

## **Written evidence submitted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales'**

### **Summary**

There are some 750 listed Catholic churches in England and Wales out of a total of around 3,000. Almost all these buildings are of nineteenth or twentieth century date with only a few dating from earlier times. Catholic churches are largely located in towns and cities. Although less well known than they deserve to be due to not being so ancient or so centrally located in towns and cities as their Anglican counterparts, many listed Catholic churches are of considerable architectural and historic interest. However, both the nineteenth and twentieth century churches (particularly those of the 1960s) are reaching a point now where major capital repairs are needed to replace roof coverings and to repair weathered stonework and other materials that erode over time.

Many Catholic churches are in poorer neighbourhoods where congregations do not have the resources to fund major schemes of capital repair. During Covid many churches saw their income drop by half, particularly in the north of England and in Wales. Catholic churches are sacred spaces dedicated to God, and access to grant funding these days can be challenging where grants criteria often expect churches to be able to provide a broad range of alternative secular uses within the church space. Yet Catholic churches provide havens of peace for those of faith or none, offering hope and shelter to many people across a hugely diverse population.

There are over six million Catholics in England and Wales. These days the Catholic community constitutes more members of migrant backgrounds than average populations. These communities face real challenges accessing funding. To protect and ensure that historic Catholic churches can continue to remain open and undertake the extensive work they already do in their communities, it is essential that adequate funding which is straightforward to access is available for urgent capital repairs. Historic England's Grants for Programmes of Major Works (part of the post Covid Heritage Stimulus Fund) which ran between 2020 and 2022 provides a good example of how an effective and targeted capital grants programme can be administered and run. With oversight from Historic England, individual denominations and other bodies concerned with the protection of historic churches in England applied for and ran their grants programmes ensuring funding was focussed where it was most needed. Sadly, no equivalent grants programme was initiated in Wales at that time. The shortage of funding for repairs for historic places of worship in Wales is now a major concern.

Three recommendations to the Select Committee are offered as follows:

1. The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme should be made permanent and return to being fully funded without a limiting cap per place of worship.
2. The UK Government and the devolved administrations need to recognise that historic places of worship are under serious threat at the present time and to provide a leadership role,

working cross-party, and with the principal denominations and civil society to develop a plan of action for the future of church buildings.

3. Government should establish a new capital funding scheme for listed places of worship of all denominations and faiths of at least £50m per annum, with proportionate funding provided for devolved administrations, to restore grant support for urgent capital repairs to the level that existed previously (taking account of inflation) and prior to the closure of the Grants for Places of Worship Programme in 2017.

## **Introduction**

1. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW) is the permanent assembly of Catholic bishops across the two member nations, which acts as the national representative body of the Catholic Church in England and Wales and works towards the common interests of all Catholic dioceses and parishes, representing these in the public sphere through engagement with Government consultations and Parliamentary calls for evidence.
2. The CBCEW is funded through an annual levy on the twenty-one dioceses of England and Wales. It has no centralised funding of its own and cannot give grants for the repair of churches or for the conservation of historic contents. Contrary to public perception, neither the CBCEW nor Catholic Dioceses, nor Catholic religious orders, receive any funding from the Vatican. Each Catholic diocese is a registered charity, and all diocesan church buildings are owned by the diocese – in contrast to the Church of England where each individual church is effectively its own charity.
3. There are currently around 3,000 Catholic churches and chapels in England and Wales open for public worship. The vast majority of these are owned by the 21 Catholic dioceses and operate as parish churches. Some parish churches are owned and run by religious orders. Of the nearly 3,000 churches, some 750 are listed buildings. Many more churches of historic interest (but unlisted) are situated in Conservation Areas.
4. As of 2018, there were 6.2 million Catholics across England and Wales. The Catholic population in England and Wales broadly constitutes more members of migrant backgrounds than average Christian populations, with sizeable communities from India, Nigeria, Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, Ireland and the Philippines to name a few. <sup>1</sup>

## **Background to Catholic churches in England and Wales**

5. Historic Catholic churches are less well known in the UK than they deserve to be yet they offer a rich heritage alongside diverse communities. There are a number of reasons why historic Catholic churches are less prominent, and some background history may be helpful in to provide context.

