



· INSTITUTE · OF · HISTORIC ·
BUILDING · CONSERVATION

Making Heritage Work

Church Buildings Review Group

c/o Andrea Mulkeen
By e-mail

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Dear Sirs

REPORT OF THE CHURCH BUILDINGS REVIEW GROUP

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) is the professional body for building conservation practitioners and historic environment experts working in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, with connections to the Republic of Ireland. The Institute exists to establish, develop and maintain the highest standards of conservation practice, to support the effective protection and enhancement of the historic environment, and to promote heritage-led regeneration and access to the historic environment for all.

Thank you for inviting us to participate in this consultation.

We welcome the report and welcome its recognition of the importance of church buildings at the heart of community life and for their considerable significant cultural, historical, archaeological, artistic and social value as well as for the Church's mission and worship. We also agree with the Report's conclusion that church buildings' rapidly declining use for worship in many places, particularly rural areas, and changing practice in others, has left the Church with some very serious challenges in organizational structure, administration and resources.

In welcoming the Church's wish to keep churches in use for worship, even if this means joint uses, we accept that disposal for other purposes will sometimes be necessary. The IHBC has always promoted the view that for historic buildings to have a future they must have a viable use. Conversion to appropriate and sympathetic alternative uses can be, and in the past has sometimes been, carried out very well.

While changes in the law to create some specific new flexibilities for parishes and dioceses are welcome, this should be more overtly within the context of a clear understanding of need and heritage significance, notwithstanding the availability of national guidance on what information should be provided by parishes to diocese. While

the level of information supplied for Faculty applications should be proportionate, the calibre of information supplied is often too low for all the statutory and other consultees to offer constructive advice or make an objective assessment of proposals.

We would ask that the Church, in its decision-making processes in future uses for its buildings adheres to, and requires its successors to, sound conservation practice in the assessment of heritage significance and minimization and mitigation of the adverse impacts of alterations to historic fabric and their settings.

Strengthening strategic capacity within dioceses to incorporate building reviews into mission and ministry planning is welcome but the sharing of good operational practices between diocese should be better and evidently more widespread than appears at present. Furthermore clear best practice standards would be beneficial in bringing, for example, the variable operation of DACs up to universally good standard. A greater degree of professionally accredited heritage expertise among Diocesan Advisory Committee Secretaries would also be supported.

Funding for the long-term conservation and management of the historic fabric of listed churches is essential but there also needs to be a recognition of the problem of insufficient capacity regarding the heritage craft trades and skills needed to maintain and repair such buildings in future.

While giving the Church Commissioners a greater role in seeking a use for closed buildings it would be helpful if continued maintenance and security during the use-seeking period is imposed upon individual dioceses, thus ensuring these important buildings are passed on to new users in the best possible condition, with as much of their historic fabric intact as possible and with the best chance of survival in a future use.

We hope these comments are helpful.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Caird". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

James Caird
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