildings. Although I work for an organisation that cares about the architectural heritage as well as the contemporary cultural heritage, I lead an organisation that cares about everyone having access, and that means we should not put buildings above people. That is something else to think about as well. We need a reflection on what listed building status means, especially when capital projects are needed to make sure everyone can access a building.

Q123 Paul Waugh: Andrew, to follow up on that, can you think of examples where listed building status restricts access and/or other contemporary elements of what you do?

Andrew Lovett: I am sure there are. We do not have many listed buildings on my site, but there are some great examples. I ran the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art on the banks of the Tyne for a long time, a big historic building that now is a big contemporary art gallery. It has its foibles and all the rest of it, but it is a stunning building to attract people in. It is tremendous.

Another way to look at it—and certainly the way that we look at it at the museum I look after—is that we regard our heritage as a stage upon which we tell stories and performance. It is the storytelling that dictates whether we want to move a building to our site or replicate a particular building. It is rarely the architectural notoriety of a building. It is more to do with the human stories. That might be a way for the likes of Historic England to be more engaged with it.

There will be lots of examples that have cost more money and taken more time to develop. The Silk Mill at Derby is another museum that has had to grapple with that. There will be lots of those. That is why I say planning officers need to be a bit more pragmatic and flexible about finding solutions.

Michael Kill: I will come in with one more example: Brixton Academy. We know the tragedy that preceded the closure, but that is a listed building. The company that owned it had to transition over £1 million-worth of changes, which were extended because of that listing status. That is really important to understand as well. If you are a smaller business, very much hand to mouth with a listed building, it makes it very difficult for those adaptations to retain that listed status. That gives you one big example that did change the shift and also extended the closure period for up to 18 months.

Q124 Jo Platt: Do you think it should be changed? If you have a heritage listed status building yet the organisation or whatever is within it is of cultural or of social good, should there be some leniency with regards to protecting that building? If the windows need doing or the roof needs replacing, does it have to come at such a cost and be like-for-like or



should there be some flexibility?

Michael Kill: I agree with what was said earlier: we just have to consider the human element. Accessibility is a big issue. When we talk about listed building status, accessibility is very limited. A huge amount of nightclubs are built within those environments that have limited access to first and second-floor experiences for people who are disabled. Change is limited by listed status, sadly. We have to put humans first and start thinking about a more pragmatic approach. That is where that differentiation in terms of cultural heritage against classic heritage would help to deal with the disparity.

Joshua McTaggart: There is a recurring theme, because people are the ones who make decisions on whether a planning consent can go ahead. It is about how we support planning officers and heritage officers at the local level to make decisions that are pragmatic rather than being constrained. It is about that investment.

Q125 **Damian Hinds:** Michael, I want to come back to this thing about the balance between buildings and intangible cultural heritage. The Marquee operated in—I had to look this up—at least five different buildings at different points in its time, but people mourn the loss of The Marquee. Another big name in music in London, the Town and Country Club, is still there, but with a completely different name. In a different vein, as you alluded to, some spaces could have enormous cultural significance but no aesthetic attraction at all. Particularly for contemporary cultural assets and places, does the whole idea of a listed buildings system really do the job that you need?

Michael Kill: The question is quite right. For me, you always ask: is it about site or organisation? I think it is important on both sides. That is why we need that fluidity of approach. The activity, organisation and community engagement are often more significant than the structure, as you rightly said, but the venue provides that locus, that expression, that tradition, that cultural community element and that continuity.

I think there is room for both. Heritage protection sits in a more architectural position, whereas cultural heritage is a really important thing that looks at that fluidity—the fact that it does not have to be a bricks and mortar space; it can be a movement, or a space or time. There is a lot of work that can go into identifying the differences. We have tried—hopefully I can get this across—to identify the differences. Historic heritage is typically physical, aged, architecturally unique, easily recognised through conservation standards and so on, whereas cultural heritage is rooted in community engagement, memory and creative practices; it may lack architectural significance, but it is vital to national identity and contemporary history.

That is how we have tried to identify it, and there will be more that we can add to that. They are both really important. I just do not think the



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mechanism at the moment allows for that, given the broader context of cultural identity. That is the bit that we need to work on.

Chair: That segues us beautifully into Bayo's question.

Q126 **Mr Alaba:** Yes, that was a question I was coming to. In Southend we have the Kursaal, which is a historic building. It was the first theme park in Europe. It is largely empty and we have been working with the owners to try to help them reimagine the space. It was interesting: I held a public meeting and the historic and architectural value came out, but there were also a lot of happy memories of how people's parents and grandparents met. I will not go on too much about how they were created—I will leave that bit.

Are there international models that we should be looking at? You spoke about Berlin, and Damian mentioned something earlier as well. With contemporary buildings, often people gravitated into those spaces because they were undervalued commercially. They were empty, so they were inhabited by operators because they saw a need.

Michael Kill: I have searched far and wide for this, to be honest with you, and I was hoping to come back with more, but there are only very similar ways of working as we have in the UK, the US being one of them: the national register for preservation grants is one that has been brought up. The biggest one that has been more forward-thinking is UNESCO. We have seen that in Berlin. We can take a lot from it. The fact that techno music has been seen as an important part of cultural heritage is vital. It has made Berghain, similar to a museum and other classic heritage buildings, a really important institution for Germany.

