

# Lifelines for Historic Churches and their Communities

Keeping church buildings open



Report of the  
**Church Buildings Commission**  
for the Diocese of Norwich 2023

# Notes

This report has been written for all those who love and appreciate the historic churches of Norfolk and Waveney. It is a report from the Commission addressed to the Rt Revd Graham Usher, Bishop of Norwich, and all those in the Diocese of Norwich. We hope that it will be widely read by those who worship and those who do not. It is for those who are part of the church community and for those who simply wish to enjoy the shared heritage we find in these beautiful buildings and the simplicity of a country churchyard.

This is a report about the nation's heritage. Local action alone will not be enough to save it. We urge the government to take action, and those who have national influence to bring it to their attention.

We are grateful to all those who gave of their time and energy to support our work, including the churchwardens and parishioners we met, clergy and parish support staff.

We owe them a great debt of gratitude, as we do to all who hosted visits, gave evidence or responded to the Commission's questions.

Please note that for the purposes of this report only, the word 'incumbent' is used to represent the clergy person with responsibility for the parish(es). Other terms include Vicar, Rector, Team Rector, Team Vicar or Priest in Charge. But for this report only, incumbent is used throughout.

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# Foreword

by the Rt Revd Graham Usher  
Bishop of Norwich



**The Archbishop of Canterbury gave a Charge, essentially my role description headlines, when I became Bishop of Norwich. In it he said, “you are called to create a sense of shared and strategic journey in ministry and mission, enabling an imaginative response to current challenges especially in relation to ... the rich legacy of church buildings”.**

Over the last four years that I have been Bishop of Norwich, I have delighted in being able to visit a significant number of our church buildings in Norfolk and Waveney. Often this is by joining in worship at Confirmations and other special occasions, though it is also a joy to slip in quietly during a walk to pray and sign the visitor book. I am conscious that with over 640 churches in the Diocese, I have a large number still to explore.

During these visits one gets a sense of whether a church building is prayed in frequently or not; whether it is lovingly cared for or not; whether the congregation is vibrant or struggling (and a vibrant rural congregation need not be large); whether it is a gathering of a like-minded club, or a group of diverse people seeking to be makers of salt and generators of light in their community.

Our church buildings witness God’s mini-miracles; vows of baptism and marriage exchanged and honoured; times of mourning and loss recognised; moments of healing gratefully acknowledged and inspiration gleaned; forgiveness offered and received. These are spaces for dialogue with the Father, through Jesus in the Holy Spirit; places of prayer and community. What is frequently not appreciated by the wider public is that our church buildings are sustained, together with the cost of ministry provided by clergy and lay ministers, by the generosity of local people.

Our churches are also historic gems; treasure troves of community memory; story-telling places of war and peace, trade and service, the famous and the infamous; architectural delights with their knapped flint, angel roofs and round towers; and outside in their churchyards there is often rich biodiversity.

Yet in a Diocese with so many church buildings, and small populations in many rural places, their future sustainability is a concern. I regularly hear the anxieties about this, especially where age is creeping up on long-committed individuals and there seem

to be no obvious successors. The responsibilities for churchwardens and parochial church council members does not decrease with Church and secular legislation. Many want to focus more on the mission and ministry of God's Church, rather than ploughing all of their energies into the maintenance of a church building.

If there was an easy answer, then I'm sure it would have been found by now. We could have said, "Look what is happening in that Diocese over there. Let's copy what they are doing".

I am clear that that the best way to sustain the church buildings of the Diocese of Norwich, indeed across the Church of England, is to have thriving, committed congregations. That means sharing the Gospel in our generation through evangelism and the wider mission of the Church. However, in some places the ground is too hard, or choked in weeds or the soil is tired out. Or there are simply too many church buildings in an area, or there are not the people coming forward to care for them. What then do we do?

I am immensely grateful to Laura McGillivray, a former Chief Executive of Norwich City Council, for chairing this Church Buildings Commission to explore the future for church buildings in Norfolk and Waveney. She and the members of the Commission have had a hard task. They have engaged with the challenge with energy and commitment during their 14 meetings and 11 visits to parishes and public consultation events not to mention numerous subcommittee meetings. We owe them a great debt of gratitude, as we do to all who hosted visits, gave evidence or responded to the Commission's questions.

This report sets out the Commission's recommendations and these will be looked at by myself, the Bishop's Council of Trustees and the Diocesan Synod so as, in the words of the Archbishop's Charge, "to create a sense of shared and strategic journey". I remain committed to seeing the parish churches of Norfolk and Waveney thrive, and supporting those that are struggling so that they can plan for their future under God, "for just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Corinthians 12.12).

+Graham Norvic:  
Trinity Sunday 2023

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# 1.

## Executive summary and recommendations



## 1.1. Executive summary

### 1.1.1. Methodology

1. In 2021 the Rt Revd Graham Usher, Bishop of Norwich, commissioned a report into the future of the church buildings in the Diocese of Norwich with the aim of identifying:
  - a. the parish churches in the Diocese of Norwich which are most vulnerable to diminishing usage in terms of financial, practical and volunteer support
  - b. potential opportunities locally to introduce complementary or alternative uses, drawing on best practice elsewhere
  - c. options for the future as resources continue to diminish (all potential options will be considered)
2. The Commission met between January 2022 and May 2023. Commission members were drawn from a variety of stakeholders including clergy, churchwardens and independent specialists with a knowledge of and interest in the use and heritage of church buildings, with an independent chair. (Section 2: Role and purpose of the Commission)
3. At the time of commissioning, there was a great concern that the report would recommend a series of church building closures; this was not within our brief, and our desire was to keep church buildings open and in use for communities and for worship.
4. For the Diocese of Norwich, the role of church buildings is intrinsically linked to its vision, priorities and strategic projects and this report should be read in that context and also in the context of keeping communities vibrant and engaged.
5. We recognise that the main purposes of the Church, in both rural and urban settings, are to:
  - offer a place for all in the community to gather for Christian worship;
  - support the life of the local community offering pastoral care to all;
  - encourage a sense of community belonging and mutual support;
  - offer services to celebrate and commemorate the key stages of life, including baptism, marriage and death;
  - maintain an accessible and time-honoured place for community gatherings, quiet reflection, consolation and peace.

6. The beginning of 2022 was in the shadow of the pandemic and many institutions had faced financial challenges; the Diocese of Norwich was amongst those. Central support staff had been cut back as a result and were under pressure. Nonetheless they had been working hard to support parishes and adjusting like everyone else to the aftermath of the pandemic.
7. Several national reports had preceded ours, including that of The Rt Revd Dr John Inge (Bishop of Worcester at time of report), in 2015. The Taylor report and its pilots were written by Bernard Taylor in 2016 and 2020 respectively. We also considered a report commissioned by the then Bishop of Norwich and carried out by Mr Justice John Blofeld in 1990, although it is not clear what action was taken as a result.
8. The existing system of support to church buildings relies heavily on the goodwill and energy of a dwindling number of increasingly elderly volunteers, members of congregations who will eventually (within the next 10 years or so) no longer be able to sustain their efforts. This is particularly true in isolated rural areas with few congregation members and small local populations where the twin pressures of paying parish share and financing the upkeep of their church presents great challenges.
9. Reductions in funding for clergy have resulted in amalgamations of benefices. In one rural benefice, for example, there are 19 churches, placing great pressure on the incumbent who has three churches with no parochial church council (PCC) members, so that she has the sole responsibility for these churches. (A second full time incumbent for this particular benefice began her post in March 2023) Where the incumbent is the sole member of the PCC, it is not clear what their legal responsibilities and liabilities are. This area of law needs clarifying.
10. In examining the position of local parish churches we sought to understand the challenges for churchwardens, PCC members and incumbents. These include the conditions that are most likely to lead to church survival and demise, the opportunities to increase usage and ownership, and available sources of help and support both within the Diocese of Norwich and outside from local and national church trusts and charities.
11. The existing system of support for churches places an unfair burden on a small number of people who are struggling. It is not sustainable or fair. While many church communities are managing the upkeep and repair of their church buildings, many are not. The complexities of formal 'redundancy' and the burden it then places on the Diocese of Norwich militates against parishes following this route unless there is an obvious alternative. At the moment there is no alternative use for the building. So churches can be locked up and left to go to ruin. We were frequently told "*we can't go on like this*" and "*something has to be done*".

- 12.** In the report we explore the significance and value of church buildings in the Diocese of Norwich, which covers Norfolk and Waveney: their theological, historical, cultural, heritage and community value. (Section 3: Why are Norfolk and Waveney churches valuable?) We then embark on a series of methods of inquiry, including a literature review, data analysis, visits to benefices, drop-in sessions, expert presentations to the Commission, parish and public surveys, and ideas sessions. (Section 4: What we did)
- 13.** What we found (Section 5) covers a range of data and information gleaned from qualitative as well as quantitative sources. The Diocese of Norwich has over 640 church buildings, the second largest number in any diocese in the country, and is third lowest in the country for population per church at 1,451 people (behind the Diocese of Hereford and the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich). Of the church buildings, 90% are Grade 1 or 2\* listed and this is quite exceptional in national terms.
- 14.** A number of redundant church buildings are in the care of locally managed trusts. The Norfolk Churches Trust has 13 buildings, the Norwich Historic Churches Trust has 18 in the city of Norwich, and the Norfolk Historic Buildings Trust has two former religious buildings. The Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust is involved in the repair of three redundant churches: St George's which has been a theatre for many years, ruined St Margaret's where teams have been trained in repair techniques, and St John's, a Victorian church acquired by the Trust for conversion to a new use.
- 15.** A number are also in the hands of national trusts. The Friends of Friendless Churches have two Norfolk churches (both in the Diocese of Ely), the Churches Conservation Trust, which is funded by the Church Commissioners and the government's Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), has 28 in the county. The Diocese of Norwich is unique in having its own Diocesan Churches Trust but these churches are not redundant. At the time of writing there were 14 of them. They are in the temporary care of the Diocese of Norwich with the intention of being returned to active use when the local communities are able to support them.
- 16.** The churches in the Norwich Historic Churches Trust have a variety of uses from an arts centre to a puppet theatre. It is much easier, although still challenging, to find uses in urban areas with a large population. The other trusts maintain their churches mainly for their intrinsic historic interest.

17. The public survey showed that regardless of religious conviction, most people felt that church buildings are an important feature of the Norfolk and Waveney landscape and they would be “*very sad*” if their local church building was closed. However, there is little public understanding of how church buildings are maintained or cared for, or indeed who owns them. There is an assumption that the Church of England owns the churches and not PCCs, and that they will always be there as they have for hundreds of years. In fact around 280 have already gone to ruin over the centuries. This means that the true vulnerability of church buildings is not appreciated. In truth the nation’s heritage is being cared for by a small handful of volunteers.
18. The challenges for church communities in the Diocese of Norwich include: falling church attendance; some very small congregations or none; ageing church members; lack of basic facilities such as electricity, toilets, kitchens or car parking; and the existence of bat roosts. We were often told that it was very difficult to find people to take up churchwarden or PCC roles. The parish survey asked if churchwardens would be happy to give up their roles if there was someone else to take it on, and 78% of respondents said they would be happy or very happy.
19. We had hoped to be able to identify which churches were struggling or at risk but this has proved to be very difficult as the hard data is not complete or it is unreliable. Where it is not complete, then estimates are made. Not all parishes complete returns (other than financial returns which are statutory). For example, there are around 100 churches which have no recorded churchwardens, but we were told of many instances where formal roles are carried out on an informal basis because individuals do not want the responsibility of the formal role. This is not encouraged but has been adopted as a pragmatic approach due to the lack of formal volunteers.
20. The most vulnerable churches were those with the smallest congregations, no or few PCC members, and small local populations in isolated rural areas where the church lacks basic amenities. However, these factors are not predictors of vulnerability as no church or parish is the same and a church that you might expect to be vulnerable may have a local patron or a highly active community that looks after its church. Key community members leaving or arriving in a parish can make all the difference. There is a degree of serendipity at play.
21. For churches within the Diocese of Norwich, the main sources of help and advice about building improvements and funding support are the parish support staff, members of the voluntary church buildings ambassadors scheme, and the Diocese of Norwich website. Parishioners did not always find help easy to access although the staff are very willing and try hard to meet demand. They recognise that some parishioners are not digitally experienced and are happy to compensate for this although this may not be clear to those needing help.

22. In addition, the Norfolk Churches Trust provides grant aid for repairs and is active in offering advice to parishes. They have a church buildings at risk register which goes beyond the national at-risk register, and a major part of the secretary's role is to go out and meet people, and discuss their projects and how best to go about them.
23. Churches looking to make repairs and improvements may also turn to a number of other sources of help and finance both local and national. The Round Tower Churches Society gives grants and is particularly active in East Anglia where most such churches are to be found. The National Churches Trust is also a significant grant giver and there are many other charitable trusts that are prepared to help.
24. For major schemes there is The National Lottery Heritage Fund ([Annex G](#)). In practice it takes time to put together a suitable funding package as the costs of major repairs and improvements can be high given their special character and antiquity. Many churchwardens or fabric officers do not have the confidence, skills or experience to undertake this work and need help and guidance. New toilets and kitchens are vital to increased community usage but are costly and it is not always easy to prove the new usage that might follow.
25. Nationally, the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme is enormously helpful in enabling the VAT on major works to be reclaimed, making expensive alterations and adaptations more affordable. There is contradictory advice about whether parish councils can contribute to churches. Although it is clear that grants towards worship are excluded, some parish and town councils have listened to advice suggesting that all contributions (even to mowing churchyards) is unlawful and should be stopped, resulting in precious funding being withdrawn in as many as 1,000 areas. This aspect of the law could usefully be clarified and is being debated in parliament at the time of writing.
26. Finally, in a bid to think creatively given that the whole system is so complicated, we embarked on a couple of ideas sessions to help us think 'outside the box'. The future sustainability of our church building heritage lies both with national government and also with those outside the church who also care about church buildings. They may be walkers, cyclists, 'church crawlers', genealogists, tourists, visitors or those on a pilgrimage, but unless wider communities of interest than PCCs themselves are engaged in caring for the buildings, then for an increasing number of vulnerable churches the future is limited to say the least, or bleak if one is pessimistic.

## 1.2. Recommendations in brief

Our full recommendations are set out in section 6 but the most significant recommendations, and those which have potentially the greatest impact are set out below.

Many of our recommendations are designed to support increased activity in church buildings for individuals and families, in line with the vision for the Diocese of Norwich, and for the wider community, as well as appealing to those who love the buildings for themselves.

Recommendations for Norfolk and Waveney cover actions that can be taken by the Diocese of Norwich, the parishes and others to relieve the pressure on individual parishes and church communities: actions that adopt a proactive approach to supporting churches and keeping them in communities, support communities, and encourage wider complementary uses and ownership. National recommendations are aimed at the Church of England and the government.





### 1.2.1. Recommendations for Norfolk and Waveney and the Diocese of Norwich

- **Significantly expand the Norwich Diocesan Churches Trust by increasing its scope and remit** to become more proactive and supportive of church buildings and their communities, collaborating with other trusts where appropriate. ([Recommendation 1](#))
- **Recruit extra Building Support Officers** for the effective operation of the Trust and the proper care of historic churches across the Diocese of Norwich. It is clear that the number of Building Support Officers is not adequate and needs to be increased. ([Recommendation 2](#))
- **Encourage parishes to adopt and carry out standard annual maintenance plans** as this is one of the key ways that major repairs can sometimes be reduced in the long term. ([Recommendation 2.2](#))
- **Establish an independent Norfolk and Waveney Churches Culture and Heritage Partnership** to engage a wide range of partners and the public in caring for church buildings and growing community engagement. The Partnership would allow work at a more strategic level creating greater impact, and potentially identify further sources of funding. ([Recommendation 3](#))
- **Employ a Community Engagement Officer** to work to support the Partnership in identifying individual communities where there are opportunities to grow engagement and potential new uses for their church building. ([Recommendation 4](#))
- **Rigorously and effectively review and analyse the data and information about church buildings and their communities** held by the Diocese of Norwich and by the Church of England centrally to guide decision making and direct support to those who need it most. ([Recommendation 5](#))

### 1.2.2. Recommendations for the Church of England and the government

- Request the government to make permanent the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (LPW) to enable longer-term planning and a greater chance of achieving major repairs. ([Recommendation 9](#))
- Ask the government to maintain and extend Historic England's ability to provide grant aid to buildings on the Heritage at Risk Register. ([Recommendation 10](#))
- Clarify parish council powers by resolving conflict in two Local Government Acts ([Recommendation 11](#)) and clarify what funding support parish councils can give to parochial church councils (PCCs)
- Clarify incumbent liability ([Recommendation 12](#)) to take the pressure off incumbents who are the sole members of PCCs.
- Encourage the Church of England to support and develop the newly established Buildings for Mission Fund over the long term and to communicate its purpose and scope to all those engaged in the care of churches. ([Recommendation 14](#))
- To all those organisations with national influence, we ask you to urge the government to recognise the significance of our national heritage of historic church buildings and the fragility of their funding support, including promoting public awareness of the same.

## 1.3. Final recommendation

**We recommend establishing an implementation working group** to support the development of recommendations to Norfolk and Waveney and the Diocese of Norwich. ([Recommendation 17](#)) An indicative action plan ([Section 7](#)) is included to guide the implementation of recommendations that are accepted. We hope that they will be seriously considered and that if implemented together, they will relieve the burden on struggling parishioners and incumbents and will widen the basis of practical, volunteer and financial support for the heritage church buildings for which this region is famous.

# 2.

## Role and purpose of the Commission



## 2.1. Terms of reference

### The purpose of the Commission

The aims of the Commission were to identify:

- a) the parish churches of the Diocese of Norwich which are most vulnerable to diminishing usage: financial; practical and volunteer support
- b) potential opportunities locally to introduce complementary or alternative uses, drawing on best practice elsewhere
- c) options for the future as resources continue to diminish (all potential options will be considered)

Commission members were drawn from a variety of stakeholders including clergy, churchwardens and independent specialists with a knowledge of and interest in the use and heritage of church buildings, with an independent chair ([Annex A](#)). The Commission drew upon the experience and views of others in formulating ideas and options and then making recommendations to the Bishop of Norwich and the Bishop's Council of Trustees.

The Commission consulted widely, received evidence from a variety of organisations and individuals, visited a variety of church buildings to meet and listen to churchwardens and incumbents, examined available data and carried out both church and public surveys before reaching its conclusions.

For those of us on the Commission who were not familiar with the workings of the Church of England, the Diocese of Norwich or its relationship to parishes and buildings ([Annex B](#)), there was a lot we had to learn. ([Annex H: Glossary](#))

## 2.2. This is about keeping churches in use and not about closing church buildings.

Fears were expressed early on that the Commission was set up to close churches (in other words make them 'redundant' and closed for the purposes of worship: [Annex D](#)). What we wanted was quite the reverse. We found that 'redundancy' is very rarely the answer.

Commission members all felt strongly that the historic church buildings of Norfolk and Waveney should be valued and protected and this was best achieved if they remained open and accessible to their communities and to visitors.

**The big question was how? and by whom? And what measures would give the greatest chances of ensuring their preservation in the long term.**



The exceptional number of beautiful medieval church buildings across our Diocese are a glorious asset. This rich heritage is the fabric of our common past, and must be part of our future, a wonderful resource that belongs not exclusively to the Church but to all of us.

However, without intervention, the next few years would see the gradual closure or abandonment of more church buildings in the context of declining congregations, an ageing demographic and the gradual falling away of PCC members and their officers.

We sought to find patterns that would predict which churches would be most likely to decline and go to ruin so that we could classify churches and predict which ones were most vulnerable. It is clear that the most vulnerable buildings are likely to be isolated rural churches with few facilities. However, what we found was that every church and every community is unique and that although there may be factors that indicate the potential decline of a building, prediction is a risky business.

Churches are not just buildings. They are maintained and supported by people. Churches become vulnerable if the people who support them are exposed to stress and discouragement and if the responsibility for caring for them seems overwhelming. If church buildings are to survive then in some cases there needs to be a shift in the sense of responsibility from the often small congregation to the wider community and the provision of support to lighten the burden. It also has to be recognised that those churches that are well supported tend to be found in places where the wider community is already vital and engaged. Where this is not the case, the business of caring for the ancient church building is still a potential catalyst for greater community cohesion if properly supported and encouraged.

## 2.3. Context

The Commission started its work in 2022 towards the end of the pandemic that had been so damaging for individual health and community activity. Even when it was possible to worship, many older congregation members were reluctant to leave home and had lost confidence in joining gatherings of different kinds. This has taken a while to build back, not just in relation to church communities but in attendance at theatres and cinemas.

Many institutions suffered from loss of income during this period. Without the intervention of government, many more businesses would have failed and jobs been lost. Local and central government were under pressure and churches lost income too. The temporary closure of church buildings and the use of remote services on the internet meant a dramatic reduction in Sunday collections. Coming in the wake of 10 years or so of reducing central and local government funding, all institutions including grant making bodies were financially constrained and remain so.

Declining congregations and increasing ages of congregations have meant that parish giving to the Diocese of Norwich in the form of parish share has been reduced. This in turn has led to reduced funding for Diocesan support to parishes and a reduction in the number of incumbents, resulting in increasing benefice size. PCCs faced with paying parish share and paying for the upkeep of their parish churches make choices and some of these are difficult. Covid did not help.

During the period in which the Commission was working, it was also a time of change for the Diocese Board of Finance, with a new Diocesan Secretary, new parish support staff and a reshaping of strategy and approach towards increasing congregations but with diminished resources. The aftermath of covid and this reshaping goes some way to explaining the feelings we encountered of disconnect between parish and the Diocese Board of Finance. Despite the dips in church attendance which occurred during covid and the subsequent 'bounce back', the trends we describe in the report are continuing and the pressures on some PCCs are acute.

## 2.4. Background reports

This is not the first report into the future sustainability of church buildings. Recent national reports include the *Taylor Review* (2016) and the evaluation of its recommended pilot projects, which reported in 2020. The Rt Revd Dr John Inge (Bishop of Worcester at time of report), had earlier produced the *Report of the Church Buildings Review Group* in 2015. The last commission into this subject in the Diocese of Norwich was chaired by Mr Justice John Blofeld and reported in October 1990: *Rural Church Buildings: Report of a Commission by the Bishop of Norwich*. In 2003 the former Bishop of Norwich, the Rt Revd Graham James, convened a small working group to look at the problem and it published a brief report entitled *Church Buildings: A Source of Delight and Anxiety*.

Each report identified a future crisis in the sustainability of church buildings and imagined that crisis being reached within 10 years or so, making recommendations to tackle the issues.

There is no evidence that the four publications mentioned above had any real impact and it is hard to see which of their recommendations have been effectively put into practice. A basic underlying problem, the dramatic decline in state aid, has been a recurrent theme.

A great many documents of this sort have helped to inform our findings and are referred to elsewhere in [Section 4.1](#) of this report and in the bibliography.

## 2.5. Challenges

**There is no single option which we could identify which guarantees the sustainability of all our church buildings** within the current configuration of resources and constraints but we have made a range of recommendations which collectively and with some targeted funding could make a significant difference.

The public imagine that the Church of England as a whole, or the state, looks after our listed church buildings. While they are still standing and in apparently good order, there will not be a high level of public concern. However, there are strong and legitimate feelings about the importance of our historic church buildings, not just for their religious purposes but as the common heritage for communities and visitors to enjoy.

It is not widely understood that the responsibility for maintaining a church building actually falls to the parish congregation through their parochial church council (PCC). At the time of writing, the majority of congregations are able to cope. However, in the more isolated rural areas with diminishing congregations and a very small number of active members or churchwardens, it is a struggle. Although the focus of the Commission is on church buildings, it is really about people. These people need support, which is why improving relationships between parishes and the Diocesan Board of Finance features strongly in this report.

This system in many cases relies heavily on the good will and energy of a dwindling number of increasingly elderly volunteers, members of congregations who will eventually (within the next 10 years or so) no longer be able to sustain their efforts. Elderly churchwardens in particular fear that failure to maintain their church building will mean its closure and abandonment, or that failure to contribute their parish share will mean the loss of their clergy.

Reduced income from parishes and falling congregations have led to an increase in the size of rural benefices, where rectors and vicars now cover ministry and in some cases care for many church buildings. In one particular case, at the time of writing this report, there was one full-time ordained priest caring for 19 churches, some with no congregations or PCC members other than the incumbent. (Case study, [Annex I](#))

Incumbents are stretched ever more thinly. Worse than that, they live with the fear that the responsibility for maintaining a church with no PCC may fall to them personally.

We were frequently told that *“something has to be done”* and *“we can’t go on like this”*.

The current system is not sustainable and it is not fair on either churchwardens or incumbents.

**Where the upkeep and use of church buildings is shared with local communities** there is a greater chance of sustainability. Even then, the future of the church building



often falls to one or two key individuals with energy, drive and a determination to keep the church building open. It is random and unpredictable. In some cases there may be the potential to increase community uses but churches without modern facilities such as toilets, car parking and electricity will be less attractive.

However, **hundreds of church buildings are still standing**. Many congregations and communities are actively involved and there are sources of funds, both national and local, that have been successfully directed at maintaining church buildings, despite the odds and in defiance of the predictions of all the reports that have gone before.

We have proposed measures that we believe will relieve the pressures on churchwardens, PCCs and incumbents and sustain historic church buildings as a vital part of the community. Most importantly, we have proposed measures that we hope will gradually increase public awareness about the value and vulnerabilities of historic church buildings and also the opportunities for their wider use and ownership.

Our recommendations are ambitious, forward-looking, innovative and built on an evidence base presented later in the report. We hope that this report will not be shelved and ineffective like many of the others and so are offering to support the practical implementation of our proposals should they be accepted.

## 2.6. Guiding principles

Our recommendations are designed to focus on:

- keeping church buildings open and available for use
- protecting church buildings from decline
- supporting communities
- relieving pressure on churchwardens, PCCs and incumbents
- raising awareness of the potential for shared and imaginative uses of church buildings
- promoting public awareness about the importance of historic church buildings, their ownership and the responsibilities for their upkeep.

Only if they are implemented together will they significantly improve the sustainability and vitality of our historic church buildings. In making these recommendations we are aware that the Diocese of Norwich has already made important innovations in the care and use of church buildings that deserve to be developed and extended.

We recognise that many of our recommendations will require additional funding. We have designed them so that as far as possible they create the potential for attracting funds from external sources. However, it is inevitable that the Norwich Diocesan Board of Finance will need to utilise existing accessible funds.

# 3.

## Why are Norfolk and Waveney churches valuable?



## 3.1. Theology

For many Christians, the building in which they worship has immense significance, but this is not reflected in the doctrine and liturgical theology of the Church of England.

One commentator noted that *“the Church of England is not the National Trust at prayer”*. How do we square our many significant listed buildings with this command from Jesus?

*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*

Matthew 28.19

In an age when there has been a much greater focus on mission and relationship with the community, some Christians see the building as a stumbling block that occupies much time and money which should be directed elsewhere. There is no mention of buildings in the five marks of mission, agreed throughout the Anglican Communion:

- to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom;
- to teach, baptise and nurture new believers;
- to respond to human need by loving service;
- to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation;
- to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Any future strategy thus needs to carefully balance the wide variety of views in both the Church and society about the ongoing role of our church buildings and their care.

In his book *A Christian Theology of Place* (2003), The Rt Revd Dr John Inge (Bishop of Worcester at time of report), examines the importance of both place and space: place emphasises security and stability, and space emphasises openness and freedom. Places are seen as the seat of meeting and activity in people’s interaction between God and the world. In 1991 a previous Bishop of Norwich commissioned J. Blofeld to chair a commission and report on rural church buildings. It reminds us that church buildings are a repository of traditions and culture: the focus of the village and a link between present and past generations.

### 3.1.1. A place for worship

Almost all religions connect people and place. From the earliest times, the temple and synagogues were central to the Jewish faith:

*One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.*

Psalm 27

In New Testament times, we read how, as a young child, Jesus sought learning in the temple:

*After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.*

Luke 2

And it was in the local synagogue that he worshipped during his ministry:

*They went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and began to teach.*

Mark 1

Later, the apostles continued to meet in the temple, while also meeting in people's homes:

*And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.*

Acts 5

This practice of meeting in homes continued but, from the third century, churches and monasteries were formed. The earliest parish church in England is probably St Martin's church in Canterbury, set up by St Augustine when he arrived in England in 597CE. These early churches were often established on pre-Christian sites of spiritual significance, emphasising continuity in human experience.

The 1991 Blofeld report recorded:

*By its form, its furnishing, its history, its association, and its very 'feel', church stimulates and inspires the activity of prayer, both public and private.*

### 3.1.2. A place of community

From earliest times, parish churches have been at the heart of rural communities. Over the years, many people attend services, especially at Christmas, Easter, Harvest and Remembrance or for national celebrations or mourning. They attend life events such as baptisms, wedding and funerals; in the churchyard, people remember relatives and friends. Many who may not be regular attenders value their church by helping in the building, in the churchyard or at church events, appreciating its comforting presence, support and history.

The Church Heritage Forum's *Building Faith in our Future* report (2004) described churches as:

*providing a physical base where people can meet and be supported, practically, emotionally and spiritually – day in, day out, church buildings host groups of all types and all age ranges, from toddlers upwards, reaching many who lack confidence to find self-worth elsewhere.*

The need to meet to enjoy worship means that we need a place in which to meet. At times, the practice of faith is diminished, yet the church building provides an ongoing witness to the life of faith.

### 3.1.3. A place of pilgrimage

Churches have long been places of pilgrimage. We may walk to a cathedral and recall those who have worshipped there over the centuries; the Rt Revd Graham Usher, the Bishop of Norwich, walked from the birthplace of St Thomas Becket in Cheapside to the place of his martyrdom in Canterbury, asking:

*“What am I doing here?”  
“How does this place speak to me of God?”*

When describing sacred spaces in *Little Gidding*, TS Eliot writes:

*You are here to kneel  
Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more  
Than in an order of words, the conscious occupation  
Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.*

TS Eliot, *Little Gidding* (Faber and Faber, 1942)

As the numbers attending church have fallen, the numbers on pilgrimages have risen. In 1985, 2,491 people chose to follow the pilgrimage road – the *Camino* – to St James of Compostela in western Spain. In 2010 that number had dramatically risen to 270,000.

Bishop Graham reminds us that as we return from a place of pilgrimage, we recall how we have been influenced by our experience. The root of the term ‘parish’ is the Greek term *paroikia*, meaning a congregation of pilgrims. He asks how we might make attending church more like pilgrimage, how we might recreate the rhythm of walking the *Camino*. After all, in many of our medieval church buildings, people have been praying for nearly a thousand years.

#### 3.1.4. More than a building

Sarah Coakley observes that, after a millennium of prayer, a church becomes more than a building:

*“The Church is not a building.” That is most certainly true. But buildings in which “prayer has been valid” are more like people than stone or brick, because of their vibrant association with the folk we and others have loved. They are not so much haunted as “thin” to another world in which past, present and future converge. And when, as in the parish system in England, each such building holds the memories of a particular geographical community, it is well to be aware of its remaining symbolic power – even if it now seems neglected, under-used or actively vandalised.*

*Praying for England, Wells and Coakley, 2008*

#### 3.1.5. A place for visitors

Church buildings also provide solace for visitors, often throughout the week. They enjoy the building, take time to reflect or recall memories. By their form, their furnishings, their history, their associations, and their very ‘feel’, churches stimulate and inspire the activity of prayer and reflection, both public and private. The ‘presence’ provided by a church powerfully represents the place and nature of God amongst his people.

The core purpose of a church is as a place of worship, both during services and informally at other times. It roots a Christian community to its past, enabling witness in the present and encouraging it to look forward; church buildings therefore need to be valued and cherished, not seen as a burden. The main purpose of this Commission is to find ways of making that process more sustainable.

Some will find solace and inspiration in worship, but church buildings minister in many other ways as well. They are places of great beauty and history, telling the story of a community in words and artefacts. A medieval wall painting appears and speaks to us of the 14th century. The font tells of all who have been baptised. Stained glass windows tell the story of faith. The generations are remembered in memorials inside and in the churchyard. All this enables us to see the community in its space and story, often over nearly a thousand years.

### **3.1.6. Churches at the centre of our communities**

Finally, churches provide security and support for the present and are places which can reach out to the vulnerable and lonely. They are often at the core of our communities, almost whether we like it or not. They will be there in our hour of need. It is no wonder there are so many, one for each community, however small, as a focus of serenity, hope and inspiration.

## 3.2. History

The vast majority of parish churches in rural Norfolk and Waveney originated in the years between 950 and 1150. They were built either on estates, usually by the manorial lord, or on common ground. They and their priests were funded by tithes, payments for services and endowments of land or rent.

A church's patron (its founder or their Norman successors) were at first responsible for the maintenance and renewal of the fabric of the building. During the 1200s Church statutes issued in English dioceses placed responsibility for the maintenance and development of the church west of the chancel arch – that is the nave, tower, aisles and porches – in the hands of the parishioners, so that the patron generally then focused attention (and money) on the chancel space to the east.

By around 1300, the income generated by many of the churches was being paid away to a larger religious corporation, such as a monastery, cathedral, college or hospital, which managed the chancel and usually nominated and paid a vicar or chaplain. Parishioners organised themselves into committees and appointed churchwardens to fundraise for the upkeep of the rest of the building.

Where a parish was wealthy this arrangement presented few difficulties, but in small or poor parishes, commitment to the fabric of the building sometimes failed. Times of economic hardship exacerbated the problem. In such circumstances churches and their parishes and incomes were amalgamated and one of the buildings was demolished or left to fall into ruin.

There are many visible instances of this across the Diocese to this day. Wholesale loss of a building was not the only outcome, and there are also examples of churches having been made smaller when a discrete part (such as a tower, chapel or aisle) was no longer used, fell into disrepair and was dismantled. There are also still a few cases where a wealthy patron (such as a local landowner or a Cambridge college) supports new developments and repairs.

Major refurbishments or extensions over the last two centuries are often evidence of just this sort of patronage. For the most part, though, the ownership of and responsibility for the church fabric rests with the PCC.

Compulsory Church Rates were abolished in 1868, and since then each parish has relied on voluntary giving to maintain the church building. This is therefore a very different situation from that which was in place until Victorian times, when all property-owning inhabitants were responsible for the church building. Now it is simply those who step forward and form the parochial church council.



It is important to recognise that the Church of England as an institution is not legally responsible for the upkeep of church buildings. Equally, it has no direct authority in deciding which churches will be closed or declared redundant. That is a matter for the parish and the PCC and the Church Commissioners.

However, in order to sustain Anglican worship in a Church of England parish it is necessary to have clergy institutionally approved and paid for, and the cost falls in part on the local community through the 'parish share'. This burden falls most heavily on churchgoers through their regular giving and through voluntarily organised fundraising events.

