

SUSTAINING MAJOR PARISH CHURCHES

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Exploring the Challenges and Opportunities

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PURCELL



FINANCES

Two-thirds of Major Parish Churches have not been received Heritage Lottery Funding. Of those that have, grants per project range from **£4,000 to £11 million**.⁰¹

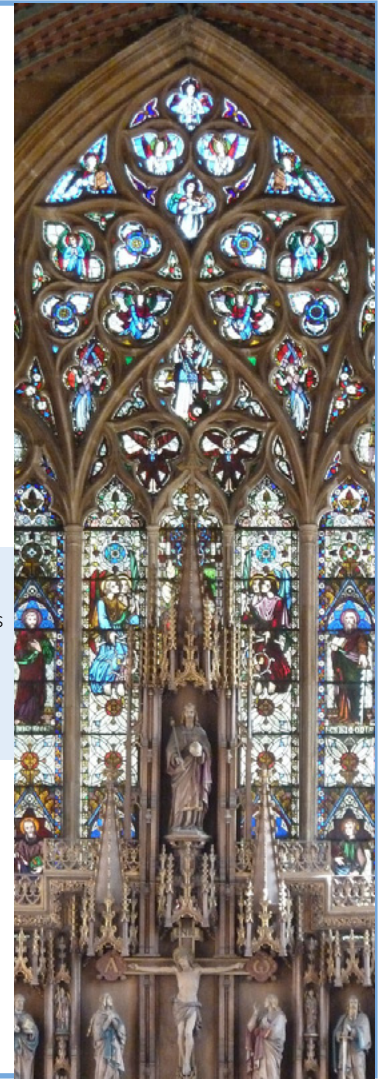
12% of Major Parish Churches have received a Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Fund grant since the scheme began in 2015. The average **grant** received under this scheme is **£97,500**.⁰²

The three top items of expenditure for Major Parish Churches surveyed were parish share, building fabric repairs and payroll. **44% of Major Parish Church** representatives chose building fabric repairs as their largest item of expenditure and **43% chose parish share**.⁰³

Of those for which parish share information was available, **24% did not pay it in full** (2015) and for many of those who did it is their largest item of expenditure. The average parish share for a Major Parish Church is **£53,800**, with a range from **£229,000** to **£5,300**⁰⁵ per church.

The average **cost** of a major repair and development project for a Major Parish Church is **£550,000**. When grant aid is obtained, an average of **£350,000 is funded** through the Heritage Lottery Fund.⁰⁴

Half of Major Parish Church representatives surveyed stated that their **income** does **not meet** their **expenditure**. Of those whose income does meet expenditure, this is often **'only just'**. Deficits are often due to **large or unexpected** capital projects for alterations or repairs.⁰⁶



CONDITION

16% of Major Parish Churches are on Historic England's 2015 Heritage at Risk Register. This is compared with **6.8% of all Church of England** parish churches.⁰⁷

35% of all Major Parish Churches are in **areas of high deprivation** but **57%** of those on the **Heritage at Risk Register** are in such areas.⁰⁸



01 Heritage Lottery Fund grants to the 50 case study churches, 1994-2016
 02 Ibid.
 03 Online survey of 63 Major Parish Church respondents
 04 Heritage Lottery Fund grants to the 50 case study churches, 1994-2016
 05 Online survey of 63 Major Parish Church respondents

06 Ibid.
 07 Dataset of 300 Major Parish Churches. Search the Heritage at Risk register here: <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-at-risk/search-register/>
 08 Dataset of 300 Major Parish Churches and the government's Index of Multiple Deprivation



RESOURCES

The Church of England Financial Review 2004-2013 stated that parish churches spend **17% of their outgoings** on church and building costs. Major Parish Churches spend **37% on urgent Quinquennial Inspection costs** alone.¹⁰

Almost 90% of Major Parish Church representatives believe that the **scale and significance** of their church is a **positive ‘help’** to mission and ministry.¹¹

Over **80% of Major Parish Church** representatives have a Statement of Significance in place but **fewer than 50%** have a Conservation Management Plan or equivalent.⁰⁹

Over 70% of Major Parish Churches have WC facilities and good physical access to the building. **25%** have a shop and **23%** a café. **5% have a dedicated heritage centre** or museum. At least one does **not have running water.**¹²

80% Major Parish Church representatives believe that the designated heritage status of their Major Parish Church is a **positive ‘help’** rather than a **hindrance.**¹³



SUSTAINABILITY

Over 60% of Major Parish Church representatives surveyed believe the **history and architecture** of their Major Parish Church is what **makes it special.**¹⁴

36% of Major Parish Churches have **additional listed or scheduled structures** for which they are responsible.¹⁵

Over 40% of the Major Parish Church representatives mentioned **lead theft as being a recent problem** at their building.¹⁶

Half of Major Parish Churches have an average attendance of **141 people.**¹⁷

An electronic copy of the Sustaining Major Parish Churches report and case studies can be found here: <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/current-research/threats/heritage-in-changing-society/major-parish-churches/>

The Sustaining Major Parish Churches film can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/183370054>

09 Online survey of 63 Major Parish Church respondents
 10 Online survey of 63 Major Parish Church respondents . Read the report here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1886486/financialoverview.pdf>
 11 Online survey of 63 Major Parish Church respondents
 12 Dataset of 300 Major Parish Churches, drawn from the churches' websites
 13 Online survey of 63 Major Parish Church respondents
 14 Ibid.

