

# Written evidence submitted by Making Music

## INTRODUCTION

0.1 Making Music is the UK association for leisure-time music, with 4,000 music groups in membership, comprising around 240,000 hobby musicians. We estimate (based on 2008 DCMS/ACE study Our Creative Talent) that we represent around 30% of the total sector.

0.2 Our members put on over 20,000 events a year, many of them in heritage buildings.

**0.3 Top 3 types of spaces for music groups to meet regularly (e.g. weekly rehearsals) are**

- 54% - churches/ church halls
- 21% - schools and other educational establishments
- 15% - community or village halls

These are used by 90% of groups; other types of spaces:

- 3% use a Local Authority venue
- 2% use a cultural venue not run by a Local Authority (e.g. arts centre)
- 1.5% use a private club / hall (e.g. scout hut, dance studio)

**0.4 Top 5 types of spaces for music groups to stage performances (public events)**

- Churches/ church halls (62%)
- Open air (8%)
- Cultural venue (not Local Authority run, e.g. theatre, arts centre) (7%)
- Community or village hall (6%)
- Local authority venue (6%)

These are used by 89% of groups.

**0.5 It is therefore clear that heritage buildings – which exist in all these categories – are crucial infrastructure for music groups, and the biggest threat to music groups and their activity is that when these buildings close or fall out of use, they are often not replaced.**

These buildings are at the intersection of physical cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage – which needs physical spaces in order to be kept alive and transmitted from one generation to the next. In 2024, the UK signed up to the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and thus committed to considering the needs of that sector, which is about performance and in-person activity, rather than a building, but needs buildings to carry out that activity.

0.6 A note on the particular suitability of heritage buildings to music groups' activity:

- they are – especially if churches – hyperlocal in every community, promoting accessibility
- they often have large enough halls to accommodate large music groups, e.g. choir of 100, amateur orchestra of 65, combination of singers and band
- acoustically, a lot of heritage buildings were built in pre-microphone days and therefore ensured acoustics maximised voice and other sounds
- heritage buildings often have storage space which is needed by music groups
- both town hall-type heritage buildings and churches very often still have a pipe organ, which is helpful to music groups
- these buildings are often built in such a way that noise pollution is not an issue for adjacent buildings and/or they are free-standing buildings (e.g. churches) where noise is not likely to reach residential dwellings

## Question 1

*What can the Government do to make it easier for communities or local businesses to take ownership of historic buildings?*

1.1 Especially in areas of highest and most complex deprivation the social capital in communities is often very low (i.e. availability of people with the time and skills to engage with and commit to a project). Yet those are the communities which would benefit most from keeping heritage buildings available in and for their communities, and from the empowerment that comes from taking on assets in their community and running them themselves.

1.2 These are also the areas which are most in need, often, of regeneration, including lifting and enhancing pride of place, something which these buildings can contribute to, especially if they are or become spaces for the community to come together and run activity and celebrate their locality.

1.3 Support is therefore needed in two ways –

- **Funding or signposting to funding in order to facilitate the regeneration or refurbishment or bringing back to life of historic buildings**
- **Active support and empowerment of local volunteers and communities to take on projects with historic buildings, whether to run them, purchase them or support them**

## Question 3

*What role does built heritage play in the regeneration of local areas and in contributing to economic growth and community identity?*

3.1 As outlined in our introduction, leisure-time music groups use – and rely on - heritage buildings for a large proportion of their public events (performances, concerts, workshops, e.g. 62% in churches) and regular meetings (e.g. weekly rehearsals, of which 54% in churches/church halls).

3.2 When those heritage buildings are closed or sold off for re-development, an essential piece of infrastructure for music groups – and many other community-run groups – falls away, and is often not replaced.

3.3 Like built heritage, leisure-time music groups contribute to the regeneration of local areas, economic growth and community identity:

- **Many groups have a very local and long-standing identity; they are thus part of the fabric of a place (e.g. 92-year-old Wigan Choral Society); they offer something to the local community and are run by the local community**
- **These groups contribute to the sustainability of heritage buildings as their activities are regular over many years (typically, weekly rehearsals for 40 weeks of the year, 3-6 concerts a year), and self-financed, so not dependent on available levels of public funding**
- **Groups contribute to the local night-time economy and local economic growth, as their activities focus on local spending: hiring of (heritage) spaces, local transport, local hospitality, music accessories, programme printing, flower shops, local music teachers and music professionals etc.**

## Question 4

*What are the financial, regulatory and practical barriers to preserving built heritage?*

- *What policy changes are needed to make restoring historic buildings easier and less expensive?*

4.1 To support the fundraising and capital investment needed to maintain historic buildings in use or bring them back into use, it would be **helpful if any listed building refurbishment costs were zero-rated for VAT (as new-builds are).**

4.2 Also, it would be helpful if the **Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (LPWGS) which allows historic churches to recover VAT on building costs could be extended beyond March 2025 to allow time for a policy change on VAT zero-rating.**