Some former sources of income, such as endowments of land (glebe), rents or charities have generally been transferred from parishes to the relevant Diocesan Board of Finance or the Church Commissioners for England. For example, glebe was transferred from parishes to the Diocesan Board of Finance in 1978 to defray the salaries of incumbents across the Diocese, regardless of the parish which had previously benefited from the endowment.

Recent developments relating to glebe and the housing of clergy (historic and current) are set out in the Church Property Measure 2018. Another fundamental shift was the creation of 'civil parishes' by the Local Government Act of 1894, which effectively separated what were deemed the secular functions of communities from those of the established Church. One consequence of this is that the maintenance of churchyards, that is burial places, was distinguished from care for the building around which the burials were clustered. The many plaques and windows inside the churches, and the graves and war memorials immediately outside them, however, show clearly that church buildings are inseparable from places of personal commemoration.



### 3.3. Culture and heritage

The importance of our remarkable collection of historic church buildings makes their care and preservation a matter of great urgency for the county and the country. Abundance does not diminish their individual value; for each is the unique product of its locality and its people. For most villages the parish church and its churchyard are the repository of ancient and more recent community memory. The church building itself is usually, in architectural terms, by far the most important building in the village, and the churchyard, studded with 18th-century and later headstones – a haven for wildlife, plants, and lichens – is where the bond with local people can be at its strongest and most visible. Here numerous inscriptions bear witness to the hard and sometimes tragic lives of former generations. The emotional response of each person to the church building and its setting will depend on their experience and temperament. The antiquity and beauty of the place, and the fact that it is – or should be – freely accessible, however, can make a major contribution to the mental wellbeing of the local community. The very identity of places and landscapes and the sense of loyalty that this engenders is strongly and positively affected by the character of these church buildings. As John Betjeman wrote:

*What would you be, you wide East Anglian sky  
Without church towers to recognise you by?*

John Betjeman, *A Passion for Churches* (Methuen, 1974)

Each historic church tells a story about past and present belief and piety, about design and manual skill, social attitudes and divisions, about community and private endeavour, basic problem solving, and about local and wider economies, geography and geology. Some church buildings are small and almost domestic in their simplicity. Others are vast and airy, filled with light from great traceried windows; unified volumes articulated by delicate arcades and spanned by oak roofs composed of hundreds of hewn and moulded timbers which, in the 15th and 16th centuries, are sometimes inhabited by carved angels with outspread wings.

Norfolk's intractable building materials, flint and crumbly Carstone, will not easily produce architecture of great sophistication without expensive close-grained limestone from the East Midlands and further afield. All the traceried windows, the quoins that reinforce corners, the masonry of piers, arches, fonts, tombs, and other furnishings involved shipping and carting this material over very long distances; in the case of Norwich cathedral, from Normandy.

The sea, with which Norfolk and Waveney are so closely identified, allowed close commercial and cultural relationships with the peoples of northern Europe. Round towers, for example, were found earlier in the Carolingian empire. Of 179 such towers in England, Norfolk and Waveney have 140 examples. Ships also brought large and

heavy pieces of polished Purbeck marble from Dorset to cover the more prosperous dead, and later – as the church floors filled up with lettered ledger slabs – the black marble of Belgium. Some early brick may have come first from the Low Countries, and by the early 16th century, terracotta monuments in the newly fashionable classical style were shipped over in sections, it is thought, from Flanders.

Until the Reformation (which came hard on the heels of the terracotta) a belief in salvation by works and the power of prayer for the souls of benefactors fuelled a remarkable cycle of building, rebuilding and furnishing. These church buildings and their contents are the visible expression of communities and their aspirations: successive vanished congregations, wealthy patrons, quarrymen, masons, carpenters, bell founders, tilemakers, glass painters, artists, sculptors and lead workers, boat crews and carters.

Timber screens from the late 15th and early 16th centuries still mark the social and liturgical division between chancel and nave. They carry images of the saints in rich colours and gilding, an incomparable collection of English late medieval panel painting. Timber seating was rare before the late 15th century. It is often movingly plain but – particularly in the west of the county – it is elaborately carved with figures and with a menagerie of exotic creatures that have been distracting congregations for over half a millennium. Late medieval stained glass by Norwich glaziers is found in many churches and every year repair work uncovers hitherto unknown schemes and fragments of wall painting that continue to expand our understanding and appreciation of medieval theology and aesthetics.

Clearly, we can learn much from this glorious display of material culture and artistic ingenuity. And it has been added to and enriched in later periods. Distinguished sculptors, both provincial and metropolitan, created magnificent Jacobean and Elizabethan funerary monuments, and the 18th century craftsmen, largely from Norwich, imported Mediterranean marble to fashion fine wall monuments. By the early 19th century they favoured the chaste white marble of Carrara to express grief and solemn recollection.

The character of the most affecting of many Norfolk and Waveney church interiors comes from finding such remarkable artistic objects and furnishings in ancient and well used buildings. They may have been partly updated, for example by the addition of Georgian box pews, galleries and pulpits. They certainly charmed John Sell Cotman and the other artists of the Norwich School who recorded in loving detail interiors adapted to the delivery of lengthy sermons. Very soon after, the Victorian passionate new interest in the religious art and architecture of the Middle Ages and its religious rituals led to widespread campaigns of restoration, rebuilding and liturgical reordering, as well as the construction of handsome new churches. Stained glass, some of it very impressive and highly decorative, is one of the most

conspicuous contributions of the Victorians and Edwardians in Norfolk and Waveney as is the new, neo-medieval seating that filled the churches. But the fact that these buildings are still there is the great achievement of their industrious stewardship of a decaying heritage. Chancels acquired floors of lustrous patterned ceramic tiles. Oil lamps lit the interiors while new vestries and heating systems, organs and lychgates all advertised the new-found vigour of the Established Church.

At the same time Roman Catholicism, reviving after centuries of oppression, produced fine new churches and chapels, many funded by the ancient former Catholic families of the county. In many villages and towns, the chapels of the Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists and Unitarians also bear witness to the popularity and persistence of Nonconformity. Historically, these other important faith groups have influenced and moulded spiritual life in their localities, just as today the changing complexion of communities continues to affect the extent to which people feel that their village church belongs to them and vice versa.

The early 20th century was characterised by consolidation, with the development of more sensitive and traditional methods of repair under the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. In the closing decades of the 20th century, these methods combined with generous levels of state aid put a quite exceptional number of churches into sound condition. The introduction of modern facilities in historic church buildings in the later 20th century has been increasingly vital for their use by congregations and the wider community. Some of the most striking new buildings were designed by nationally important architects for the Roman Catholic Church but some distinguished new work was also done for Anglican congregations.

Cultural significance is very much in the mind and eye of the beholder. So as well as preserving these wonderful church buildings, it is important also to make strenuous and creative efforts to celebrate them, to explain their meaning and to advocate their importance for today and for future generations. Historic England's *Places Strategy* (2018) sets out a virtuous and productive heritage cycle for community engagement as a self-invigorating process: *understanding* which leads to *valuing* which leads to *caring* which leads to *enjoying*.

### 3.4. Community uses today

Many churches today are still situated at the heart of their communities and are used for many other purposes, complementary to worship. The extent of activity will depend upon the size of the local community, how active it is, what facilities the church has and if there are alternative community facilities such as a village hall. Clearly the more activities a church has, the greater the chance of supporting its building. Activities will be more limited if the church is isolated, has no parking, toilet or tea point.

In our public survey, we tested the public's appetite for complementary uses and they were many, varied and in line with current uses. The more imaginative included; cinema and theatre productions, art exhibitions, talks and lectures, heritage tours, local history displays, school trips, training space for heritage building skills and a repair shop hub. There may be scope for more cultural activities which we explore later in this report. Activities not welcomed were those which would be seen to pose a risk to the fabric of the building and were not respectful of the primary purpose of the church building as a place of worship. The findings of our survey are in [section 5.1.4](#).

The national churches trust has produced a list of 50 things to do in a church (available at [www.nationalchurchestrust.org/impact/our-campaigns/fifty-things-to-do-church](http://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/impact/our-campaigns/fifty-things-to-do-church)).

In addition to complementary uses, some parishes have chosen to lease out part of their building to another organisation. A useful guide to the legal options for this and examples of where it has been carried out is available at [www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/sharing-your-building-and-finding/](http://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/sharing-your-building-and-finding/).

A number of local churches that have been closed (formally made redundant) are transferred to trusts and cared for by volunteers. The Norwich Historic Churches Trust looks after 18, the Norfolk Churches Trust 13, and the Norfolk Historic Buildings Trust is responsible for two former places of worship. ([Annex G](#))

# 4.

## What we did



The Commission wanted to understand the issues surrounding the vulnerability of church buildings in the Diocese of Norwich and Waveney from a wide a range of perspectives and as thoroughly as possible. As well as referring to written reports and interpreting existing data, we were keen to speak directly to churchwardens, incumbents and other stakeholders to hear about their experiences and opinions.

Our main activities consisted of:

- a literature review
- an analysis of existing church data
- visits to benefices in the Diocese of Norwich
- drop-in discussion sessions
- Commission presentations/expert evidence
- a church buildings survey
- a public survey
- ideas sessions

## 4.1. Literature review

All the literature directly referred to in this report is listed in the bibliography presented in [Annex O](#). Although this does not represent a complete record of all the reports we read during our work, it forms a reasonably comprehensive list of the sources we relied upon most for information and insight.

As well as the documents already referred to in [Section 2.4](#), we actively sought literature that referred to the national situation as well as the situation locally. We also read reports to allow us to understand the current situation from an historic perspective. Included in our literature review was any written work considered reliable and relevant whether formally published or not.

We would like to thank those individuals, groups and institutions who brought reports to our attention and those who contributed their own unpublished work for us to review. We would also like to highlight the valuable *Sustaining Historic Churches: What Does Recent Research Tell Us?* compiled by Charlotte Dodgeon and published by The Historic Buildings Alliance in 2022. As well as relating a brief history of major publications on the topic of church buildings since 1951, it summarises the findings of nine significant reports published between 2015 and 2021. The same resource also provides links to an extensive online repository of reports published from 1923 to 2022 (available at [www.hrballiance.org.uk/resources/policy-documents-etc/general-repository/](http://www.hrballiance.org.uk/resources/policy-documents-etc/general-repository/)).

## 4.2. Analysis of existing church data

A systematic analysis of existing qualitative and quantitative data relating to church buildings in the Diocese of Norwich was carried out. As well as facilitating informed and objective discussions relating to the vulnerability of church buildings, an additional aim was to identify those areas where there was insufficient information, so that survey tools could be designed to remedy that lack.

The Commission had access to various datasets maintained by the Church of England and several held by the Diocese of Norwich. The Commission also actively sought relevant data published by non-church organisations (e.g. Historic England's 'Heritage at Risk' register). Some unpublished material was also made available for consideration by Commission members.

Where possible, church or parish level data was used. The data analysed included, but was not restricted to, the following categories:

- church attendance statistics
- parish finance statistics
- listed building status
- building condition ratings
- facilities including electricity, toilets, kitchens and car park access
- number of churchwardens
- heritage at risk
- community data

To ensure that the situation with church buildings in the Diocese of Norwich could be understood in a national context, data from other dioceses was also reviewed where necessary.



### 4.3. Visits to benefices in the Diocese of Norwich

Commission members visited churches across the Diocese of Norwich to have conversations with those people directly responsible for managing them. Some visits were by invitation while others were by request as the work of the Commission progressed.

Visits were planned so that most types of church in most types of situations were visited. These varied in location from isolated rural churches to major parish churches, and from those churches in regular use to those churches that were under the care of a trust or were ruins.

Inevitably most of our visits were to rural churches, primarily because these make up the vast majority of church buildings in the Diocese of Norwich, and secondly because the challenges of caring for historic buildings in these areas are often exacerbated because they are in isolated situations or in places with very low populations.

While Commission members visited some churches in larger towns and a market town, we did not visit church buildings within the city of Norwich. Since the establishment of the Norwich Historic Churches Trust in 1973, which today manages 18 redundant medieval church buildings, the situation regarding church closures in the city has stabilised. Also, alternative uses are usually easier to find because of the city's relatively high population density.

The dates and benefices visited are listed below (the Commission agreed not to name individual churches in this report, except in instances where we had asked permission to do so; this was usually when we intended to highlight useful case studies).

- Thu 10 Feb 2022: Benefice of Stiffkey and Bale
- Mon 14 Feb 2022: Benefice of Coastal Group of Parishes
- Fri 25 Feb 2022: Benefice of Launditch and The Upper Nar Team Ministry
- Tue 15 Mar 2022: Benefice of Docking, The Birchams, Fring, Stanhoe and Sedgeford
- Mon 13 Jun 2022: various churches in several benefices: which included the Benefice of Venta Group, Benefice of Acle and Bure to Yare, Benefice of the South Trinity Broads, Benefice of Great Yarmouth Team Ministry, Benefice of Kessingland
- Mon 16 Jan 2023: Benefice of North Walsham, Edingthorpe, Worstead and Westwick, Benefice of Lowestoft St Margaret, Benefice of Lowestoft St Andrew

## 4.4. Drop-in discussion sessions

A series of drop-in discussion sessions were organised to provide opportunities for anyone interested in the work of the Church Buildings Commission to share their experiences, views and suggestions with Commission members directly. These were held in different parts of the Diocese of Norwich with good transport links to ensure the largest participation possible.

Each session ran from 16:00 until at least 18:30. The dates and venues were:

- Wed 6 Sep 2022: Great Yarmouth, Great Yarmouth Minster (St Nicholas)
- Wed 28 Sep 2022: Thetford, St Cuthbert's Church
- Mon 3 Oct 2022: Sheringham, St Peter's Church
- Tue 4 Oct 2022: Eaton (Norwich), St Andrew's Church
- Mon 10 Oct 2022: King's Lynn, King's Lynn Minster (St Margaret)

The drop-in discussion sessions were promoted on the Diocese of Norwich website and social media channels (Facebook and Twitter).

## 4.5. Commission presentations/ expert evidence

Representatives of various organisations and professions were invited to share their expertise and views with Commission members during our full monthly meetings. These included:

- Mon 28 Feb 2022:

**Jane Kennedy OBE** (Architect), Quinquennial Inspection Reports.

**Jeremy Burton** (County Officer, Norfolk Association of Local Councils)

with Pete Strange (Wellbeing Officer, Norfolk Association of Local Councils),

The relationship between Parish Councils and PCCs.

- Tue 5 Apr 2022:

**Trudi Hughes** (Heritage at Risk Surveyor – East, Historic England), Heritage at Risk Register, Taylor Review Pilot, Fabric/Diocesan Support Officers, value of maintenance, sustainable uses of places of worship.

- Wed 4 May 2022

**Darren Barker MBE** (conservation officer at Great Yarmouth Borough Council and managing director at Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust), Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust and skills development.

**Caroline Rawlins** (former Diocesan church buildings officer), Ruins: How many and how much of a problem?

- Wed 8 Jun 2022

**Dr Joseph Elders** (Major Projects Officer, Church Buildings Council), National guidance on church care and alternative management models, including partnerships and trusts.

- Mon 4 July 2022

**James Halsall** (Interim DAC Secretary, DoN), The faculty process, Listed Places of Worship Grant, maintenance, insurance, the Diocesan Churches Trust model.

**Anne Jenkins** (Executive Director of Business Delivery, National Lottery Heritage Fund), The work of the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

- Tue 6 Sep 2022

**Pete Waters** (Chief Executive, Visit East of England), Church's importance to tourism and potential for expansion and development.

- Tue 4 Oct 2022

**The Rt Revd Graham Usher** (Bishop of Norwich), Expression of support for the work of the Commission and the rationale for establishing it.

**Anton Bull** (former Director of Business Services, Norwich City Council), Collaborative procurement.

- Wed 2 Nov 2022

**Greg Pickup** (Chief Executive, Churches Conservation Trust), The role of the Churches Conservation Trust and recent projects.

- Mon 27 March 2023

**Tim Sweeting** (Diocesan Secretary).

## 4.6. Church buildings survey

An online survey was used to canvas the experience and opinions of those people directly responsible for managing church buildings across the Diocese of Norwich on a day-to-day basis. The survey was 'live' between 21 June 2022 and 22 July 2022. A list of all the questions included in the survey is given in [Annex F](#).

The survey was designed to collect data not routinely collected elsewhere. It consisted of eight sections:

- you and your church
- your church and its neighbourhood
- your church community
- community activities at your church
- church finances
- your church building
- collaborations between your church and other groups
- architectural and historic value of your church

The survey included branched questions so only those questions relevant to the respondent were presented to them during the survey.

Two trials were conducted before the full survey. Following feedback from participants the final survey was conducted using SmartSurvey.

Details about the survey were emailed to all PCCs. The survey was further promoted in PCC News and on the Diocese of Norwich website.

Following the close of the survey a quality check was carried out during which several duplicate responses were identified (where a church was represented by more than one reply). There were three main reasons why duplicates occurred: 1) more than one person associated with a church completed the survey, 2) one person associated with a church completed the survey more than once, 3) the person completing the survey incorrectly identified the church they were associated with. All duplicates were resolved by contacting individual respondents to ascertain which responses should be included in the final survey results.

## 4.7. Public survey

The Commission wished to canvas the ideas and opinions of members of the public regarding church buildings, whether they were churchgoers or not. An online survey was designed to collect this data. As this was a short survey that did not require respondents to look up specific information, MS Forms was used. A list of the questions in the public survey is given in [Annex E](#).

The public survey was launched on 17 November 2022. It was promoted on the Diocese of Norwich website and advertised in the Eastern Daily Press (EDP) on 21 November 2022. As well as providing a web address allowing access to the online survey, the EDP article also included a printed copy of the questionnaire (which did not include the demographic questions that were asked in the online survey).

The public survey was promoted by various groups on social media (this included Twitter – Diocese of Norwich, Norfolk Historic Environment Service; and Facebook – Diocese of Norwich, Norfolk Historic Environment Service, Historic Churches of Norfolk).

Thirty-five paper responses were received by post and these were added to the online survey. There had been 1,004 responses to the survey in total when the survey was closed to new responses on 9 January 2023.

## 4.8. Ideas sessions

The representatives from creative arts groups listed below were invited to one of two ideas sessions to discuss complementary and alternative potential uses of church buildings. The sessions were convened on Tue 1 and Wed 2 November 2022 and were chaired by the Chair of the Commission.

- **Daniel Brine**, Director, Norfolk and Norwich Festival
- **Chris Gribble**, Chief executive officer, National Centre for Writing
- **Pasco Q Kelvin**, Director, Norwich Arts Centre
- **Nikki Rotsos**, former Director of culture, Norwich City Council
- **Lucy Farrant**, Director, Young Norfolk Arts
- **Paul Greenhalgh**, Director, Zaha Hadid Foundation
- **David Powles**, former editor, Eastern Daily Press
- **John Allison**, of Allison Consulting



# 5.

## What we found



## 5.1. General information about church buildings

The Diocese of Norwich covers most of Norfolk (but not all) and part of Suffolk. Redundant churches and churches in trust are not officially part of the Diocese of Norwich. In addition, there are a considerable number of ruined church buildings. As a result of these complications there is considerable confusion about the exact number of church buildings in the Diocese of Norwich. The 640 church buildings included in the Church of England's Statistics for Mission reports should be regarded as a minimum figure.

In rural areas, there are up to a dozen paid clergy serving in the benefices within each deanery (Fig. 1). There may be as few as 3 or as many as 11 benefices in a deanery. Benefices may have only one church and one incumbent. The largest benefice in the Diocese, however, has 19 churches in 17 parishes.

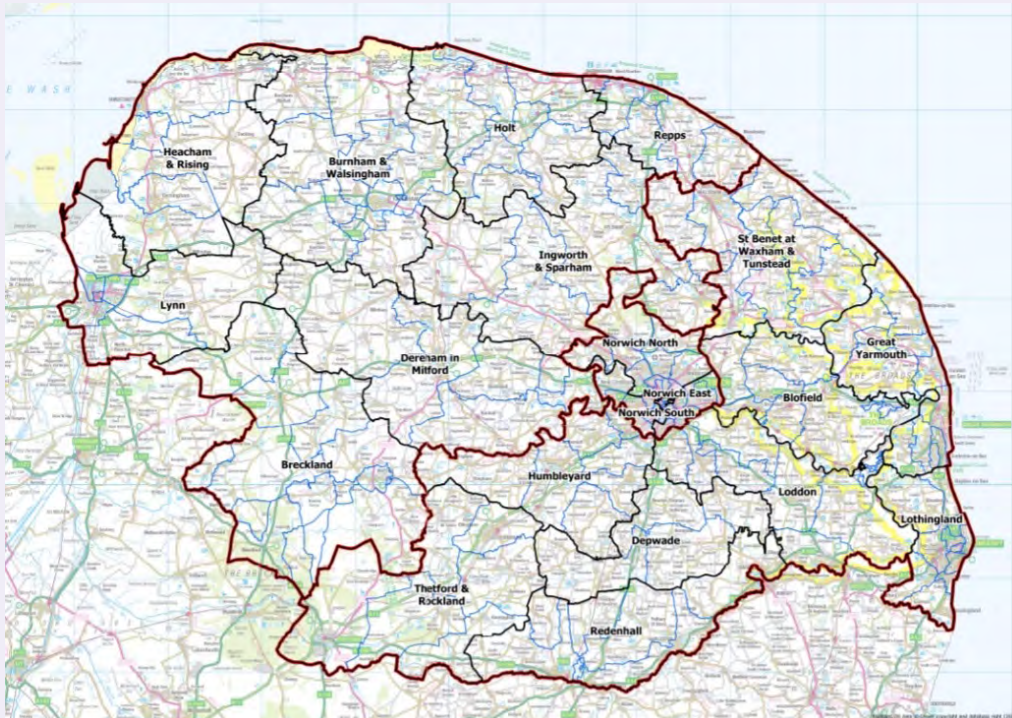


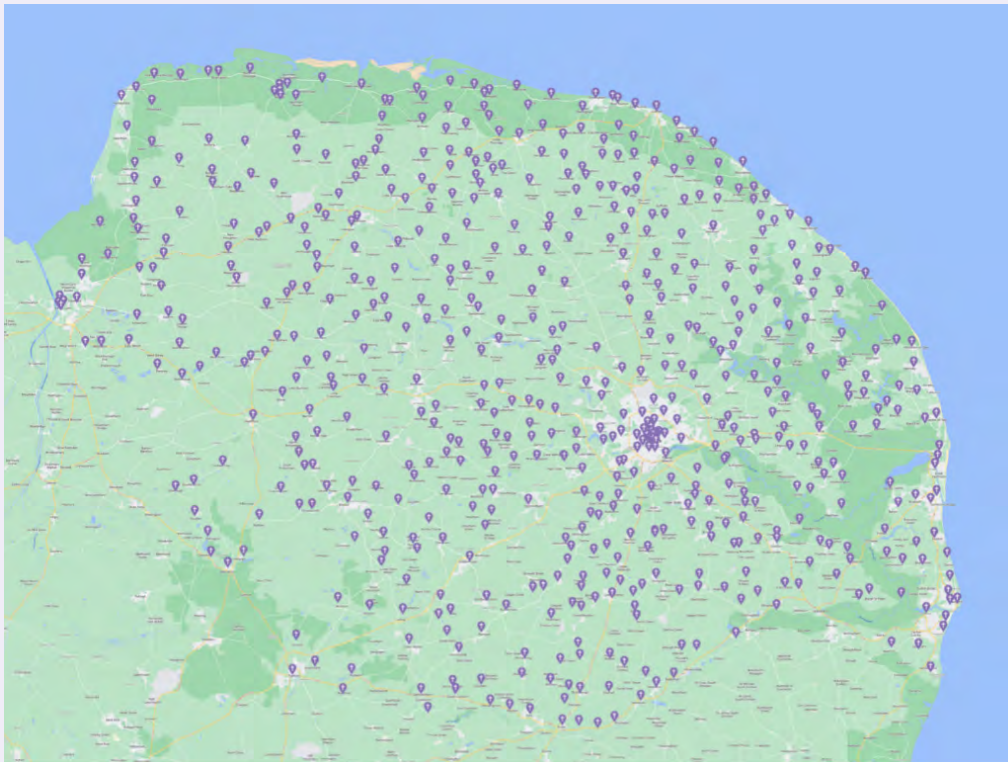
Figure 1. The arrangement of deaneries in the Diocese of Norwich.



### 5.1.1. Density of churches

The Diocese of Norwich has an unusually large number of churches per head of population. The average number of church buildings per Church of England diocese is 377. The Diocese of Norwich has 640 according to data included in Statistics for Mission.<sup>135</sup> By this measure it has the second largest number of church buildings in any diocese in the country. Only the Diocese of Oxford has more (811 churches). However, the population density of the Diocese of Norwich is less than half that of the Diocese of Oxford (only 520 people per square mile compared to 1,100 people per square mile).

The average number of people per church across Church of England dioceses is 3,968. The Diocese of Norwich has 1,451 people per church. Only the Diocese of Hereford and the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich have fewer people per church (837 and 1,417 people per church respectively).

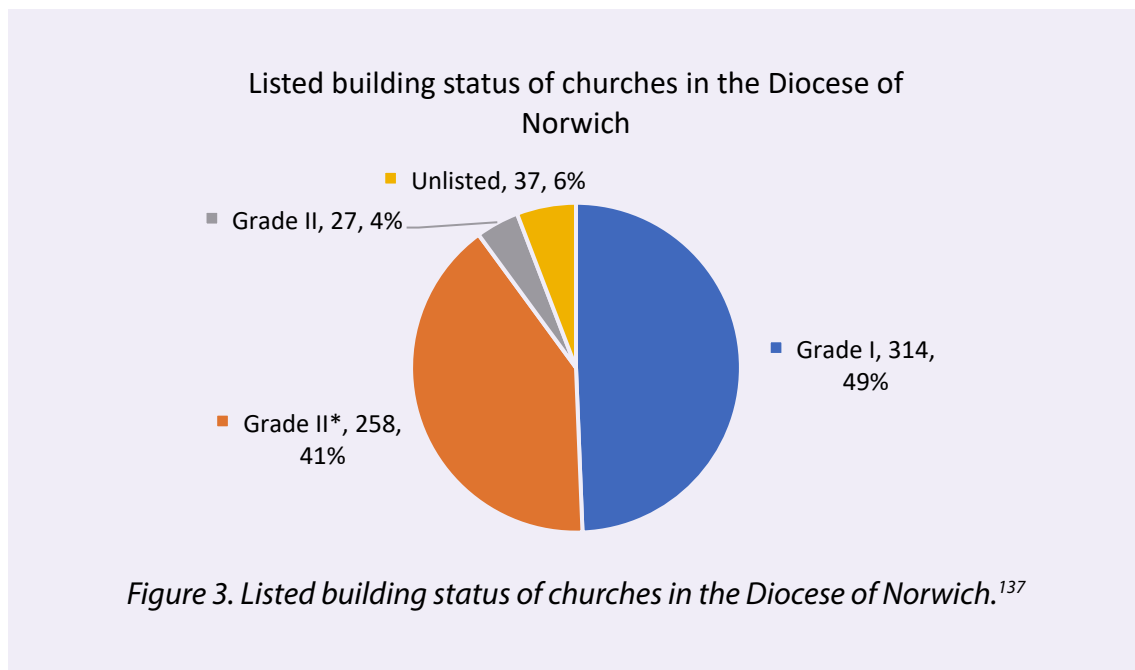


*Figure 2. Churches in the Diocese of Norwich. Adapted from [www.exploringnorfolkchurches.org/explore/](http://www.exploringnorfolkchurches.org/explore/). Map data ©2023 Google.*

<sup>1</sup> Church of England, 'Detailed Diocesan tables from Statistics for Mission 2021', [www.churchofengland.org/about/data-services/key-areas-research#church-attendance-statistics](http://www.churchofengland.org/about/data-services/key-areas-research#church-attendance-statistics)

### 5.1.2. Listed churches

Historic England maintains the listed buildings scheme which confers various degrees of protection on buildings of special architectural and historic interest. Buildings that qualify are listed according to one of three grades: Grade I (exceptional interest), Grade II\* (particularly important buildings of more than special interest) and Grade II (special interest).<sup>136</sup> The Diocese of Norwich has an unusually large number of church buildings of more than special interest (Grade I and Grade II\*).



The Diocese of Norwich has one of the highest proportions of listed church buildings in the country. Blofeld (1991) asserted that:<sup>138</sup>

*the vast majority of our country churches, well over 98%, are listed either Grade I or Grade II\**

We found that 90% of church buildings across the whole of the Diocese of Norwich were listed either Grade I or Grade II\* (Figure 3).<sup>139</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Historic England: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/what-is-designation/listed-buildings/>

<sup>137</sup> Statistics for Mission 2021 data, provided by Church of England.

<sup>138</sup> Blofeld, J. (Chair). (1991). *Rural Church Buildings: The Report of a Commission Appointed by the Bishop of Norwich*.

<sup>139</sup> Statistics for Mission 2021 data, provided by Church of England.

The Church of England represents around 15,600 church buildings in total, around two-thirds of which are listed by Historic England at their highest levels: Grade I and Grade II\*.<sup>140</sup>

(Since 92% of listed buildings in England are Grade II, 5.8% being Grade II\* and only 2.5% being Grade I, it can be appreciated that churches represent a very large proportion of the most significant buildings in the country. Inge (2015) states that 45% of England's Grade I listed buildings are church buildings).<sup>141</sup>

### 5.1.3. Redundant churches

The number of church buildings being closed ('redundant') nationally has decreased each decade since 1969 and alternative uses have been found for most of these church buildings. In the Diocese of Norwich, the Commission encountered considerable concern from several quarters suggesting that we are on the cusp of a great wave of church closures ('redundancies'). Some of these sentiments have been committed to print. For example, Cooper (2004) predicted at the national level that:

*Looking ahead, the available information suggests a rate of closure ('redundancy') of at least 60 churches per year on average for the foreseeable future – at least equal to the previous highest rate, seen for a few years only in the 1980s.*

The process of permanently closing a church, by means of redundancy, is governed by Church law and involves the Church Commissioners, the Church Buildings Council, the local PCC and the Diocese.<sup>142</sup> The system does not promote church closure and alternative outcomes are always sought as part of the process (see also [Annex D](#)).

There is little documentary evidence to suggest that a wave of official church closures has started in the way that some have feared. Monkton (2010), who reviewed all church closures in the Church of England between 1969 and 2009, stated that:<sup>143</sup>

*The nature of the debate about closure tends towards the alarmist.*

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<sup>140</sup> Cooper, T. 2004. *How do we Keep our Parish Churches?* The Ecclesiological Society. (Available at: [keepingchurches.pdf](http://hrballiance.org.uk/keepingchurches.pdf) ([hrballiance.org.uk](http://hrballiance.org.uk)), accessed 26 Jan 2023).

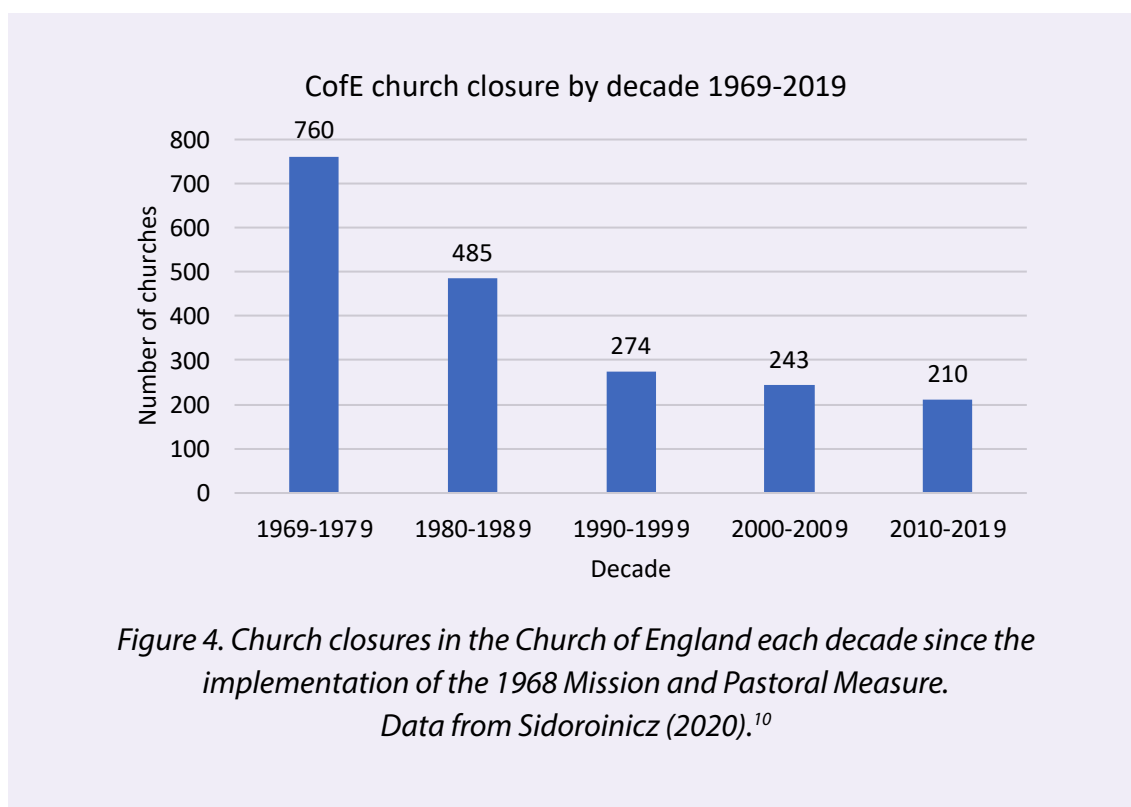
<sup>141</sup> Inge, R. 2015. *Report of the Church Buildings Review Group*. Church of England. (Available at: [www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/launch-major-new-report-how-church-england-manages-its-16000](http://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/launch-major-new-report-how-church-england-manages-its-16000), accessed 31 Jan 2023).

<sup>142</sup> [www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/church-buildings-council/how-we-manage-our-buildings/churches-no-longer-needed](http://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/church-buildings-council/how-we-manage-our-buildings/churches-no-longer-needed)

<sup>143</sup> Monkton, 2010. *Churches and Closure in the Church of England: A Summary Report*. English Heritage.

Monkton's (2010) research demonstrated that the number of church closures has been decreasing over time, rather than increasing, and that there was a trend away from closing highly listed buildings. While 1,280 church buildings closed in the 20 years between 1969 and 1989, only 515 church buildings closed in the 20 years between 1990 and 2019. During the first period, 11% of those closed were Grade I and 26.5% were Grade II\* listed. In the second period, 9% were Grade I and 14% were Grade II\* listed.

Sidoroinicz (2020) also reviewed the rate of closure and fates of church buildings.<sup>144</sup> Between 1969 and 2019 some 1,972 churches were closed. The rate of church closures fell in each of the five decades following the implementation of the 1968 Mission and Pastoral Measure (see [Figure 4](#); note that far fewer than 60 churches per year closed in the decades during and after the publication of Cooper's (2004) report).



