

MPs have spoken of their concern over the future of a grants scheme covering VAT on repairs to listed places of worship, in a question-and-answer session with the Church of England's representative in Parliament.

Marsha de Cordova MP, the Second Church Estates Commissioner, told the House of Commons that the Listed Places of Worship scheme is beyond March next year.



Louise Haywood-Schiefer

The scheme, introduced in 2001 by the then Chancellor Gordon Brown, gives grants covering the VAT on repairs of more than £1,000 to listed buildings used as places of worship. That in turn enables many church buildings to provide an accessible place for vital charitable works.

Overall 31,300 social action projects are supported or run by Church of England churches including nearly 8,000 food banks, according to its 2022 Statistics for Mission.

Around six in 10 Church of England churches are involved in running or supporting food banks while more than one in five, or 23 per cent, run or support a community café, typically offering low-cost or free meals.

The scheme is due to expire in March next year and as yet there has been no announcement about its long-term future.

Without this support parishes will find it harder to fund essential repairs, she told MPs.

Churches are playing a 'vital role' as a "cornerstone of all our communities, up and down the country, alongside their role of providing community and spiritual leadership," she said.

"Without access to the Listed Places of Worship grant scheme, parishes will find it harder to fund essential repairs, and they will have to spend more time on fundraising and less time on the needs of their local communities," she told MPs.



**Katie Lam, MP for Weald of Kent**, said churches in rural areas such as the Weald of Kent, are "vital public buildings, providing somewhere not just for the spiritual life of our villages and towns, but for their civic life".

"What is being done to support churches like St Mildred's in Tenterden?" she asked.

"It plays a vital role in the town, especially now that the town hall is closed for refurbishment, and it relies on the scheme to make essential repairs."

**Kettering MP Rosie Wrighting** told the House that St Andrew's parish church and Holy Trinity church in her constituency are both listed buildings that provide vital community services.

"The former is saving for a heat pump and the latter for a new roof," she said.

"They were hoping to use the Listed Places of Worship grant scheme to undertake the work, but because the scheme is due to expire next year, their future is uncertain."

**Blake Stephenson, MP for Mid Bedfordshire**, spoke of constituents who are 'passionate' about preserving St Botolph's church in Aspley Guise.

"They are working hard to raise tens of thousands of pounds for their tower restoration project and expect work to start early next year," he said.

"However, they are concerned that without the listed places of worship grant scheme, works will become much more expensive and may not be able to proceed."

**Bradley Thomas, MP for Bromsgrove** said his constituency is home to many historic churches that "continue to be much loved by their communities".

He said: "They include St John's church in Bromsgrove, which dates from the 12th century but was predominantly constructed in the 14th and 15th centuries.

"The church has had to raise many hundreds of thousands of pounds for the upkeep and maintenance of its spire. Key to that is the listed places of worship grant scheme."

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