<sup>1</sup> Bullivant, S. (2018) Contemporary Catholicism in England and Wales; A statistical report based on recent British Social Attitudes survey data, St Mary's University Twickenham  
<https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/research/centres/benedict-xvi/docs/2018-feb-contemporary-catholicism-report-may16.pdf> (accessed 31 January 2025)

6. For over 200 years after the Reformation, the saying of Mass was illegal and Catholics faced fines, imprisonment and even death. To this day, the anti-Catholic Gordon riots of June 1780 remain the single most destructive public disturbance in London's history, with eight days of mayhem when Catholic chapels in foreign embassies were sacked and houses of prominent Catholics torched. The army was finally called in to restore order. Over 300 people died.
7. Whilst private chapels existed in the houses of Catholic families, it was the 1791 Catholic Relief Act that first permitted the building of public places of worship. Full Catholic Emancipation followed in 1829 and the Hierarchy of Catholic Bishops was reinstated and Catholic dioceses created in 1850. This, combined with the Catholic Revival of the nineteenth century and the Irish Famine which began in 1845 and brought thousands of impoverished Irish to the fast-growing industrial heartlands of Britain, led to a surge in church building which continued well after the Second World War and into the 1960s. In recent years, Catholic churches have welcomed members of Catholic migrant communities from all over the world.

#### **Listed Catholic churches in England and Wales and the Taking Stock Project**

8. Whereas Anglican churches, whether medieval, Georgian, Victorian or twentieth century, tend to occupy central and highly visible sites in cities, towns and villages, Catholic churches are often to be found in secondary locations, mainly in towns and cities. Historic Catholic churches often have quite plain exteriors so as not to draw too much attention to themselves, whilst interiors can be highly decorative. The result has been that, until recently, many Catholic churches were either unlisted or under-graded.
9. In 2005, Historic England and the CBCEW commenced a project with individual dioceses called the Taking Stock Project. In an extensive exercise jointly funded by Historic England and individual dioceses, reviews were undertaken of all diocesan churches with a view to establishing the architectural and historic importance of these buildings. This hugely important and ambitious project, covering both England and Wales, was finally completed in 2019. The results publicly accessible via the Taking Stock website.<sup>2</sup> The Taking Stock Project has provided dioceses, parishes and the public with up to date, authoritative information on the historic and architectural significance of Catholic church buildings in England and Wales.
10. As listings are being reviewed by Historic England (still an ongoing process) many Catholic churches are being upgraded or being listed for the first time. These churches range from under appreciated Victorian churches to post war modernist churches. The overall aim is to ensure that the listing of

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<sup>2</sup> Taking Stock <https://taking-stock.org.uk>

Catholic built heritage is brought up to date aligning with current listing criteria. This is a hugely welcome development, not least in that it raises the profile of historic Catholic church buildings amongst a wider public and generates interest in them. New listings have also allowed many more parishes to reclaim VAT spent on repairs through the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (LPWGS). By being open to all listed places of worship, the LPWGS provides a simple grant scheme with a straightforward application process that is now regarded by all in the sector as a lifeline. The positive impact of this grant scheme, administered in recent years by helpful and conscientious consultants on behalf of the DCMS, is widely acknowledged. The scheme needs now to be made permanent and the cap per church of £25k introduced a few weeks ago needs to be removed as this penalises larger churches with more expensive capital repairs due to their size.