If you think about it, it is not just about that. It is about the narrative that it presents and the value that it puts on contemporary music culture and contemporary culture as a whole. There is a lot we can take from UNESCO. It is the only true example of an extended forward-thinking mechanism or framework for us to consider a broader spectrum, particularly around contemporary culture, which is really important to us. I have a huge amount of examples of clubs in different environments, from Fabric to Sub Club, Ministry of Sound and Heaven, that are really important.

Mr Alaba: The End as well.

Michael Kill: The End, yes. It is a month away from being demolished, sadly. Liam O'Hare, the old general manager, goes there every day with Mr C, Erol Alkan and people like that. They were the original residents and they talk in that context. It would be great to start to protect some of those businesses. At the moment there is no avenue and no clear understanding of how that works. That is why this extension of that cultural heritage position becomes vitally important.

Andrew Lovett: We should draw a line between what we are talking about and the visitor economy, because it is really strong. If you want an



international example, the one that comes to my mind is in Denmark and particularly in Aarhus, where there is a wonderful open-air museum called Den Gamle By. They strongly make a link between the development of that site and the tourist economy. You might want to look at that.

My other quick point is that we talk about listed buildings, but it is a terribly administrative word. I think we could do better with it being a positive brand that could be applied to buildings of architectural and cultural significance. At the moment, it sounds very administrative.

Joshua McTaggart: You talk about a building being a month away from demolition. There were some questions around listed buildings being a challenge, but a building's being listed means that it is more difficult to demolish it. There are a number of buildings on our at-risk register that we believe genuinely could return to cultural use. I do not know off the top of my head whether they are listed—I should know—but Bradford Live, the former Bradford Odeon, and the former Walthamstow Granada have reopened just this year. There are heritage buildings that have been closed for a significant amount of time, and they are protected in some way, potentially, if they are listed. I should know off the top of my head if they are, but I do not—apologies. We should think about protection meaning that something is not just demolished and then local authorities and campaigners can work to get it back into some form of cultural use. The listing structure has real importance, but I agree that there is a way of broadening it and thinking of it as a way of protecting for the future.

Q127 **Mr Alaba:** Michael, we understand the current system for listed buildings, but what would be the advantages of a system that specifically protected buildings of cultural importance and significance?

Michael Kill: This is about inspiration and innovation a lot of the time. We talk about talent incubators. I go back to the Brixton Academy example. It is an aspirational position. Something that is held and protected and ratified as a valued piece of cultural heritage is quite inspirational. Creative venues, particularly those with historical roots, serve as cultural innovators. Operating within those listed heritage spaces often gives us things like authenticity and aesthetic inspiration, enabling site-specific, innovative programming. The narrative backdrop is important, and it also reinforces the value of contemporary culture if we commit to driving down that road and making sure that we have representation and a framework that enables a support mechanism to protect.

The big thing—and we talk about it all the time—is that culture and community identity anchoring. Whether we talk about Bradford or Back to Basics in Leeds or Cream in Liverpool, we are talking about giving areas that community identity. Many venues act as a civic landmark. Sadly, they are normally used as civic landmarks for policing and crime, but they are also used as civic landmarks for people identifying memories—the places they met their loved ones, for example. All these things are



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really important and we have to start to recognise and value them so that we can start to open access, encourage investment, encourage people to be more innovative and start to celebrate them. One thing we do not do very well is celebrate what we have in the UK in terms of contemporary culture, particularly around clubs, electronic music and that side, which are hugely seen as something that people aspire to be part of in the UK.

Andrew Lovett: From a museum perspective, it is all about understanding the human psyche over generations. That is endlessly fascinating. Heritage is quite a resource for people to be curious, and I think curiosity is a really good hallmark. In terms of identity, like good ideas, identity needs to be shared if it is going to be better understood and gain currency. Protecting built heritage is part of that.

Joshua McTaggart: We have assets of community value in the planning system. Strengthening that is a key thing to think about, as is the role of communities and what matters to them and protecting spaces.

I mentioned it earlier, but with the push towards devolution to local authorities and new unitary authorities, and the powers that may be given to metro mayors, we should make sure that at every level of government, from local through to regional, there is a cultural strategy that protects cultural and community heritage, and local people are worked with to identify that. It will make our job easier and the sector's job stronger if, from local government through to regional government, our cultural assets are being protected and seen as assets, not liabilities. With mergers of authorities, new groups of people will potentially inherit assets that they will see as liabilities. How do we make the case that they are assets, not liabilities?

Chair: Thank you all so much for joining us today. It was great to have your various expertise. I forgot to mention at the beginning, in Andrew's honour, that yesterday was Black Country Day.

Andrew Lovett: Indeed.

Chair: I am pleased that we were a little belatedly able to help celebrate by having you here bigging up the Black Country Living Museum and indeed the rest of the Black Country. Thank you all very much for your time. It was great to see you.