<sup>144</sup> Sidoroinicz, C. 2020. *The Re-Use of Closed Churches: An Analysis of Use Types and Sustainability From 1969–2019*. London: Church Commissioners.

Braithwaite (2020), in a statistical analysis of the Church Buildings Council's casework between 2004 and 2018, found that:<sup>145</sup>

*The [Church Buildings] Council issues an average of 37 reports each year ... currently just under half result in closure within five years.*

Monkton (2010) and Sidoroinicz (2020) both found that alternative uses have been found for most of the church buildings closed since 1969. Sidoroinicz (2020) reported that 57% were reused for alternative purposes, 18% were preserved, 21% were demolished (the majority of these were not listed buildings) and 4% had other fates (including being returned to use as Church of England churches).

Alternative uses have included:

- civic, cultural and community use
- residential use
- worship by other Christian bodies
- sports use
- arts, crafts, music and drama use
- museum use
- educational use
- office and shopping
- light industrial
- parochial and ecclesiastical
- storage
- private and school chapel
- adjuncts to estates
- demolition
- other

Not all of the initial plans for alternative use turn out to be successful. Sidoroinicz (2020) noted that around a quarter of those closed church buildings that started with one alternative use went on to have other uses in the future.

Braithwaite (2020) states that:

*The smallest parishes in population terms produce disproportionately few struggling churches and actual closures. Those that do occur in very small parishes tend to be in those which are smaller than the deanery average.*

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<sup>145</sup> Braithwaite, G. 2020. *Struggling, Closed and Closing Churches*. Church Buildings Council. (Available at: [www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/church-buildings-council/how-we-manage-our-buildings/struggling-churches-research](http://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/church-buildings-council/how-we-manage-our-buildings/struggling-churches-research), accessed 28 Apr 2023).

However, all the studies quoted above examined only those churches which had been officially closed since the 1968 Mission and Pastoral Measure. Perhaps of greater concern than official church closures in more rural areas is the possibility of church buildings being abandoned and becoming inaccessible. Some respondents to our Church Buildings Survey stated that their churches were closed as the building was not safe to access, e.g.:

*due to internal structural issues the church is closed ... until remedial work begins*

*...currently locked as a section of the roof is in danger of falling and until this has been secured nobody is allowed access*

During visits to various benefices in the Diocese of Norwich, Commission members were also told of some churches that did not have sufficient local support to keep them open. While not officially redundant, these churches were usually inaccessible to worshippers and visitors nonetheless.

#### **5.1.4. How churches are used in the community**

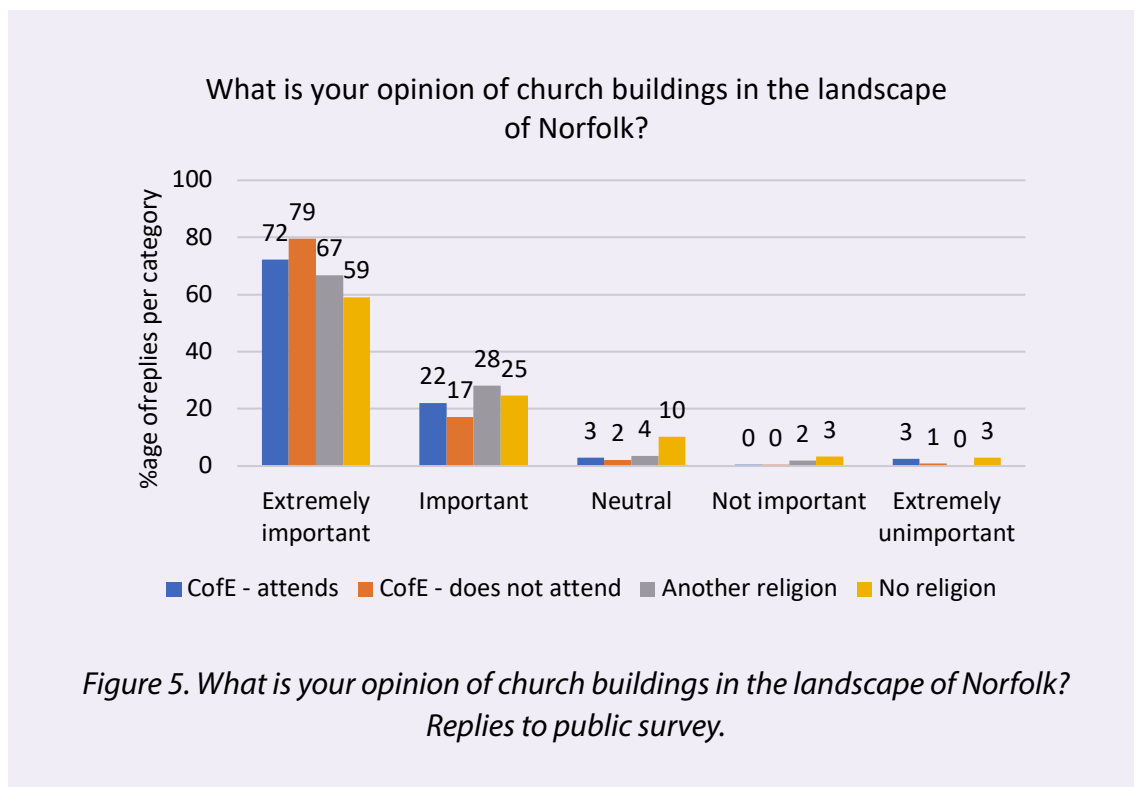
In our parish survey ([Question 4.1](#)) we asked which community activities a church was currently used for. The answers were enormously varied: adult education, art exhibitions, bat nights, credit union/debt counselling, food banks, fundraising events, fitness and wellbeing, parish walk/pilgrimage, post office. Most popular were concerts (184 responses), fete or flower festival (157 responses) and bell ringing/organ playing (133 responses).

Among the respondents, 120 had a friends group or other such support network, and another 57 said that they were planning to set up one. There are of course many support groups that are not formalised into 'friends groups'.

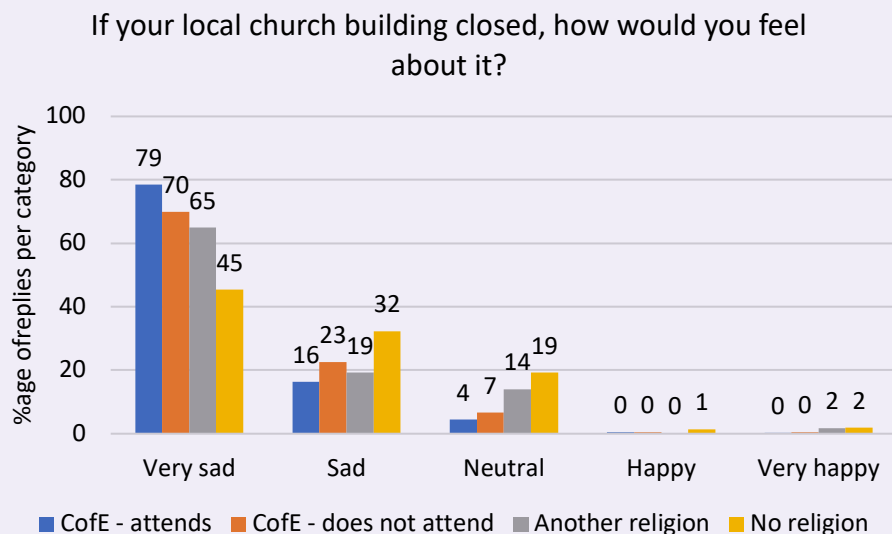
## 5.2. Public perceptions about church buildings

### 5.2.1. Churches are valued

Regardless of religious conviction, a majority of the public believe that church buildings are an important feature in the landscape of Norfolk and Waveney (Figure 5) and would be sad if their local church building closed.



Similarly, most respondents to our public survey stated that they would be ‘very sad’ or ‘sad’ if their local church building closed (Figure 6).



*Figure 6. If your local church building closed, how would you feel about it?  
Replies to public survey.*

(These findings influenced the drafting of [Recommendation 3](#)).

### 5.2.2. Churches are vulnerable

The vulnerability of church buildings to a range of threats is not understood by the community at large. Two prevalent and persistent views are commonly encountered with groups when discussing this vulnerability. The first is that church buildings are owned directly by the Church of England. The second is that the Church of England is a very wealthy institution with ample resources to maintain its estate.

These two beliefs may have a corrosive effect where the public do not appreciate the true vulnerability of church buildings:

- lobbying for financial support may not be as effective
- recruitment of local volunteers may be stymied
- the endeavours of existing volunteers may not be sufficiently acknowledged
- the care of church buildings – which make up a cohort of historic buildings far larger than that currently cared for by the National Trust and English Heritage combined<sup>146</sup> – may be perceived as the responsibility of the Church of England rather than of local communities (which it currently is) or the country in general (which it could be).

<sup>146</sup> Cooper, T. 2004. *How do we Keep our Parish Churches?* The Ecclesiological Society. (Available at: [keepingchurches.pdf](http://keepingchurches.pdf) ([hrballiance.org.uk](http://hrballiance.org.uk)), accessed 26 Jan 2023).



One respondent to our Church Buildings Survey stated that the greatest barrier to them carrying out their role as a churchwarden was:

*Public apathy and the assumption that the church will be there for the few times the public wish to make use of it oblivious to the fact that a small nucleus of people are involved in maintaining this facility.*

Another comment on our online public survey repeated the commonly held assertion that the Church of England had sufficient financial reserves to resolve many problems:

*... why can't some of that money be spent on local churches and clergy, instead of millions spent on cathedrals, abbeys and the higher ups in the church?*

Such comments highlight the issue of misconceptions that surround the financing of church buildings.

Our drop-in discussion sessions, although open to all, were almost exclusively attended by those with a keen interest in church affairs. There was a concern among many that the decision to close churches was a strategic one taken by either the Diocese of Norwich or the Church of England:

*More than one person spoke of the fear that people have of 'the Diocese' saying: "You are not viable, give us the keys". It was explained that this could not happen. [it was] pointed out that ownership rested at a local level and that the Diocese did not actually own any of the churches.*

Notes from Sheringham drop-in

(These findings influenced the drafting of Recommendations [3](#) and [16](#)).

## 5.3. Challenges

### 5.3.1. Falling attendance

The number of people attending services at Church of England churches has been decreasing for many years.<sup>147</sup> The reported ‘usual Sunday attendance’ of adults has reduced each year over the decade between 2009 and 2019.<sup>148</sup> The difference between usual Sunday attendance in 2009 compared to 2019 was a little over 102,000, a reduction of over 14% (Figure 7).



<sup>147</sup> [www.brin.ac.uk/figures/church-attendance-in-britain-1980-2015](http://www.brin.ac.uk/figures/church-attendance-in-britain-1980-2015) (accessed 19 Apr 2023).

<sup>148</sup> Data extracted from the ‘Detailed Diocesan tables from Statistics for Mission 2021’ [www.churchofengland.org/about/data-services/key-areas-research#church-attendance-statistics](http://www.churchofengland.org/about/data-services/key-areas-research#church-attendance-statistics)

An accurate measure of church attendance in the Diocese of Norwich is difficult to ascertain. In 2019, before the pandemic, data for 70% of churches in the Diocese of Norwich was submitted using the Online Parish Returns System. This was one of the lowest return rates in the country (the average response rate was 89%).<sup>149</sup> Data for only 55% of churches in the Diocese of Norwich was submitted in both 2019 and 2021. Only the Diocese of Lincoln had a lower response rate (51%), the average rate was 76%. However, usual Sunday attendance was not recorded in the 2021 returns.<sup>150</sup>

Missing data is estimated by the Church of England's Data Services Unit. If the recent low response rate has a historic basis, it is possible that numbers produced in official statistics are not accurate. A higher return rate would feed into Statistics for Mission and would improve the information available to the Diocese of Norwich. This would provide essential information about the vulnerability of church buildings over time and enable the Diocese of Norwich to prioritise the allocation of resources more reliably.

(These findings influenced the drafting of [Recommendation 5](#)).

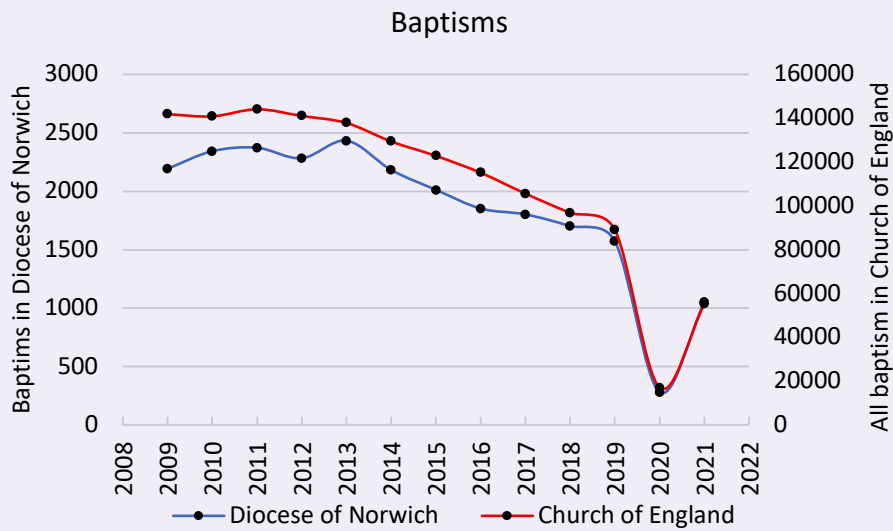
The number of baptisms, marriages and funerals taking place in Diocese of Norwich churches is also decreasing. The number of baptisms and marriages taking place in Diocese of Norwich churches fell between 2009 and 2021, markedly so from 2013 onwards. This decrease mirrors the same trend reported across Church of England churches generally ([Figure 8](#) and [Figure 9](#)).<sup>151</sup>

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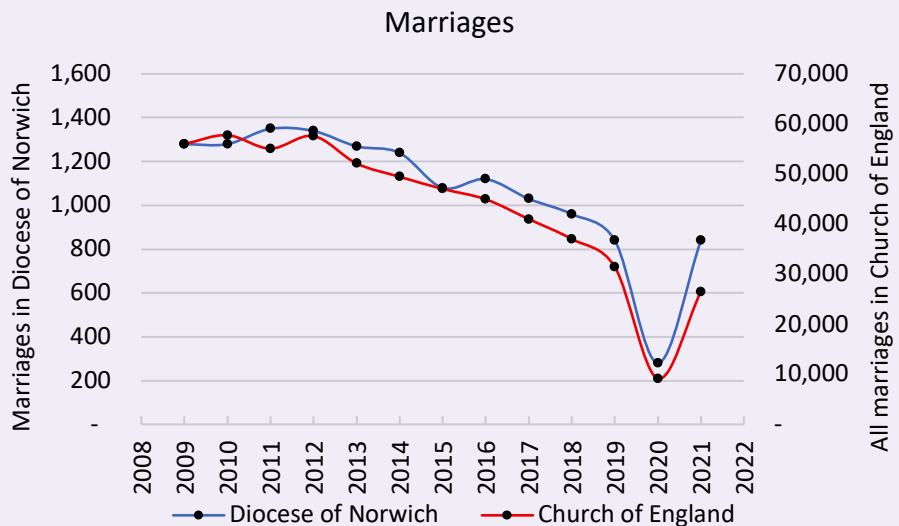
<sup>149</sup> [www.churchofengland.org/media/21970](http://www.churchofengland.org/media/21970)

<sup>150</sup> [www.churchofengland.org/media/28929](http://www.churchofengland.org/media/28929)

<sup>151</sup> Data extracted from the 'Detailed Diocesan tables from Statistics for Mission 2021'  
[www.churchofengland.org/about/data-services/key-areas-research#church-attendance-statistics](http://www.churchofengland.org/about/data-services/key-areas-research#church-attendance-statistics)



*Figure 8. Number of baptisms taking place in Church of England churches and churches in the Diocese of Norwich, 2009–2021. (Note the y-axes in Fig. 8 and Fig. 9 have different scales and note the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic around 2020).*



*Figure 9. Number of weddings taking place in Church of England churches and churches in the Diocese of Norwich, 2009–2021. (Note the y-axes in Fig. 8 and Fig. 9 have different scales and note the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic around 2020).*

The number of funerals taking place over the same period has also decreased, but the rate has been slower than for either baptisms or marriages (Figure 10).

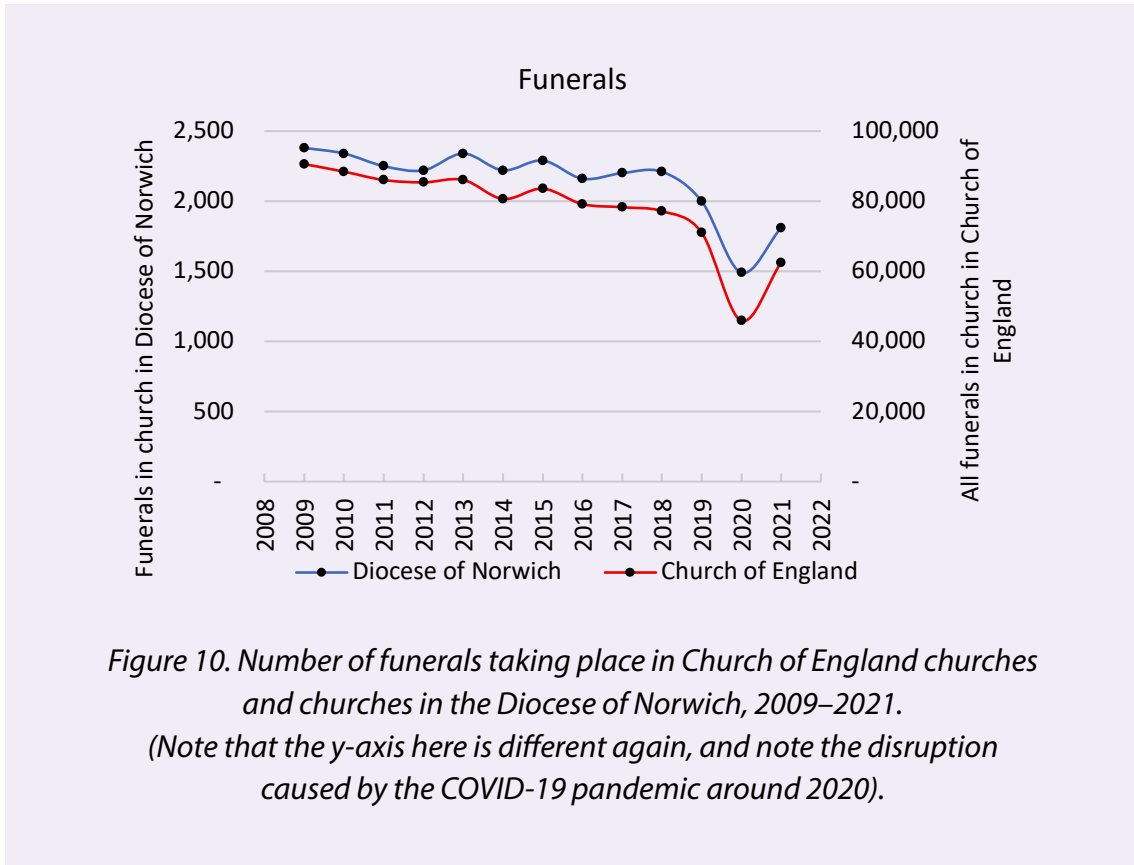
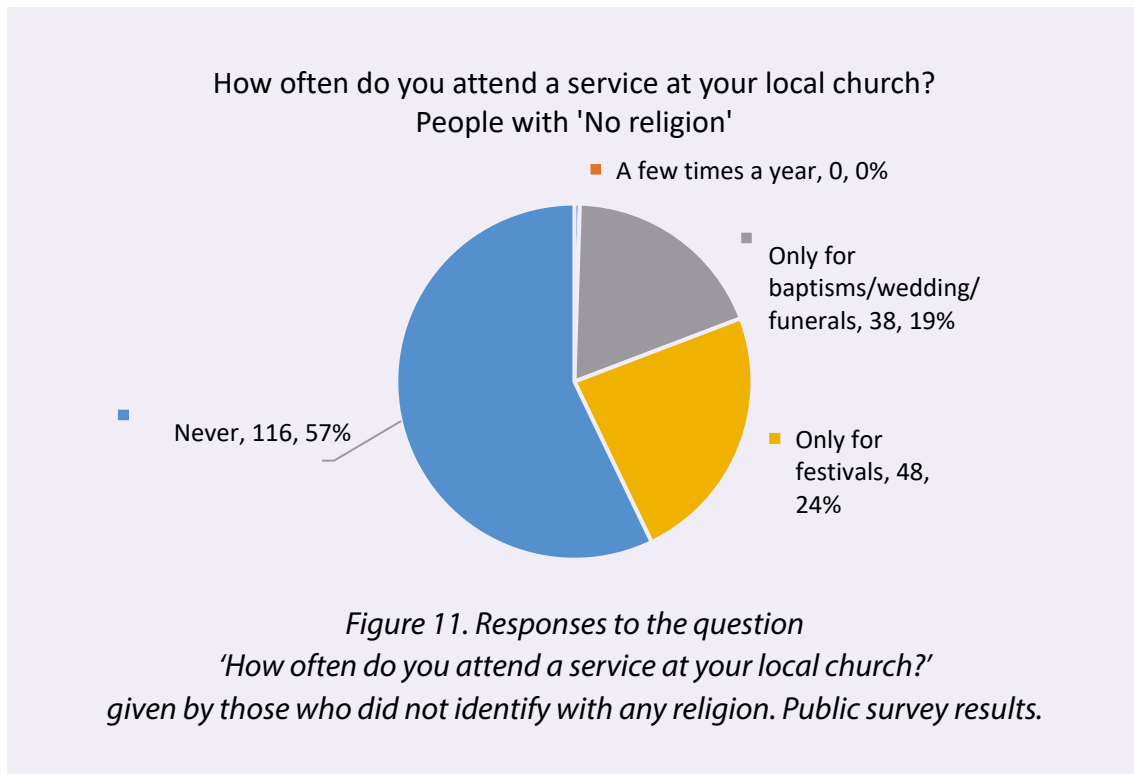


Figure 10. Number of funerals taking place in Church of England churches and churches in the Diocese of Norwich, 2009–2021. (Note that the y-axis here is different again, and note the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic around 2020).

For those in the community who do not identify with any religion, events such as baptisms, weddings and funerals are some of the few occasions when they may attend a service. In our public survey, 19% of those with no religion only attended church services for these reasons (57% stated that they never attended church services) ([Figure 11](#)).

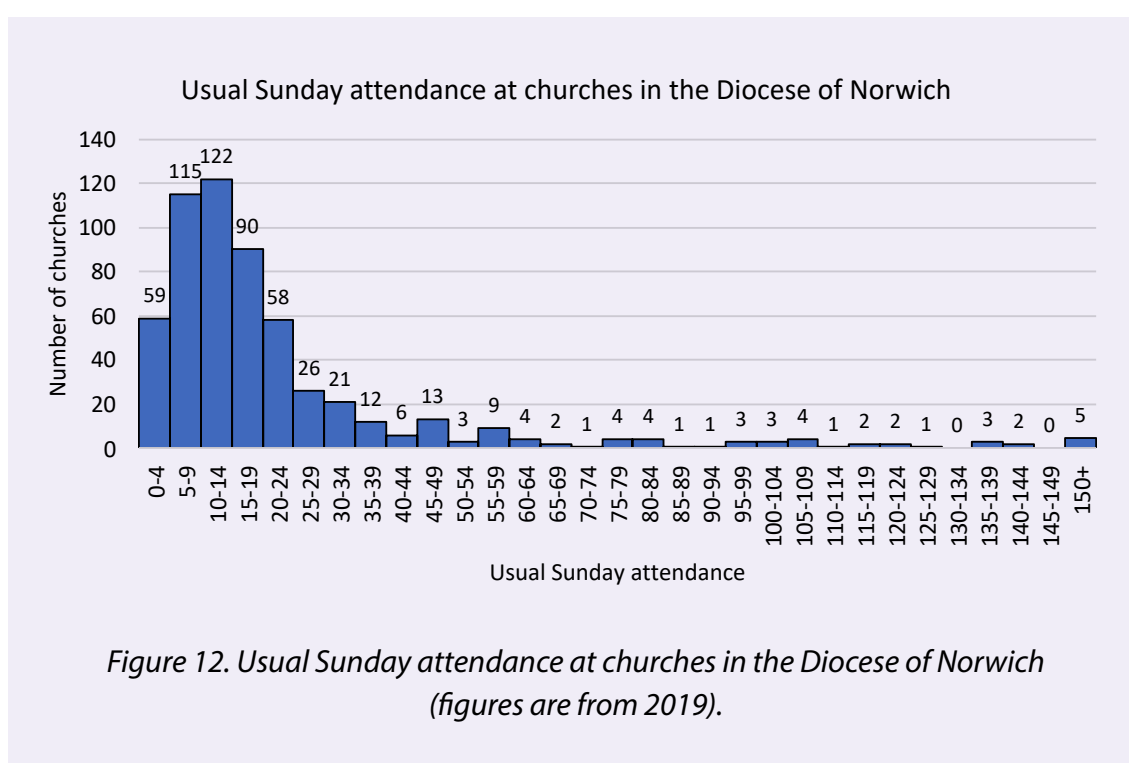


If the number of baptisms, marriages and funerals continues to decrease there will be fewer reasons for people of no faith to experience a church service in their local church.

(These findings influenced the drafting of [Recommendation 5](#)).

### 5.3.2. Diminishing congregations

Against a context of an abundance of church buildings, a low population density and a decrease in church attendance nationally, it is not surprising that many churches in the Diocese of Norwich usually have small congregations. The average usual Sunday congregation for a church in the Diocese of Norwich is 23 people. However, this is skewed because a small number of churches report relatively large congregations; 267 churches in the Diocese of Norwich do not enjoy congregations even half as large as the average. (Figure 12).<sup>152</sup>



On a national scale, the concentration of congregations into relatively few churches was noted by Cooper (2004) who reported that 61% of those attending church do so in 21% of church buildings.<sup>153</sup> The parish returns for the Diocese of Norwich reveal that only 143 churches reported usual Sunday congregations of over 23 people while 361 reported having fewer. This figure increases to 434 churches with fewer than 23 people in their usual Sunday congregation if those for which numbers were estimated are considered (an additional 59 churches are designated as N/A under 'usual Sunday attendance' in the official data).

(These findings influenced the drafting of Recommendations 1 and 2).

<sup>152</sup> Statistics for Mission 2021 data, provided by Church of England.

<sup>153</sup> Cooper, T. 2004. *How do we Keep our Parish Churches?* The Ecclesiological Society. (Available at: [keepingchurches.pdf](https://www.kkeepingchurches.pdf) ([hrballiance.org.uk](http://hrballiance.org.uk)), accessed 26 Jan 2023).

### 5.3.3. Congregations are ageing

The age of those attending and caring for churches is thought to be increasing. Cooper (2004) refers to research which found that the average age of worshippers increased from 36 years of age in 1979 to 46 by 1998.<sup>154</sup> Of those that were over 20 years of age in 1998 congregations, more than a third (37%) were past retirement age. During this same period, the number of under 16s attending church services decreased by 40%.

There is little evidence to suggest that these historic trends are changing. In 2019 the age of the worshipping community in the Diocese of Norwich was recorded as 0–17 years 12%, 18–69 years 41%, 70 years and over 47% (the averages across the Church of England were 20%, 47% and 33% respectively).<sup>155</sup>

Age of worshippers	Diocese of Norwich	Church of England
0-17	12%	20%
18-69	41%	47%
70 +	47%	33%

At our drop-in discussion session in King's Lynn, it was stated by one attendee that their parish was mainly made up of retired people between 65 and 80 years of age so that it was unlikely that younger people would arrive to reinvigorate their congregation. They suggested this might be the case for other parishes in the Diocese of Norwich.

This observation is not quite borne out by the facts (Figure 13). No parish in the Diocese of Norwich has a population in which most inhabitants are over 65 years of age (they account for 23% of the average parish population, the maximum proportion they account for in any parish is 46%).<sup>156</sup> However, some parishes do have an older age profile than others and here, perhaps, the chances of recruiting younger congregations might be lower.

<sup>154</sup> Brierley, P. 2000. *The Tide is Running Out: What the English Church Attendance Survey Reveals*. Christian Research. Quoted in Cooper (2004), *How do we Keep our Parish Churches?*

<sup>155</sup> [www.churchofengland.org/media/21970](http://www.churchofengland.org/media/21970)

<sup>156</sup> Statistics for Mission 2021 data, provided by Church of England.



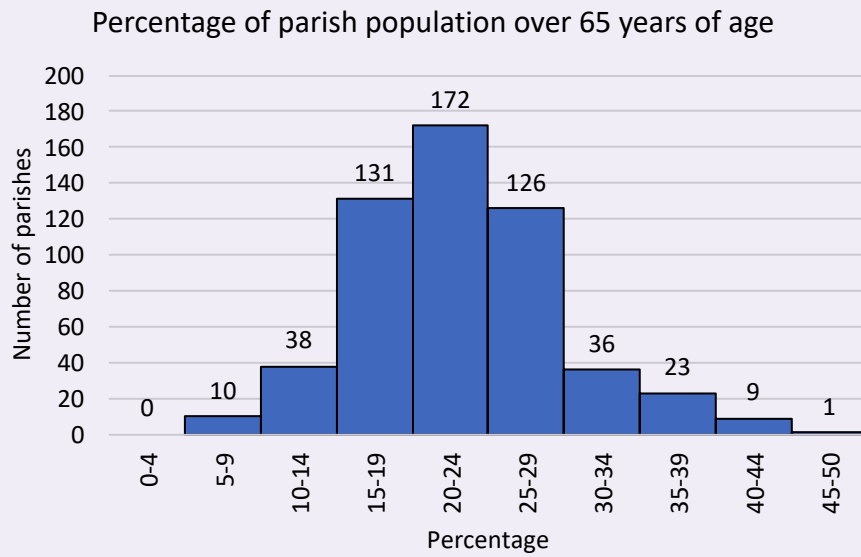


Figure 13. Percentage of parish population over 65 years of age.

Certainly, it appears that older age groups are more likely to be associated with churches and church life. The profile of respondents to our public survey was skewed heavily toward those over 40 years of age (Figure 14).

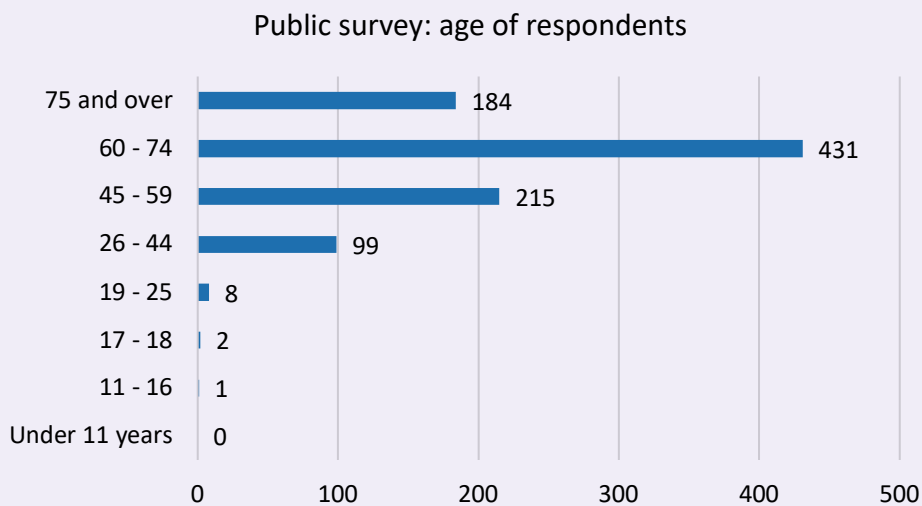


Figure 14. Answer to the question "Which is your age group?" on our online public survey. The copy of the survey printed in the Eastern Daily Press did not include this question.

Age concerns were cited by some churchwardens in our Church Buildings Survey as the main barrier for them in their church role. Responses included:

*We are an older generation of PCC plus congregation and struggle to find enough helpers to do the day-to-day running of our wonderful church building.*

*The small size and remorseless ageing of the regular worshippers, who do all that they can but are not getting any younger or more able-bodied – nor am I...*

At our Thetford drop-in discussion session we were told of one PCC in which all members were in their 80s or 90s with no apparent successors to fulfil their roles.

Concerns regarding age may also create issues when attempting to recruit volunteers:

*...as churchgoing becomes more unfashionable, the ability to draw upon people resources to complete church and churchyard maintenance tasks becomes more challenging. We rely too much on the same folk, all of whom are retired, with no obvious replacements.*

Church Buildings Survey

*...anyone young is met by "old" people who they have very little in common [with].*

Public Survey Comment

(These findings influenced the drafting of Recommendations 1 and 2).

#### 5.3.4. Vulnerability is elusive

The vulnerability of Norfolk and Waveney churches to diminishing usage, financial, practical and volunteer support has been a concern for many years, but there is currently no reliable method to identify vulnerable churches. It was a surprise to most members of the Commission that ours was not the first group appointed to review the vulnerability of church buildings in the Diocese of Norwich. The issue has vexed various groups for over 50 years.

In 1972, *Norfolk Country Churches and the Future* was published by The Norwich Society.<sup>157</sup> It contains several articles whose titles echo themes that are still being grappled with today; for instance: 'Finding the money', 'Are there alternative uses?' and 'Keeping your church'. While this publication was not instigated at the request of the Diocese of Norwich, the Bishop of Norwich, Maurice Wood, contributed a foreword in which he noted:

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<sup>157</sup> Harrod, W. (ed.). 1972. *Norfolk Country Churches and the Future*. The Norwich Society.

*Some people feel that buildings are less important than people, and that the limited resources of the church both in manpower and money demand some form of rationalising our present plant. Others feel that every church should be maintained for the worship of God if it is even remotely possible. This book will make a significant contribution to this urgent ongoing debate.*

*Rural Church Buildings: Report of a Commission Appointed by the Bishop of Norwich*, was produced in 1991 and included a foreword by the Bishop of Norwich, Peter Nott.<sup>158</sup> *Church Buildings: A Source of Delight and a Cause of Anxiety* was produced by the Diocese of Norwich in 2003 by a working group whose members included the Bishop of Thetford, David Atkinson, among others.<sup>159</sup>

The 1991 Commission made 38 recommendations, the last of which read:

*The Diocesan Board of Pastoral Affairs should advise the Bishop at regular intervals of progress throughout the Diocese in implementing our recommendations.*

The Commission has not been able to ascertain the extent to which any of the recommendations of the 1991 report were adopted, or what efforts were made to adopt them (certainly, many of the findings of the 1991 report appear similar to those presented in this Commission's report).