***Select Committee Questions:***

**What are the most significant challenges facing owners and operators of building heritage assets, and how are they affecting what those sites can offer?**

**What interventions are needed to prevent the managed decline of heritage assets on publicly owned land?**

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

11. The majority of Catholic churches in this country are either nineteenth or twentieth century in date. Nineteenth century churches tend to be extremely well built but they are now reaching a point in time where they need major capital works. Materials, such as leadwork, fail over time, slates slip as fixings erode, and stonework, particularly at high level, need replacement.
12. Many twentieth century buildings are reaching the same point in their building life-cycle. This is particularly the case with the modernist post war churches of the 1950s and 1960s which were often built using new and experimental methods and materials. These types of churches, many now listed due their innovative design, are also reaching a point where major repairs are urgently needed.
13. Under the 2014 First World War Centenary Cathedral Repairs Fund, a grant of nearly £1m was made to Plymouth Cathedral for roof and stonework repairs and over £1m to Clifton Cathedral in Bristol. Plymouth Cathedral dates from 1858.<sup>3</sup> Stone parapets were crumbling and the leadwork behind had reached the end of its life. Clifton Cathedral is a remarkable building designed by the Percy Thomas Partnership and constructed between 1969-73. Metal sheeting used to cover the roof and the spire

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<sup>3</sup> Plymouth Cathedral. Taking Stock <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/plymouth-st-mary-and-st-boniface-cathedral/> (accessed 3 February 2025)

was of an inadequate thickness and, as a result, deteriorated at a rapid rate causing damaging water ingress. The grant enabled the roof covering to be replaced using materials of the correct thickness.

14. The most significant challenges faced by those responsible for the protection and conservation of historic Catholic churches – whether belonging to dioceses or to religious orders – is shortage of funding for capital repairs, and this for a heritage which has only recently come to greater prominence.
15. The closure of places of worship during Covid put enormous strain on Catholic parishes with, in most cases, incomes dropping by half. This loss of income was particularly acute in the north of England and in poorer neighbourhoods throughout the country where contributions are traditionally received at Mass on a Sunday. In more affluent areas, particularly those parishes with established planned giving programmes, parish income held up better. Such schemes are only possible in areas where people's incomes are more secure. The closure of churches during Covid was damages for a range of reasons, but financially it had a serious negative impact.
16. Whilst Catholic churches are not publicly owned and belong either to dioceses or to religious orders (or are in some cases owned privately), these are buildings which provide enormous public benefit in a whole range of ways. The contribution that churches and chapels make to the wider community is well captured in the National Churches Trust's two groundbreaking reports – The House of Good<sup>4</sup> (2020) and The House of Good: Health<sup>5</sup> (2024).
17. A typical Catholic parish will have a number of parish groups. Many parish groups are part of vital national networks which do essential work in the wider community integrating migrants, helping ex-offenders integrate into society, assisting the needy and also assisting those who are unable to participate fully in society because of illness and infirmity. For example, many Catholic parishes will have groups representing national and international Catholic charities such as Caritas<sup>6</sup>, CAFOD<sup>7</sup>, and the St. Vincent de Paul Society which, nationally, made 475,064 visits and spent 625,084 hours visiting such people last year.<sup>8</sup> It is clear that the work of these groups aligns closely with the Government's evolving health strategy as evidenced by its 'Change NHS: help build a health service fit for the future' consultation.<sup>9</sup> Catholic churches also provide a range of social services – food banks, homeless shelters, nurseries and the like. Keeping buildings in good repair allows these important services to continue.

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<sup>4</sup> House of Good Report (2020) National Churches Trust <https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/house-good-research> (accessed 31 January 2025)

<sup>5</sup> House of Good: Health Report (2024) National Churches Trust <https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/house-good-health> (accessed 31 January 2025)

<sup>6</sup> Caritas Social Action Network <https://www.caritas.org/where-caritas-work/europe/england-and-wales-csan/>

<sup>7</sup> Catholic Agency for Overseas Development <https://cafod.org.uk/>

<sup>8</sup> St Vincent de Paul Society <https://svp.org.uk/visiting-and-befriending>

<sup>9</sup> Change NHS: Help build a health service fit for the future <https://change.nhs.uk/en-GB> (accessed 3 February 2025)

