

## **Blessings or Burdens? Listed Places of Worship and their role in communities: Summary of key findings**

To support the Caring for Places of Worship at Risk programme, English Heritage commissioned Living Stones to undertake a number of consultation events with listed Places of Worship across the country.

The aim of the research was to:

- Explore the issues facing those responsible for maintaining listed places of worship
- Explore the impact that listing has on Places of Worship (PoW)
- Explore the role of listed places of worship in local communities

Trustees/managers of places of worship, congregations, community users of the building and local planning authorities were all invited to attend. In total 67 places of worship took part in the consultation.

The findings were used by English Heritage to support the production of the “Caring for Places of Worship” booklet and to help make the case for the importance of listed places of worship to the wider community. English Heritage is continuing to assess the results of the consultation and its implications for supporting places of worship.

### **Key findings: Issues facing those responsible for maintaining listed places of worship**

#### **Maintaining the building must be put in context**

- Matters relating to built heritage are not a priority for the majority of faith groups. Maintaining their building must be seen within the context of mission. Some PoW feel that their mission has suffered due to the attention they have had to put into the historic fabric.

#### **Ageing and diminishing congregations are the key concern**

- The main concern from many congregations involved in the consultation is “who will look after our building in ten years” time. Many, though not all, have falling congregation numbers from which to pull the volunteers needed to look after the historic building.

#### **Importance of volunteers**

- Volunteers are vital to places of worship, and they play an important role in maintaining the building. However many feel they do not have all of the support they require either in terms of advice and funding and many are frustrated by the bureaucracy and conflicts of interest. Most importantly they are concerned about where the new generation of volunteers will come from.

## **Partnerships**

- Partnerships and dialogue between PoW and local authorities are often relatively weak. This lack of dialogue has an impact in particular on non-exempt PoW, who in many instances need to get permission from Local Planning Authorities to make changes to their building. The importance of dialogue was highlighted at one event where a church and Local Authority were able to discuss and come to some conclusions regarding on-going issues around access.

## **Funding**

- 70% of trustees surveyed felt that the maintenance of LPoW should remain their responsibility, though there were preferences for partnerships.
- A number of PoW expressed concern that many grant-making bodies preclude funding projects which are associated with “religious purposes”. This can make it difficult to get funding for community activities.
- There were some calls for a “one stop” shop for funding opportunities and advice.

## **Skills Training**

- Some PoW stated that would appreciate further skills training on maintaining places of worship, especially in regards to project management

## **Key findings: The impact and experience of the listing process**

### **Awareness of the listing procedure**

- Overall the majority of PoW were aware that they were listed and the implications of it. 90% of congregation members surveyed were aware that their PoW was listed, 55% familiar with why it was listed and 70% with the implications of being listed. However there are differences between faiths in awareness, with those outside the mainstream Christian denominations having a lower level of awareness of implications of listing.

### **Many viewed of listing positively in regards to adding value for worship though some PoW expressed concern that it has limited what they can do**

- 62% of congregation members and 40% of trustees felt that listing added value to worship. For many this was because listing helps ensure continuity of worship and continuity. However 35% of trustees felt that being listed restricted or prevented proposed activities.

### **The number of partners involved in the listing process can cause delays and complications**

- PoW discussed the issues concerning having to get all “your ducks in a row” (e.g. permission from EH, denominational decision makers

amenities societies), before changes could be made to the building. They also commented on the length of time that it takes to get permission.

### **Occasions where PoW received conflicting advice**

- There was also some concern regarding conflicting advice from within organisations and between organisations.

### **Pre-access advice**

- Some PoW questioned whether English Heritage and other partners could give guidance on what could be done to their buildings without needing to get formal permission.

### **Standards and principles of repair**

- Some PoW called into question the need to replace like with like when these materials would only suffer the same fate in the future. However this was not an universal view with many valuing the quality of historic methods and materials.

### **Working with English Heritage**

- There was some confusion about the role of English Heritage as a regulator and a grant giver, with some PoW believing that English Heritage agreement for works would automatically lead to an EH grant.

## **Key findings: Role of listed places of worship in local communities**

### **Listed/historic PoW help attract visitors to local areas**

- PoW trustees recognise that the historic nature of their buildings helps attract tourists to the local area and can help increase interest within the local community, through for example, heritage trails.

### **Provide a safe space for new communities**

- PoW play an important role in providing safe spaces for individuals and communities, especially for some new communities to England, who are relatively familiar with the layout of PoW and feel comfortable there.

### **Being listed/historic helps strengthen links with the local community**

- In many instances, being listed helps PoW develop links with the local communities. 55% of trustees surveyed agreed that they had received added support from the local community because their place of worship was listed.

### **PoW help bring people and communities together**

- 62% of congregation members surveyed agreed that their listed place of worship is an important way for them to meet other people and 88% agreed that their place of worship plays a part in developing community spirit.

### **Sustained and regular community use is limited**

- Very few PoW have sustained community use and what does happen, tends to be in halls etc. rather than in the listed buildings. Most PoW limit themselves to a small number of activities per year, for example concerts or plays.

### **Increased community use is not always the answer to sustainability**

- Many PoW felt that widening the community role of listed places of worship is often not the answer, especially when there are other alternatives available, such as schools and village halls, which can often offer a better service for customers.

### **Awareness of community funding opportunities is relatively low**

- Awareness of public funding for running social and community activities (for example regeneration funding) was relatively low with few places of worship actively using it.

### **Lack of facilities is a problem**

PoW stated that lack of facilities, such as kitchen and toilets is an issue, because without these facilities it can be difficult to attract community funding or groups.

For the full Living Stones report, including stand alone findings for the six consultation areas (Birmingham, Newcastle, Lincolnshire, Exeter, Hastings and Bradford) please visit <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/research/social-and-economic-research/>

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