Despite these reports about churches in the Diocese of Norwich, and others produced in a national context, there is no agreed methodology for identifying vulnerable church buildings. However, some possible characteristics have been suggested:

*...problem churches are likely to suffer from some or all of the following:— (a) very low population figures, probably under 100, and hence with little or no congregation or finances, (b) being a substantial distance from the centre of the parish, (c) having at least one other Anglican church in the parish, (d) being one of a considerable number of churches in the care of one incumbent, (e) not qualifying either for a grant from English Heritage or for vesting in the Redundant Churches Fund.*

Blofeld, 1991

While there is general agreement about the major challenges facing church buildings it is unlikely that vulnerable churches will be able to be identified using quantitative data alone.

<sup>158</sup> Blofeld, J. (Chair). 1991. *Rural Church Buildings: The Report of a Commission Appointed by the Bishop of Norwich*.

<sup>159</sup> Diocese of Norwich. 2003. *Church Buildings: A Source of Delight and a Cause of Anxiety*. The report of a Working Group, November 2003.

'Red flags' that could be raised using data that is already routinely collected might include:

- reduced payments of parish share over time,
- reduction in building condition between three or more QIs,
- a precipitous decline in church attendance so that usual congregations are in low single figures.

However, each of these requires analysis of historic data and this is not currently being done.

Even if such data were collected and analysed it might lead to misleading conclusions. For example, in the case of All Saints at Lessingham, the position of churchwarden is currently filled, parish share and insurance premiums are being paid and the church is in a fair condition (on a scale of good, fair, poor, very bad) according to the last QI conducted in 2019. None of these would raise 'red flags', but it is in fact clear that the long-term prospects for the church are precarious (Margaret, the churchwarden, is in her 80s and she is the only lay member of the PCC, with no obvious successor). It is currently impossible to determine how many church buildings in the Diocese of Norwich are in a similar position.

In other instances, the Commission has been made aware of churches where services are rarely held, but the support of a patron ensures that the building is maintained in good condition.

The only clear conclusion is that the fewer people have a vested interest in a church building, the more vulnerable the building becomes. This vulnerability may not be obvious from quantitative data that is currently collected. Qualitative information might be far more valuable. Incumbents, in their role as chair of PCCs, may be best placed to identify those church buildings for which local support is waning. If routinely collected, this soft data could be very valuable for planning purposes and could prompt interventions based on vulnerability and need.

The sequence of events and circumstances that have resulted in historic and current church closures would be worthy of study. Comparative analysis with churches in similar situations and locations which have continued to thrive would be similarly illuminating. Such research may be able to identify the 'red flags' to vulnerability that have so far proved elusive.

(These findings influenced the drafting of [Recommendation 5](#)).

### 5.3.5. Poor basic facilities

Many churches lack the basic facilities associated with most other community buildings. While historic churches are a community resource, most were not provided with access to parking, toilets, heating and an area for making refreshments when they were constructed. However, there is demand within some congregations to provide facilities to make conditions more comfortable for their older worshippers. Additionally, these facilities are increasingly viewed as important if churches are to encourage complementary uses. This view is by no means universal:

*In our community there is a huge difference of opinion as to whether we should add facilities (WC, kitchen) and therefore involve more of the community, and those who want the church to remain unchanged, when in my view it may close.*

Often other community buildings already possess the types of facilities which may be absent at the local church. And given the isolation of some of the church buildings it is considered unlikely that simply providing facilities will reinvigorate church use.

*With no water supply, extremely limited parking and single-phase electricity our building is not suited for community use. The church is on the edge of the village. In the centre of the village there is a purpose-built village hall.*

Church Buildings Survey

*Many villages have halls with heating and toilet facilities.*

*I would rather we could use other more convenient buildings in the community that have better facilities and are warm and seen as neutral in the community.*

Public Survey comments

Official Diocese of Norwich data shows 92% of church buildings have access to parking nearby (DAC data). Our Church Buildings Survey found that 74% of church buildings had access to off-street parking.

While only 5% of the churches in our Church Buildings Survey did not have an electricity supply, around two-thirds reported having only a single-phase supply. This may be insufficient for running a heating system for a church building, where a three-phase supply would be necessary.

Most churches (82% in our Church Buildings Survey) do not have access to gas supply while 4% rely on bottled gas.

The requirement for toilets is increasingly important. Data held by the DAC suggests that around two-thirds of church buildings do not have toilets nearby, while 51% of the churches in our Church Buildings Survey replied that their churches had their own toilet facilities. Of these 71% were located within the building and 80% were wheelchair accessible.

Only a handful (less than 15%) of church buildings have a kitchen according to data held by the Diocese of Norwich, but this number is obviously inaccurate. Possession of full kitchen facilities was reported for 77 churches that responded to our Church Buildings Survey while a further 180 stated that they had a servery area suitable for preparing teas and coffees. However, almost 40% of churches that replied stated that they had no refreshment facilities at all.

(These findings influenced the drafting of [Recommendation 2](#)).

### 5.3.6. Ruined churches

There are more ruined medieval church buildings in the county of Norfolk than any other county, some of which remain the responsibility of PCCs. Batcock (1991) in a detailed account of the disused and ruined church buildings of the County of Norfolk noted that:<sup>160</sup>

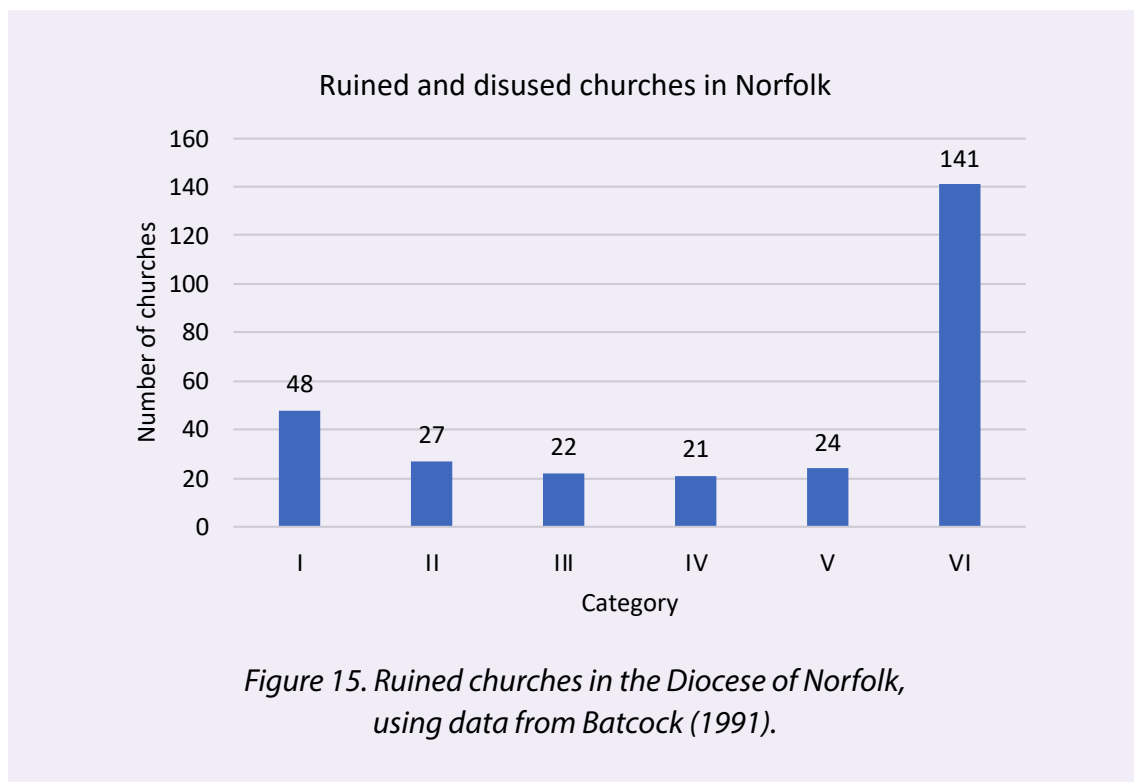
*Over the last thousand years, more than a thousand parish churches have been built in Norfolk. About one-third of these are no longer in use*

Most of these church buildings were originally built in the medieval period which means that not only does Norfolk have a larger number of intact medieval parish churches than any other county, it also has the largest number of ruined medieval church buildings.

Today there are around 280 ruined church buildings in Norfolk which vary in condition from intact (around 50) to disappeared (around 140) (see [Figure 15](#); categories: I – completely intact; II – largely intact, III – substantial ruin; IV – tower; V – fragmentary remains; VI – disappeared). Historically, most ruins have resulted from natural decay after abandonment rather than catastrophic events (though these do occur).

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<sup>160</sup> Batcock, N. 1991. 'The Ruined and Disused Churches of Norfolk'. East Anglian Archaeology 51.



If abandoned, an intact church building will become a disappeared church building within 400 to 500 years. However, during this period the ruin will pose a considerable danger. Winter frosts and unchecked vegetation can dislodge masonry. In more recent times considerable expense has been incurred in keeping ruins in a stable condition. That so many ruins have now been preserved is a testament to the fact that a range of bodies (from trusts to private owners) have taken responsibility for their maintenance.

In some cases – around 12% according to the results of our Church Buildings Survey – the responsibility for ruins still rests with the PCC. For some this is an additional financial and administrative burden:

*We pay a larger insurance premium for enhanced liability insurance.  
Ruins are fenced off for safety.*

*We constantly fear injury to the public and the health and safety responsibility we have.*

*It's been a constant source of angst for 20 or 30 years.*

However, for other PCCs the ruins under their care require little attention and in some instances are viewed as an asset:

*...it is so ruined that there is no maintenance required*

*Fortunately there is keen interest in them from outside the church congregation so it does not impact us too heavily*

*Ruins consolidated in 1995 by Norfolk CC and others.*

The Commission heard about St Margaret's Church at Hopton where the Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust took the opportunity to train 200 volunteers while repairing the ruins and also ran a community archaeology project there.

The integrity of some ruins is at risk due to delays regarding their future. Commission members visited the ruin at St Andrew's Church, Bircham Tofts. This is a roofless church, completely covered in ivy, which the PCC maintains but no longer requires. The interesting possibility of repair and domestic conversion (there is already a potential buyer in place) is kept in abeyance by problems over the valuation of such an unusual asset.

'Controlled' ruination of church buildings is expensive and poses long-term maintenance costs. It could also be premature as there are cases where churches apparently heading toward ruination have been rescued by local people and trusts. There are recent examples where this has happened in the Diocese of Norwich. A comment on our Church Buildings Survey informed us that:

*Forncett St Mary's was a ruin itself until a few years ago when lottery Grants enabled it to be restored to a fully functioning church again.*

Over 30 years ago Batcock (1991) had noted that:

*Forncett St Mary might have been a candidate for preservation as a monument, but has unfortunately suffered from vandalism and neglect; it should be either fully repaired, or have its roofs removed and walls capped. In equally bad condition is St Peter and St Paul at Runham, but this has yet to be declared redundant; it is to be hoped that it can be repaired and returned to use.*



The Commission is also delighted to note that St Peter and St Paul at Runham has been restored and is open again for quiet contemplation and occasional services. The Commission agrees with Simon Knott's assessment that:

*St Peter and St Paul is one of the great success stories of Norfolk churches so far this century, and a sign of the real difference ordinary people can make when they put their mind and energy to it.<sup>161</sup>*

At St Peter's Church, Corpusty – a church which became completely derelict and vandalised in the 1970s – initial intervention by the Friends of Friendless Churches and then the Norfolk Churches Trust has restored the building and its churchyard to display part of the Lettering Arts Trust's collection of lettered stones. ([Annex J](#))

(See also [Annex N](#) for a case study of the ruin at Bircham Tofts).

### 5.3.7. Bat roosts

The presence of bat roosts in some churches creates additional problems for those caring for those buildings. All species of bat are protected by law. Many church buildings now have a bat roost which creates particular problems. Monuments can be damaged by bat droppings, and clearing the mess they create needs to be a regular activity for a church building with an active congregation.

We heard from a number of people about the negative influence which bats can have on the viability of their churches. This stems primarily from the urine and faeces which are present in a church when bats roost there which is unsightly, damages fixtures and fittings, requires significant cleaning before worship can take place and causes a health worry for some volunteers.

Although our Church Buildings Survey did not include any questions relating to bats, the topic was raised by many respondents in their free-response answers:

*Closed due to problems with bats.*

*Their [the PCC] first concern is to preserve the building, and trying to keep it clean because of the bats. This is all very demoralising, because the bats deter people from coming.*

*The church did have a monthly service before the bat problem became so appalling.*

*They [the PCC] are unfortunately terribly hampered by a severe bat problem which restricts what they can do and when.*

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<sup>161</sup> [www.norfolkchurches.co.uk/runham/runham.htm](http://www.norfolkchurches.co.uk/runham/runham.htm)

We are aware that several churches in the Diocese of Norwich have taken part in the Bats in Churches Project.<sup>162</sup> Commission members visited one in the early stages of its work. The project is scheduled to run until the end of 2023. The results of the evaluation would be of interest to those with issues relating to bats.

(These findings influenced the drafting of Recommendation 15).

### 5.3.8. Decarbonisation and net zero

The Church of England's Environment Programme includes a plan to aim for Net Zero Carbon by 2030.<sup>163</sup> This commitment is particularly significant for the Diocese of Norwich. The Bishop of Norwich has been the lead for the Environment Programme since June 2021.<sup>164</sup>

It is essential that all parishes are encouraged to strive to reach the various road map milestones on time – as well as complying with the Diocesan Synod's own environmental policy – but many may need significant support from the Diocese of Norwich Board of Finance and other parishes and/or an expanded Diocesan Churches Trust, particularly with regard to technical issues and faculties but also in some cases with funding. All actions taken towards hitting the target are not only the right thing to do – they will have benefits for parishes including significant reductions in energy costs and making churches more attractive to grant-making bodies.

The national church advises in the first instance draft exclusion, repairing broken windows, LED lighting and a renewable energy tariff, rather than expensive interventions.

Although the public survey did not address environmental concerns directly, it was referred to some by some respondents:

*I think the C of E should allow churches to use solar power, especially if the church roof would be out of sight.*

*Sustainable heating solutions – solar, air source, ground source, battery storage – showing that as Christians we place the climate crisis at the top of our concerns;*

<sup>162</sup> <https://batsinchurches.org.uk/project-home/>

<sup>163</sup> [www.churchofengland.org/about/church-england-environment-programme](http://www.churchofengland.org/about/church-england-environment-programme)

<sup>164</sup> [www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/faqs-rt-revd-graham-usher-bishop-norwich-lead-bishop](http://www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/faqs-rt-revd-graham-usher-bishop-norwich-lead-bishop)

It is evident from responses to our Church Buildings Survey that some churches are actively considering technologies that may help to achieve the Net Zero Carbon by 2030 goal. However, it is also clear that additional support and advice would be appreciated.

*Solar pv arrays (plus battery storage) may be allowed on south facing roofs to reduce our carbon footprint...*

*We would like more information on whether it will be possible to utilise environmentally sustainable resources such as solar panels on our listed church.*

(These findings influenced the drafting of [Recommendation 8](#)).



## 5.4. What impact does this have?

### 5.4.1. Multiple roles

In many parishes across the Diocese of Norwich a very small number of dedicated individuals work vigorously to preserve their church. It is a matter of pride and principle to them that their parish share is submitted in full, insurance is paid and maintenance work is carried out regularly. However, these obligations are often being fulfilled at a considerable personal cost which is difficult to quantify. Where membership of the PCC is very small some volunteers take on multiple roles, which can be a burden.

Commission members were invited to visit various churches in the Benefice of Coastal Group of Parishes by Margaret Henderson. Margaret is churchwarden at All Saints Church, Lessingham, and is also a Commission member. She is proud of her church, one of two in the parish, which she looks after with help from her husband. The couple are both over 80 years of age.

Simon Knott, an online chronicler of Norfolk and Waveney churches, states in his account of All Saints that:

*The church is always open. You step into a pleasant, well-kept, much-loved and welcoming village church.*<sup>165</sup>

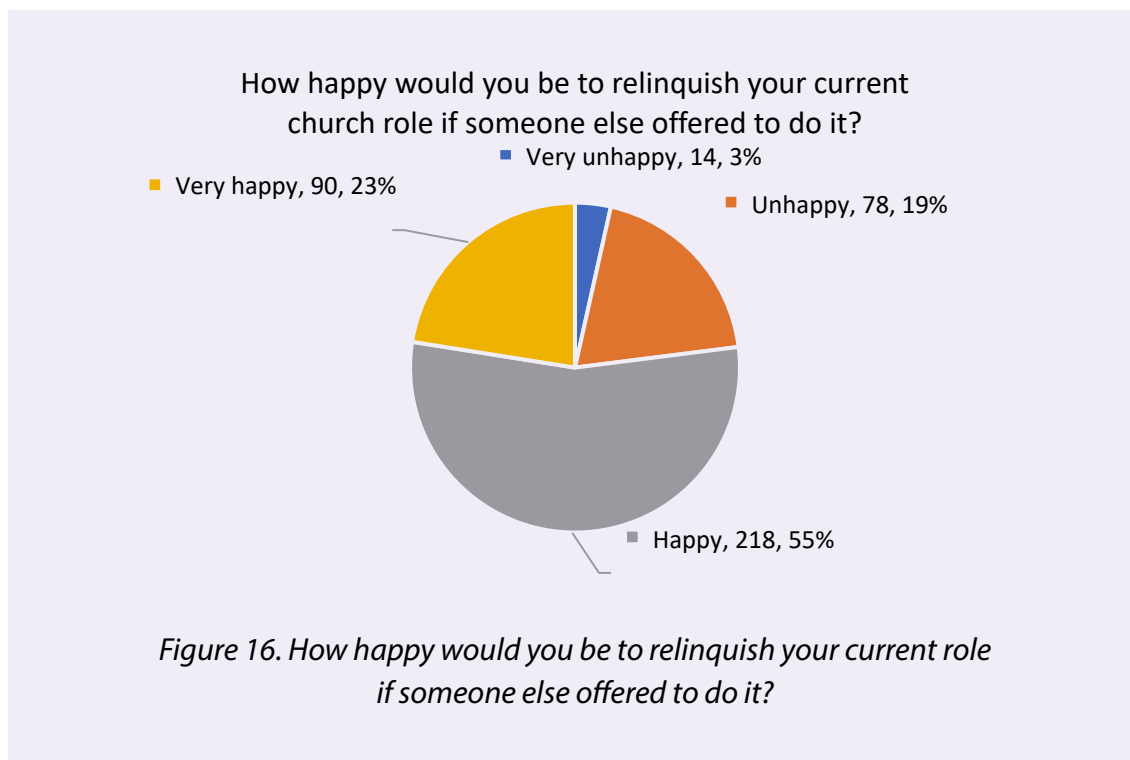
Margaret told us that the church is opened each day by her husband, a non-communicant (as such, he cannot officially take on the role of churchwarden unless special permission is given by the Bishop).<sup>166</sup> Despite this, he also takes on many maintenance tasks that ensure All Saints appears as a “pleasant” and “welcoming” church.

Margaret also told us that on the occasions when services are held at the church there are usually only two people from the parish in the congregation. The church is in an isolated spot some distance from most of the homes in Lessingham. There is little interest from others in the local community in becoming involved with the church. Margaret is extremely concerned about the fate of the church when she and her husband finally decide they can no longer look after the building.

Over three-quarters of those that responded to our Church Buildings Survey said that they would be “happy” or “very happy” to relinquish their role if someone else offered to do it (Figure 16). While not all of those that chose this option did so because they felt that it was over burdensome (we know this because some told us this in the ‘other comments’ section) there were many that did.

<sup>165</sup> [www.norfolkchurches.co.uk/lessingham/lessingham.htm](http://www.norfolkchurches.co.uk/lessingham/lessingham.htm) (accessed 13 Apr 2023).

<sup>166</sup> [www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/churchwardens](http://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/churchwardens) (accessed 13 Apr 2023).



It has been impossible to find out how many other churches are in a similar position to Margaret's. There are around 100 parishes in the Diocese of Norwich that are without a churchwarden.<sup>167</sup> It might be assumed that if there is no churchwarden it is unlikely that there will be any other members of the PCC other than the incumbent. However, the situation is more complicated than this.

There are certainly instances in which the incumbent is the sole member of the PCC, but there are also many PCCs with members carrying out roles unofficially (such as Margaret's husband). Because of this, statistics about the number of churchwardens collected by the Diocese of Norwich may not be a reliable measure of the vulnerability of PCCs.

Our Church Buildings Survey asked whether PCCs had enough members to function effectively.<sup>168</sup> Three-quarters of the churches (315, 75%) in our Church Buildings Survey reported that they did, while one-quarter (106, 25%) reported that they did not.

<sup>167</sup> Diocese of Norwich's data.

<sup>168</sup> Church Buildings Survey 2021. Responses to question 2.5

Of those who identified that their PCC did have enough members to function effectively, the free-response comments that followed to justify this opinion were revealing, perhaps suggesting that the current situation is not as robust as might be supposed by the 75% figure:

*The PCC is made up of the entire congregation.*

*All good chiefs but suffering a lack of Indians (churchgoers).*

*Just about! Several members have chronic health issues and we really need to recruit a wider set of members – preferably younger and fitter!*

*We have sufficient numbers to, potentially, function effectively, but whether we have the 'right' members is questionable.<sup>169</sup>*

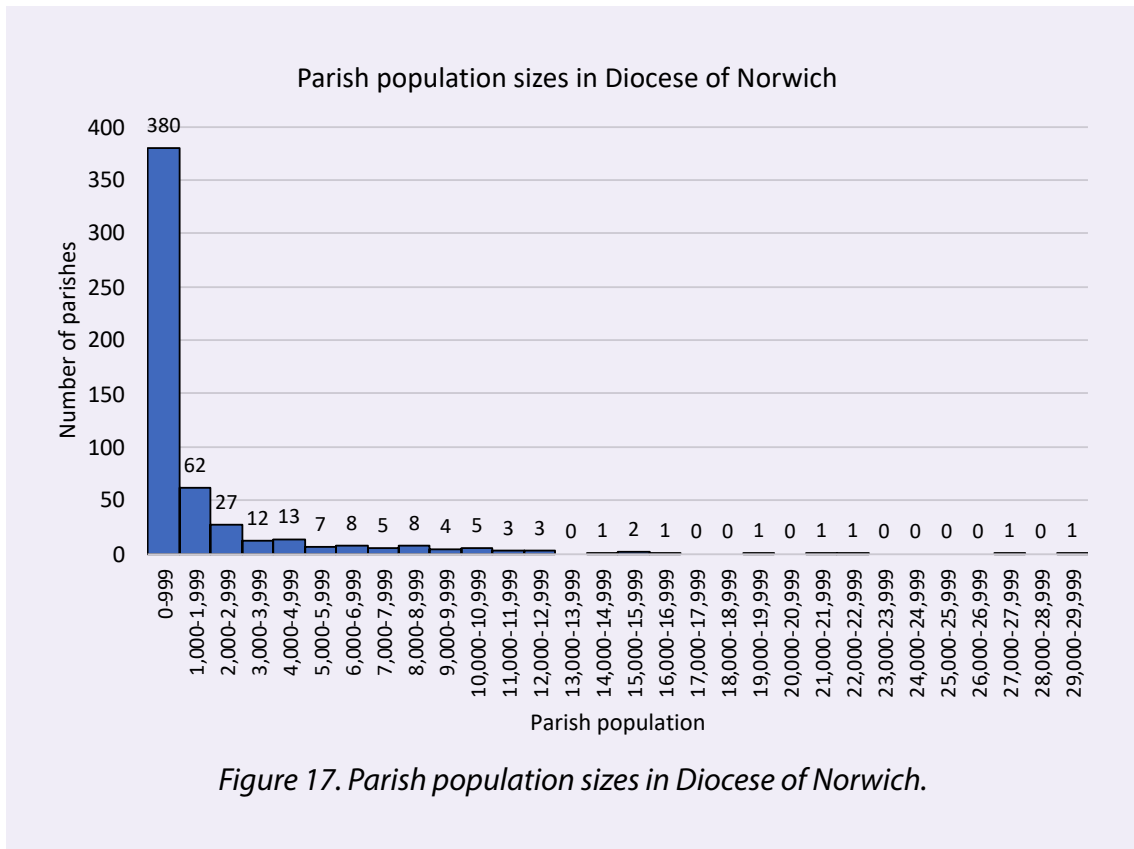
(These findings influenced the drafting of Recommendations 1, 2 and 4).

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<sup>169</sup> Church Buildings Survey 2021. Responses to question 2.6

### 5.4.2. The smallest can be the most vulnerable

Churches with the smallest congregations might be especially vulnerable. The average population size of parishes in the Diocese of Norwich is 1,681. However, over two-thirds of parishes (69.6%) have a population smaller than 1,000 people (see [Figure 17](#)).



Even within this subset, the distribution is skewed toward smaller populations. Of the 380 parishes that have a population smaller than 1,000, the mean population is 337, and 58.4% of parishes have a smaller population than this average (see [Figure 18](#)).

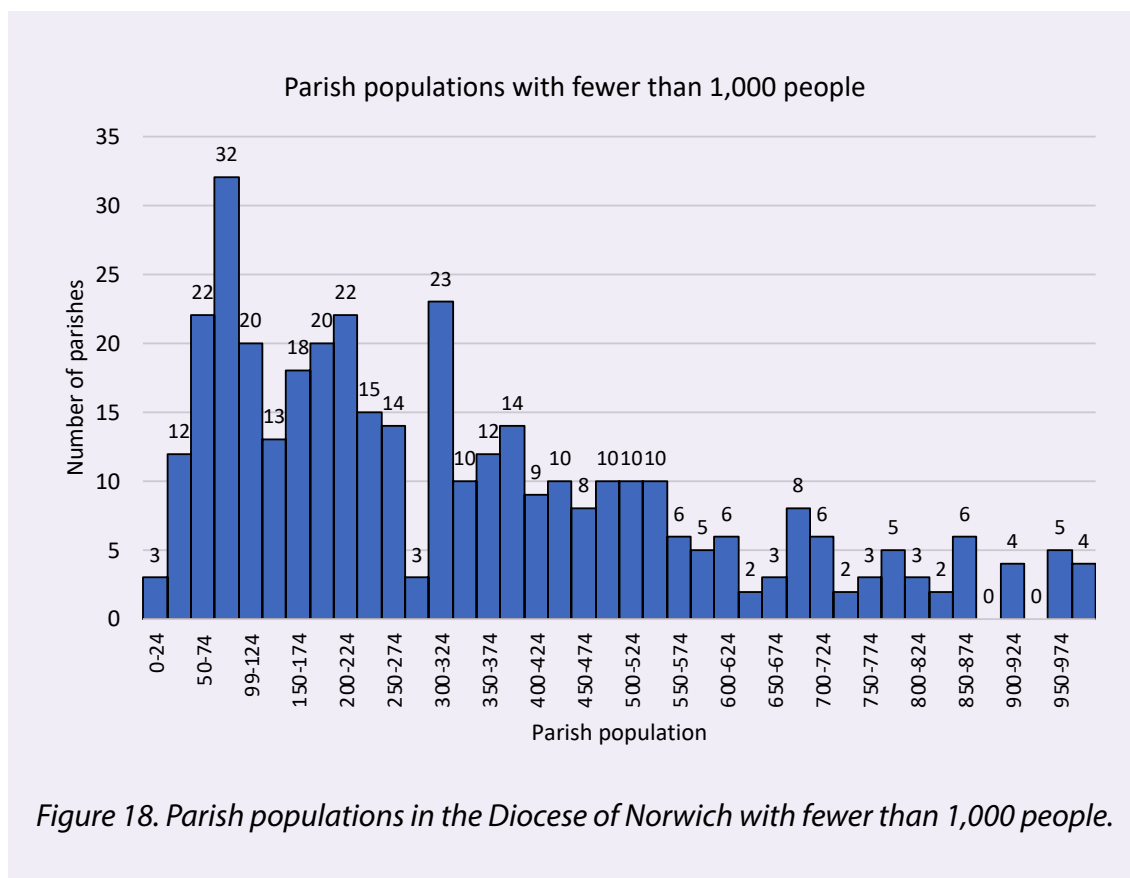


Figure 18. Parish populations in the Diocese of Norwich with fewer than 1,000 people.

It is self-evident that a PCC in a parish with a low population will have a smaller pool of volunteers to call upon. Braithwaite (2020) in his report *Struggling, Closed and Closing Churches* for the Church Buildings Council noted that:<sup>170</sup>

*...on its own, sparsity of population does not make for a struggling church but, where the community is smaller than those nearby, it will be more vulnerable than its neighbours.*

<sup>170</sup> Braithwaite, G. 2020. *Struggling, Closed and Closing Churches*. Church Buildings Council. (Available at: [www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/church-buildings-council/how-we-manage-our-buildings/struggling-churches-research](http://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/church-buildings-council/how-we-manage-our-buildings/struggling-churches-research), accessed 28 Apr 2023).



During the visit to the Benefice of Launditch and The Upper Nar Team Ministry in February 2022, Commission members toured various churches and met with local parishioners. This benefice was created in 2016 when three former benefices were combined. It is comprised of 19 medieval church buildings in 17 parishes. While some of the churches are well supported, due to falling attendance and members of PCCs approaching advanced years, several other church buildings in the benefice are now not used regularly.

The incumbent is now the sole member of the PCC for three of the churches. Despite public consultations and efforts to grow congregations, these churches are now used only for the minimum number of services required to maintain their listed place of worship status. A Christmas service at one of these church buildings in 2019 attracted just 5 people, 3 of whom visited from outside the parish ([Annex I](#)).

Despite there being no demand for services, the PCC (in this case the incumbent) is responsible for raising the funds necessary to pay the insurance costs of the building.

The vulnerability of churches with small congregations was noted by Cooper (2004):

*Depending on the size and condition of their church buildings, it will typically be the smaller congregations which are less likely to be able to maintain their church buildings in good repair over the longer term, and to be most susceptible to redundancy.<sup>171</sup>*

Redundancy can be a complicated, protracted and one-way process so is avoided whenever possible. However, as the above case study demonstrates, this does not mean that a church that is not officially declared redundant is regularly used. The Commission was not able to establish how many 'non-redundant' churches in the Diocese of Norwich have no regular congregation.

(These findings influenced the drafting of Recommendations [1](#), [2](#) and [4](#)).

### 5.4.3. Incumbent as PCC

Incumbents who are the sole members of their PCC bear a particularly heavy burden. In those PCCs with few effective members, the burden of responsibility for PCC matters usually falls to the incumbent as chair. In these instances, the competing pressure between buildings and ministry is at its most acute. Many incumbents are concerned about the legal obligations related to the role.

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<sup>171</sup> Cooper, T. 2004. *How do we Keep our Parish Churches?* The Ecclesiological Society. (Available at: [keepingchurches.pdf](http://hrballiance.org.uk/keepingchurches.pdf) ([hrballiance.org.uk](http://hrballiance.org.uk)), accessed 26 Jan 2023).

The Commission has not been able to ascertain how many incumbents are acting as sole members of a PCC because the data is not collected. While officially there are 100 parishes in the Diocese of Norwich that are without a churchwarden<sup>172</sup> we know this number is misleading.

A solution to the problem of church buildings with no congregation and only the incumbent as a PCC member is obviously required. Inge (2015) recommended that:

*In order to facilitate new, creative models of managing and caring for buildings and free up clergy and laity for mission and ministry the Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956 should be amended to enable a PCC – with diocesan consent – to formally transfer its care and maintenance liability to another body.*

The innovative model established by the Diocesan Churches Trust<sup>173</sup> in 2015 is already supporting some churches by:

*...administering, maintaining, repairing, renewing and replacing churches*<sup>174</sup>

(These findings influenced the drafting of [Recommendation 12](#)).

#### 5.4.4. Limiting the focus

PCCs responsible for multiple churches sometimes concentrate their limited resources into one church. Although most parishes in the Diocese of Norwich have only one church, 47 have two churches, and a much smaller number have three or more. Inevitably, with small congregations, PCCs are often unable to maintain multiple buildings and their efforts become concentrated in one that is used most regularly by most people.

Commission members were invited to visit St Mary's Church at Thrigby. This is a Grade II\* listed building dating from the medieval period. During the visit it was not possible to enter the building for reasons of safety. It is on the Heritage at Risk Register due to several significant structural problems, including "*concerns of stonework falling off the south belfry opening*" and "*structural movement affecting the chancel*".<sup>175</sup>

<sup>172</sup> Diocese of Norwich's data.

<sup>173</sup> [www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/buildings/diocesan-churches-trust/](http://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/buildings/diocesan-churches-trust/)

<sup>174</sup> <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/5066719/charity-overview>

<sup>175</sup> Heritage at Risk Register entry: <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-at-risk/search-register/list-entry/13323> (accessed 12 Apr 2023).

There are currently no plans for remedial work to take place at St Mary's. The PCC, which also looks after All Saints Church at Filby, is concentrating its limited resources there, as explained on this entry on the 'A Church Near You' website:

*St Mary's Church at Thrigby is currently a chapel of ease but, due to falling masonry has been closed to the public. In reality St Mary's Church has no congregation let alone a priest. It has no power, water or other facilities and has not been used for anything more than occasional evensong services in summer for a very long time. It is linked with All Saints Church at Filby, less than 1 mile distant, which is now the main focus of the local worshipping community. However, due to ever scarcer resources the parish of Filby feels they can no longer justify expenditure of any kind upon a church that has no purpose.<sup>176</sup>*

We do not know what proportion of multi-church parishes face similar difficulties. However, we do know that a similar problem exists across benefices where increasingly limited resources are spread thinly between many church buildings. These responses to our Church Buildings Survey were typical:

*...we really do not need the expense of 7 churches and if our overheads were reduced we would be in a better position to pay parish share and put energy into mission and ministry rather than building maintenance.*

*We do not need all our churches for the numbers of people who attend services.*

(These findings influenced the drafting of Recommendations [1](#), [2](#) and [4](#)).

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<sup>176</sup> Note for St Mary's Church, Thrigby, on 'A Church Near You' website: [www.achurchnearyou.com/church/10185/](http://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/10185/) (accessed 12 Apr 2023).

## 5.5. What practical help is available?

### 5.5.1. Finding support

Points of contact between PCCs and support offered by the Diocese of Norwich are not always obvious. The Diocese of Norwich website is used as the main conduit by which the range of support offered is publicised. However, the Commission heard from many members of PCCs who found the website difficult to navigate. There were also concerns that information that might be helpful was being missed.

In response to our Church Buildings Survey some churchwardens stated that communication issues were the main barrier they encountered in carrying out their role:

*Communication. My predecessor received information on a regular basis, but I'm concerned that important information may not come my way nearly as promptly.*

*We have been in interregnum for 6 years with no indication of progress at this time. Lack of communication between the Diocese and the benefice. No information or updates recently on our future.*

*Sporadic internet connection in our village can make communication between church officers protracted.*

These issues give rise to a feeling that help is often sought by PCC members, but some find it difficult to access, which in turn leads to frustration. There is clearly a mismatch between the help that is offered and the perception that it is not available.

