

Memorandum of Evidence by Cambridgeshire Historic Churches Trust

United Kingdom Parliament Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee Impact of Covid-19 on the Heritage Sector

1 Status and Relevant Experience of the Organisation Submitting Evidence

1.1 Cambridgeshire Historic Churches Trust is an unincorporated charitable trust established in 1983 to assist the repair and improvement of churches of all denominations in the county. Within the Trust's area of operation there are over 400 churches, chapels and meeting houses currently in use for worship. 295 belong to the Church of England, 21 to the Roman Catholic Church and about 90 to the Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Churches, in some instances shared. There are 9 meetings of the Society of Friends (Quakers) and a number of congregations not attached to any of these formal organisations. Within the county there are two cathedral churches, Ely and Peterborough; in theory they too would fall within the Trust's remit, but in practice they do not look to the Trust for assistance and this memorandum does not deal with the impact of Covid-19 on them.

1.2 Churches are not in essence part of the heritage sector. They are faith organisations. However, like other owners of listed buildings they have a responsibility to the community and posterity for the care of the heritage assets in their custody. The great majority of the church buildings belonging to the Church of England in the county, and many belonging to other denominations, are included in the statutory list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. In England as a whole, places of worship form about 14,500, 3.6%, of the total stock of just under 400,000 listed buildings. Those listed Grade 1, about 4,000, are 45% of the total buildings in that Grade. We will attempt to provide a supplementary memorandum giving a breakdown between Grades 1, 2* and 2 for the county.

1.3 The Trust's charitable purposes are set out in detail in Appendix 1 to this Memorandum. In pursuit of these purposes the Trust has since 1983 awarded almost £3 million in interest-free loans and over £1 million in grants for works of repair and improvement. The loans, repayable over four years, give congregations time to raise funds without delaying works, and they tide them over while they await repayment of Value Added Tax through the Listed Places of Worship reimbursement scheme. The grants, though usually limited to a maximum of £3,000, can often be the key to obtaining larger sums from major funding organisations. The improvements which the Trust supports in this way, such as toilets, serveries, better heating and modern electric wiring, enable church buildings to be more widely used in the 21st century. Along with repairs they are therefore important to the healthy survival of the buildings as important community and heritage assets. In order to foster public understanding of and support for the ecclesiastical built heritage the Trust also organises conferences and guided tours, but these are at present suspended.

2 Specific questions on which the Committee has called for evidence

2.1 What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector?

2.1.1 The chief potential direct financial impact on the Trust itself will be on the annual Ride and Stride which is due to take place on Saturday 12th September 2020. This nationally co-ordinated event involves people obtaining sponsorship to visit numbers of churches during the day. The proceeds are shared equally between the Trust and any churches nominated by the participants. In 2019 this raised a total of £16,469, of which £8,426 was retained by the Trust. Together with resulting Gift Aid recoverable, this will provide some 38% of the Trust's total net income of a little over £27,000 for the financial year to 30th June 2020, upon which it will rely in order to pay grants to churches in the following financial year. The remainder of the Trust's income is from membership subscriptions, donations, Gift Aid recoverable on these, and a currently small amount of interest on investments. It is hoped that Ride and Stride can take place this year in some form, but the constraints on activity then still in operation are likely to limit its scope and the financial returns.

2.1.2 For the churches which the Trust exists to support, the consequences of Covid-19 have been considerably more severe. The suspension of church services has deprived churches of cash collections and of fees for weddings and funerals. More significantly in financial terms for many churches, the prohibition of gatherings has led to the cessation of fundraising events which commonly engage with the local community beyond regular churchgoers and can be a major source of income to meet regular outgoings. Those outgoings include clergy employment costs, which in the Church of England are met through the Ministry Share payable by each parish to the Diocese. This is not widely understood. The Share pays for the cost of stipendiary clergy and their pensions. Neither the Church of England nationally nor the dioceses have a large pot of money to see them through the present crisis.

