

~~Buildings Debate – Repair and maintenance costs~~ \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ **GS 1610**

~~Briefing paper to be circulated to support the Church buildings  
debate~~ \_\_\_\_\_  
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**THE CHURCH'S BUILT HERITAGE**  
**Background Note by Roy Thompson, GS444 York**

Text of my Private Member's Motion enthusiastically signed up for in November 2005 – "*...that this Synod, recognising the contribution which church buildings make to the church and to the nation, but noting the continuing decline in real terms of the repair grants available from English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund in recent years, calls upon Her Majesty's Government to increase the financial support for the maintenance and repair of church buildings.*"

My motion has now been joined in a composite motion from the Division with one from Lincoln Diocese and this paper seeks to address the main thrust of my original text.

Why do we need more help and encouragement from Government?

Churches, mainly those of the Church of England, contribute hundreds of millions of pounds to the economy through the provision of buildings and voluntary work for social care, education, culture and economic benefits from tourism and receive less than £30m in grants for the maintenance of its buildings (£11m from the Government). **In real terms the value of the grants from Government is falling, year on**

**year, at above inflation, due to increasing costs of building work.**

Does the Government value the work of the church? Is it an embarrassment that so much social and charitable work, education and culture is carried out by the voluntary sector, much of it initiated and co-ordinated by volunteers? Or is the Government of one of the wealthiest countries in the world proud of the fact that so much of this work goes on to the benefit of the nation, by volunteers, quietly and uncomplainingly, and largely without encouragement and support, but prefers to keep quiet about it?

Do we, as the Church, need to be aware of the coming changes in the political scene and so prepare ourselves to take recognition of those changes as the spending on Iraq comes down and that on the Olympics increases. **We need the leaders of the Church to make every effort to have our voice heard in the corridors of power and at the tables of the decision makers.** We are falling behind the timescale to act.

There are signs from commissioned surveys that Church Regional Forums are quantifying the impact of the church in social and cultural work in their communities and the benefits to them are huge. **The cost of the buildings and the voluntary work carried in social care ALONE would equate to huge rises in bills if transferred to the tax or rate payer.** This debate will press for that awareness to be affirmed and the messages passed to Regional and National Government bodies and agencies.

The thrust of my original motion, ~~now joined in a composite,~~ was to call on the Government to increase the grants available

for repairs and maintenance of parish churches. Why? Because these buildings are the focus of our mission and the base from which much of the work is carried out and they need to be welcoming and kept in good repair, well maintained, safe environments and readily accessed by the disabled. The route for public funding for repairs through English Heritage is well established and increasing the allocation available to them, specifically for this purpose, would be the quickest and easiest way for Government to provide further help for repairs to listed churches.

~~As an established route, it would be easier and quicker for funds to be transferred through English Heritage for repairs to listed churches.~~

The costs of legislation for disabled access and safety and health of visitors and employees are high, made even higher in historical buildings, and all work in heritage buildings needs to be of the best and may be a burden on small communities. The grant system recognises only a small part of these problems.

**The cost to the country of adequately maintaining parish churches would be small if balanced against the value of social care and cultural use they provide, which is taken for granted and is huge. ~~Government could encourage the Heritage Lottery Fund to significantly increase funds for modifications to churches used for community projects. Should not the Government also be actively encouraging the use of more Lottery money for heritage and community projects based in these buildings, both to maintain these buildings and to enable new facilities or appropriate modifications for churches carrying out community projects?~~**

# Heritage

We provide 16,196 parish churches, 30 greater churches and 20 42 cathedrals in England, of which two-thirds~~three quarters~~ are among the heritage-listed buildings in England. We have many buildings with the highest grades of listing, often the oldest and most significant buildings in their communities, especially in rural areas. **The landscape would change if significant numbers of heritage parish churches were allowed to fall into disrepair.** Inevitably, there would then be a huge public outcry at the lack of care by the custodians, perceived as the Church and the Government.

We maintain, manage and keep open, a very high proportion of church buildings containing works of art, furnishings, stained glass, music and unique crafts visited by millions of tourists, school parties and local visitors, all the year round. They represent a significant part of the country's stock of iconic art. They are unlikely to fade with fashion as some museums and galleries lose their popularity. The work of NADFASS church recorders has been invaluable in accurately writing up and photographing the contents of many heritage churches for the benefit of future generations and insurers.