18. Catholic churches are open to all, and it is noteworthy that visitors to Catholic churches – of all faiths or none – will often visit because they are seeking a place of peace, quiet and reflection. Catholic churches are sacred spaces dedicated to God. Under Canon Law (which applies to the whole of the Catholic Church, globally) they cannot be used for secular activities in the way that many churches of other denominations are today. Visitors, however, appreciate the quiet and often beautiful interiors. It is increasingly recognised that quiet and beautiful spaces can contribute to people's sense of well-being.
19. In order to support the enormously valuable work carried out across the country by churches, buildings need to be in good order and to have adequate facilities. Again, this is a matter of funding. A church and its associated buildings in poor condition due to lack of resources can easily encourage a spiral of decline. Often, this is the case in areas where these buildings are significant landmarks yet where, for example, past housing clearance and general economic decline have brought additional issues. The large and outstanding Grade II\* church of St Michael's, Elswick, Newcastle,<sup>10</sup> once served the thriving community of workers at the vast Armstrong Elswick Works which specialised in making hydraulic machinery and armaments and later expanded into shipbuilding on the Tyne. The housing around the church was demolished in the 1960s and the factory closed and was demolished in 1979. St Michael's thus lost its hinterland and its congregation shrank.
20. In the last decade new housing has been built on the cleared sites, but the church had declined and was nearly closed entirely a decade ago. It needs repair and the former presbytery, currently in a very poor state of repair, is on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register.
21. With support from Historic England, the parish is now seeking funding for a feasibility study, the aim of which is to work with the local community to find a way to bring the presbytery back into beneficial use. It is these kinds of partnerships that are critically important to stem and reverse decline. More focus needs to be given by government to encourage this kind of joint working to support places of worship bring ancillary buildings back into beneficial use to support local communities. Encouraging – and providing funding for – more support officers is an obvious step. Coming up with solutions for these kinds of buildings at risk is more than an individual parish, or even diocese, can manage (or afford) without help and it can often take time for ways forward to be found and for regenerative projects to be got off the ground.

#### **How effective are the current funding and finance models for built heritage?**

22. There is absolutely no doubt that at the present time places of worship are the single category of historic building most at risk in the UK. The current wave of church closures in Scotland and in Wales provide clear evidence of this and the situation in England could follow the same trajectory. In the Catholic context, shifts in population from the inner cities, particularly in the north of England, has left a number of fine nineteenth century churches, originally built for large Irish immigrant

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<sup>10</sup> St Michael's, Elswick. Taking Stock <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/newcastle-upon-tyne-st-michael/> (accessed 3 February 2025)

populations, struggling. Declining Mass attendance and a shortage of priests are also taking their toll.

23. However, Catholic immigrants to this country in recent years from all over the world seek out their local Catholic church, often on arrival. Historic Catholic churches are thus often the first introduction these communities have to this country's heritage. One of the churches which the CBCEW funded under Historic England's Grants for Programmes of Major Works was St Mary's, Great Yarmouth.<sup>11</sup> This fine nineteenth century church needed its whole roof renewed as the materials had failed over time. The Heritage Lottery Fund's dedicated Grants for Places of Worship scheme (GPOW) scheme had just been closed in 2017 when the church suffered a devastating flood. A failed gutter brought water into the church destroying a much-loved wall painting of Our Lady of Great Yarmouth. The outlook was bleak with no chance of grant funding until the Culture Recovery Fund of 2020-22.
24. The congregation of St Mary's comprises people from no fewer than 51 countries from around the world – a collection of national flags stands proudly in the church. To understand how much getting the roof repaired meant to this congregation see the link cited below.<sup>12</sup> This church was just one of the 39 projects the CBCEW was able to fund with its allocation of £6.6m under the two tranches of Culture Recovery Fund funding through Historic England's Grants for Programmes of Major Works. The CBCEW published a booklet - '*Living Stones*' - in 2023 to celebrate the success of this programme and to thank all those who had worked so hard to ensure their projects were completed on time and to budget.<sup>13</sup>
25. Whilst the Grants for Programmes of Major Works was a one-off grant scheme, it illustrated very clearly how partnerships between Historic England and denominations such as the Church of England and the Catholic Church, and organisations such as the National Churches Trust, can work to deliver targeted grant support to where it is most needed. Sadly, Wales did not initiate a similar scheme.
26. The way this particular grant scheme was organised and managed provides an excellent model for the future. Organisations - such as the denominations themselves- which know where the most needy historic church buildings are can target grants where they are most needed, working closely with dioceses and individual parishes and with expert advice and support from highly professional staff at Historic England.
27. This Historic England scheme applied only to Grade I and Grade II\* churches and the timescales for delivery - which were set by Treasury - were unrealistically tight given that, to meet a March 31<sup>st</sup> deadline, work (often on roofs at high level) had to be carried out in the depths of winter with wind, rain, snow and frost making building work extremely challenging. However, overall this grant scheme