It is not clear to the Commission whether some perceived problems are real or are the result of gaps in communication. For example, we do not believe that it is correct that no training is available to churchwardens as suggested by this comment:

*No formal training has been given by the Diocese, which is disappointing I think. I would like to see some sort of church warden network being available for mutual support, particularly in the areas of health and safety, human resources and legal matters.*

Church Buildings Survey (Barriers)

In practice there are many communication tools available to PCC members including PCC News, a parish resources website, a fortnightly digital e-newsletter, parish support staff contact details, and a database that is available via log-in. The communications team also told us that they are always willing to print off and post, or otherwise make more accessible, any information required for those who find using online resources a challenge.

There is a wealth of information on the website about the care of buildings and how to obtain faculties, for example: [www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/buildings/faculties](http://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/buildings/faculties)

However, there is not always a link to the support staff who are able and willing to help navigate the system and provide positive help and support. They can be found at [www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/buildings/#Care&DevelopmentofChurchBuildingsTeam](http://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/buildings/#Care&DevelopmentofChurchBuildingsTeam). Current staffing levels militate against offering a proactive approach to providing support.

(These findings influenced the drafting of Recommendations 2 and 6).

### 5.5.2. Getting through

Some members of PCCs are frustrated by their interactions with the Diocese of Norwich Board of Finance and the parish support team and think their day-to-day concerns are not listened to or understood.

Responsibility for the day-to-day care of church buildings in the Church of England rests with PCCs. These comprise the incumbent – who acts as chair – supported by churchwardens and others. The PCC may appoint various people in support roles, e.g. fabric officer, treasurer, secretary, etc.

The role of a PCC includes, but is certainly not restricted to, raising money to pay the parish share, insurance, organising maintenance and completing grant applications for larger capital works.

The various roles on PCCs are usually carried out by volunteers. It is therefore unfortunate that some are frustrated by their interactions with the Diocese of Norwich Board of Finance. This sentiment was encountered on many of our church visits, during the drop-in sessions and in response to our surveys. This comment in response to our Church Buildings Survey was typical:

*Constant additional responsibilities required by the Diocese, e.g., Eco Church, demands for parish share (fundraising). It is seemingly forgotten that the PCC are all unpaid volunteers most of whom are in their 70s. The list seems to be getting longer without any effective support from the Diocese.*

*“Diocese bureaucracy”, “Faculties, Red tape and regulations.” were highlighted as being the main causes of frustration as was a general feeling that the Diocese of Norwich was not promoting opportunities for support even when it might be available<sup>177</sup>*

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<sup>177</sup> Church Buildings Survey 2022. Comment in response to question 2.4

Another comment was:

*...the church structure at Diocesan level is not fully transparent and guidance on who is responsible for what aspect would be helpful such as a directory of contacts.*

One churchwarden, in response to our Church Buildings Survey, cited demands from the Diocese of Norwich as one of the barriers to their carrying out their role:

*...the difficult things are the things sent down to a churchwarden from the Diocese, laborious form filling in, treasurer report's being web based when Parkinson's makes it impossible to fill in on line, ridiculous wording in Diocese letters which means you have to get a dictionary out to understand what is being asked of you. Diocese makes things over complicated and elitist, it's no wonder people are scared to become churchwardens, it's onerous.*

Another complained that:

*It's all out of date and too complicated using archaic language which empowers those in the know and disempowers lay people.*

Not all views expressed were negative. One respondent to our Church Buildings Survey commented:

*...the recent support from the Diocese to our challenges has been very positive and supportive, including helping us and the other churches in the benefice to build a sustainable vision for the future.*

Personal visits from Diocesan staff were appreciated and can be very impactful. A note from our drop-in Session at Eaton (Norwich) stated:

*Views on the Diocese were very mixed with a couple saying they felt the parishes were no longer being listened to, but some saying they were grateful for visits received from the Archdeacon which were helpful.*

And some criticisms were aimed at the Church of England more generally:<sup>178</sup>

*...rural churches are clearly not high in the consideration of the central governance of the Church of England*

There was a pervasive view in all our surveys and face-to-face sessions that members of PCCs felt strongly that they were caring for church buildings and carrying out mission work against the odds.

(These findings influenced the drafting of [Recommendation 6](#)).

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<sup>178</sup> Response to our Church Buildings Survey.

## 5.6. What financial help is available?

### 5.6.1. Grants

Grants are usually required to fund major capital work for church buildings, but the application system is considered to be competitive and complicated.

PCCs usually rely on grants to fund major repairs or improve the facilities associated with their church buildings. During our church visits and drop-ins, we heard testimony from many who were concerned about grant application processes.

Among the issues were:

- the complexity of grant applications
- the lack of a standardised application form
- the restrictive criteria placed on grants by some providers
- the number of grant awarding bodies and the difficulty of finding out about them

There is evidence that these concerns may prevent some PCCs applying for grants at all:<sup>179</sup>

*We do not have the manpower to manage a sophisticated money raising/grant application programme.*

During his presentation to the Commission, James Halsall (former Interim DAC Secretary, Diocese of Norwich) stated that funding for churches had become more difficult to obtain in recent years. He stated that English Heritage once provided generous grants and the Heritage Lottery Fund used to have ringfenced funds for places of worship. Neither are available now, and the current preference that the National Lottery Heritage Fund has for projects aimed at engaging hard-to-reach groups was difficult for rural parishes to satisfy.

A common view expressed at our drop-in sessions was that the criteria used by the National Lottery Heritage Fund were biased toward urban areas rather than rural ones (especially as far as the public engagement element was concerned), and that far fewer grants were now being made to churches than in previous years.

Anne Jenkins (Executive Director of Business Delivery, National Heritage Lottery Fund, NLHF), in her presentation to the Commission, confirmed that the NLHF no longer had protected funding for places of worship. However, they were still awarding significant grants to churches. The Commission was told that during 2021–22 there had been 43 full applications, 22 of which had been successful, from parishes in the Diocese of Norwich.

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<sup>179</sup> Church Buildings Survey, response to Q 6.7.1

Since this presentation to the Commission, the NLHF has consulted on and launched a new ten-year strategy. One of the early initiatives in this strategy includes a focus on “Heritage in Need”, which is defined as “heritage at risk and in need of conservation”. This will include places of worship.

Although some churches cited successful NLHF supported projects on our church buildings survey (one reporting a grant of over £250,000) others mentioned applications that had been refused:

*Tried four times to get a lottery grant but unsuccessful and disappointed that they don't appreciate the value of this building.*

*We urgently need to replace the heating system but have been turned down twice by Heritage Lottery funding.*

Anne Jenkins told the Commission that each project was judged on its own merits. Some of the main reasons for rejecting projects can be that they fail to demonstrate how a wider range of people would be involved in heritage, or because the project focused on new capital works rather than conservation. Grants cannot be awarded for mission alone.

### 5.6.2. Help with applying for grants

Applying for grants is a competitive process. We are aware that some PCCs have employed the services of consultants to write grant applications.<sup>180</sup>

*[Name given], expert Heritage Consultants, are working on our behalf to apply to Heritage Lottery funding.*

Less than one-fifth of PCCs (62, i.e. 14.7%) regularly collaborate with other parishes to share knowledge and experience about applying for grants.<sup>181</sup> A larger proportion collaborate occasionally (191, 45.3%), which is perhaps unsurprising given that grant applications might only be required periodically. Over a quarter (114, 27%) rarely collaborate, while some never do (55, 13.0%).

An online grant finder is promoted by the Diocese of Norwich to help PCCs identify potential funders.<sup>182</sup>

<sup>180</sup> Church Buildings Survey, response to Q 6.3.1

<sup>181</sup> Church Buildings Survey, response to Q 7.4

<sup>182</sup> [www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/finance/external-grants-funds/](http://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/finance/external-grants-funds/)



### 5.6.3. Fundraising and gift aid

The Diocesan Generous Giving team has supported churches to acquire card readers via a national initiative. We understand that there are only a limited number however.

The main focus of the Parish Giving Scheme encourages regular giving by direct debit from congregation members and others, which are managed by the national Parish Giving Scheme team (see [www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/parish-giving-scheme/](http://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/parish-giving-scheme/)). This saves PCC treasurers a great deal of work. It also assists parishes with gift aid donations. (These findings influenced the drafting of [Recommendation 7](#)).

### 5.6.4. The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

This is a valuable incentive but is not permanent which is unhelpful in terms of long-term planning and budgeting.

VAT paid in association with the cost of repairs to most listed church buildings (and a range of associated costs) can be reimbursed through a scheme co-ordinated by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The grant is not awarded automatically. Applications must be made to the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme so that claims can be assessed.<sup>183</sup> To qualify the building must be listed and its sole or main use must be as a public place of worship.

This scheme, which enables up to 20% of the total spend of a project to be returned, has benefited many churches in the Diocese of Norwich since its inception in 2001. However, James Halsall (Interim DAC Secretary, Diocese of Norwich), in his submission to the Commission, highlighted that the scheme is not a permanent one and is instead subject to periodic renewal (the current extension to the scheme ends on 31 Mar 2025).

The benefit of scheme was noted in some responses to our Church Buildings Survey, for example:

*£7,029 reclaimed from the Listed Places of Worship VAT reclaim scheme.*

*Costs after VAT was reclaimed £30,478*

*Cost £126,000 + VAT £26,460 = £152,460*

The uncertainty about the scheme is problematic for PCCs planning long-term improvements, repairs and for setting targets for fundraising. The withdrawal of the scheme would effectively increase the costs of any future repair work by up to one-fifth.

(These findings influenced the drafting of [Recommendation 9](#)).

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<sup>183</sup> [www.lpwscheme.org.uk/index.html](http://www.lpwscheme.org.uk/index.html)

### 5.6.5. Do parish councils contribute?

There is contradictory advice about whether Parish Councils can contribute to maintenance and repair of church buildings, which may deter support being offered.

PCCs are distinct from parish councils. Parish councils can raise money through a precept, a component of Council Tax. As church buildings are often promoted as community resources, it might be assumed that parish councils could contribute to the upkeep and maintenance of church buildings. However, there is considerable confusion over the issue.

In a presentation to Commission members, Jeremy Burton (County Officer, Norfolk Association of Local Councils) stated that parish councils were not permitted to maintain church buildings under conditions set out in the Local Government Act 1894. However, there was provision to allow parish councils to maintain cemeteries and closed churchyards. Additionally, it was possible for parish councils to provide financial support for church activities that benefited the community.

This interpretation of legislation, that parish councils cannot contribute to church buildings, has been challenged by the Church Buildings Council.<sup>184</sup> They cite provision made in later legislation – namely the Localism Act 2011 and the Local Government Act 1972 – and suggest these supersede the Local Government Act 1894.

Taylor (2017) highlighted these contradictory views and recommended that the legal position should be settled:

*The law should be clarified, whether through legislative change or the issue of guidance, to establish that local authorities are not prohibited from awarding funding to churches.*

Of course, even if it was clear that a parish council could contribute to the maintenance of a church building, it would not compel it to do so. However, currently any parish council that might wish to contribute might be deterred by the possibility of legal action.

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<sup>184</sup> [www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/local-authority-investment](http://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/local-authority-investment)

This issue is a concern that was raised during our drop-ins. Comments recorded during various sessions included:

*Divisions between PC & PCCs not helpful.*

*Church & community should work together. Encourage Parish Council to engage.*

*Precept of parish council to help with supporting the church building – sorting it out so that they could support churches if they wish.*

Church buildings are sometimes the only public meeting space in a locality. In our church buildings survey, 12 churches recorded that their parish council held their meetings in church buildings. Preventing parish councils contributing to church buildings may stop other community activities from being developed:

*We would like to add a kitchen and toilet if we are able to raise enough money. This is being looked into by the parish clerk, because the parish council would like to help us, so that they are able to hold meetings and coffee mornings in the church.<sup>185</sup>*

*The parish council gave the proceeds of the Jubilee Tea Party to the church and intends to use the church for an annual fete.<sup>186</sup>*

It is interesting to note that 9.1% of those who responded to our public survey thought that the local authority should be responsible for the upkeep of church buildings<sup>187</sup> (while only 1.6% thought that the local authority owned them<sup>188</sup>). A larger proportion of those who professed to not follow any religion expressed this view than those who stated that they worshipped at a Church of England church (11.6% compared with 3.3%).

(These findings influenced the drafting of [Recommendation 11](#)).

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<sup>185</sup> Church Buildings Survey, response to Q 6.3.1

<sup>186</sup> Church Buildings Survey, response to Q 7.5.1

<sup>187</sup> Public survey, response to Q 5

<sup>188</sup> Public survey, response to Q 3

## 5.7. What technical help is available?

### 5.7.1. Mandatory Quinquennial Inspection (QI) reports

These are regarded as useful, but are also a cause for concern.

Inspections of church fabric every five years by a Quinquennial Inspector (a suitably qualified architect or surveyor) has been a requirement since The Church Inspections Measure 1955 (various modifications have been made since). The report records a thorough and complete assessment of the condition of the building.

As well as a description of the condition, the report also suggests any remedial work and estimated costs. These are arranged in a hierarchy according to the urgency of repair.

During church visits and drop-in sessions, it was clear that QIs are a major concern for PCC members. QI reports are technical and some PCCs do not have the skills necessary to interpret them fully. They are also a cause of stress since the list of proposed remedial work is often lengthy and the associated costs very high. There is often little chance that the work suggested in one report will have been completed by the time the next report is produced:<sup>189</sup>

*...in the Diocese of Norwich ... the conservation deficit for all churches identified from Quinquennial Inspections between 2012 and 2017 was approximately £63 million and this is expected to be higher in the 2017 to 2022 period based on data received to date.*

Despite the concerns that were expressed in person at drop-in sessions, most respondents to our Church Buildings Survey stated that they find QIs either “useful” (158, 38%) or “very useful” (196, 47%). Only 3% (12 churches) stated that they found them “unhelpful” or “very unhelpful”.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Anon., 2020. Taylor review pilot evaluation. (Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-taylor-review-pilot-final-evaluation](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-taylor-review-pilot-final-evaluation), accessed 31 Jan 2023).

<sup>190</sup> Church Buildings Survey 2022, Q 6.7

Several reasons were given for why QIs were viewed as being useful:<sup>191</sup>

*It gives professional advice to us amateurs looking after the building.*

*With a professional report we are able to prioritise and plan maintenance with a planned programme of work, and receive advice on specialist contractors.*

*It is the only professional inspection carried out.*

*It keeps our feet on the ground – we don't miss or neglect big problems and we don't stress over things that the architect isn't worried by.*

An architect who visited one of our drop-in sessions thought that the QI system was generally working. Not only were most of the church buildings they reported on in a reasonable condition, but there was also generally more knowledge in parishes about how to approach repairs because of the QIs.

It remains the case that QIs often record faults with the building that would require work beyond technical and the financial capability of the PCC. This was pointed out even by those who find the reports “useful”.<sup>192</sup>

*Useful to see an independent, expert review of the church's condition. The cost estimates though suggest a 'Rolls Royce' approach, way beyond the means of available funds, which undermines credibility, and a greater focus to help determine the top two or three priorities would be useful.*

Some, who find them “unhelpful” put it in different terms:

*There are 7–8 pages of items listed ranging from “replace leaking roof” through to “repaint tower”. On the whole we are aware of what we should do, but don't have the finance to do it. Although each item is listed in priority order – it is impossible to achieve most of them.*

*...ridiculous and totally unaffordable projects... Time to simplify and radically alter the inspection to be a more practical and focused approach.*

One respondent who had a “neutral” opinion of QIs suggested that:

*If there was a conversation after the report with the churchwardens some areas could be explained. It would be useful to have [an] understanding of some priorities.*

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<sup>191</sup> Church Buildings Survey 2022, Q 6.7.1

<sup>192</sup> Church Buildings Survey 2022, Q 6.7.1

We understand that in some instances these conversations do take place, but it is not currently a requirement of QIs. Indeed, one respondent reported that:

*Seems a lot of money for very little return, [we] even have to print [it] out ourselves.*

(These findings influenced the drafting of Recommendation 14).

### 5.7.2. Regular maintenance

When church buildings are regularly maintained, this can assist in preventing serious structural problems from developing, but not all churches in the Diocese of Norwich follow a maintenance plan.

Of the churches that responded to our survey, 62.9% (266 churches) stated that they had a maintenance plan, leaving 37.1% (157 churches) without one. Even where maintenance plans are said to be in place, it is clear from comments submitted in the Church Buildings Survey that the nature of these plans varies significantly from church to church:

*The “maintenance plan” is in my head, but discussed with PCC.*

*We use the quinquennial report as our maintenance plan and try to carry out all work recommended therein.*

*It [the QI] forms the basis of our maintenance plan.<sup>193</sup>*

A 2019 study by APEC Architects Ltd and Greenwood Projects Ltd, commissioned by Historic England, concluded that churches that undertake regular maintenance spend less on repairs in the long term.<sup>194</sup> They also identified that roofs, rainwater goods and drainage are the primary cause of defects and consequential decay (where an initial problem causes further damage to the building). The report stated that:

*Not only are the costs far greater for churches that delay repair and maintenance, but also the deterioration is noted to generally escalate from one QI to the next, as defects have a consequential impact on other building fabric.*

<sup>193</sup> Quote from our Church Buildings Survey.

<sup>194</sup> Philips, J. 2019. *The Value of Maintenance?* Historic England. (Available at: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/value-of-maintenance>, accessed 27 Jan 2023).

Prior to engaging in the pilot projects initiated following the Taylor Review, only 26% of participating churches in Greater Manchester and 14% of churches in Suffolk had maintenance plans in place. During the pilot, the adoption of a maintenance plan, with support from dedicated Fabric Support Officers, was a pre-condition for a church being awarded funding from a dedicated Minor Repairs Fund.

A maintenance plan is included as standard in Quinquennial Inspection (QI) Reports. These are often basic – often not more than a list of maintenance tasks (see examples below in [Figure 19](#)) and do not always include timescales. However, these can be a useful starting point for drafting a more formal plan.

Maintenance plan A	Maintenance plan B (now and every six months)	Maintenance plan C
<p>Regular clearance of gutters and downpipes, and surface water drains</p> <p>Look at trees for loose branches.</p> <p>Professional testing of electrical system and lightning conductor.</p> <p>Check water runs away from gullies.</p> <p>Check the roofs after severe weather conditions.</p> <p>Inspect tower roof and tower interior.</p> <p>Treat areas of active beetle.</p> <p>Oil ironmongery and treat doors.</p>	<p>Clear out all the parapet gutters on the nave and chancel.</p> <p>Clear out and check the outlets, spouts and downpipes on the nave, chancel and vestry.</p> <p>Replace slipped or broken tiles on the nave, chancel, porch and roofs.</p> <p>Carefully check the easternmost downpipes on the north nave to see if it is cracked on the rear side or blocked to stop the damp getting in to the wall.</p> <p>Check the tower to ensure birds cannot get in and brush down the tower roof and gutters.</p> <p>Check all windows and patch any breakages.</p> <p>Turn on all the lights and heaters and ensure they work.</p>	<p>Check and clear rainwater gutters, downpipes and gullies.</p> <p>Lift grilles in the gullies and check below ground drainage.</p> <p>Check and clear the rainwater butt overflow.</p> <p>Check and clear tower roof gutters and outlets.</p> <p>Kill and remove moss and plant growth from the church walls.</p> <p>Check the condition of the roofs, rainwater goods and windows after strong winds and heavy rain.</p> <p>Check for wood boring beetle during the Spring. Particularly in the nave and chancel.</p> <p>Kill and remove ivy and plant growth from headstones and churchyard walls.</p> <p>Check for loose headstones and repair as necessary.</p> <p>Inspect trees and maintain as required.</p>

*Figure 19. Three examples of maintenance plans presented in recent QI reports.*

The Diocese of Norwich provides guidance for those responsible for the maintenance of church buildings on its website. It includes downloadable resources, such as maintenance plan templates, as well as providing links to other specialist organisations who can provide advice, such as the Church Buildings Council, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) and Historic England.<sup>195</sup>

(These findings influenced the drafting of Recommendations [2](#), [6](#) and [14](#)).

### 5.7.3. Theft and vandalism – Collaboration is the answer!

Theft of lead from roofs has been a significant problem for some churches.

Several churches mentioned lead theft from church roofs in our Church Buildings Survey. On our church visits we heard that some church buildings are at risk of not being used due to the problem.

Lead theft from church roofs is a heritage crime that is a distressing event for those entrusted with caring for the church affected. Damage to church fabric can be caused during the crime itself, and potentially serious consequential damage can result if there are delays in making the building watertight. Replacing the roof covering is both expensive and time-consuming.

The following sample of comments from our Church Buildings Survey are typical of those we received:

*...we also had £30,000.00 worth of lead stolen*

*We have been struggling for 6 years to raise enough funds and applying for grant to replace stolen lead on south aisle and porch roof.*

*We are having to have part of the roof replaced. The lead was stolen before the pandemic...*

*Lead was stolen from the church roof in early 2020. A grant of £27,000 was awarded from English Heritage, which enabled us to repair the roof.*

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<sup>195</sup> [www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/buildings/dac-support-and-resources/maintenance/](http://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/buildings/dac-support-and-resources/maintenance/)



Alternatives to lead are available, but special permissions must be obtained before they can be used. Negotiating these permissions can cause further delay and stress. We are aware of at least one recent instance in the Diocese of Norwich where the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings declined to support a proposal to use zinc as a replacement. In their letter (a copy of which was presented to the Commission) they stated:

*A lead roof contributes greatly to the character of a highly listed church building and replacing it with an alternative material is not something to be undertaken lightly.*

Historic England have commissioned guides regarding the use of alternatives to lead, including the use of terne-coated stainless steel, which are freely available on their website.<sup>196</sup> The same site offers guidance on theft prevention.

The Commission is aware of the successful Roof Alarm Scheme which encourages the installation of roof alarms approved by insurers.<sup>197</sup> The scheme (which is a partnership between the Diocese of Norwich, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Norfolk, the All Churches Trust, the Norfolk Churches Trust and the Round Tower Churches Society) provides churches with financial support to acquire roof alarms. In the two years following the introduction of the scheme, church lead theft fell by almost half compared to the previous two years (26 thefts compared to 48).<sup>198</sup> Although some have suggested that the scheme is costly, it is an investment which is much less expensive than replacing a whole roof.

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<sup>196</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/caring-for-heritage/places-of-worship/places-of-worship-at-risk/metal-theft/>

<sup>197</sup> [www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/buildings/lead-theft/](http://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/buildings/lead-theft/)

<sup>198</sup> [www.dioceseofnorwich.org/news/lead-thefts-halve-following-roof-alarm-roll-out/](http://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/news/lead-thefts-halve-following-roof-alarm-roll-out/)

We are also aware of the use of SmartWater to deter theft and help trace stolen metal, which is actively supported by insurers.<sup>199</sup> During our series of church visits we saw notices displayed in church porches warning potential thieves that the premises were protected by SmartWater (Figure 20).



*Figure 20. An example of the warning sign commonly seen in church porches/ noticeboards warning potential metal thieves that SmartWater has been used.*

Similarly, we saw prominent notices outside some churches stating that the church roof was not covered with lead.

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<sup>199</sup> [www.ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/smartwater/](http://www.ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/smartwater/)

## 5.8. Thinking outside the box

It is clear that church buildings are appreciated by many more people than the number who worship in them. Local communities are often engaged, but so are “communities of interest”; people who are interested in architecture, family history, wildlife and many other pursuits that involve church buildings and their associated churchyards.

Our Church Buildings Survey found that most church buildings have some form of information available for visitors and that some church buildings are visited regularly by special interest groups (although currently only a minority of churches stated that such visitors made a significant contribution to church finances).

Several initiatives have been instigated in response to an increased interest in pilgrimage. The launch of the 37-mile signposted route between Norwich cathedral and the shrines at Walsingham is one recent example.<sup>200</sup> Several rural churches are also located on the routes of established long distance trails, of which there are several across the geographical area of the Diocese of Norwich. There is potential here to attract more visitors by making walkers and cyclists aware of the churches that are usually open and of any facilities that are available.

The Churches Conservation Trust’s ‘Champing’ (camping in churches) innovation is a model that might be of interest for some suitable church buildings.<sup>201</sup>

Widening the sense of ownership and appreciation of churches could be the key to their long-term sustainability. Thinking more broadly about engagement might also enable access to other funding streams and even more ideas ‘outside the box’.

The ideas workshops were designed to test perceptions about church care and heritage and also examine the potential for different ideas about how churches might be used, whether for complementary uses or alternative uses if redundancy is proposed. Although the issue of local population size was cited as a limiting factor for some activities, other ideas did emerge. Creative Arts East ([www.creativeartseast.co.uk/](http://www.creativeartseast.co.uk/)) are keen to investigate activities in church buildings as well as community centres. The music service might be able to provide pianos in churches.

The potential for arts-based programmes in church buildings was discussed. For example, given the number of churches offering concerts, if programmes were co-ordinated, the same programme could be repeated in different areas of the Diocese, increasing the number of performances and potential audiences.

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<sup>200</sup> <https://cathedral.org.uk/explore/walsingham-way/>

<sup>201</sup> <https://champing.co.uk/>

The investigation and implementation of these and similar ideas would support and augment the activities already organised by many church communities and established schemes such as Music in Country Churches (<https://musicincountrychurches.org.uk>), which already run successful events in the Diocese.

(These findings influenced the drafting of Recommendations 1.5, 3, 4 and 6)

# 6.

## Recommendations in full



The following recommendations flow from what we did and what we found. They represent a **package of proposals** that if taken together should make a significant difference to parishes, to incumbents, to communities and above all to the historic church buildings of the Diocese of Norwich. If the national recommendations are adopted they will make a significant difference to historic church buildings all over England.

For the Diocese, the role of church buildings is intrinsically linked to its vision, priorities and strategic projects and these recommendations should be read in that context and also in the context of keeping communities vibrant and engaged for the benefit of all.

**If these recommendations are implemented they will significantly improve the sustainability and vitality of our historic church buildings.** In making these recommendations we are aware that the Diocese of Norwich has already made important innovations in the care and use of church buildings that deserve to be developed and extended. Most notably the Diocesan Churches Trust and the development of the Spire Property Consultants, a property management company that is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Diocese.

We recognise that many of our recommendations will require additional funding. We have designed them so that as far as possible they create the potential for attracting funds from external sources. However it is inevitable that the Diocese will need to utilise existing accessible funds.

## 6.1. Recommendations for Norfolk and the Diocese of Norwich

### 6.1.1. Recommendation 1: Significantly expand the Norwich Diocesan Churches Trust by increasing its scope and remit

This would enable it to become more proactive and supportive of church buildings and their communities, collaborating with other trusts where appropriate, in order to:

- maintain historic church buildings which are vulnerable now or could be in the future to prevent closures and the slow decline of some churches into ruins
- relieve pressure on incumbents and PCCs with few members
- release incumbents' time and energy to focus on mission and ministry

- create a safety net for the churches in its temporary care where PCCs can no longer cope or recruit members, with a view to returning to the parish when feasible
- take advantage of scale of operation to engage in collective procurement of key services such as insurance for Trust church buildings and others
- explore complementary uses for community benefit
- ensure that formal redundancy only takes place after viable alternative use has been secured, or on transfer to a preservation trust

### Current scope and operation

The Norwich Diocesan Churches Trust was established in 2015 with an intake of 15 church buildings to create respite for PCCs where there was little or no activity and a significant danger of building decline. The first of its kind nationally, the charitable trust takes a lease from the PCC, maintains the church to minimum standards and insures the building with the possibility of eventual return to normal parish governance. The need for support goes way beyond the Trust's current capacity or resources.

The Trust recognises that changes in community make-up over the years can revive dormant churches. In nearly all cases village churches survive and flourish because of the energy and enterprise of a few key individuals in their immediate locality.

Annex C describes the current work of the Trust

The Trust already represents a bold vision of how a diocese can work more effectively to prevent the decline of churches. As an experiment it created a vision and a platform for what could be an even more bold intervention to relieve the pressure on parishes.

The current Trust operates within the existing resources of the Diocese but is legally separate. It is designed to be lean and flexible and has been successful in rescuing a number of church buildings, one of which is due to be returned to its community. It has a small number of internal trustees designed to support quick and flexible decision making.

The Trust is designed as a temporary safety net so that future options can be explored and there is a rigorous selection process before a church building can be admitted. It is clear that the concept of the Trust and its operation have been very carefully thought through. However, it is at capacity and is essentially reactive in nature. In order to reach its full potential, it requires a different future model building on the existing one.

### **Recommendation 1.1: Increase the scale of the Trust and resource appropriately**

The numbers of isolated, vulnerable, and struggling historic church buildings have been established in broad terms by the findings of the Church Buildings Commission Survey. It is clear that the existing need goes way beyond the current capacity of the Trust.

Expansion of the Trust would be dependent on increased funding and we recommend that consideration is given to funds being released from the total return on investment of historic resources of the Diocese of Norwich. Funds will be required to cover start-up and running costs.

### **Recommendation 1.2: Adopt a proactive approach**

To be most effective, an expanded Trust would need to be proactive. It would identify vulnerable church buildings and intervene early before their assimilation into the Trust becomes necessary. It would provide a range of support to share responsibility for church care and ideally prevent churches coming into the Trust. Support would be on a needs-based approach.

A proactive Trust would:

- actively intervene where need is greatest to encourage greater practical support for congregations and communities
- collect and analyse available quantitative data to identify vulnerable church buildings at potential risk (e.g. QI returns, financial returns, survey data)
- conduct regular reviews of qualitative data and feedback from incumbents, rural deans, Archdeacons and churchwardens about the vulnerability of churches to diminishing practical and volunteer support.

### **Recommendation 1.3: Share the responsibility for church care**

Once a church building has been taken over by the Trust, local communities might become reluctant to resume responsibility and the worst outcome would be loss of the connection with the local community. Even minimal connection is important to maintain a church as open to the public, and is essential if it is eventually to be returned to normal parish governance. The Trust should therefore seek to share responsibility for church care and to support local church communities that still have some capacity. Support could be offered in one of three ways:<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> In neither Type 1 or 2 would the church be made redundant, and in order to continue to access to the VAT reclaim offered by the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme six basic church services would take place annually.



- **Type 1: Trust churches** are those where practical and volunteer support has already diminished so that direct management by the Trust is the only practical answer. These are the buildings that would be cared for by the Diocesan Trust on the normal preservation trust model.
- **Type 2: Supported churches** are those which are vulnerable to diminishing practical and volunteer support. They would remain outside the Trust but could be given assistance with annual maintenance and small works on the basis of need. Such buildings however, remain in use and may return to normal parish governance when appropriate.
- **Type 3: All other churches.** The majority of churches in the Diocese are self sustaining would be able to benefit from joint purchasing. They would also be able to benefit from the advice of the Building Support Officers.

**Temporary support.** It may be that at times a short-term lease of say 5 years (as opposed to the current standard lease of 20 years) would create respite in a community and the opportunity to explore complementary uses to invigorate support. In practice a range of support could be offered with the objective of creating local sustainability where possible.

**Clear criteria** would need to be developed before any church would be considered for Type 1 or Type 2 support, to ensure that only those in the greatest need would benefit. Consideration should be given not only to the state of the building but the capacity of the local incumbent, congregation and/or community members to continue to care for it.

In all cases the objective would be for the church building to remain open and accessible for all to enjoy, ideally to continue in use and be capable of a higher level of activity should the local community desire it.

**Formal redundancy** would be considered only as a last resort after viable alternative use had been secured or on transfer to a preservation trust.

#### **Recommendation 1.4: Economies of scale**

Building on the existing parish buying scheme, [www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/finance/parish-buying/](http://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/finance/parish-buying/), increasing the size and scope of the Trust would allow for central procurement working through Spire. This collective purchasing could have other benefits such as:

- Reduced insurance costs for churches inside and also outside the Trust
- Reduced repairs and maintenance costs for churches in the Trust or supported by the Trust

The Trust should establish a procurement function for churches within the Trust and supported by the Trust taking advantage of economies of scale. These benefits could be extended over time to all churches that wished to purchase at beneficial cost. The most obvious of these would be insurance but there are other services that could be usefully procured in bulk at least on an area basis, e.g. roof repairs, annual maintenance, electrical and fire extinguisher testing. This would apply only where it does not cut across beneficial local arrangements.

### **Recommendation 1.5: Diversify the Trust's scope and governance**

The scope of the Trust's objectives would need to be reviewed and broadened if it is to meet the above recommendations. It is also recommended that the governing body is increased in range beyond the Diocese to include independent members with relevant skills and connections. This is in line with accepted good governance and thus would create the potential to raise funds from external sources for major repairs and key activities.

A new objects clause might look like the following:

*The preservation, provision and administration of churches and other ecclesiastical buildings (or former buildings and ecclesiastical buildings) within the Church of England's Diocese of Norwich by maintaining, repairing, renewing, restoring, beautifying, reconstructing and replacing such buildings for religious, community, artistic and other compatible uses or such other purposes being exclusively charitable according to the law of England and Wales as the trustees may from time to time determine*

### **Recommendation 1.6: Collaborate with other Trusts**

There are a number of other trusts operating locally, such as the Norfolk Churches Trust, the Norwich Historic Churches Trust, the Churches Conservation Trust and the National Churches Trust. There is also potential for collaboration around collective purchasing, skill sharing and the general sharing of experiences and examples of good practice

#### **6.1.2. Recommendation 2: Enhance the role of Church Building Support Officer**

##### **Recommendation 2.1: Recruit extra Church Building Support Officers (CBSOs)**

These are needed for the effective operation of the Trust and the proper care of historic church buildings across the Diocese. It is clear that the number of CBSOs is not adequate and needs to be increased.

Extra Church Building Support Officers would:

- ensure that all parishes with or without fabric officers have ready access to named support when they need it with advice on building maintenance, adaptations, including faculties, fundraising and grant applications
- assist in training new fabric officers, other office holders and fundraisers
- develop further the Buildings Ambassadors scheme so that those parishioners with expertise in fundraising and/or major projects can help others with advice
- establish regular, proactive, personalised communications with fabric officers, churchwardens and others.

The appointment of CBSOs was one of the key recommendations of the Taylor Report. These were successfully trialled and also had access to small repairs grants. At the time of writing it is understood that the Diocese has applied to the Church Commissioners Buildings for Mission Fund for a CBSO and small repairs grant fund. This support would be effective and very much to be welcomed.

PCCs experience considerable pressure and stress in formulating and funding schemes of repair and improvement. Digital resources and application forms that are now part of the Faculty Jurisdiction system and the Lottery Heritage Fund Grants can be difficult for those uncomfortable with digital media.

The requirement to provide detailed statements of significance following a template set out by the Church Buildings Council is a considerable challenge. Consultation with Historic England and the National Amenity Societies sometimes involves contested and detailed discussions on technical matters. Statements of need and access have also to be written.