**This custodian work needs to be affirmed, encouraged and supported by the Church and Government through grant aid for which covers not just the very urgent high-level work ~~LESS urgent work than that~~ prioritised by current English Heritage restrictions: but covers LESS urgent work too – if only to stop it becoming more urgent and expensive in the near future.**

Tourism (which represents 7% of GDP )

Millions of tourists visit cathedral cities and major church buildings, spending little at the church building but contributing millions of pounds in the local economy and creating thousands of jobs (see summary below) drawn by the magnets of the heritage buildings. Consider how many people visit York, Lincoln, Salisbury, Canterbury, Westminster and although they are in the highest category of visitor attractions, many others visit the cities but never enter the iconic buildings. Many visitors are content to stand outside, in wonder and awe, marvelling at the skills of their forebears.

Think of the value of the souvenirs, the catering and hospitality supporting the local trade. Cathedral cities and major historic sites are so crowded in summer that a pilgrimage seems to be taking place; but much of the crowd's money is spent on candyfloss and printed tea towels. **The only way of the country quickly returning some of that money is through increased Government grants for repairs** (other countries in Europe adopt a more generous line).

In addition, thousands of others visit rural churches, bringing much needed economic benefit to their communities. As just one example, the catering and retail businesses in the small village of Lastingham on the edge of the North Yorks Moors, benefit hugely from the thousands of visitors who make their way to the Saxon crypt in the village church. The multiplier effect then spreads to the wider local economy.

**Churches like this are the most expensive to repair. Grant aid for tourism related work should be available from ALL local authorities.**

## Education

Church buildings provide a national resource for school visits, but also they host thousands of Sunday schools, midweek clubs, uniformed groups, music groups. As many schoolchildren visit churches as visit museums and galleries.

Many of the buildings chosen for visits are the most highly listed, the most expensive to maintain and are often located in small communities. **They need to be kept in good repair if they are to continue to be such a valuable education tool. Grant aid for education-related projects in churches should be more freely available**

## Culture

Church buildings provide a resource in almost every community where groups may meet for music, art, drama, debate or structured learning. Often performing in a drama or concert in a church will be a child's first opportunity of taking part directly in such activities – and may change them for life.

The visual arts and musical are catered for at very lowest costs, in most instances. **Cathedrals and churches are at the heart of training and performance of choral music which is achieving an increasing popularity.** Many notable soloists and performers are church trained.

## Social Care

Church buildings provide the environment in which church communities offer clubs or facilities for the disabled, the marginalised, the elderly and the little children.

Thousands of church communities, based around church buildings in almost every community, are the prime movers in care for the marginalised, the local homeless and local, national and international charitable work.

**In several surveys, church communities are the main providers for voluntary social work and a high proportion of church members are involved in social work.**

## Conservation skills

Church buildings (perhaps especially cathedrals) are the buildings on which traditional skills are maintained and training is available and paid for. Training in stained glass, masonry, wood and stone carving, and surface decoration is

available from experienced craftsmen who have given their working lives to such work. Commissions for new works are regularly placed for new artists in traditional and new materials.

## What do we receive by way of Government support?

Since 1996 when joint funding by English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund began, the value of the repair grants have declined in real terms. Since 2002, the total repair grants budgets under the Joint English Heritage and Heritage Lottery Fund Repair Grants for Places of Worship Scheme has averaged £26m per annum. Also since 2002 repair grants are only available for urgent high level work.

Other grants available often depend on schemes meeting the EH/HL criteria and are a fraction of what is needed. In addition, Cathedrals have currently received £1m per annum towards their £110m spent on repairs and maintenance, with a backlog of £39m. We also currently received rebate of VAT on repairs to fabric on listed churches (except but not on fees and electrics, heating, plumbing and fittings and not on works below a certain financial threshold).

In addition, £120m of work has been carried out annually, some of which has been for improvements and disability access. Grants have represented about 30% of completed work.

## What do we need to keep churches in good repair (ie to keep them open and safe)?

Cost of repairs to church buildings (2003) – spent by PCCs



£101m was spent - plus £11.5m on other buildings\*

Backlog of repairs needed - £373m (£323m on listed buildings)  
– 2003 estimate\*

Costs of repairs increased by 8.2% over 2004 to £115,000 per church (average)\*\*

Average church needs-spends £6,000 per annum in maintenance costs\*

Rural churches need £10,000 average in repair costs each 3 years and this is once they have already been brought up to a good standard of repair\*\*\* -

Average costs of disabled access £49,000 per church\*\*

\*Archbishops' Council \*\*HCPT \*\*\*CCT

None of the above includes work carried out by volunteers, churchwardens as custodians and work paid for directly by donors.

RT 9<sup>th</sup> January 2006