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<sup>11</sup> St Mary's, Great Yarmouth. Taking Stock <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/great-yarmouth-st-mary-2/> (accessed 3 February 2025)

<sup>12</sup> Historic England (2022) Restoring St Mary's Church in Great Yarmouth [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INk\\_WtNEt5Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INk_WtNEt5Q) (accessed 31 January 2025)

<sup>13</sup> CBCEW (2023) Living Stones: A Celebration of Achievement [www.cbcew.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/04/Living-Stones-Patrimony-2023.pdf](http://www.cbcew.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/04/Living-Stones-Patrimony-2023.pdf) (accessed 31 January 2025)

was judged to have been an enormous success. It should provide a model for the future, balancing expert oversight by Historic England with efficient and targeted delivery.

28. Obtaining grant support for Catholic places of worship from the NLHF can be challenging. After the closure of GPOW in 2017, very few Catholic churches were successful in obtaining Lottery grants due to the changes in grant criteria which focused much more on outreach, engagement and activities which Catholic churches find hard to deliver due to Catholic churches being sacred spaces. The complexity of the NLHF grant application process was also a challenge for congregations who found themselves in direct competition in the open NLHF programmes with visitor attractions such as museums with professional education and outreach teams.
29. The announcement in July last year by NLHF of a specific focus on funding for places of worship, simpler criteria and a greater focus on supporting projects where historic fabric is at risk has been welcome. However, it will take time for a pipeline of applications from Catholic churches to come through and the recent uncertainty around the future of the LPWGS will give congregations pause for thought.
30. However, gaining significant grant support from NLHF is still a complex undertaking requiring a level of knowledge and expertise that is often beyond the scope of Catholic congregations, particularly immigrant communities where English may not be a first language and where there may be hesitancy, particularly amongst those who have come to this country to avoid persecution, about form filling what appear to them to be akin to official documents – a potentially risky endeavour in the countries from which they have fled.
31. These communities need more help to build the confidence, knowledge base and skills to be able to apply for NLHF support.
32. The Syro-Malabar Catholic community from southern India (of which there are now some 80,000 in Great Britain)<sup>14</sup> now have as their Cathedral the former Jesuit church of St Ignatius in Preston<sup>15</sup> (where the poet Gerard Manely Hopkins was a curate). Now called the Cathedral of St Alphonsa, it is a Grade II\* building of the 1830s near the centre of Preston. It has a serious problem with dry rot in the roof because the roof coverings need to be renewed. With some help back in 2014 the congregation was successful in securing a £100k grant from the 2014 Roof Repair Fund but this only enabled repair of a small section of roof.

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<sup>14</sup> Catholic Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain <https://eparchyofgreatbritain.org/csmegb-at-a-glance/> (accessed 3 February 2025)

<sup>15</sup> Taking Stock. Cathedral of St Alphonsa. <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/preston-st-ignatius/> (accessed 3 February 2025)



33. At that time the church had not been dedicated as the Syro-Malabar cathedral so was unable to benefit from the First World War Centenary Cathedral Repairs Fund between 2014-18. The CBCEW was able to support further roof repairs under the Historic England's Grants for Programmes of Major Works in 2020-2022 but there remains a very large section of roof, including the roof of the nave, which needs renewal. Meanwhile, dry rot remains an issue. This community is trying to raise funds for a further phase of work but it does not have the money or the expertise itself to manage major funding applications of the kind needed to ensure this wonderful building is fully restored.

