

The Church of England welcomes the Chancellor's announcement of an 'English Churches and Cathedrals Sustainability Review' which is the first time Government has brought together experts to consider the future of England's magnificent church heritage. The Church of England is the largest steward of England's built heritage through its network of 16,000 parish churches. Among these are 45% of England's grade I listed buildings, showing just how special these buildings are.

The Church has always appreciated that the value of these buildings goes beyond the ways they tell our shared history - they are also crucial to the present and future of local communities. It was for this reason that the recent [Church Buildings Review](#) was set up to identify ways in which new and different models of care, openness and sustainability could be implemented. In making this announcement the Chancellor is taking forward the work of the Church Buildings Review to ensure that an immensely significant part of England's cultural and physical landscape remains, cared for and open for everyone.

The Bishop of Worcester and lead bishop for church buildings, the Rt Revd Dr John Inge, said: "Churches offer space for prayer, worship and the bringing together of community, everywhere from inner cities to country villages. They are the jewel in the crown of our built heritage and immensely important community hubs. The Review Group's remit to look at new models of financing repairs and maintenance of churches and cathedrals, as well as increasing community use, supports the Church of England's own aims. That the Government taking responsibility in this area is very encouraging."

Sir Tony Baldry, Chair of the Church Buildings Council, said: "We are all very proud of the energy and innovation shown by churches up and down the country who are opening up their buildings in new and exciting ways. To have the Government's support in looking at the long term future of care, maintenance and financial sustainability is an appropriate recognition of the important role churches play in the life of the nation."

Many churches have already adopted innovative ideas and creative solutions in order to enhance sustainability and build links with local communities. At St James' in North London the [Sherriff Centre](#) operates a children's gym, café and fully functioning Post Office. St Mary's at Beech Hill in Oxfordshire recently opened a community shop selling local produce, filling a much needed gap for local people. At Ashford in Kent, [St Mary's](#) is now an exciting music and cultural venue). In none of these places does the provision of community spaces or the running of events conflict with the underlying mission of the church. Instead the combination of functions is seen as an important and entirely appropriate response to the needs of local communities, bringing people in to church.

Not every church can re-invent itself as dramatically, and the Review Group will look particularly hard at rural churches where the challenges of population change may well present specific issues. Innovations such as the Churches Conservation Trust's 'champing' (church camping) and the Church of England's own Virtuous Circles project, currently in development phase, to allow rural churches to be used by walkers for overnight stays, will be part of the picture. But also important are measures to allow local communities to take greater control of their own church,

something already started through the work of the Church Buildings Review.

The Church of England looks forward to supporting the work of the Review Group in consultation with church-goers, local community groups, and others, so as to ensure the future of our churches and develop opportunities for everyone to share more widely in their use.

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