CBSOs help churches navigate these procedures, indicate sources of help, clarify responsibilities, reduce anxiety and assist progress. The widespread and misplaced perception that nothing can be changed in buildings of the highest importance is a myth that the CBSO can temper with common sense and information, and they can explain how others, including the church architect or surveyor, the Church Building Ambassadors and other Diocesan staff, can help. They can also assist with the interpretation of Quinquennial Inspections and should encourage and help institute the programme of essential annual maintenance that every QI recommends.

Given that there are over 640 church buildings in the Diocese of Norwich, the existing complement of less than one full-time equivalent CBSO, part-funded by Historic England, is not regarded as adequate to meet the needs of those seeking to make adaptations to church buildings with listed status and with ecclesiastical exemption.

Many church buildings lack basic toilet and kitchen facilities and these features enable greater use of churches, whether it is at weddings and funerals or supporting

community activities. These enable churches in some communities to enhance their roles and create more sustainable futures for their buildings and communities. CBSOs can play a crucial advisory role in helping churches plan and fund these facilities.

### **Recommendation 2.2: Encourage parishes to adopt and carry out standard annual maintenance plans**

A good maintenance plan is one of the key ways that major repairs can be prevented in the long term. A 2019 study by APEC Architects Ltd and Greenwood Projects Ltd, commissioned by Historic England, concluded that churches that undertake regular maintenance spend less in the long term on repairs.<sup>136</sup> They also identified that roofs, rainwater goods and drainage are the primary cause of defects and consequential decay (where an initial problem causes further damage to the building). The report stated that:

*Not only are the costs far greater for churches that delay repair and maintenance, but also the deterioration is noted to generally escalate from one QI to the next, as defects have a consequential impact on other building fabric.*

### **Recommendation 2.3: Improve communication with fabric officers**

Contact with fabric officers by name with direct communication to target support and help, inviting feedback to specific named officers of the parish support team.

### **Recommendation 2.4: Offer regular training programmes for fabric officers**

Promote training for fabric officers and create opportunities for those who are experienced to share with others.

### **Recommendation 2.5: Continue to promote and expand the Buildings Ambassadors scheme**

Parishioners with expertise in fundraising, setting up friends groups and running major projects can help others with advice. We found that parishes appreciated this scheme which had been in abeyance during the Covid-19 period and has just been reintroduced.

### **Recommendation 2.6: Work across parish support staff, clergy and volunteers**

CBSOs should use soft information to target support to those in need to encourage the adoption of regular maintenance plans.

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<sup>136</sup> Philips, J. 2019. *The value of maintenance?* Historic England. (Available at: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/value-of-maintenance>, accessed 27 Jan 2023).

### **6.1.3. Recommendation 3: Establish an independent Norfolk and Waveney Churches Culture and Heritage Partnership**

Such a Partnership should engage a wide range of partners and the public in caring for church buildings and growing community engagement. The Partnership would allow work at a more strategic level creating greater impact, and identify potential further sources of funding. The Partnership will:

- increase the engagement of communities outside the church who are motivated to care for their shared heritage
- explore further opportunities for extending uses such as collaborative music programmes, pianos in churches, art exhibitions and cultural activities
- collaborate with tourism and heritage organisations to promote tourism, pilgrimages and walking trails, church and heritage tours
- attract volunteers young and old to engage with church buildings and churchyards in a variety of activities such as genealogy, wildlife protection, learning and caring for the building
- develop church buildings as education hubs where many different communities will have the opportunity to enjoy learning

The decline in the use of church buildings for worship puts their future sustainability at risk. These buildings are an essential part of Norfolk and Waveney's history, they enrich all our lives and are valuable community assets. There is a clear need to create the circumstances in which they can thrive and can be seen as a vital part of everyone's heritage; to achieve this we must build greater community involvement and engagement.

There has to be a change in public understanding. We need to break down the barriers between the public and these church buildings: churches should be seen as an integral part of our collective history rather than the exclusive responsibility of the Church of England.

#### **Recommendation 3.1: Create the Partnership**

The Partnership should involve leaders from different sectors and organisations across the county with the responsibility of generating a change in public thinking, and overcoming the barriers to more public involvement. The Partnership will promote greater appreciation of these buildings as part of our shared heritage and as community assets, helping to grow community engagement.

#### **Recommendation 3.2: Community volunteering**

The Partnership will promote and support community volunteering in order to create greater sustainability for Norfolk and Waveney's medieval churches.

### **Recommendation 3.3: Partnership roles**

The Partnership will become a permanent body which ultimately could apply for funding and grants to support church buildings. It would also be responsible for identifying potential pilot projects.

### **Recommendation 3.4: The role of tourism**

Tourism is one of the most important industries in Norfolk and Waveney and presents a real opportunity to grow income for churches across the county. The extraordinary number of Grade 1 and Grade 2\* listed historic church buildings is a unique offer to visitors, and it is the distinctive nature of our heritage that attracts so many to visit the county.

The Norfolk and Waveney Churches Culture and Heritage Partnership will work together with Visit East England to build a strategy to develop church tourism. This will include camping in churches, pilgrimages, walking and cycling trails, and church tours, thus increasing potential income for the churches involved.

This will require a consistent policy of keeping church buildings unlocked during the day and improved signage and information boards.

### **Recommendation 3.5: Building the cultural offer**

Norfolk and Waveney has an extensive and exciting cultural offer. A sustained programme of cultural events in the county's church buildings could be hugely beneficial to those communities and help to grow community use of rural churches.

The Partnership will work together with Norfolk and Waveney's cultural sector to build a regular cultural calendar which could include planned music trails, film screenings, pianos in churches and art exhibitions, all of which could grow the churches' income. Collaboration with the Norfolk Record Office could help to research the history of individual church buildings, so they have their own unique story for the benefit of their community and visitors.

### **Recommendation 3.6: Churches as an education hub**

The Partnership will work with various education authorities and organisations, including the Diocesan Board of Education and Inspired Classrooms,<sup>137</sup> to promote the role of churches as exciting places to learn. Churches can be places to study natural history, maths, geometry, geography, history and many more subjects. This could be a rich genesis for developing church community use.

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<sup>137</sup> [www.inspiredclassrooms.org/](http://www.inspiredclassrooms.org/)

### **Recommendation 3.7: Spread the word**

The Partnership will communicate with the public at large to:

- inform them about the state of historic church buildings in Norfolk and Waveney and the need for their maintenance
- raise awareness of where responsibility lies for church buildings and their maintenance
- draw their attention to churches in individual communities where more could be done to prevent a church deteriorating by wider engagement

### **Recommendation 3.8: Seek support**

Using the skills and knowledge of Partnership members, seek funds to support the Partnership and its work.

Potential Membership of the Norfolk and Waveney Culture and Heritage Partnership could include the following sectors and organisations:

- arts and culture
- Creative Arts East
- Visit East of England
- the county council
- businesses
- the Dioceses of Norwich and Ely
- Norfolk Museum Service
- Norfolk Wildlife Trust
- Norfolk Community Foundation
- Community Action Norfolk
- public health
- education
- Norfolk Historic Buildings Group
- Centre of East Anglian Studies
- heritage organisations
- pilgrimage sites
- volunteering.

### **Recommendation 3.9: Explore options**

If it is discovered that in certain cases there is little community interest, together with the Trust, the Partnership should explore the potential to lease part of church buildings for cultural uses such as artists' studios, galleries or workshop spaces sponsored by artists.

#### **6.1.4. Recommendation 4: Employ a Community Engagement Officer**

The Diocese should employ a Community Engagement Officer to work to support the Partnership in identifying individual communities where there are opportunities to grow engagement and potential new uses for their church building.

##### **Recommendation 4.1: The role**

The Community Engagement Officer will have the following tasks:

- develop new relationships with individual communities and wider communities of interest
- identify opportunities for complementary activities in church buildings
- seek income streams to underpin local community activities
- provide advice and support
- collaborate with charitable, cultural and heritage organisations
- act as advocate for the architectural, cultural and historic importance of the church buildings to raise awareness, understanding and appreciation

The Community Engagement Officer will thus work to support the Partnership in identifying individual communities where there are opportunities to grow engagement and potential new uses for their church building.

##### **Recommendation 4.2 Establish a small grants fund**

The Community Engagement Officer will set up a fund to help with pump priming and matching of community raised funds.

The Taylor report pilot was not so successful in relation to Community Engagement Officers because unlike Church Buildings Support Officers, they did not have small grants to give out or to match. However, this may present fundraising opportunities. It is understood that the Taylor pilot carried out in St Edmundsbury and Ipswich was less successful because the Community Engagement Officers lacked a small grants fund, unlike the Church Building Support Officers.

##### **Recommendation 4.3: The wider role of the Community Engagement Officer**

The Community Engagement Officer could have a wider role in the Diocese, working with Church Building Support Officers and advising on fundraising, and collaborating with local organisations to provide local advice, ideas and support. Working with the Church Building Support Officers, the Community Engagement Officer would actively engage with charitable trusts already involved in the care of the county's churches.



#### **Recommendation 4.4: Seek funds for administration support**

Administrative backup will clearly be needed for the field work of the Community Engagement Officer and the Church Building Support Officers. Consideration should be given to the kind of staffing required.

#### **6.1.5. Recommendation 5: The use of data**

**Rigorously and effectively review and analyse the data and information about church buildings and their communities** held by the parish support team and by the Church of England centrally to guide decision making and direct support to those who need it most.

This will require identifying key sources of hard quantitative and soft qualitative data that is pertinent to understanding both the vulnerability of church buildings but also the people who care for them, including:

- hard data sources such as financial return trends, PCCs with no members, QI returns where no improvements have been made or where no maintenance plans are put into effect
- soft information sources including incumbents, rural deans and Archdeacons who will be aware of wardens and other PCC members who are struggling and where community engagement is lacking
- working with other trusts to share information
- conducting 'case reviews' with Trust and support staff to identify the need for community engagement or buildings support and for possible church inclusion in the expanded Diocesan Trust.

#### **Recommendation 5.1: Review data sources**

Conduct a review of data sources available to the parish support team and parishes and identify which elements of data are most relevant to assessing vulnerability and focus on collecting and analysing those.

#### **Recommendation 5.2: Keep a 'watch list'**

Carefully monitor vulnerable church buildings, including those on the Heritage at Risk Register, identified on a 'vulnerable watch list', and keep a similar 'stressed watch list' of parishes where the people are struggling.

### **Recommendation 5.3: Case reviews**

Conduct regular case reviews of vulnerable buildings and parishes and use those to direct support to those most in need, conducting assessments as to suitability for Norwich Diocesan Churches Trust support.

### **Recommendation 5.4: Parish returns**

Encourage and support parishes to complete their online parish return which contributes to 'Statistics for Mission'. This would improve the information available to the parish support team.

According to Church of England data on church returns in 2019, before the pandemic, there was a 70% return rate, one of the lowest in the country, compared to an average return rate of 89%. An improved rate of return would provide essential information about the vulnerability of church buildings over time and enable the Bishop's Council of Trustees to prioritise the allocation of resources.

#### **6.1.6. Recommendation 6: Improve communications**

Improve communications between the parish support team centrally and parishes in order to:

- provide customised communication to individually named churchwardens and fabric officers about the upkeep of buildings and support available – in progress with new software
- ensure targeted communication to 'unofficial' parishioners who are stepping into formal roles like churchwarden, treasurer and fabric officer
- encourage two way communication and opportunities for feedback
- support an approach that communication is everyone's responsibility
- keep the parish support team up to date with key contact officers whether official or unofficial
- encourage a culture of greater collaboration between the parish support team, benefices and parishes
- foster wider and joined-up communication across support functions in the Diocese so that information sought and given is shared for the benefit of parishes.

On our visits to parishes and drop-ins we were told that people appreciated us coming out to listen, that 'the Diocese' was felt to be remote. We encountered a 'them' and 'us' attitude which referred to 'the Diocese' as other and not perceived as including themselves. In practice we found the Diocese of Norwich parish support staff to be helpful and willing to provide support but they were very stretched due to recent staffing reductions and the aftermath of Covid-19. The perception was that there

was no dialogue and that communication was one-way. Information was hard to find and contact impersonal through website and email. Collaboration between parishes within a benefice was variable and not evident between benefices. Collaboration means that experiences are most likely to be shared. Positive communication is most likely to lead to volunteers feeling valued and appreciated.

Good communications are essential to collaboration across the Diocese of Norwich. If volunteers are to understand where to seek help, that help needs to be easy to find, whether it comes as direct communication or from the website. Evidence has shown that communication is often generalised and not accessible to all.

In practice there are many communication tools available to PCC members including PCC News, a parish resources website, e-news fortnightly digital news letter, parish support staff contact details and a database that is available via log-in. The communications team also told us that they are always willing to print off and send or make more accessible any information required for those who find digital challenging.

#### **6.1.7. Recommendation 7: Encourage donations**

Make it easier for the public to donate to parish churches by promoting electronic giving such as the current project to provide card readers for every church that wants one.

[www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/parish-giving-scheme/](http://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/parish-giving-scheme/)

#### **6.1.8. Recommendation 8: Decarbonisation and net Zero**

The Diocesan Synod should support and encourage all parishes to meet the targets in the Church of England's road map for decarbonisation and to comply with the Diocesan Synod's own environmental policy, recognising that by:

- appointing a lead within the parish support team (or within the expanded Norwich Diocesan Churches Trust) to oversee the decarbonisation programme
- ensuring sufficient support staff are available to actively encourage and assist PCCs in pursuing the road map and all funding opportunities; assistance should in particular include help with technical issues and feasibility, any necessary applications for faculties, and funding where appropriate sources are available
- ensuring progress returns are filed by PCCs on an annual basis and the ensuing data is fully analysed
- encourage PCCs to adopt appropriate measures to achieve the targets

It should be noted that many rural church buildings are already nearly net zero due to their infrequent use or lack of energy supply.

## 6.2. Recommendations for the Church of England and Government

### 6.2.1. Recommendation 9: Listed places of worship grants

**Request that the government make permanent the listed places of worship grants** to assist with the forward planning of buildings work and to create better chances for the preservation of the culture and heritage of our listed church buildings.

### 6.2.2. Recommendation 10: Grant aid from Historic England

**Request that the government maintain and extend Historic England's ability to provide grant aid to buildings on the Heritage at Risk Register.**

This capability has enabled Historic England to deal with urgent cases that have sometimes failed to attract sufficient grant aid from other sources. In the case of St Mary's Church, North Tuddenham, an important Grade I listed church, the fine late medieval west tower would almost certainly have collapsed without Historic England's timely intervention.

### 6.2.3. Recommendation 11: Clarify parish council powers

Conflict in two local government acts needs to be resolved.

We strongly encourage the Church of England to continue to lobby Parliament to pass legislation to confirm that parish and town councils (and other local authorities) may contribute to the upkeep of church property for the benefit of the community, and to remove the uncertainty created by a perceived conflict between the provisions of the Local Government Acts of 1894 and 1972 by pursuing the routes suggested in the Church Buildings Council's March 2018 paper "Local Authority Investment in Church Property". Proposed changes to the Levelling-up bill being debated at the time of writing would help, including the proposal that additional money raised through second homes should be retained very locally.

#### **6.2.4. Recommendation 12: Clarify incumbent liability**

The Church of England/Church Commissioners should propose clarification of the law by statutory provision to state that incumbents who are the sole member of a PCC shall in no circumstances (other than in cases of criminal acts or deliberate insolvent trading) be personally liable to effect insurance (including public liability insurance) or repair of church buildings or under the Occupiers Liability Acts.

#### **6.2.5. Recommendation 13: Support and develop the Buildings for Mission Fund**

Encourage the Church of England to support and develop the newly established Buildings for Mission Fund over the long term, and to communicate its purpose and scope to all those engaged in the care of churches, including the charitable sector whose funds and expertise could contribute to its range and effectiveness.

The allocation of funding to dioceses from the Church of England for the care and development of church buildings (The Buildings for Mission Fund) is a very welcome initiative, but at the time of writing its purposes and detailed application are not widely known. They are understood to encompass the establishment of Church Building Support Officers and Community Engagement Officers as well as funding for maintenance and small repairs.

It is possible that there could be scope for matching funding from charitable or heritage organisations, if only the parishes knew of these initiatives and how to apply for them, alongside guidance from the parish support team. In which case, the value of these funds could be extended and become even more effective.

#### **6.2.6. Recommendation 14: Simplify quinquennial reports**

Ensure surveyors discuss essential maintenance with PCCs including the drawing up of standard maintenance schedules. In addition QIs should:

- recommend repair priorities in the light of current economic conditions
- be cross-referenced with previous reports to show action taken
- follow a standard format including a standard summary
- not be overburdened by detailed observations at the expense of overall clarity and simplicity of presentation
- strongly recommend the adoption of a maintenance schedule.

We understand that architects fees for QIs have not increased in a number of years. We recommend that they are increased and that a commitment is made to meet with PCCs to explain the report findings.

### 6.2.7. Recommendation 15: Bats in churches

**Request that the Church of England seek funding to continue the work of the 'Bats in Churches project' scheduled to end in 2023.** The project is currently funded by the National Heritage Lottery Fund and aims to help and support church communities, especially with mitigation measures which can exclude bats from some or all of the church under the appropriate legislative framework. In some rare cases, it may be appropriate to devote some or all of the church to bat conservation as opposed to worship and community activity.

### 6.2.8. Recommendation 16: Lobby the government to recognise our national heritage

**To all those organisations with national influence, we ask you to** urge the government to recognise the significance of our national heritage of historic church buildings and the fragility of their funding support, including promoting public awareness of the same.

### 6.2.9. Recommendation 17: Bringing it together

**Establish an implementation working group to support the development of these recommendations.**

**This is a particularly important recommendation,** one that will help to ensure that the findings of this report will be followed by programmed, decisive and positive action to support communities and their clergy in the care of church buildings.

We recognise that the Bishop's Council of Trustees does not have the capacity to deliver these recommendations alone and therefore we recommend bringing expertise from outside and inside the Diocese to make a difference, to relieve the pressure on parishes and incumbents in vulnerable areas, to share the wonderful heritage that Norfolk and Waveney churches represent with wider communities and to prevent the closure of churches wherever possible.

We have included with the report an indicative action plan to guide implementation of the key recommendations to the Diocese of Norwich.

# 7.

## Indicative action plan for key recommendations



Action	Lead	Timing	Priority
Establish an implementation working group to support the development of the recommendations ( <a href="#">Recommendation 17</a> )			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify who will oversee the implementation of the recommendations.</li> <li>• Identify a clear Diocesan lead for the overall implementation and for key elements of the recommendations.</li> <li>• Each lead must have responsibility for the development, implementation and management of the relevant recommendation.</li> <li>• Project management support will be required</li> </ul>			
Expand the Norfolk Diocesan Churches Trust ( <a href="#">Recommendation 1</a> )			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify who in the Diocese will oversee and manage this development</li> <li>• Establish broad objectives of the Trust and powers required</li> <li>• Obtain legal advice as to how to expand existing objectives</li> <li>• Identify scope of trustees' expertise requirements, numbers and potential trustees, including chair of Trust</li> <li>• Identify start up budget and sources of funding</li> <li>• Develop a business plan to estimate the build-up of Trust numbers and assumptions about resources required to support churches in the Trust and to keep churches out of the Trust</li> </ul>			



Action	Lead	Timing	Priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start-up budget to include adequate resources for development of criteria, assessment of proposed Trust churches, administrative, legal, financial and project management support</li> <li>• Appoint trustees and establish the board</li> <li>• Appoint a procurement officer or commission procurement advice – timing to match build-up of numbers</li> <li>• Set up liaison arrangements between local church trusts to pool information</li> <li>• Identify hard and soft data, liaise with rural deans, incumbents and Archdeacons and other local trusts to gather information for screening and assessment</li> <li>• Identify initial criteria for admission into the Trust</li> <li>• Develop a business plan with assumptions around speed of development of Trust expansion, phasing of development and intake activities including assumptions of how many churches to add year upon year</li> </ul>			

Action	Lead	Timing	Priority
Appoint least one Church Buildings Support Officer ( <a href="#">Recommendation 2</a> ) and administrative support			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the cost of the post and explore potential sources of finance to fund the position. If possible then:</li> <li>• Identify where the management of the post will be held and whether the post (together with the other Church Buildings Support Officers) should be seconded to the Trust</li> </ul>			
Establish a Norfolk and Waveney Churches Culture and Heritage Partnership <a href="#">Recommendation 3</a>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin to talk to leaders of potential member organisations, which are key to gaining the support of others, e.g. County Council</li> <li>• Identify how to develop the partnership until the full Partnership can be launched. The group to include a few Commission members, and Diocesan staff, e.g. communications (<a href="#">Recommendation 3</a>) and key influential organisation leaders</li> <li>• Identify a chair of the interim group who might act as chair of the Partnership once established</li> <li>• Consider how to launch the Partnership and gain wider public attention and support, e.g. by holding a conference on the future of the listed buildings of Norfolk and Waveney and their cultural and heritage potential</li> <li>• Consider how to establish this body as a permanent partnership including gaining resources to develop activities which might include: promoting volunteering, enhancing tourism activities such as pilgrimage trails, camping in church buildings or nearby, increasing cultural activities via Creative Arts East, and using vehicles such as improved web information and linkages to relevant bodies</li> </ul>			

Action	Lead	Timing	Priority
Employ a Community Engagement Support Officer supported by a small grants pump priming fund ( <a href="#">Recommendation 4</a> )			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the cost of the post and seek sources of funding or match funding from relevant trusts and other sources for outreach and community engagement activity</li> <li>• Link to the development of the Trust and of the Partnership</li> <li>• Identify criteria for small grant distribution linked either to preventing churches from needing to be absorbed into the Trust, or to supporting community re-engagement for churches going into the Trust on a short respite lease</li> <li>• Work with relevant national and local organisations identified in the report, such as National Heritage Lottery Fund, local trusts and grant-making bodies.</li> <li>• Establish start-up funds for the post and grant making</li> <li>• Identify admin resources to assist the post</li> </ul>			
Analyse data and information held by the Norwich Diocese parish support team about church buildings and their communities and use it to drive decision making ( <a href="#">Recommendation 5</a> )			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify data and information sources and work with the Trust development group to work out which data and from what sources are most useful to help with decision making.</li> <li>• Establish a plan for regular analysis and feedback into decision making bodies</li> </ul>			

# 8.

## Afterword



I am deeply indebted to all the Commission members who gave very generously of their time and experience in the making of this report. Members came with a variety of backgrounds from inside and outside the Church. It was this rich tapestry of experience that enabled each of us to learn from each other and from those whom we met and received presentations from. The world of church building conservation and maintenance is highly complex and even now I would say that we are not all experts.

We met many enormously committed and deeply impressive members of parish communities and are grateful for the time they took to explain how they felt about their challenges.

Thanks too go to the staff of the Diocese of Norwich who impressed us with their deep commitment to the Church and to helping those in the parishes.

What was refreshing to hear was from those outside the Church who love the historic church buildings of Norfolk and Waveney and who appreciate them in so many and varied ways, whether it is as cycling or walking stops, wandering round churchyards or simply appreciating the enormously varied churches in the Diocese of Norwich.

I hope that this report will help those who are struggling with the upkeep of church buildings and encourage a widening of commitment to and appreciation of our historic cultural heritage. I for one will never look at a historic church in the same way again!

**Laura McGillivray MBE**  
**Chair, Church Buildings Commission**

# 9.

## Annexes



## 9.1. Annex A: Church Buildings Commission members

### **Laura McGillivray MBE (Chair)**

Pro Chancellor University of East Anglia, Board member Sainsbury Centre and Norwich Theatre. Formerly Chief Executive Norwich City Council with a background in local authority senior management and community based economic development

### **The Venerable Steven Betts**

Archdeacon of Norfolk, ex-officio on Norfolk Diocesan Advisory Committee. Instrumental in setting up Norfolk Diocesan Churches Trust, chair of the trustee body. For him, the Commission is an opportunity, perhaps once in a generation, to take seriously the future of our church buildings and look to imaginative but also realistic outcomes for the future.

### **Darren Barker MBE (to July 2022)**

Managing Director of Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust, and the Heritage, Culture and Design Manager for Great Yarmouth Borough Council.

### **The Revd Peter Cook**

Rector of the Docking Benefice, Priest in Charge of Snettisham and Rural Dean of the Heacham and Rising Deanery.

### **The Revd Miriam Fife**

Rector of the Launditch & the Upper Nar group benefice, comprising 19 medieval church buildings in 17 rural parishes situated in mid-west Norfolk. Miriam served for four years as assistant curate in the benefice before recently being appointed as Rector.

### **Margaret Henderson**

Churchwarden and PCC in the parish of Hempstead with Lessingham and Eccles in the Coastal Group of parishes. Previously deputy Principal at Paston College. Member of the parish council for 40 years. I have become Churchwarden, Secretary and Assistant Treasurer.

### **Professor Sandy Heslop**

Emeritus Professor of Visual Arts, medieval art and architecture, UEA.

### **Peter Goddard**

Chair of Housing Association Solo, providing accommodation and support to single people. Retired as a partner and lead of Social Housing Team from law firm Birketts in 2021. Previously Board Member and Committee Chair of Hereward Housing Association and later Sanctuary Hereward. From 2009 to 2012 Chair of Norwich City Council's Housing Improvement Board.

**Helen Lunnon**

Museum and heritage professional specialising in learning and participation. Honorary Research Associate at UEA investigating medieval church art and architecture in East Anglia and the mutual influences of people, places and things.

**John Maddison**

Chair of Norfolk Churches Trust. Previously Victorian Society Northern Caseworker and then Architectural Adviser in London. Ten years with the National Trust as their Historic Buildings Representative for East Anglia based at Blickling and member of several Diocesan Advisory Committees.

**Ian Newton**

Churchwarden and PCC member, Field Dalling church near Holt. Previously a member St Edmundsbury and Ipswich Diocesan Board of Education.

**Helen Wilson**

Chair, Norfolk and Suffolk Culture Board 2012–2022, National Lottery Heritage Fund Regional Committee Member 2013–May 2023, Trustee, Norfolk Museums Development Foundation. Formerly Controller, BBC Radio 4.

**Diocesan Support****Nicholas Cannon**

Church Care and Development Manager (DAC Secretary)

**Paul Dunning**

Director of Education, Diocese of Norwich

**Elizabeth Humphries**

Communications and press

**Stuart Jones**

Diocesan Registrar

**Margaret Mallett**

Minutes and meetings

**Julie Smith**

Diocesan Strategy

A special mention for **Dr Andrew Tullett** who was seconded from Norfolk County Council and without whom this report would not have happened.



## 9.2. Annex B: The Church of England and its Buildings: a brief overview of the organisation

There are 42 dioceses in the Church of England. Most of Norfolk and the Waveney area of Suffolk are in the Diocese of Norwich. Parishes in the extreme west of the county, including some of Norfolk's most distinguished churches, lie in the Diocese of Ely and fall outside the remit of this Commission.

The Diocese of Norwich is led by the **diocesan Bishop** with the assistance of two **suffragan Bishops**: the Bishop of Lynn and the Bishop of Thetford. They assist the diocesan Bishop in his role as spiritual leader of the Diocese. Answering directly to the diocesan Bishop and taking responsibility for clergy welfare, discipline, the proper conduct of parishes and the care of their church buildings and contents are three **Archdeacons**: the Archdeacon of Norwich (part-time), the Archdeacon of Lynn (full-time) and the Archdeacon of Norfolk (full-time).

The Diocese is split up into **rural deaneries** and within the rural deaneries there is a further division into **benefices**. Rural deaneries are presided over by **rural deans** but it is the **incumbent** clergy who have direct and ongoing responsibility for parishes within their benefice. The benefice can contain anything from one to nearly 20 parishes and their church buildings.

Parish churches are governed by the **parochial church council (PCC)** who are elected from communicant members of the congregation. The incumbent is the chair of each **PCC** in their benefice. A **benefice council** is often established to assist with the running of the benefice. It is usually composed of members with useful experience and can give advice and provide services to individual PCCs. In some cases, PCCs can delegate certain responsibilities to the benefice council.

PCCs have officers: a **secretary, treasurer, churchwardens** and often a **fabric officer**. The **churchwarden** is answerable for the care of the building and contents and is expected to assist the incumbent with good liturgical and pastoral practice, and the wellbeing of the congregation. Additionally, PCCs are now required to appoint a **safeguarding officer**.

When for whatever reason there is no PCC its responsibilities fall on the incumbent. In some benefices the incumbent clergy will be assisted by a curate, and in many cases there are retired clergy who will also be prepared to take services. **Licensed Lay Ministers (LLM)** can assist in services and are licensed to preach but only ordained clergy are allowed to administer the sacraments.

Churches in use are the property of individual parish councils and their incumbents. They do not belong either to the Diocese or to the Church of England. The ownership passes with changes in office (PCC and incumbent) on the principle of the Corporation Sole. In a church building context, in order to keep the property from being treated as the estate of the vicar of the church, the property is titled to the office of the corporation sole.

Churches in use enjoy exemption from the legislation covering ancient monuments and listed buildings but remain subject to planning permission for external alterations and extensions. Permissions for other changes and significant repairs are obtained through the **faculty jurisdiction**. This applies to furnishings and disposal of contents as well as architectural matters.

Minor issues can be determined by **Archdeacons** but more significant applications affecting the church building and churchyard monuments require a **faculty**. Faculties are determined by the **diocesan chancellor** who acts on behalf of the diocesan bishop. The chancellor is advised on these matters by the **Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC)**. The **DAC** is composed of the three Archdeacons and a group of clergy and experts in the care of historic buildings and church furnishings. The committee has a secretary and additional support staff.

Faculty petitions (which must be advertised) are forwarded to the chancellor via the **diocesan registrar** together with the DAC's advice, any representations from Historic England and from the Statutory Amenity Societies as well as any letters of objection and the advice of the **Church Buildings Council** (a national body under the Archbishops' Council) when it has been sought by the DAC. The chancellor can either issue the faculty, refuse it, or if the case is contentious, hear it in open court (a **Consistory Court**). It is the registrar who issues the faculty if one is granted.

Church buildings that are considered for redundancy fall under a separate piece of legislation, the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011, which at the time of writing is due to go to general synod for debate in July 2023.

This measure is administered by the Church Commissioners. Under the measure a building can be declared redundant and a scheme for its disposal and reuse drawn up. It can also be demolished under the measure but the total demolition of a listed church requires listed building consent as its use for worship has by definition ceased. Between a declaration of redundancy and disposal a church building becomes the responsibility of the Diocesan Board of Finance. As it is no longer used for worship it loses its exemption and becomes subject to all aspects of secular planning legislation including listed building controls, repairs notices issued by the local authority etc.

Churches of the highest architectural and historic interest that fall redundant will be considered for acquisition by the **Churches Conservation Trust (CCT)**, a charity jointly funded by the Church Commissioners and the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. The small number accepted by the CCT will be governed by its resources.

### 9.3. Annex C: Norwich Diocesan Churches Trust leaflet



Please see below  
an extract from the leaflet:

#### The following factors need to be carefully considered:

**Open** – It is anticipated that the Church will be regularly open to enable visits and opportunities for prayer. Indeed, when churches are unlocked there are often more visitors during the week than worshippers at usual Sunday services. Some Churches are never locked and this would continue, others may have a local key holder who is very happy to lock and unlock each day. Alternatively (assuming that there is electricity), a simple electronic door lock might be fitted to allow unrestricted day time visits. A sensible approach to valuable items and security will need to be taken including the removal of some portable items to a safe place such as a locked vestry.

**Available** – The Church will remain available to the local community for occasional offices (baptisms, weddings and funerals) in the usual way, although there may be limited facilities, in time, with regard to the maintenance of organs and bells. Nevertheless, there is no plan to restrict such services, indeed they should be actively welcomed for those eligible.

**Worship** – It is not expected that regular worship would take place but there should be a minimum of six services each year (arranged by the incumbent) in the building which would be recorded in the Service Register. There would be an expectation of a service at Christmas, probably Harvest (in an agricultural area), Holy Week and/or Easter and on sufficient other occasions to produce a minimum of six. These may be held either during the week or on Sundays, should be advertised, but can be low key in nature if necessary. Such a minimum establishes that the Church is still used for regular worship and so is eligible for a variety of sources of support if no other funds are available (HLF and VAT refund grants).

## 9.4. Annex D: ‘Open’, ‘closed’ and ‘redundant’ churches

**During the Commission’s work several times there were difficulties understanding the technical meaning of various terms which appear not to mean what they say!**

For example, an open church can still be closed to members of the public yet remain technically ‘open’, in other words not made redundant or, in imprecise shorthand, deconsecrated. The various documents which govern the life of the Church of England include the Canons ([www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/legal-services/canons-church-england/canons-website-edition](http://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/legal-services/canons-church-england/canons-website-edition)), Measures (which have been approved by both the Church and Parliament; see [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm)) and secondary legislation such as Rules and Regulations ([www.legislation.gov.uk/secondary?text=ecclesiastical%20law&sort=year](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/secondary?text=ecclesiastical%20law&sort=year)). A very brief guide can be found at [www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/ecclesiastical-law/legislation](http://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/ecclesiastical-law/legislation).

Features of open churches would normally (but not always if there are no volunteers) include churchwardens and a PCC. The building itself needs to be inspected by a suitably qualified person every five years (the Quinquennial Inspection) and any significant changes are subject to Faculty Jurisdiction. Once no longer an ‘open’ church by scheme of redundancy, such requirements usually no longer apply and instead secular planning regulations and listed building consent are applicable, from which open churches are exempt.

There are very specific rules about worship in open churches and the number of services which take place, although recent legislative change allows for significant reductions (see Canons B14 and B14A). Open churches (even in the care of the Norwich Diocesan Churches Trust, but not other historic bodies as these arrangements normally follow formal closure or redundancy) will usually be required to hold six services a year, which is a requirement not of Canon law but rather of the Listed Places of Worship Scheme, in order for VAT on repairs to be reclaimed ([www.lpwscheme.org.uk/lpw\\_guidance\\_notes\\_download.pdf](http://www.lpwscheme.org.uk/lpw_guidance_notes_download.pdf)).

The process of redundancy is lengthy and involves the Church Commissioners as the final arbiter. The process is set out at [www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/church-buildings-council/how-we-manage-our-buildings/churches-no-longer-needed](http://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/church-buildings-council/how-we-manage-our-buildings/churches-no-longer-needed) and involves very significant consultation and reporting. This is at least in part as the local community loses use of the church and with it certain rights such as the possibility of holding baptism, wedding (providing certain criteria are met) and funeral services in that building. In addition a redundant or closed church

loses ecclesiastical exemption, becoming (as set out above) subject to local authority control of planning. If no alternative use can be found, responsibility for a redundant church switches to the Diocesan Board of Finance from the PCC at the point of redundancy, albeit with no additional resources to maintain it, a situation almost every Diocese in the country aims to avoid.

The term 'Festival Church' has recently been coined for churches which have services at church festivals (eg. Christmas, Easter etc.) only. It is a descriptive rather than strictly legal phrase and reflects the reality that a gradually increasing number of rural churches have only very occasional use, often at a time when the community comes together to celebrate, mourn or remember.