**What should long-term public funding for the sector look like?**

34. For the places of worship sector what is needed is the establishment of a grant programme for capital repairs accessible for all three grades of listed building. This needs to be of the order of £50m per annum with proportionate funding provided for the devolved administrations.
35. Up until 2017 when GPOW was closed, there had been grant support for capital repairs in one form or another since 1977. Whilst the 2014 Roof Repair Fund, the First World War Centenary Cathedral Repairs Fund and, most recently, Historic England's Grants for Programmes of Major Works, have all been extremely helpful, and NLHF's new focus on places of worship is most welcome, what is missing is a secure and long term funding stream that allows churches to undertake the necessary capital repairs that all historic buildings need at intervals, which local congregations are unable to fund. Such a scheme needs to have an application process that is simple and straightforward
36. It has sometimes been asserted that grant schemes for buildings reward neglect. This assertion is misplaced and fails to recognise the difference between maintenance and the requirement for cyclical capital repairs. Regular maintenance certainly staves off decay, but every historic building requires capital repairs from time to time as original materials fail or design flaws are identified – for example inadequately sized gutters and downpipes which cannot now cope with the much more regular extreme weather events occurring today.

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

37. Historic places of worship can make a major contribution to the regeneration of local areas. They provide architectural foci to neighbourhoods and help to create a sense of place. This concept was well understood by the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) which was established in 1981 to regenerate the depressed dockland areas of East London. From the outset, the LDDC recognised the importance of local churches as the historic centres of neighbourhoods and during the Corporation's 17-year existence the LDDC funded the repair and restoration of all the key historic church buildings in the LDDC area. This was a remarkable and far-sighted achievement.
38. Many of these Docklands churches were in a very poor state of repair at the time and some had been bomb damaged during the War. It was a bold and innovative policy by the LDDC at the time but one which led directly to neighbourhoods - such as Limehouse - being revitalised. Decaying buildings around Hawksmoor's great church of St Anne, Limehouse, built in 1730, were renovated and brought back into use. Similar transformation was seen elsewhere around historic churches in Docklands.
39. The significance of church buildings as landmarks around which regeneration can be focussed is all too often overlooked. The settings of historic churches can be compromised by road schemes or unsympathetic development coming forward with little thought to heritage considerations. Sometimes, historic churches have been left surrounded by busy roads which make access to them challenging and ultimately threatening their long-term future.
40. Historic England initiated the Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) and High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) programmes in 2018. These heritage-led regeneration schemes, spread around the country, have had a significant impact. Based on partnerships between Historic England, local authorities and local communities, some £92m of government funding and some £3m of funding from the NLHF has unlocked a further £140m of further private and public investment<sup>16</sup> The restoration of the roof at St Mary's, Great Yarmouth (mentioned above), was warmly welcomed by the HSHAZ Partnership, even though the church itself was located a short distance from the actual High Street.
41. In Rochdale, the boundary of the Drake Street HAZ included the astonishing Grade II\* church of St John the Baptist.<sup>17</sup> Built in 1924 and based on Justinian's great mid sixth century Byzantine church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, the church of St John the Baptist is covered internally with elaborate mosaic decoration. Urgent repairs to roof coverings, which were failing due to age, causing water ingress and damage to the mosaics, were needed, as well as repointing of brickwork. A major restoration programme was undertaken with funding from the NLHF, and from Historic England's Grants for Programmes of Major Works, overseen by CBCEW. As at Great Yarmouth, a restored church can breathe new life into an area.

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<sup>16</sup> Heritage Action Zones, Historic England, <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-action-zones/regenerating-historic-high-streets> (accessed 31 January 2025)

<sup>17</sup> St John the Baptist, Rochdale. Taking Stock. <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/rochdale-st-john-the-baptist/> (accessed 3 February 2025)

## **How can heritage buildings be supported to increase energy efficiency and contribute to the Government's net zero targets?**

42. Changing existing heating systems for church buildings is very expensive, as is the cost of energy more generally, but the Catholic Church in England and Wales is committed to reducing its carbon footprint. Historic church buildings, due to their height, volume and design, can present great challenges when it comes to heating. Dioceses have been asked to set target dates for given reductions in carbon emissions. A number of Catholic organisations, including the Diocese of Salford, Cafod and St. Mary's University, Twickenham have led the widely acclaimed Guardians of Creation project<sup>18</sup> which produces guides as to how parishes can reduce their carbon emissions as well as guidance on carbon accounting. Parishes are small organisations with limited administrative support and, therefore, straightforward approaches to providing government support for projects that increase energy efficiency or reduce carbon emissions are especially important.

