

I write in response to the Consultation on the Inquiry into Historic Environment published by the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee of the National Assembly for Wales. The National Churches Trust welcomes the introduction of the Wales Historic Environment Act 2016 and the beneficial changes for historic environment protection that it contains. We recommend that the Welsh Government now look at what support those tasked with looking after Wales' bounty of heritage buildings and monuments should be offered to protect the historic environment.

The National Churches Trust supports and promotes church buildings of historic, architectural and community value through support, advice and grant giving. We are an independent, UK-wide charity supporting all 42,000 churches, chapels and meeting houses of all Christian denominations. We believe that places of worship are an integral part of our nation's architectural heritage and play a vital part in building and sustaining local communities. The Trust is keen to raise the profile of churches and chapels in Wales, which has resulted this year in our [Sacred Wales](#) campaign to identify Wales' favourite place of worship, and the inclusion of over 200 churches and chapels on our [ExploreChurches](#) tourism website. In 2017 we have also launched a Partnership Grants programme in Wales, match funded by the Church in Wales.

The National Churches Trust is a member of both the Wales Heritage Group and the Wales Places of Worship Forum, and supports consultation submissions made by these groups. We are, however, especially concerned about the future of historic places of worship in Wales, the challenges this special sector faces, and the solutions that are needed to help the thousands of volunteers who look after these wonderful buildings to sustain them at a time of falling congregations and community interest. Churches are a unique group, in that they are run by volunteers from the community rather than heritage professionals. They are often reliant on external support and advice on how to

Keep their buildings open and sustainable. Often that support comes from infrastructure bodies, such as Church in Wales dioceses or Addoldai Cymru, but it is also important that the wider sector has a better understanding of the challenging circumstances that Wales' places of worship face. We urge the Welsh

government to support the development of a training and capacity building programme for church and chapel volunteers, and for support officers in Welsh religious infrastructure bodies, to help encourage sustainability of historic places of worship in Wales. This training should also be available to local planning authority staff who will use the new provisions within the Act, to ensure that they are familiar with the unique challenges facing churches and chapels in Wales.

The National Churches Trust, on behalf of the Wales Places of Worship Forum, conducted a survey of churches in chapels in Wales to help identify issues and support needs affecting the sector. Over 200 churches and chapels completed the survey, the results of which are available in English and Welsh on our website at:

<http://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/news/future-wales%E2%80%99-churches-and-chapels>

The survey supports our view that training and systems improvements are needed to address critical sustainability issues for churches and chapels related to the following critical issues:

1. A severe shortage of volunteers to look after church and chapel buildings.
2. A lack of skills needed to manage churches, fundraise for repairs, or development community engagement plans.
3. A lack of funding for Churches and chapels to carry out regular maintenance.

The National Churches Trust would welcome a dialogue with Cadw and the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee on how the support needs of churches and chapels can be met.

Protection for buildings and monuments at risk

As an important funder of projects to repair, maintain and improve the community facilities of churches and chapels in Wales, the National Churches Trust welcomes the increased oversight of and support for the historic environment contained within the Act.

Where the National Churches Trust considers there is room for improvement is in the protection of heritage at risk. Whilst Cadw undertakes a survey of heritage at risk, it does not currently publish the results of that survey. Both Historic England and Historic Scotland publish 'Heritage at Risk' lists. These lists are helpful tools in communicating the issue of 'at risk' buildings to a wider audience, and encourage collaboration between heritage organisations, local authority officers, owners and

Building Preservation Trusts in trying to save redundant and neglected assets. The National Churches Trust puts significant weight on heritage at risk when assessing the urgency and case for investment of projects competing for bids. At present, Welsh churches are at a disadvantage to their competitors for funding in England and Scotland due to the opaque nature of the Cadw survey. The Trust would welcome a more transparent approach to heritage at risk in Wales, which would help planners, funders and owners of heritage better understand priorities for conserving the historic environment.

Facilitating collaboration within the sector

Cadw published a Strategic Action Plan for Historic Places of Worship in Wales in 2015. This important document resulted in the creation of the Wales Places of Worship forum, and contains many valuable proposals for supporting churches and chapels. The plan identified the creation of Sanctaidd, a new non-denominational organisation to support places of worship across Wales as a critical partner for Cadw. Unfortunately, Sanctaidd has not proven sustainable, and was wound up in 2017. The National Churches Trust has been working with former trustees of Sanctaidd to identify a way forward, and has already taken on some elements of Sanctaidd's plans for church tourism, funding and maintenance. The Trust would welcome the opportunity to work with Cadw to explore a re-drafting of the strategy to recognise the loss of Sanctaidd and the role that the Trust is now playing to support the sector in Wales.

The Trust is concerned with the suspension of Cadw funding for the historic environment, and the closure of the Heritage Lottery Fund's Grants for Places of Worship programme. We have seen the loss of government funding impact on the funding mix for Aberdare, St Elvan's ambitious conservation and re-ordering project. We urge that Cadw's grant giving function is returned, and that the Welsh government convene a panel to explore the future funding needs of the ecclesiastical and wider heritage sector. The National Churches Trust will continue to play a role in funding, but would appreciate a more coordinated approach to funding conservation and maintenance needs that would also make it easier for volunteers to apply for and manage grants.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit additional evidence for the consultation. The National Churches Trust would welcome the opportunity to participate in further discussions about the historic environment once the consultation has closed.