## 9.5. Annex E: Public Survey – responses and analysis

### 9.5.1. General notes

We received 1,004 responses to our public survey in total. Of these, 953 were collected online while 51 were received by post. Demographic information was not collected on the paper responses.

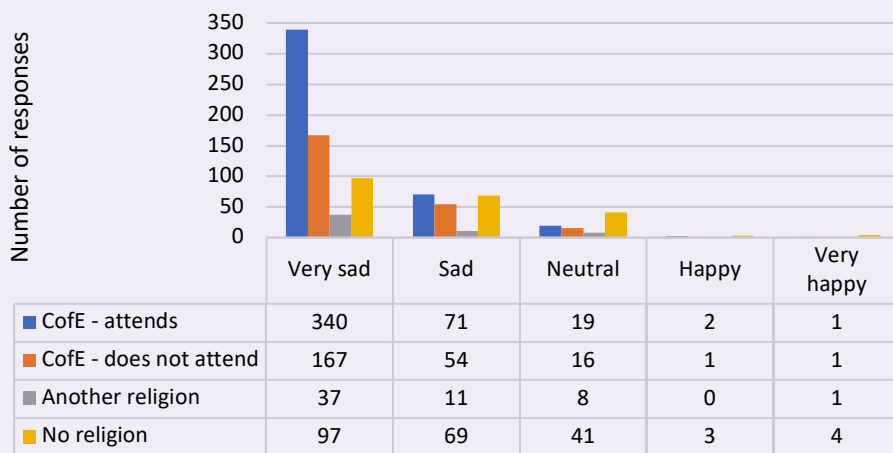
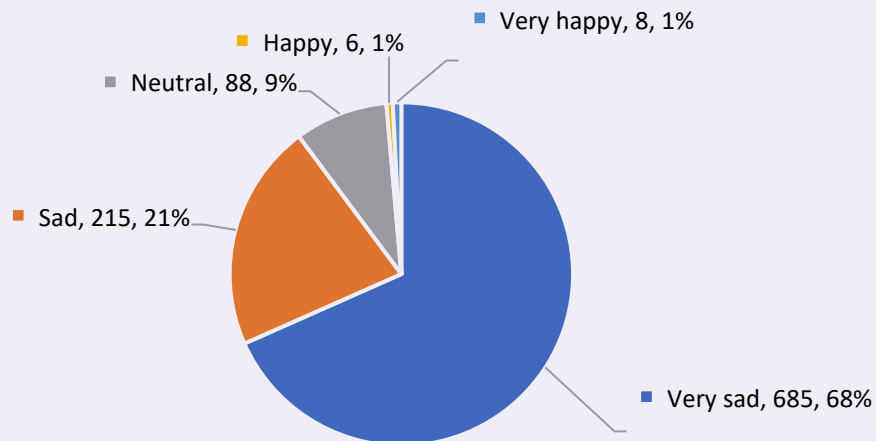
Respondents could select more than one answer in response to some of the questions so that the total number of responses to a particular question may appear to exceed the total number of participants.

In the pie-charts presented on the following pages, percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number. This might cause total percentages to exceed 100% for a particular question.

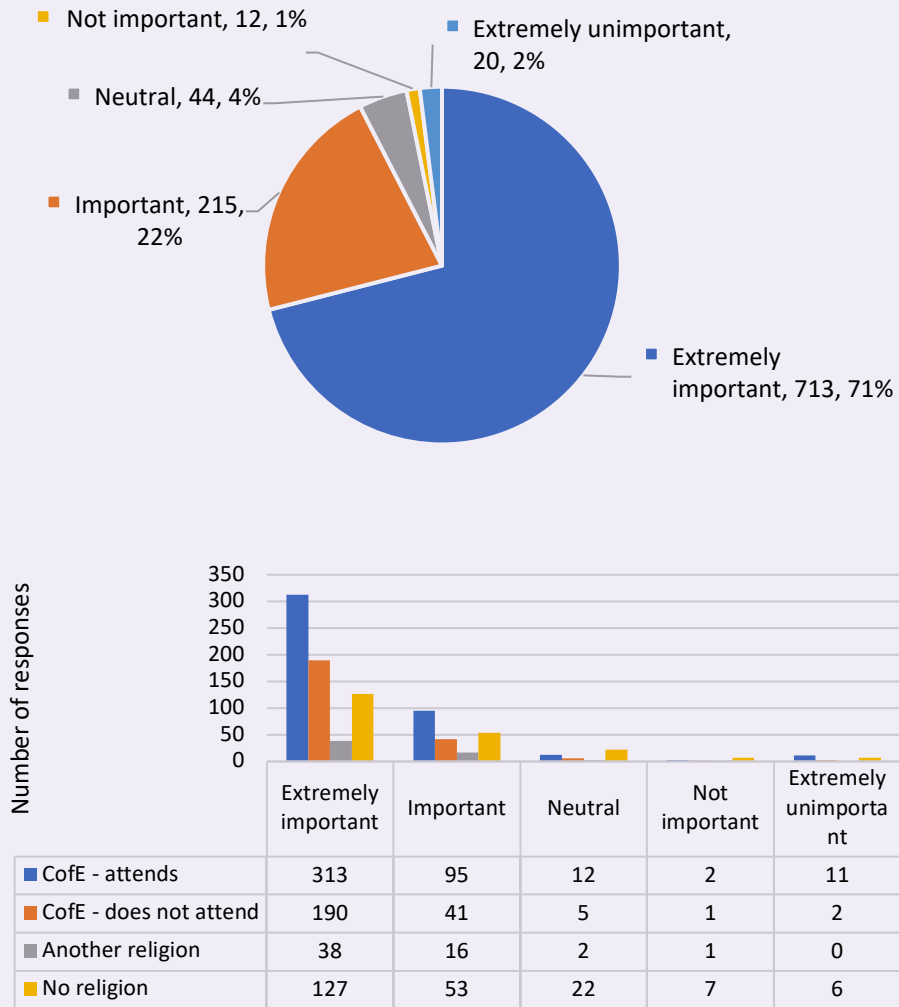
### 9.5.2. Survey questions and responses

#### The church building and its uses

##### 1. If your local church building closed, how would you feel about it?

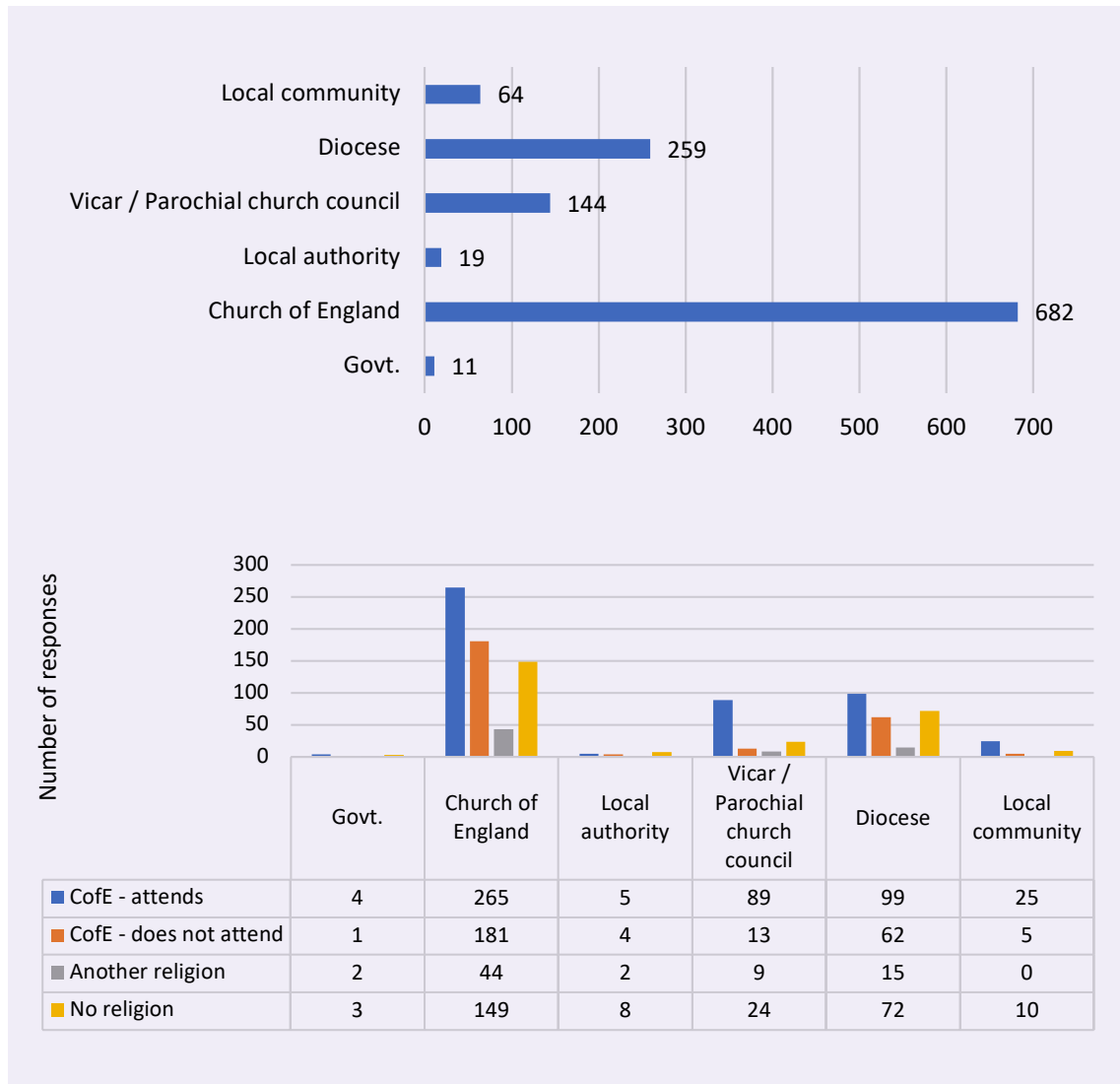


## 2. What is your opinion of church buildings in the landscape of Norfolk?



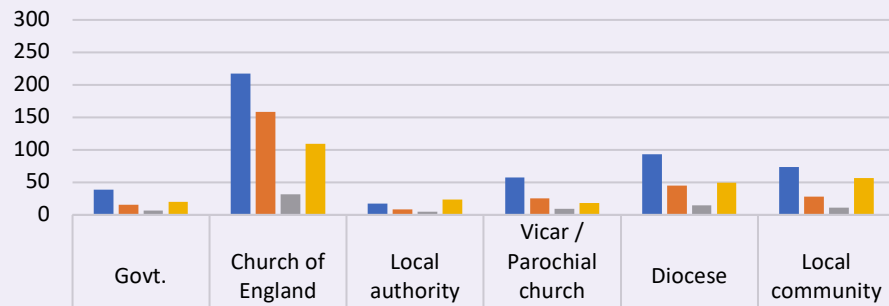
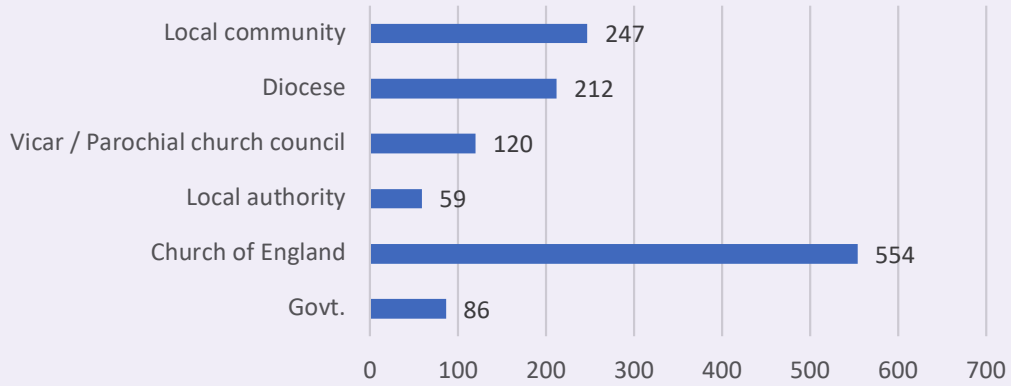


**3. Who do you think owns these churches?** (Multiple answers were allowed).



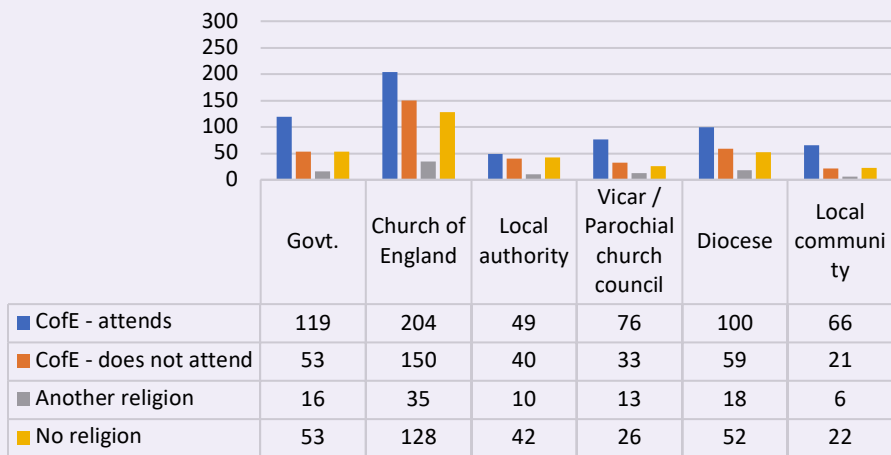
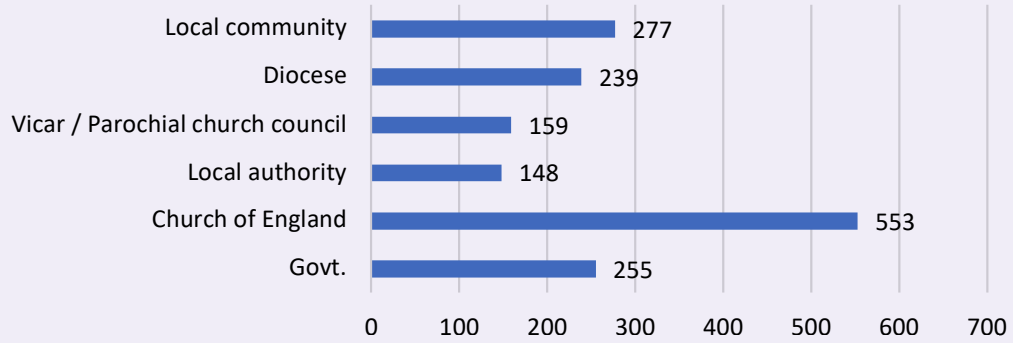
#### 4. Who do you think should own these churches?

(Multiple answers were allowed).

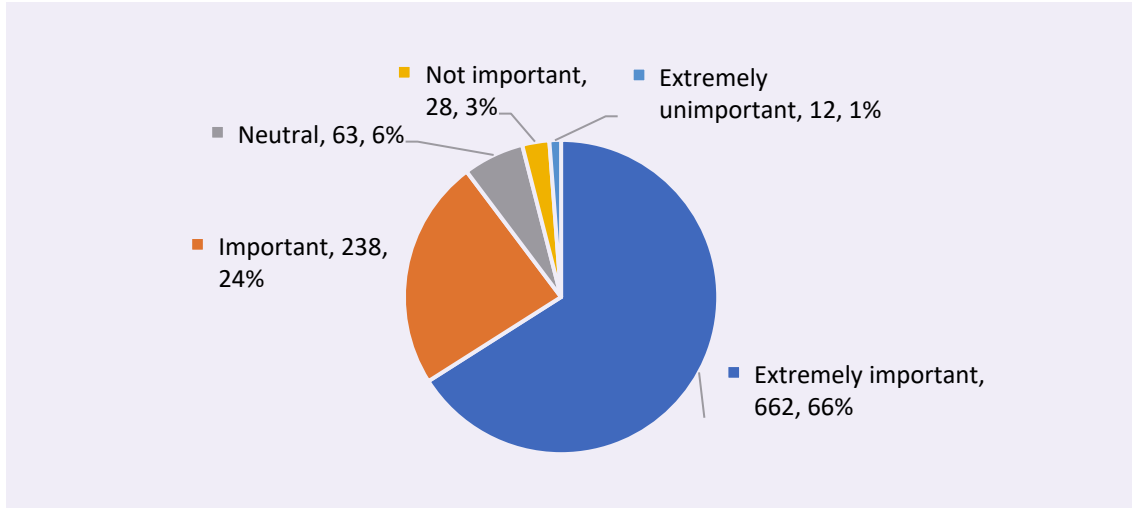


	Govt.	Church of England	Local authority	Vicar / Parochial church council	Diocese	Local community
■ CofE - attends	39	218	18	58	94	74
■ CofE - does not attend	16	159	9	26	45	28
■ Another religion	7	32	5	10	15	11
■ No religion	20	110	24	19	50	57

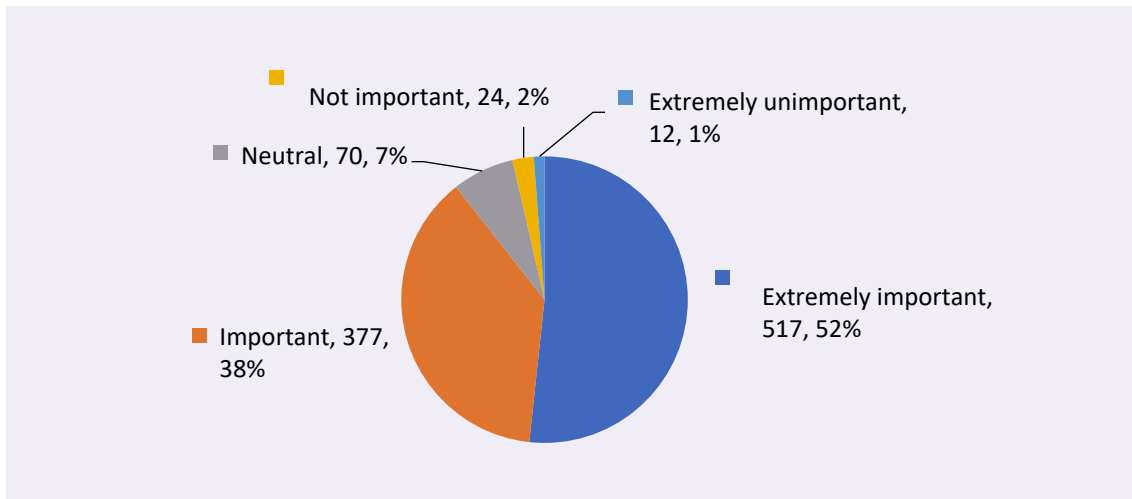
**5. Who do you think should be responsible for the upkeep of these churches?**  
 (Multiple answers were allowed).



**6. How important do you think church buildings are for life events, such as weddings, funerals and baptisms/naming ceremonies?**



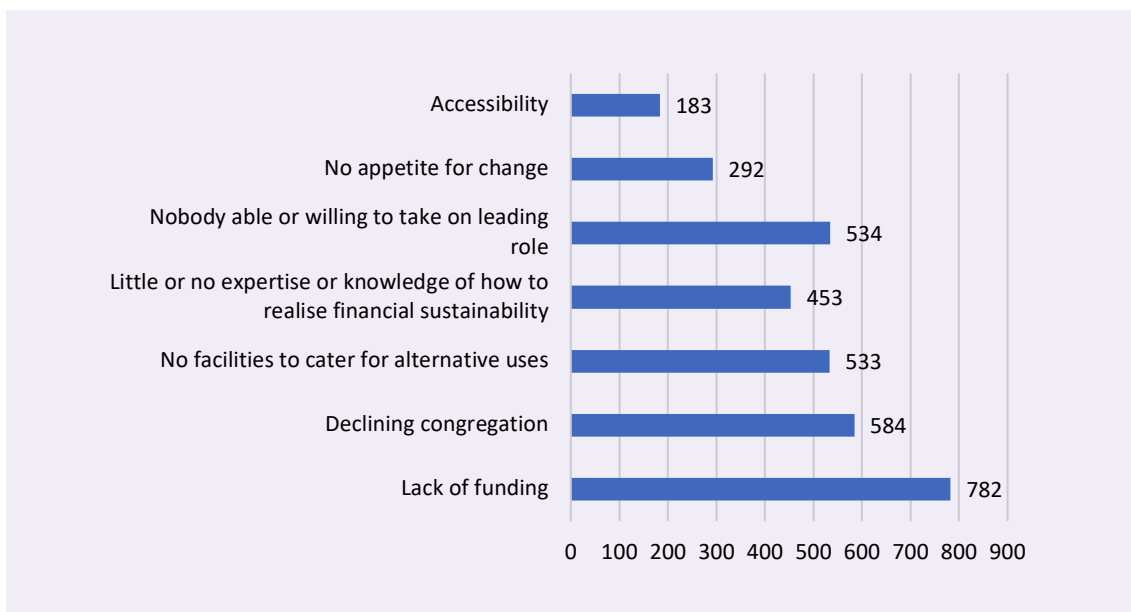
**7. How important do you think it is that church buildings are used for the benefit of the wider (non-worshipping) community?**



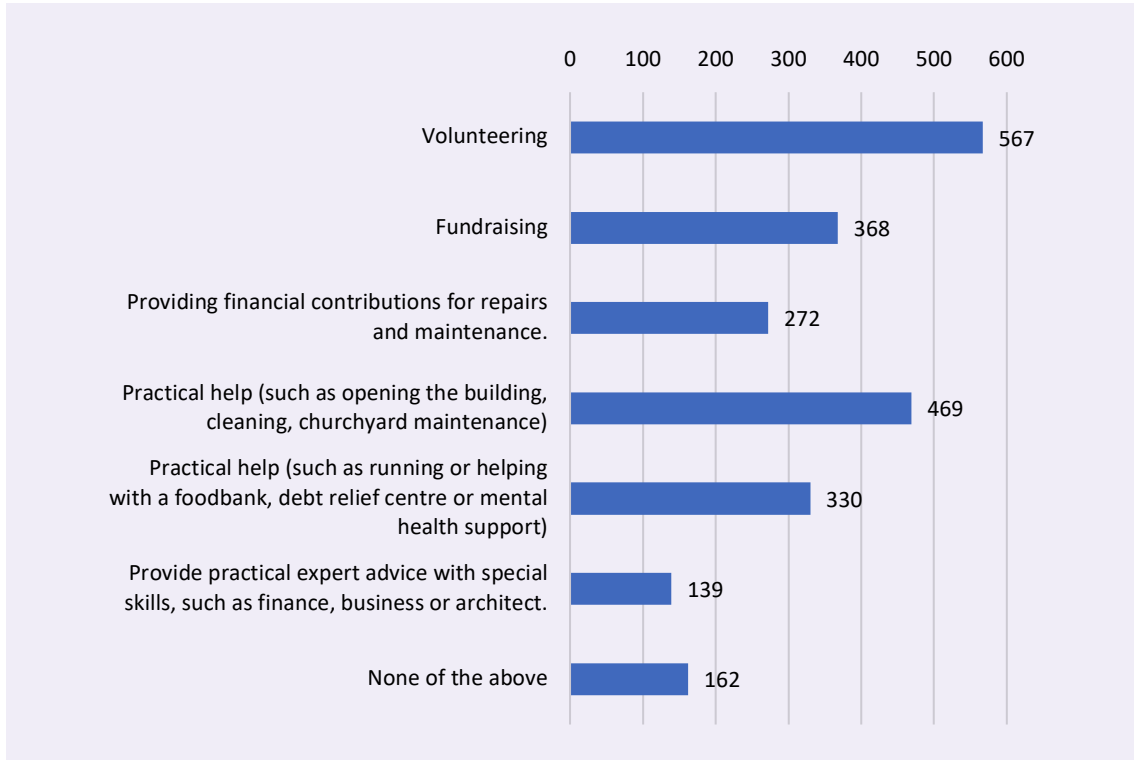
**8. What do you believe are the key factors that might prevent the wider (non-worshipping) community from being involved with their local church building? Tick all that apply.**



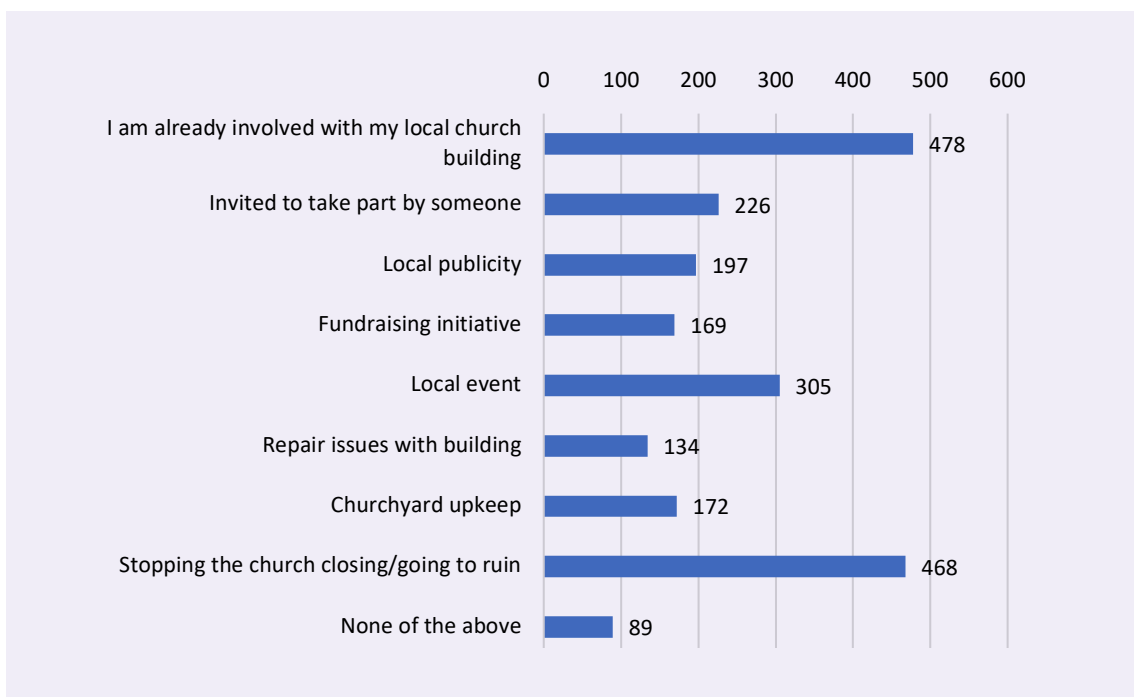
**9. What do you think are the main factors that prevent a church building from being a sustainable resource into the future for wider community activities? Tick all that apply.**



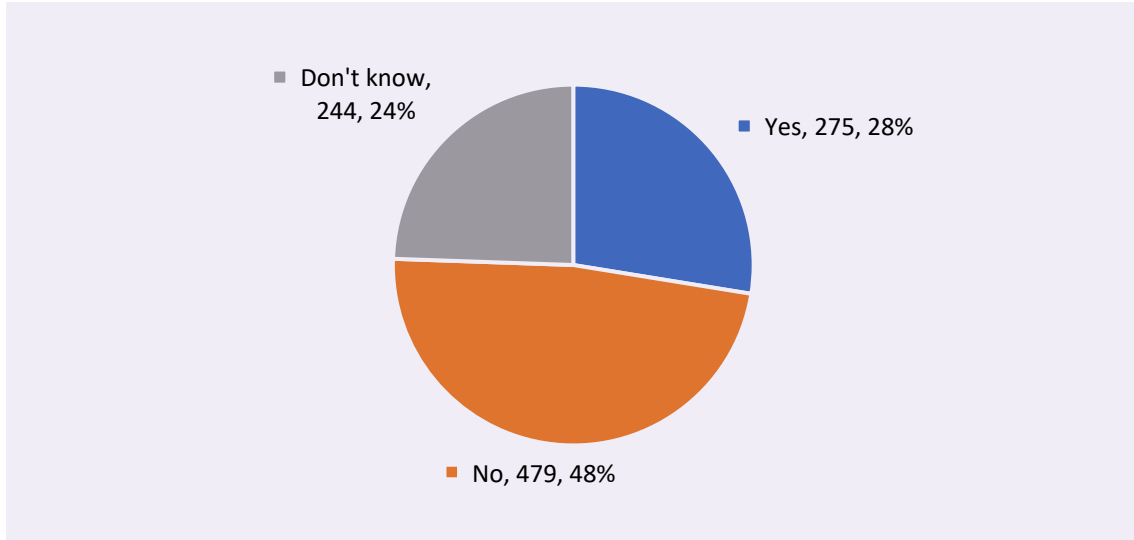
**10. Would you be prepared to engage in any of the following to support your local church building? Tick all that apply.**



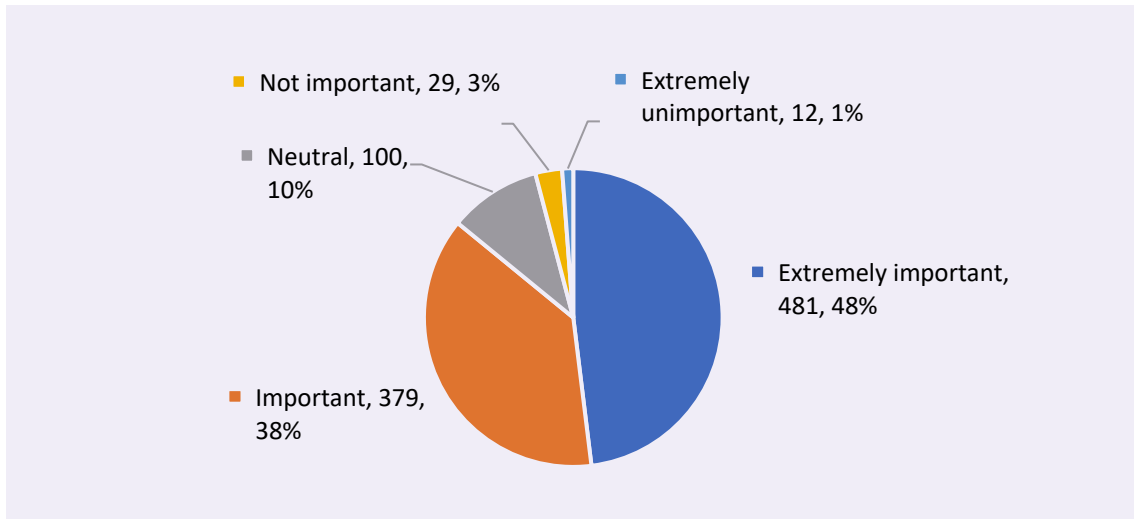
**11. What would encourage you to become involved in some way with your local church building? Tick all that apply.**



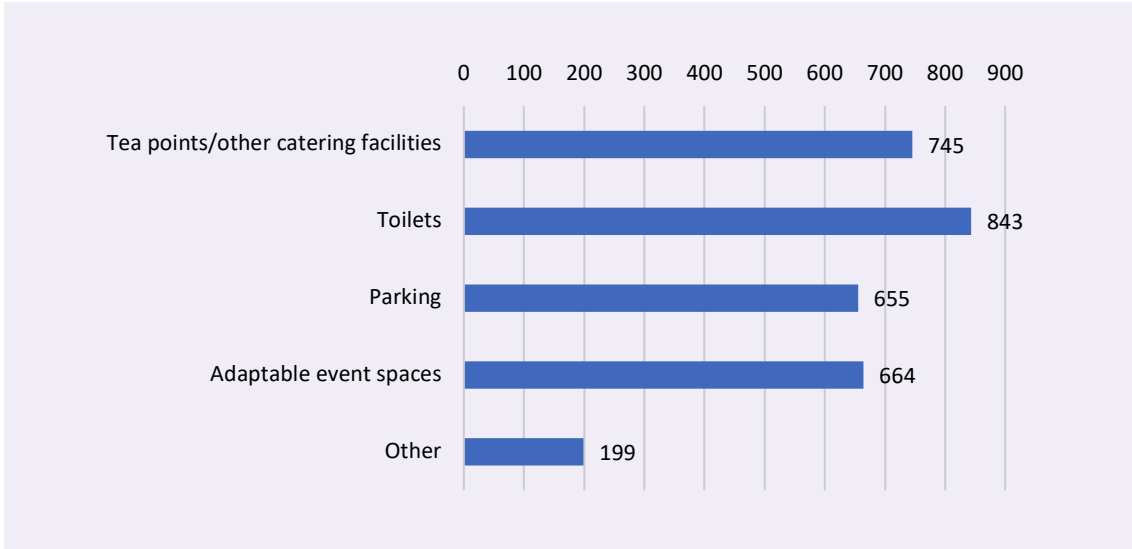
**12. Do you believe that your wider community feels a sense of responsibility for their local church building?**



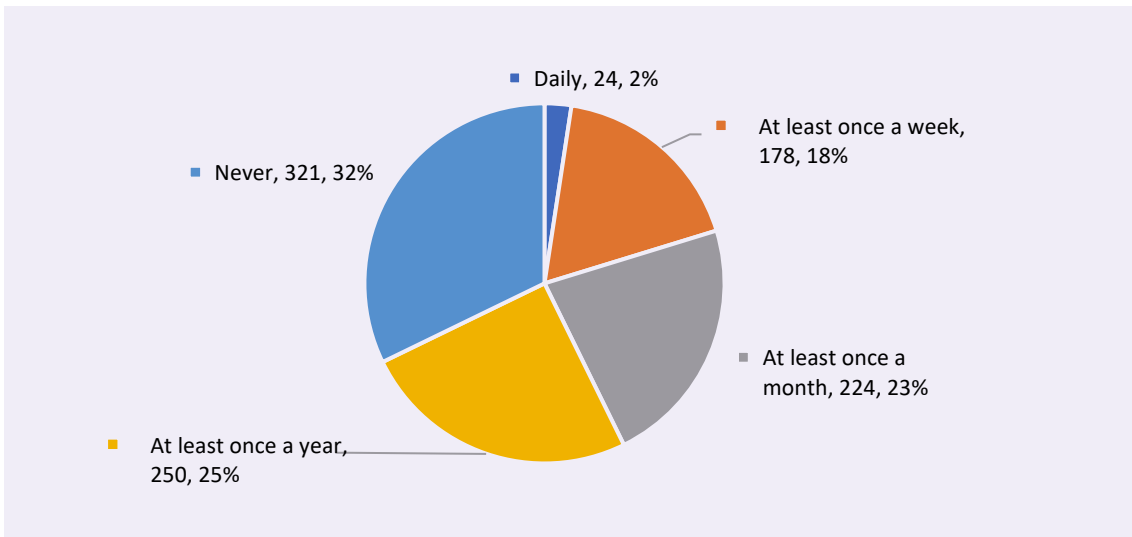
**13. How important would the use of a church building for non-worshipping activities be in contributing to a sense of local community?**



**14. What do churches need to offer in order to be attractive as venues for wider events and ventures? Tick all that apply.**

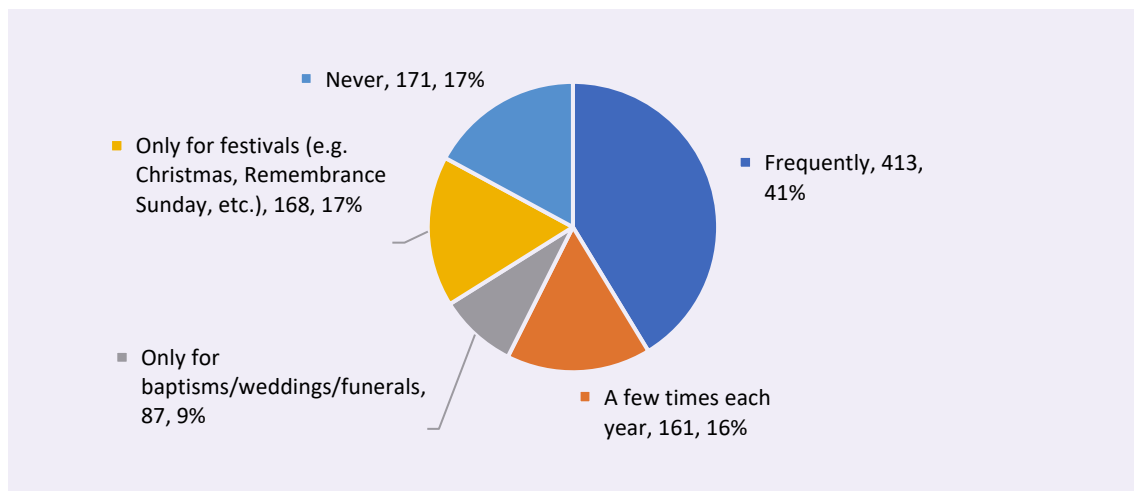


**15. How often do you use your local church for quiet reflection or prayer (other than attending a service)?**





## 16. How often do you attend a service at your local church?



## 17. Are there any activities that you would like to see the church in your community used for?

There were 531 replies to this question. Many complementary activities were suggested, including: creche/parent and toddler groups/messy church, cinema/theatre productions, fetes, craft fair, art/photo exhibitions, music concerts, talks/lectures, café/lunch club, use as an adaptable meeting space, mental health support/counselling, food bank, heritage tours, local history displays/museum, school trips, teenage social club, training space for heritage buildings skills, repair/upcycling shop hub.