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

43. From the perspective of historic churches, the principal barrier is financial. Without a dedicated grant scheme for capital repairs – which existed in various forms between 1977 and 2017 – it is extraordinarily challenging for churches to raise the necessary funds for major projects such as re-roofing or for other significant repairs. The almost doubling of scaffolding, building materials and construction costs since the pandemic has made the situation much worse. Whilst most Catholic parishes can manage to raise the funds needed to maintain their churches, it is the major capital works required once in a lifetime that present the greatest challenge.
44. Very helpful though the new National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) policy relating to places of worship is (the £85m over three years announced last July, and the further £15m for strategic projects), access to this funding requires knowledge and understanding of NLHF processes which not all parishes have, particularly those in the most disadvantaged areas. Not that many applications from Catholic churches have come through to NLHF since last July, suggesting that parishes remain cautious and nervous of the complexity.
45. There is then the current uncertainty regarding the future of the LPWGS which has been renewed for a year, but with a cap of £25k for claims from individual places of worship. It is already clear that this cap is going to cause major issues for those churches with repair schemes costing more than £125k. Nottingham Cathedral<sup>19</sup>, for example, which is hoping its application for Round II funding from the NLHF will be successful so that it can go ahead and restore the outstanding original painted decoration designed by A.W.N. Pugin (Nottingham Cathedral's 'Restoring Pugin' Project)<sup>20</sup> is now looking at an unfunded budget increase of £250k just to cover the VAT.

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<sup>18</sup> Guardians of Creation Project <https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/research/areas/theology-and-ethics/guardians-of-creation-project/about.aspx> (accessed 31 January 2025)

<sup>19</sup> Nottingham Cathedral. Taking Stock. <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/nottingham-cathedral-church-of-st-barnabas/> (accessed 3 February 2025)

<sup>20</sup> Restoring Pugin. Nottingham Cathedral <https://www.stbarnabascathedral.org.uk/heritage/restoring-pugin/> (accessed 3 February 2025)

46. Then there are the very large churches with extensive roofs where even a section of reroofing can cost well over £250k. The Grade I church of St Walburge, Preston<sup>21</sup> was built in 1850 on a heroic scale. Now being cared for by a religious order, the Order of Christ the King Sovereign Priest, the church needs the entire 1850s roof covering renewed as slates are slipping and leadwork flashings and parapet gutters have failed. One third of St Walburge's roof was recovered with funding from Historic England's Grants for Programmes of Major Works in 2021/22 but two thirds remain to be done. The church is hoping to apply to NLHF for support but, given the sums needed, the recent announcement of the LPWGS cap has come as a serious blow.
47. Turning to Wales, there is very little funding for historic churches. There was no equivalent of the First World War Centenary Cathedral Repair Fund in Wales and no equivalent of Historic England's post Covid Grants for Programmes of Major Works. In addition, the Buildings at Risk Register for Wales does not serve historic churches well. Assessments of the condition of listed buildings in Wales is carried out by consultants driving past buildings and making a cursory assessment of condition. Unlike in England, where churches are assessed by Historic England experts before being placed on the Heritage at Risk Register, no internal inspections are carried out at churches in Wales. Furthermore, the Buildings at Risk Register for Wales is not yet publicly accessible.
48. The shortcomings of the 'drive by' approach is illustrated by two Catholic churches in Wales (Grade II\* Our Lady Star of the Sea, Amlwch, Anglesey<sup>22</sup> and Blessed Sacrament, Gorseinon, near Swansea).<sup>23</sup> Both churches are suffering serious water ingress. Amlwch dates from 1933 and is an unusual design in reinforced concrete with *dalle de verre* style glass incorporated into the roof. It has been closed for two years due to the roof leaking. Gorseinon, a 1960s church inspired by the design of Liverpool Metropolitan<sup>24</sup> Cathedral, is still in use for worship but has extensive areas of water ingress and damp due to faults in the original design. It emerged last year that both churches were listed on the Buildings at Risk Register for Wales not only as being in good condition but were listed at the very top end of the scale for good condition. Had the interiors of these two buildings been inspected the opposite would have been found to be the case. As well as Amlwch, there are other churches in Wrexham Diocese in north Wales which are in urgent need of repair – the roof at Our Lady Star of the Sea in Llandudno<sup>25</sup> needs replacing and major work is required at Wrexham Cathedral<sup>26</sup> where unexpected ground subsidence has caused part of the rear of the nave to be cordoned off – yet parishes and the Diocese of Wrexham do not have the funds. The Welsh Government urgently needs to recognise the threats to historic places of worship in Wales and to work positively with denominations to provide support.