15 Dataset of 300 Major Parish Churches
 16 12 in-depth case studies
 17 Dataset of 300 Major Parish Churches. Average weekly attendance taken from the Church Buildings Councils statistics. Find this information here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2432327/2014statisticsformission.pdf>

RESEARCH SUMMARY

What is a Major Parish Church?

The Church of England has identified more than 300 Major Parish Churches, representing some of the most well-loved, significant and unique places of worship. These buildings face a different scale of opportunities and challenges to those experienced by the vast majority of the Church of England's 12,220 listed church buildings. They all meet several, if not all, of the following criteria: grade I, II* or II listed with significant heritage value; open daily to visitors; make a civic, cultural and economic contribution to their communities and the majority are physically large with a footprint over 1000m².

Reasons for the Research

The project partners - Historic England, Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the Greater Churches Network, the Church of England's Church Buildings Council and Doncaster Minster - wanted to understand Major Parish Churches. What is the physical condition of the historic fabric? What resources are available to maintain, repair and manage them? We also investigated how they are used and what people feel about them.

This research, funded by Historic England, provides a robust baseline of evidence based on a sample of Major Parish Churches from across the country. As well as publicly available information we asked those who are responsible for them to tell us about their experiences and give us facts and figures.

Aims of the Project

The project partners hope this information will:

- provide information on the physical condition of Major Parish Churches and the cost of maintaining and repairing them
- identify the challenges they face and the capacity of local resources to manage those challenges and seek new opportunities
- identify factors that may impact on future sustainability
- articulate the distinctive characteristics of this particular group of churches and share best practice

What research has been carried out?

Three hundred Major Parish Churches have been analysed in a desk-based survey. A sample of 60, representing a range of geographical, architectural, demographic and historical types, was then surveyed on line. Three hundred architects and diocesan representatives were also invited to contribute. Fifty buildings were then the subject of short case studies and of these 12, illustrating a variety of emerging themes, were studied in depth. A report, synthesising these findings has been produced.

Summary Findings

Characteristics

These buildings are important repositories of the material, cultural and spiritual history of their local communities, illustrating the impact of national events and changes on people and places. Towns grew

around some, benefitting from the economic activity they generated but some that began as monastic centres of learning and hospitality are now isolated in rural areas. Most are simply awe-inspiring because of their size, architecture and the treasures they contain. All provide place for personal sanctuary and grand public spectacle, prayer and celebration, serving the most vulnerable and hosting the most important civic events.

Challenges

Most of these buildings are well cared for and in a good state of repair but some need to do urgent work despite having a substantial disparity between income and expenditure. Some do not have the facilities to sustain complementary uses and most find it increasingly difficult to recruit skilled volunteers. Few have effective strategic plans in place either to deal with substantial repair needs or to raise the funds to pay for them. Volunteers and the limited number of employed staff and incumbents all cope with huge pressures on their time and skills.

Perceptions

The case studies show that most Parochial Church Councils believe their Major Parish Church is an asset to ministry and mission, not a burden or hindrance. Public understanding of how they are funded and managed is very low; there is a general perception that large churches are equivalent to cathedrals and have access to the same resources or that because the buildings are impressive they must be wealthy.

Sustainability

The ability to grow the congregation, the volunteer base and available skills may be restricted by the demands upon limited existing resources. Some new models of governance are being explored but their long-term effectiveness is unknown. Most Major Parish Churches depend on financial support from national funding bodies to achieve major repairs or development work.

Opportunities

Many Major Parish Churches have successfully implemented projects to increase sustainability and they provide good examples of best practice. Parochial Church Councils with responsibility for these buildings require support to improve strategic planning and income generation, provide new community and visitor facilities, increase staffing and grow capacity. Parish representatives have asked for more support to identify funding sources, help to develop a strategy for repairs and a forum for sharing best practice.

Next Steps

The report and case studies will be a valuable resource to those responsible for the management and care of Major Parish Churches, both individually and strategically at local, regional and national levels. This research provides a the foundation from which to stimulate debate about the potential future of Major Parish Churches.



Further information

We hope the report and case studies will be a valuable resource to those responsible for the management and care of Major Parish Churches, both individually and strategically at local, regional and national levels. All documentation and access to the film is available from <https://historicengland.org.uk/majorparishchurches>

If you wish to comment or have a query please email churches@historicengland.org.uk