

The Church of England has welcomed a Government-commissioned report calling for measures to promote the upkeep and community use of church buildings.

The Taylor Review: Sustainability of English churches and cathedrals concludes that the buildings of Church of England play a "vital role" in providing public services and in the sense of identity of communities across the country.

The report makes recommendations aimed at targeting resources and funding to support the care, maintenance and community use of church buildings to ensure their sustainability in the future.

These include networks of community support advisers to promote wider and more mixed use of church buildings and fabric support advisers to provide churches with access to skills and resources including building management and maintenance.

It also recommends simplifying regulations to help churches remain in use both as places of worship and community resources.

The review panel, chaired by Bernard Taylor, and made up of representatives from the Church of England and heritage bodies, highlighted the best practice of many churches and of volunteers around the country, with buildings adapted and used for cafes, playgroups, and in some cases NHS and post office services in addition to worship.

The Bishop of Worcester, Dr John Inge, the Church of England's lead bishop for cathedrals and church buildings – who was a member of the panel that drew up the report – said: “Our 16,000 churches are the jewel in the crown of our built heritage.

“They exist, as they always have done, to serve their communities.

“This is seen through daily acts of worship, celebrations of the joys of life and commemorations of its sorrows.

“They are, though, not just places of worship for their communities: they are social hubs for people of all ages, spaces to offer hospitality and vital services to the vulnerable; churches increasingly are the glue in community life.

“I have enormous respect for the millions of volunteers and church workers who through the generations have cared for our churches.

“The strategy proposed in this report to support these vital buildings will, I pray, help to protect their fabric and equip them to serve anew in the future.

“The Review makes clear how churches and cathedrals are vital community assets in need of support nationally. We look forward to working with funding partners to put the proposals into place.”

Becky Clark, the Church of England's Director of Churches and Cathedrals, said: “By bringing greater support and sense of shared responsibility for these complex buildings we will be able to secure their future not merely in terms of bricks and mortar but as community assets reactive to the needs of local people.

“Some of the recommendations, including cutting red tape which can hinder progress are already central to the Church's strategy.

“I am looking forward to implementing the reviews recommendations with key partners.”

Sir Tony Baldry, Chair of the Church Buildings Council, said: “The commitment of government to support our churches and cathedrals is acknowledgement of their vital purpose of service to the people of this country as well as their role in our national identity.

“I welcome this robust national strategy for the long-term sustainability of these buildings and am confident that those charged with supporting community assets will find much to support here.”

Dame Caroline Spelman MP, Second Church Estates Commissioner said: “Maintaining over 16,000 building across the country of which around three quarters are listed is a huge challenge for the Church of England.

“I welcome the review from DCMS into the sustainability of the Church of England’s parish churches and cathedrals as a springboard to engage with those in the communities the Church serves with an interest in order to help better maintain these valuable historic community assets.

“In addition to worship, the Church is embracing complementary uses for its buildings including broadcasting Wi-Fi to rural communities, post offices, and community shops.

“It is time for communities to be realistic about what it takes to maintain these local hubs to ensure they are available for the generations to come”.

Notes to editors

The Church of England has more than 16,000 church buildings of which more than three quarters, 78%, or 12,200, are listed. Nationally nearly 45% of Grade 1 listed buildings in England are parish churches.

A Church Urban Fund and Church of England survey published in 2015 showed 60% of churches hold parent and toddler groups, 66% help with food banks, and 53% hold holiday clubs for children.

Figures from the Mission Statistics 2015 showed the 16,000 churches of the Church of England serve communities in a range of different ways, including full-or part-time shops in 212 of them and post offices in 152.

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/church-england-welcomes-churches-sustainability-report>