SIR MICHAEL PALIN HELPS SAFEGUARD THE FUTURE OF THE UK'S CHURCHES

Monday 1 November, 2021

PRESS RELEASE FROM THE NATIONAL CHURCH TRUST

STRICT EMBARGO 22.00 SUNDAY 31 OCTOBER 2021

SIR MICHAEL PALIN URGES PUBLIC TO HELP SAFEGUARD THE FUTURE OF THE UK'S CHURCHES

A national debate to help safeguard the future of the UK's local churches has been launched by the National Churches Trust, the UK's church buildings support charity.

With an increasing number of churches and chapels facing closure, 'The Future of the UK's Churches' debate highlights the community, economic, heritage and spiritual benefits of churches.

It also gives the public a chance to have their say on how some of the UK's most important local buildings can be saved for future generations.

'The Future of the UK's Churches' debate is being backed by Michael Palin, Vice President of the National Churches Trust. He said:

"The UK has over 39,000 church buildings. The restrictions of COVID-19, resulting in reduced funding and fewer worshippers, has clouded the future for many of them.

Yet churches remain a vital and much-loved part of the UK's history and heritage and we can't let them fall into neglect and disuse.

There is hope. More and more churches are adapting to the modern world and the needs of their communities, providing not just spiritual comforts but a range of valuable services to local people such as foodbanks and youth clubs.

We must build on this, and encourage people of all sorts and from all backgrounds to find hope and relevance in their local churches.

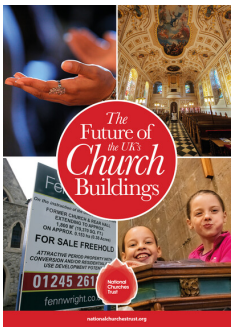
If you care as much as I do about the future of these much loved buildings, do get involved with the National Churches Trust debate about 'The Future of Churches' and help shape their future."

Church buildings manifesto

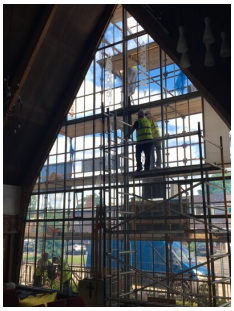
To highlight the importance of churches, the Trust has published a church buildings manifesto in which 16 leading figures make the case for their future:

They include: Andrew Stokes, the Director of Visit England; Harry Mount, the Editor of The Oldie; the Right Reverend John Arnold, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Salford; Jay Hulme, the transgender poet

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and performance artist; Alexander Stafford, the Conservative MP for Rother Valley; Canon John McGinley, Director of Myriad, the centre for church multiplication and Barbara Eifler, CEO of Making Music, the charity for amateur musicians.

Church closures are growing

The number of churches open and being used for worship has fallen from around 42,000 to 39,800 in the last ten years, according to research from The Brierley Research Consultancy. Closure has been particularly acute in some inner-city areas.

Funding for the repair and maintenance of church buildings has to be raised by congregations and is not provided by central church authorities. It is particularly difficult for churches in deprived areas and rural churches with a small number of worshippers to pay for urgent repairs.

There are fears that many more may close in the coming years, putting local heritage at risk and jeopardising the future of community support services run in church buildings such as youth clubs, foodbanks, mother and toddler groups and drug and alcohol counselling.

In England, 350 Church of England churches are reported to be at risk of being closed or demolished within the next five years. In Scotland, at least 275 churches have closed since January 2000, a decline of 15.6% in 21 years.

Costs and benefits

A shortage of funding to keep churches in good repair is a key factor leading to closure. Latest figures show that the Church of England will have to find £1billion to fund repairs to its 16,000 parish churches in the next five years.

The Government's Cultural Recovery Fund has recently provided £12 million to help places of worship in England, but with over 900 churches on Historic England's 'Heritage at Risk' Register more financial help is needed.

New figures released by the National Churches Trust show that the repair bill is vastly outweighed by the economic and social benefit of church buildings.

The annual social and economic value of church buildings to the UK is worth around £55 billion. This sum, calculated using the latest HM Treasury Green Book guidance, includes the contribution churches make to wellbeing and to local economies.

Claire Walker, CEO of the National Churches Trust said:

"Church buildings belong to all of us and that's why we are starting a national debate about their future. Whether you are a regular churchgoer, a heritage lover or have been in a church recently to have your COVID vaccination, please do take part and tell us what you think.

Right now, many church buildings are in danger. That's because there isn't enough money available to fund urgent repairs and maintenance or to

instal essential facilities such as toilets and kitchens.

Over
900 churches are on the Historic England ‘Heritage at Risk Register’,
with many more in a dire state in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Church
buildings are a unique national asset. It would be a huge mistake to
let them decay when they provide around £55 billion of economic and
social value to the UK each year.

At the heart of the debate are some simple questions:

• Why do church buildings matter?

• What should we do to preserve their magnificent heritage?