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<sup>21</sup> St Walburge, Preston. Taking Stock. <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/preston-st-walburge/> (accessed 3 February 2025)

<sup>22</sup> Our Lady Star of the Sea Amlwch. Taking Stock. <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/amlwch-our-lady-star-of-the-sea-and-st-winefride/> (accessed 3 February 2025)

<sup>23</sup> Blessed Sacrament, Gorseinon. Taking Stock. <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/gorseinon-blessed-sacrament/> (accessed 3 February 2025)

<sup>24</sup> Our Lady Star of the Sea, Llandudno. Taking Stock <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/llandudno-our-lady-star-of-the-sea/> (accessed 3 February 2025)

<sup>25</sup> Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral. Taking Stock. <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/liverpool-metropolitan-cathedral-of-christ-the-king/> (accessed 3 February 2025)

<sup>26</sup> Wrexham Cathedral. Taking Stock <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/wrexham-cathedral-church-of-our-lady-of-sorrows/> (accessed 3 February 2025)

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

49. Good restoration is not cheap, but conservation carried out well using appropriate materials stands the test of time. Cheap repairs using inappropriate materials should never be encouraged. This kind of approach, common in the 1960s and 1970s, has led to all kinds of fabric problems emerging in recent years. The key is adequate funding being available and access to properly qualified professional advice. Historic England's requirement that all architects and surveyors working on grant supported projects be fully conservation qualified helps to ensure that repair works are properly specified at the outset and are then overseen by individuals with a sound knowledge of traditional materials and appropriate methods of repair and conservation techniques.

### **What policies would ensure the UK workforce has the right skills to maintain our heritage assets?**

50. Without adequate funding for capital repairs to historic places of worship and uncertainty from year to year over availability of funding streams – for example with the LPWGS - the decline in craft and conservation skills is likely to continue. This is extremely serious for the long-term protection of historic churches across the country.
51. The closure of GPOW in 2017 led directly to the winding up of a number of smaller architectural practices in East Anglia. These were practices that specialised almost exclusively in historic church repair schemes which dried up as grant funding came to an end. This had an immediate knock-on effect on those builders and craftspeople specialising in the repair of churches. At the same time, and across the country, the number of firms specialising in historic buildings conservation has declined.
52. The Culture Recovery Fund and Historic England's Grants for Programmes of Major Works (part of the Heritage Stimulus Fund) provided new funding to get building repair schemes underway after Covid. This provided immediate employment for many skilled people (restorers of stained glass, stone masons and stone carvers, skilled carpenters, roofing experts and many more).
53. The CBCEW received £6.6m to support some 39 projects under this scheme. These projects were all completed in 2022. Since then, there have been no further grant schemes other than the NLHF's announcement last July of a three-year programme targeted at historic places of worship at risk, and the announcement of the continuation for one year only of the LPWGS earlier last month. For young people wanting to embark on careers in skilled conservation work this kind of stop start approach to funding is demotivating. Training and apprenticeships are important, but if long term career

opportunities are not there at the end of these, the skills base in this country will simply decline further.

54. Regular long-term funding for capital repairs to historic places of worship would provide job opportunities for skilled workers in all the many aspects of repair and conservation.

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