2.1.3 The Trust does not generally seek financial information from the churches in the county, except when they apply for loans or grants. Since the Trust is administered exclusively by volunteers working from home, and the officers of individual churches are busy grappling with the immediate challenges posed by Covid-19, it is not possible to collect and quantify, within the time available, an assessment of the financial losses suffered by churches across the county. This could anyway be no more than a prediction, based on past figures as an indication of income currently foregone. The actual outcome will depend upon how soon official controls on activity are relaxed, and on people's individual confidence in the safety of resuming physical association with others. The best we can do is supply (Appendix 2) recent years' figures for a very small number of churches with which the Trust's officers have direct personal connections, as an illustration of the impact likely to be felt across the county.

2.2 How effectively has the support provided by DCMS, other Government departments and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?

2.2.1 So far this has been confined to regulations and guidance as to the closure and subsequent re-opening of church buildings. The problems identified in this memorandum lie mainly in the future. We are not aware that any support in that regard has so far been sought or offered.

2.3 What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?

2.3.1 The current loss of income will be a setback from which it may take years to recover. Coupled with other demands arising from Covid-19, such as the need to make good the deficit in diocesan funds for the employment of clergy, this will make it hard for church congregations to afford routine works, let alone more major repairs and improvements. For many of them, vital preventive maintenance such as gutter clearance is beyond their DIY capability and contractors have to be engaged. Listed buildings, especially if they are relatively tall, periodically need costly renewals in order to remain wind- and weather-tight and avoid deterioration. While some help is available from Cambridgeshire Historic Churches Trust and more major funders, congregations are expected to contribute substantially from local sources. The present damage to their finances will have a longer-term effect on their ability to discharge these responsibilities. It is too early to quantify the financial support they will need to rectify this, or to suggest how such support should be made available.

2.4 What lessons can be learnt from how DCMS, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with Covid-19?

2.4.1 As we have said at 2.2.1 above, the official response to Covid-19 has been concerned with the immediate practicalities of closure and re-opening, and churches have not so far expressed views to the Trust about this. It is too early to draw conclusions about the way in which churches have interpreted and implemented official restrictions, or whether their actions have been able to mitigate the financial impact.

2.5 How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation to available deal with future challenges?

2.5.1 Churches are already encouraged by major funders such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund to reach out to a wider and more diverse public and especially to those who do not have any

existing engagement with heritage. Given the significance of church buildings as embodiments of the history of their local communities, there is also largely untapped potential to contribute to an expansion of cultural tourism. To realise these opportunities it is essential to have appropriate interpretative material readily accessible to visitors. Technology exists, and is being developed, to assist this, and also to capture revenue from visitors. That will require investment. Churches will look to DCMS to find ways of making funding available.

Appendix 1

The Trust's founding Declaration of Trust states its charitable purposes as "The preservation repair maintenance improvement upkeep and reconstruction of Churches in the County of Cambridge and or monuments fittings fixtures stained glass furniture ornaments and chattels in such churches and of the churchyard belonging to any such churches." There are ancillary powers to do "all such things as are permitted by law to the Trustees of a Charitable Trust and as are incidental to the execution of the trusts hereof" and "all such things as shall further the attainment of the objects of the Trust".

"Church" is defined as "any Church Chapel or other building used for public worship whether belonging to or used by the Church of England or any other religious body".

"The County of Cambridge" consisted in 1983 of the present (2020) administrative county of Cambridgeshire together with what is now the unitary local government area of Peterborough. The Trust's sphere of operation continues to extend to that whole area.

Appendix 2 Illustrative Examples

(a) St Mary's, Mepal is a small Grade 2 listed 13th century church, sensitively restored in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It serves a fenland village 6 miles west of Ely with just over 1,000 population, many aged over 70 years.

In 2019 cash collections totalled £796.75. Ten fundraising events raised a net total of £2,921.03 but donations of £988.50 were to a large extent prompted by those events. Fees for weddings and funerals totalled £2,147.00. In 2020 much of this revenue totalling £6,853.28 has already been missed and there is no certainty about the resumption of the relevant activities in forthcoming months, bearing in mind not only official restrictions but also the likely risk-averse attitudes of a predominantly elderly clientele. Of total outgoings of £16,584.20 in 2019 the chief item was £11,389.12 Ministry Share payable to the Diocese of Ely towards clergy costs. This annual call on resources will continue.