• How can more church buildings be made into community hubs?

• What is the best way to pay for the upkeep of church buildings?

Our
vision is that church buildings across the UK are well maintained, open
to everyone, sustainable and valued. At the National Churches Trust we
will continue to do everything we can to support church buildings as we
all stand to lose if we let them disappear.”

ENDS

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. **A video of Michael** Palin about ‘The Future of the UK Church Buildings’ can be downloaded here https://vimeo.com/639997016 and full embed link is <iframe title="vimeo-player" src="" width="640" height="360" frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>

1. Photos and logos can be downloaded here https://spaces.hightail.com/space/gJuGTRwdNA

1. **The Future of Church Buildings manifesto can be downloaded here** https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/sites/default/files/28-10-21 FINAL HIGH RES FoC report.pdf

1. **The consultation can be accessed here**

2. **The web url is** www.nationalchurchestrust.org/futureofchurches
3. **The hashtag is #futureofchurches**
4. **Contributors to The Future of Church Buildings Manifesto**

CHURCHES AND HERITAGE

- **Harry Mount – Editor of The Oldie**
- **Andrew Stokes, Director, Visit England**
- **Jay Hulme, Transgender Poet and Performance Artist**
- **The late Peter Ainsworth, Chairman Churches Conservation Trust 2016- 2021**

CHURCHES AND WORSHIP

- **The Rt Revd John Arnold, Catholic Bishop of Salford**
- **Revd Lucy Winkett, Rector St James’s church, Piccadilly, London**

- **Rev Eve Pitts, Vicar, Holy Trinity church, Birchfield, Birmingham**
- **Rev Canon John McGinley, Executive Director, Myriad**

CHURCHES AND COMMUNITY

- **Barbara Eifler, CEO, Making Music amateur musicians charity**
- **Simon Thomson, FairShare food charity**
- **Dominic Grieve QC**
- **Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP**
- **Alexander Stafford MP**

CHURCHES AROUND THE UK

- **Christopher Catling, Secretary, The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales**
- **Dr Julian Litten, Chairman of the Norwich Cathedral Fabric Advisory Committee**
- **Stuart Beattie, Director, Scotland's Churches Trust**
- **Iain Greenway, Director of Historic Environment, Department for Communities, Northern Ireland**

KEY FACTS ABOUT CHURCHES

- **Repair bills**: The estimated repair bill for Church of England churches over the next five years - £1 billion (Andrew Selous MP, 1st Church Estates Commissioner Hansard, 9 September 2021)

- **Listed churches:** 45% of all Grade I Listed Buildings in England are churches (www.buildingconservation.com/articles/listprot/listprot.htmchurches)

- **Number of churches in the UK:**
  There are around 39,800 church buildings in the UK (The Brierley Consultancy 2021) – that's more than the 39,130 pubs in the UK (ONS 2019)

- **£55 billion**
  – the annual social and economic value of church buildings in the UK.
  (The House of Good – 2021 Update, National Churches Trust)

- **Oldest parish church in England**: St Martin, Canterbury, AD 597
  www.explorechurches.org/church/st-martin-canterbury

- **Oldest church in Wales:**
  Llewelyn's Church in Llanrhychwyn is claimed is the oldest in Wales, marking the site where Rhychwyn originally established his church in the 6th century. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Llanrhychwyn

- **Oldest church in Scotland:** Old St. Peter's, a ruined parish church in Thurso is reckoned to be the oldest: it dates to at least 1125. Glasgow Cathedral is reputed to be the oldest working place of worship on mainland Scotland.

- **Oldest church in Northern Ireland:** Purported to be St Nicholas in Carrickfergus, but likely contenders to the title include the cathedrals in Armagh and Downpatrick

- **Most recent parish church:** Genesis church, which is in fact a boat, was opened in 2020, is one of the UK's most recent churches. www.london.anglican.org/articles/genesis-delivered-to-new-home-on-the-olympic-park/

- **Smallest parish church:** St Trillo, Rhos on Sea www.explorechurches.org/church/st-trillo-rhos-sea

- **Largest parish church**: Holy Trinity Church in Hull is the largest parish church in England. The church dates back to about 1300 and appears in the Guinness Book of Records as England's largest parish church (by floor area.)

- **Most remote parish church**: The Church of the Holy Cross at Kilgwrrwg, Monmouthshire, is one of the most remote parish churches in the UK still in regular use. It can only be reached by crossing two fields and a stream from the nearest house. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kilgwrrwg

About the National Churches Trust

The National Churches Trust is the leading national independent charity concerned with the protection and welfare of churches, chapels and meeting houses throughout the United Kingdom. We aim to:

a) Provide grants for the repair, maintenance and modernisation of church buildings

b) Act as a catalyst to improve and bring more resources to the management of church buildings

c) Promote the value of church buildings to the community at large

For more information visit www.nationalchurchestrust.org

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View Online

Additional Assets:
https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/futureofchurches

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