

In 2017 there were two significant occurrences for the churches of England; forty years of ringfenced grant funding for building repairs and development came to an abrupt end, and the government published a review of church building sustainability, known as the Taylor Review. These two events were not directly linked, but their close proximity highlighted the vulnerability of many of England's 16,000 parish churches when it comes to how they care for their buildings.

**The Taylor Review**, which the Church of England was closely involved in, is worth a read for anyone interested in not just how we care for our churches, but why we bother. It brings out the enormous cultural and community value of churches, the millions of people who visit each year, whether as tourists or pilgrims or worshippers, and discusses the innovative mixed-use models some churches have already developed, which allows them to be used by local people every day of the week.

The report's conclusions were that each area of England should be allocated specialist support in the form of a Fabric Support Officer and Community Development Adviser, working together so that the care of the built heritage was done with the potential of the church for community use always in mind; and of course visa-versa. The implied harmony between historic importance and modern-day use is extremely attractive, although anyone involved in a church will know it is not always easy to live this dream. The Review also recommended these new posts have access to grant funds for both minor and major repairs, with the idea being to encourage better maintenance and small fixes, meaning very large repairs will be needed less frequently; a stitch-in-time approach.

Last month Heritage Minister Michael Ellis MP launched two pilot projects which will try out these recommendations with real churches and real people, in Manchester and Suffolk. Over 18 months, costing £1.8m, these pilots will show us whether this approach, which echoes ways of working some Church of England dioceses have already adopted, is effective in supporting worshipping congregations to care for their buildings. It is enormously encouraging to see the Government funding these projects, and to be involved in giving local parishes the tools they need to continue serving their communities. We hope the evaluation of the project will give all involved evidence of the difference targeted support can make, and encourage this productive partnership to continue.

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A full version of this piece can be found [here](#)

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