Total net assets at 31st December 2019 were £13,712.09 – considerably less than normal annual outgoings. The building is at present in generally satisfactory repair following substantial expenditure within the past decade, but each quinquennial survey, the next of which is due in 2021, reveals the need for significant work.

(b) St Peter ad Vincula, Coveney is a small Grade 1 listed 13th century church with 14th century additions, conservatively restored at the end of the 19th century and fitted at that time with various very high quality furnishings originating from around mainland Europe. It serves a fenland village and adjoining hamlets, about 3 miles west of Ely, with a total population of about 300.

In 2019 cash collections totalled £273.47. Various events yielded income of £1,113.60 and fees produced £839.00. These sources of income totalling £2,226.07 helped substantially to meet annual expenditure totalling £5,864.96 which included £3,107.25 Ministry Share. It is proposed to run a series of individual stalls on successive weekends in place of the fête which is usually a major source of income, but the outcome is hard to predict. The recent quinquennial survey revealed a need for repairs estimated to cost about £35,000. Application has been made to Cambridgeshire Historic Churches Trust and other grant-aiding bodies, but they will expect the Parochial Church Council to meet a significant part of the cost.

(c) Holy Trinity, Great Paxton is a Grade 1 listed church, substantially 11th century and probably pre-dating the Norman conquest, with later medieval and 19th century alterations and

restorations. It serves a village of a little over 1,000 population just east of the A1 about 5 miles south of Huntingdon.

In 2019 Sunday collections and a collecting box in church for visitors to donate came to £4,321.51 - 21% of total income. This included collections from occasional offices, including baptisms, which are not currently happening. Fee income in 2019 was £2,067.00, 10.4% of total income. The Vicar is officiating at funerals, but these are mostly at crematoria and the diocese keep the fee of £199.00. If there were an influx of graveside burial services at Great Paxton the PCC would keep some of the fees, but there would be no church service fees. Obviously no wedding fees can be expected in the near future. Fundraising events - central to the church's fund raising efforts - in 2019 brought in £2,447.00 or 12.3%. Adding up all of those percentages, 43% of the church's expected income might not be available this year if the church and churchyard cannot be used for events. This amounts to £8,835.00 - a very large sum of money. There is a 100 Club draw which will still provide a good 17% of income, but that involves a lot of person contact and another way may have to be found of collecting in the monies.

From being a very vibrant church community raising funds through many community ventures, Holy Trinity has shifted for now, with the rest of the benefice, to an online presence. This does not bring in the sort of funds that are needed, however. Some individuals have given some extra one off donations and the church will need to look at how it can approach the wider community when many folk are on reduced income or feel that supporting other charities, like the local hospitals or NHS, is more urgent.

It will therefore be apparent that a parish like Great Paxton is concerned about how it will meet its Ministry Share in full in 2020. The bill for maintaining and repairing the alarm system comes to about £900.00 this year, and there are ongoing insurance premiums to pay. The Treasurer has reduced the monthly payments for the time being to make sure that the basic ongoing charges can be met.

(d) St Luke's Cambridge is a large urban Victorian church, and therefore representative of a significant minority of churches in a county where village and market town churches of medieval origin predominate. In 1988 it was recognised that the church building could not survive without multiple uses that must all fit with the existing congregation's own values and serve their community. Reserves, United Reformed Church funds and other resources were used to convert it to a joint Anglican and URC church with a generous worship area and separate spaces for community use.

Rentals now normally raise about £70,000 annually, which pays for running, maintaining and improving the building and for the Ministry Shares for St Luke's and an adjoining Church of England parish within the same benefice. The majority of this income will be lost this year, and will be severely affected as long as social distancing continues, while normal fund-raising activities will be impractical.