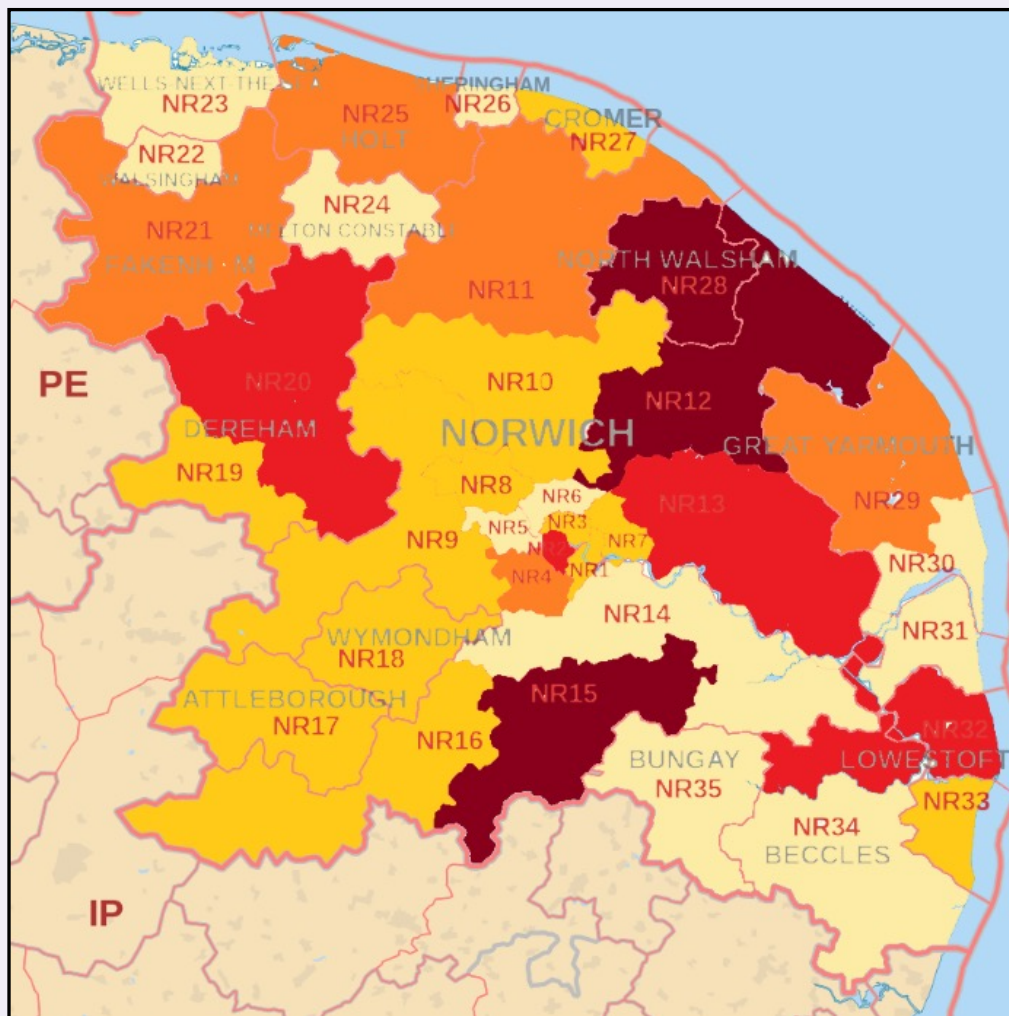
## 18. Are there any activities that you would object to seeing the church in your community used for?

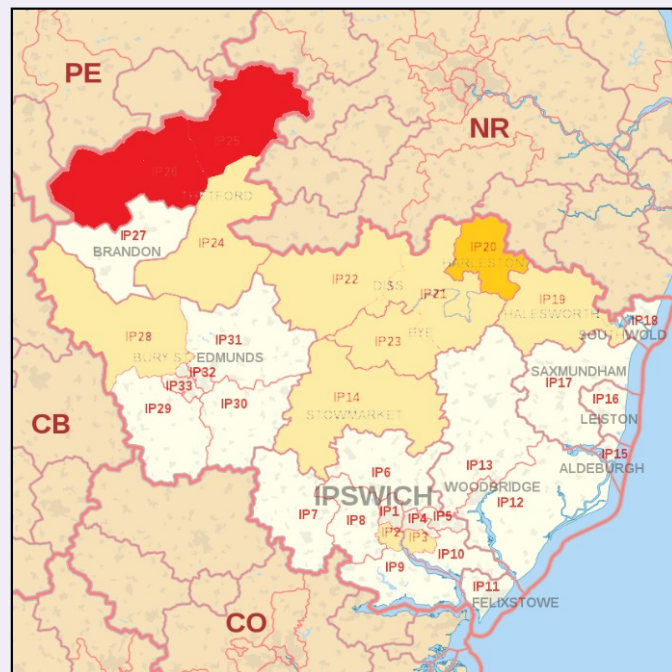
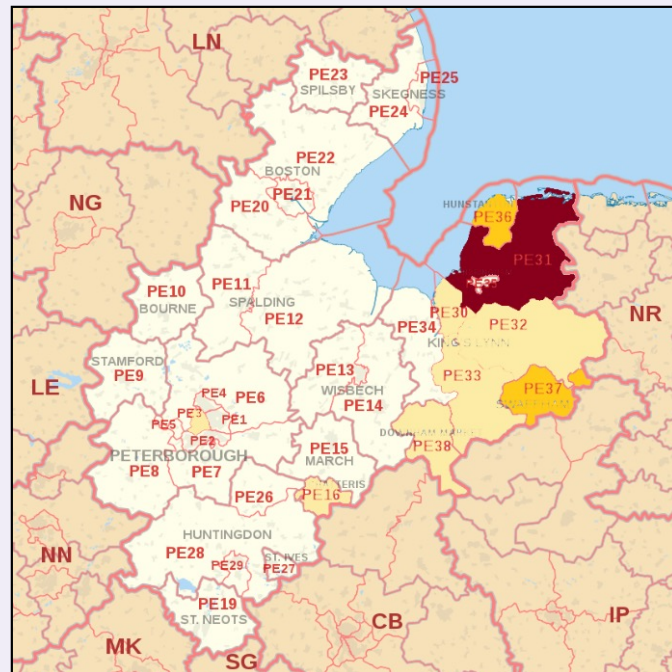
There were 493 replies to this question, around 10% gave 'No' or 'None' (or variations on this) as their response. Several respondents stated that they were happy for other activities to take place inside church buildings so long as they did not pose a risk to the fabric of the building and that they were respectful to the primary purpose of the church as a place of worship. The activities cited most often as being unsuitable included: gambling, consumption of alcohol, loud music, political events, purely commercial activities, activities organised by other religious groups, yoga, ball games and cinema.

## Demographic questions

### 19. What is the first half of your postcode? (E.g. NR2 3DB would be given as NR2)

855 respondents left their postcode. The majority of these had postcodes which were in, or bordered, the geographical area covered by the Diocese of Norwich. Only 20 responses were received from respondents outside of the postcode areas IP (113), NR (619) or PE (103).

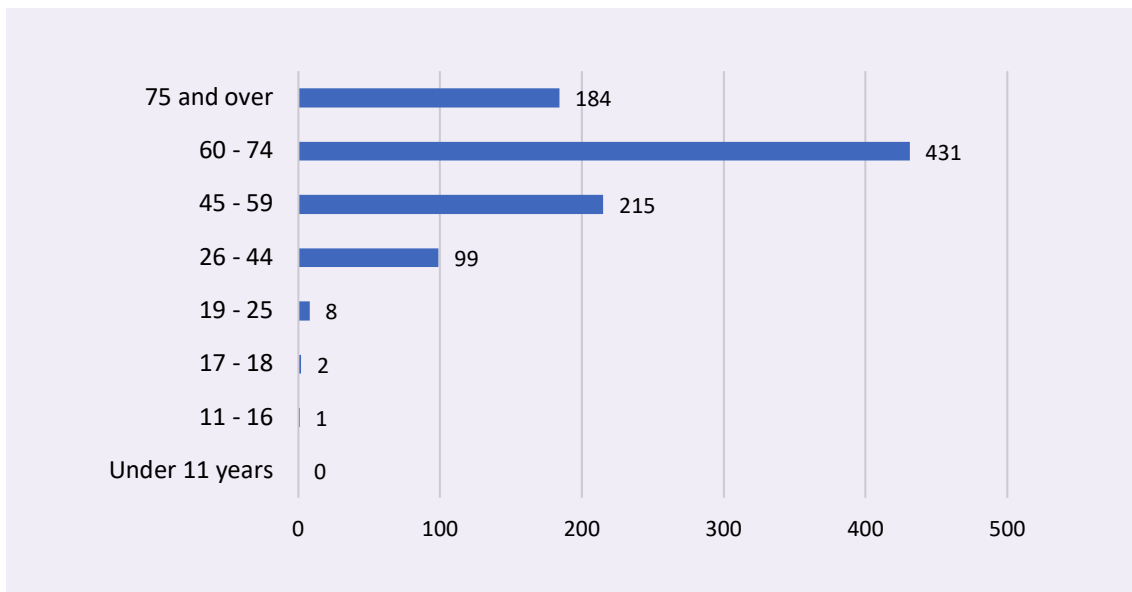




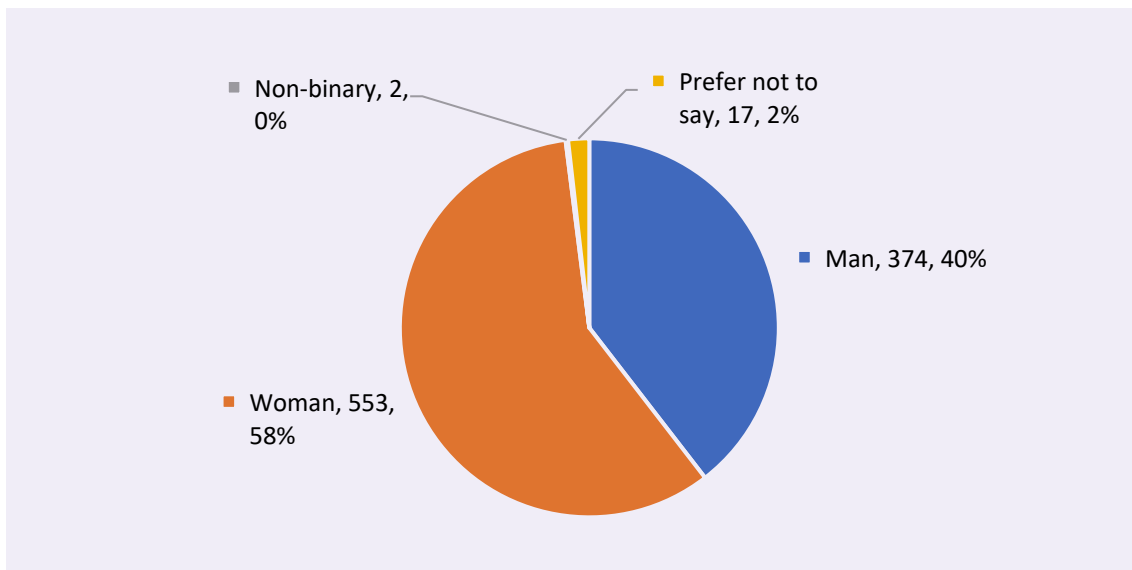
0	1 – 9	10 – 19	20 – 29	30 – 39	40 – 49

Figure 21. Number of responses to public survey from postcode areas NR (left), PE (top) and IP (bottom).

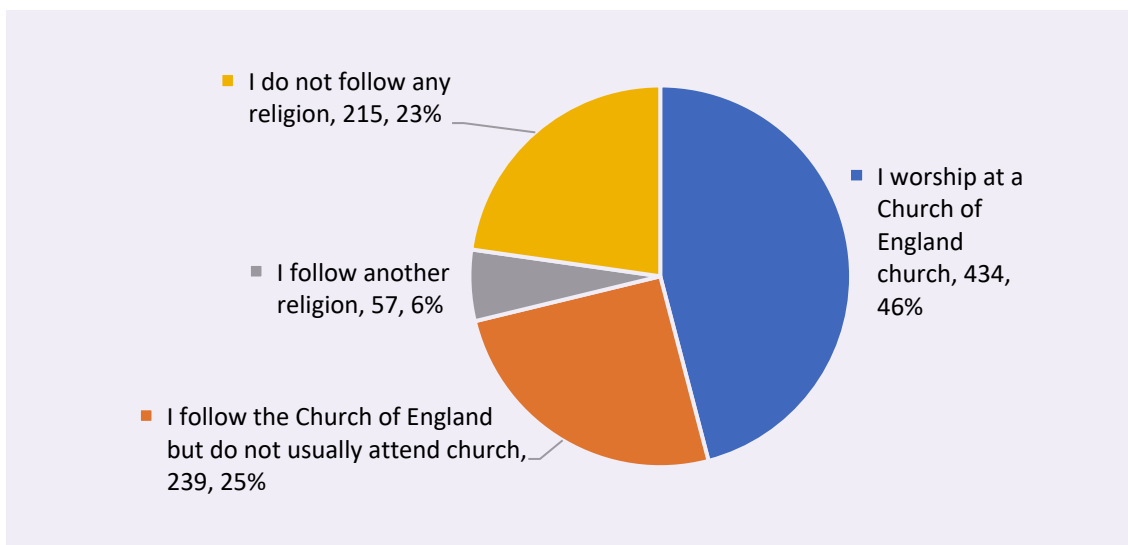
## 20. Which is your age group?



## 21. Gender



## 22. How would you describe yourself?



## 23. If you have any other comments, please give details below.

There were 376 replies to this question. Although a range of opinions were expressed, the overwhelming majority stressed how important they thought church buildings were from a community and heritage perspective. However, many also acknowledged the enormous challenge involved in maintaining them given that congregations are declining and the average age of those taking on the responsibility is increasing. Some also referred to the fact that in many places village halls provide more comfortable facilities for community activities.

Many respondents stated that government funding, or the creation of a National Trust-like body, should be considered to support church buildings.

There were contrasts in opinion, but most people agreed with the sentiments expressed in the second of the quotes below, rather than the first:

*Churches are an unnecessary drain on local communities and should be allowed to fade away.*

*Churches are an irreplaceable cultural and community asset, built by our ancestors and the property of us all.*

## 9.6. Annex F: Church Buildings Survey – responses and analysis

### 9.6.1. Introduction

An online survey was ‘live’ between 21 June 2022 and 22 July 2022. Following quality control checks, responses representing 424 individual churches in the Diocese of Norwich have been included in the results and analysis.

#### 9.6.1.1. Structure of survey

Section 1: You and your church

Section 2: Your church and its neighbourhood

Section 3: Your church community

Section 4: Community activities at your church

Section 5: Church finances

Section 6: Your church building

Section 7: Collaborations between your church and other groups

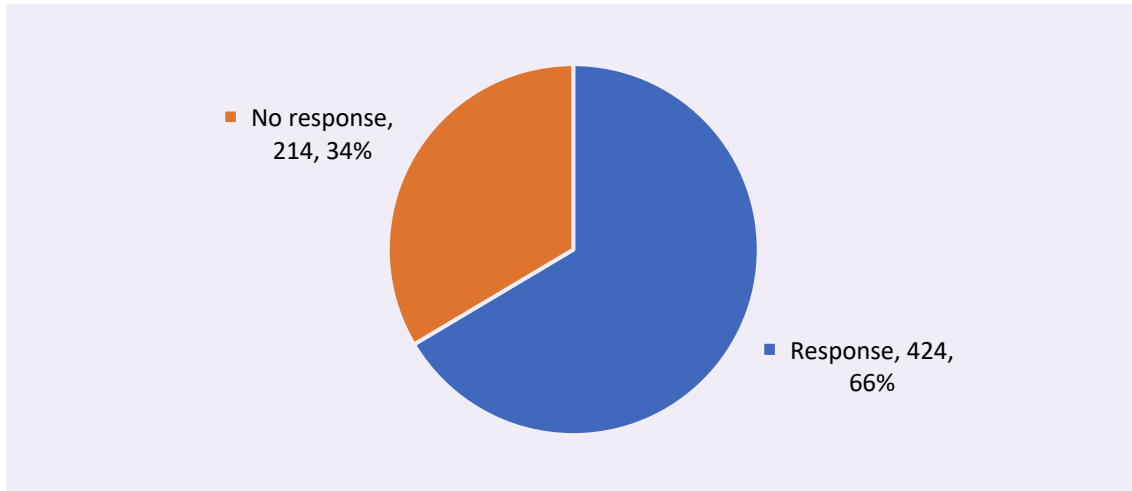
Section 8: Architectural and historic value of your church

Section 9: End of survey

In the charts presented below, percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number. This might cause total percentages to exceed 100% for a particular question.

## Section 1: You and your church

### Response rate

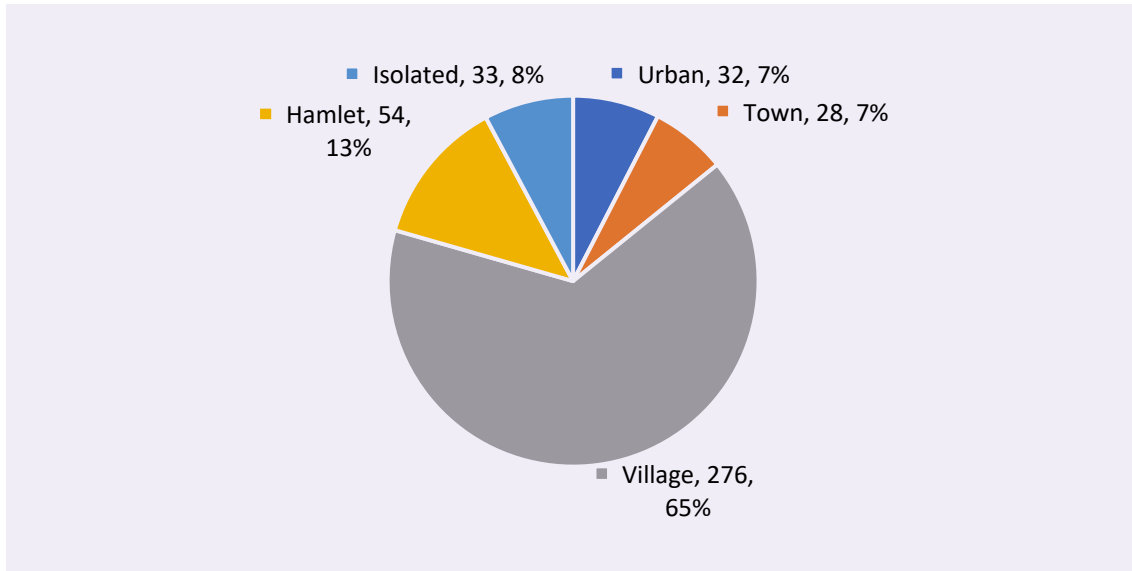


The online survey asked respondents to select their church from a pre-set list of churches in the Diocese of Norwich. The details of 638 churches were included in the list. Of these, responses were received from 424 churches. This represents a response rate of 66.5%.

There may be various explanations for the 33.5% of churches that did not respond. Some may have been unaware of the survey despite the publicity and direct emails. Some may have taken the deliberate decision not to submit a response. Some may not have had a representative who could complete an online survey.

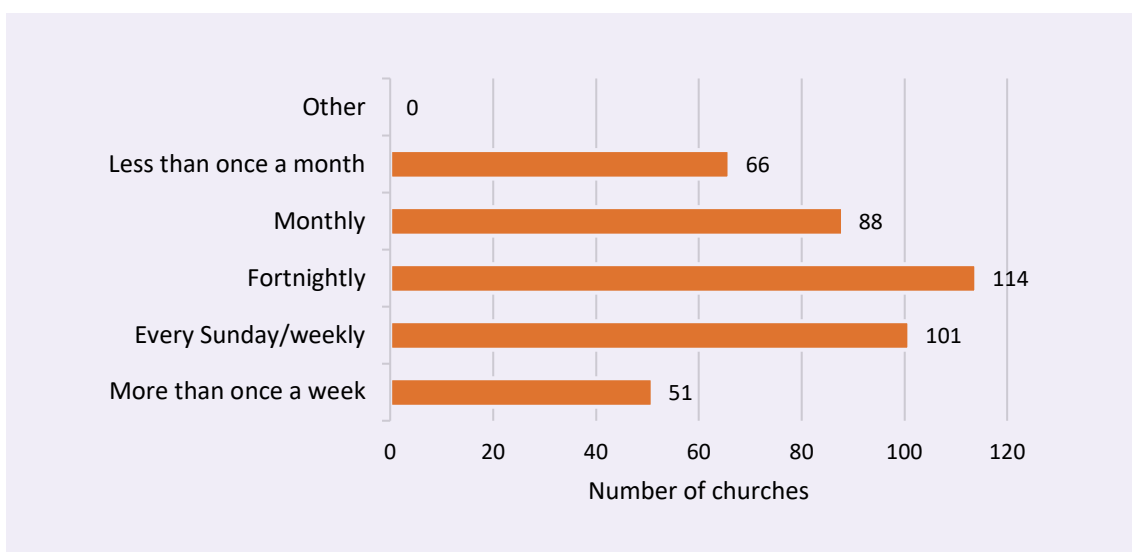
## Section 2: Your church and its neighbourhood

### 2.1 Which best describes the area where your church is located?



Over 85.8% of churches were described as being in a village, hamlet or in an isolated location. Only 14.2% of churches were described as being in a town or urban location.

### 2.2 How often are services held at your church?

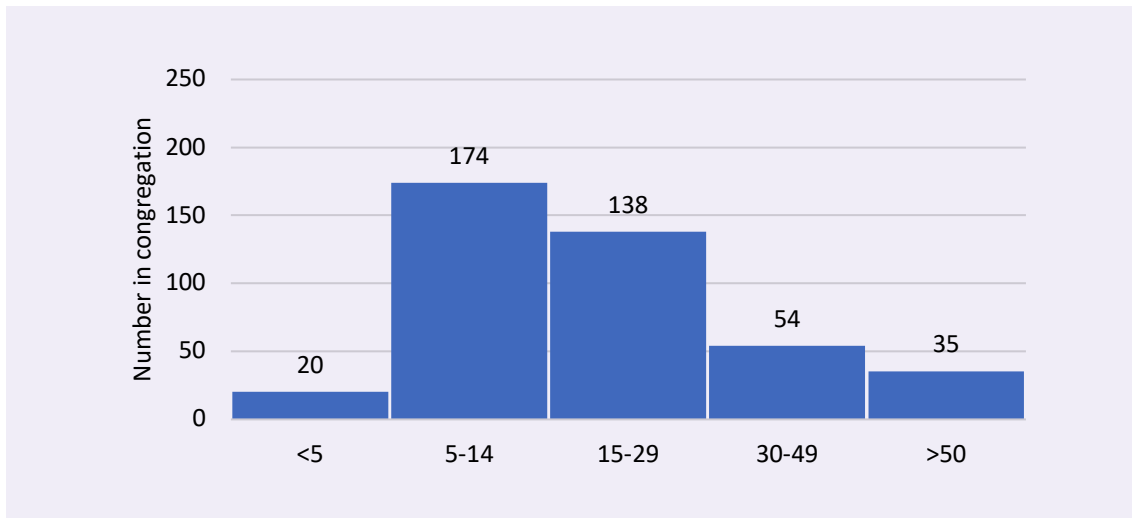


Over one-third of churches (36.7%) hold one service a month or less in their building. Just over one-third of churches (36.2%) hold at least one service per week.



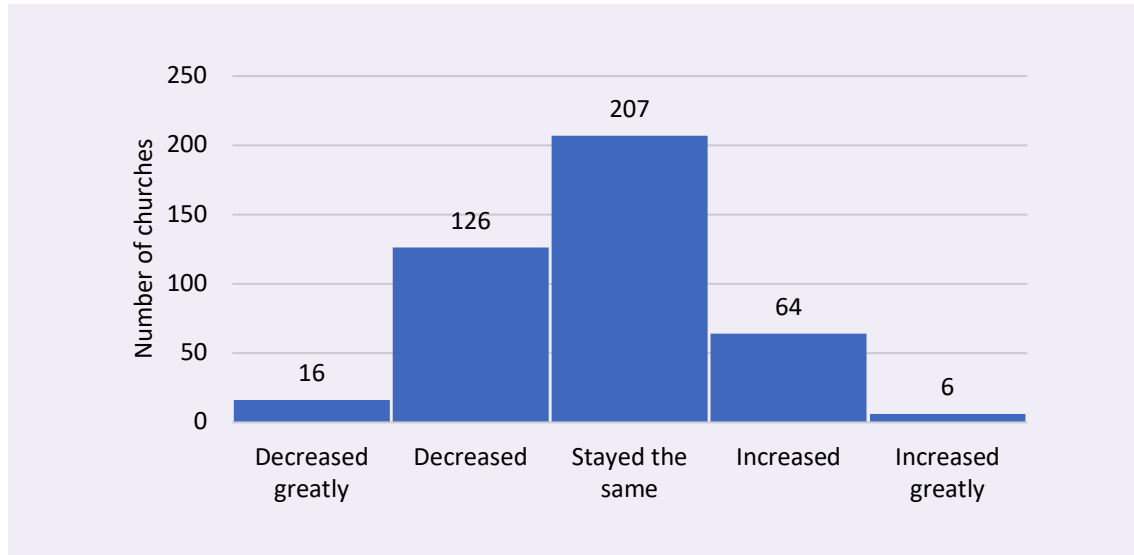
### 2.3 What category best describes the usual size of the congregation at your church just before the Covid-19 pandemic started?

(n = 421: total number of churches providing answers)



Thirty-nine churches (8.3%) reported that their congregation size was usually more than 50 people. However, most churches report an attendance between 5 and 29 people (74.1%).

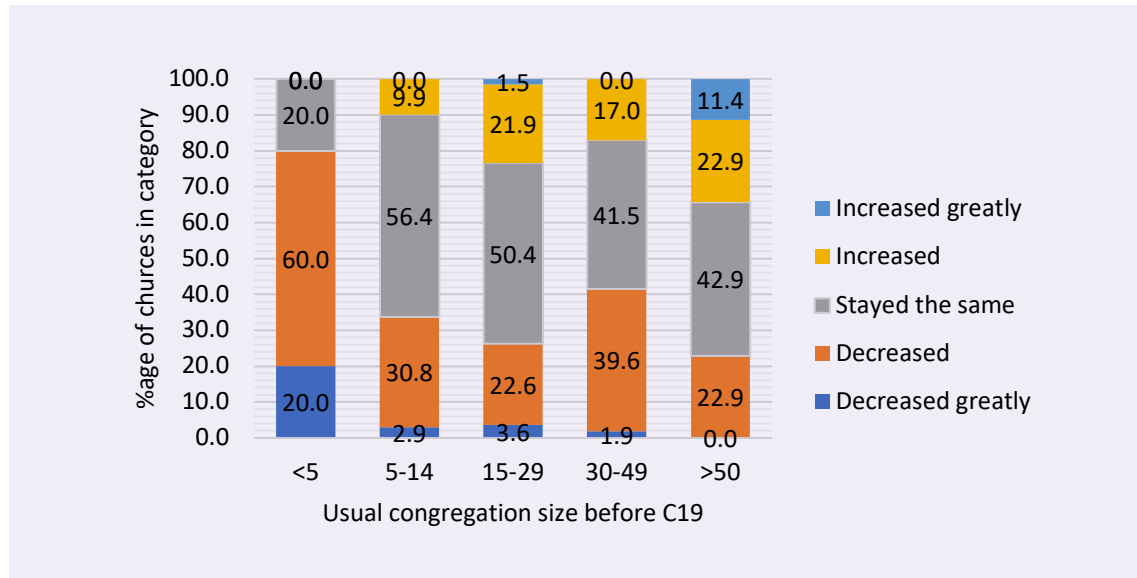
## 2.4 How did the size of your usual congregation change in the 5 years prior to the Covid-19 pandemic?



A greater proportion of churches (33.9%) experienced an overall decrease in their congregation size in the period leading up to the Covid-19 pandemic than experienced an overall increase in their congregation size (16.7%), a ratio of almost 2:1.

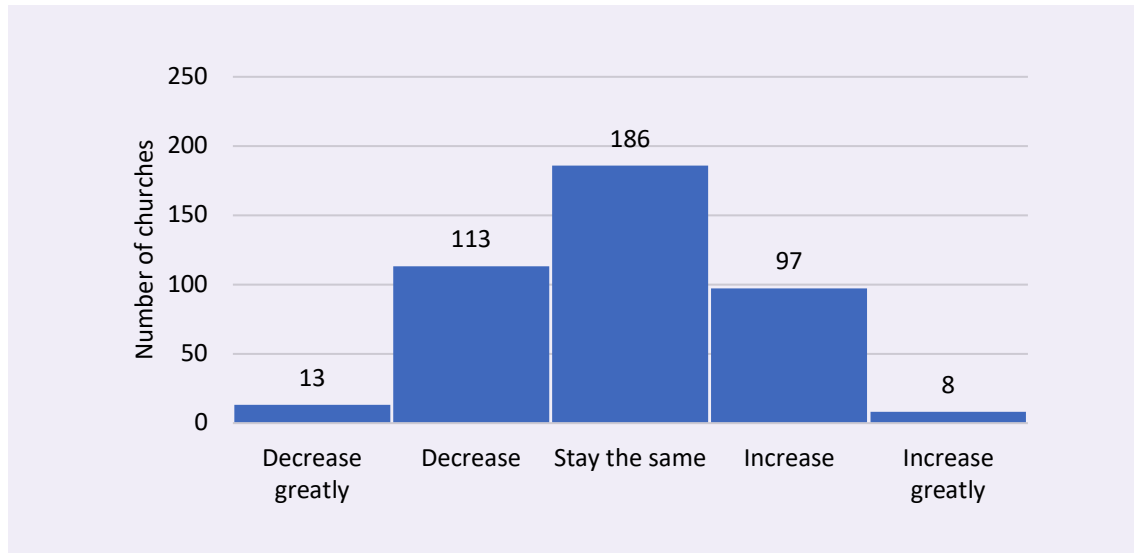
### 9.6.1.2. Further analysis

Combining the usual congregation size data with the trend in congregation size pre-Covid reveals that it is the churches with the smallest congregations that experienced the most substantial decreases. The larger the congregation the higher the chance that the congregation would experience an increase in size.



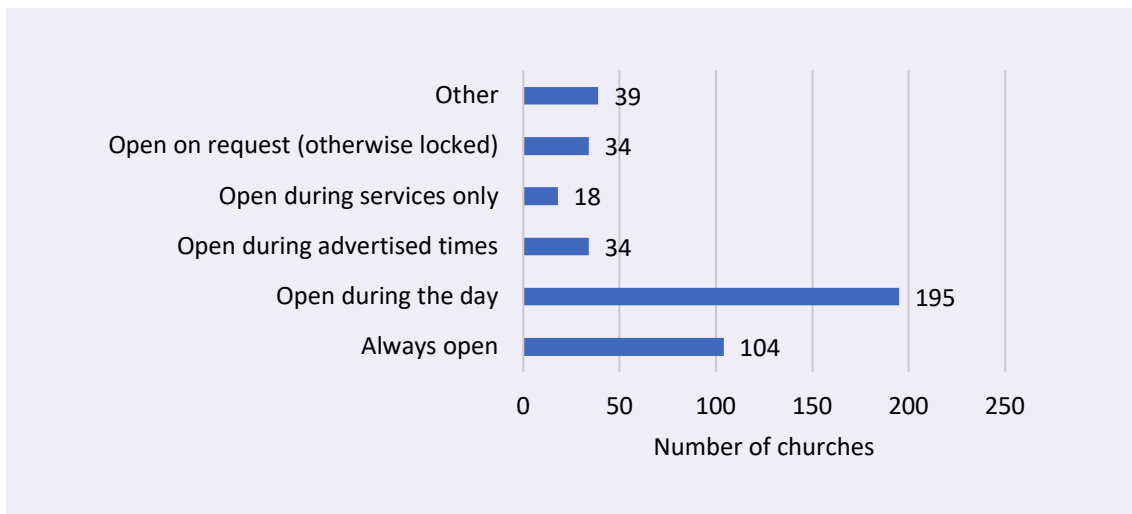
However, it is important to note that in four of the five categories used, more churches reported decreases in congregation size overall than increases. The only exception was for churches with a usual congregation size more than 50 people (a total of 12 churches).

## 2.5 How do you think the size of your usual congregation will change over the next 5 years?



The number of churches expecting their congregation size to decrease or increase overall over the next 5 years is roughly the same, both in actual and percentage terms (126 decrease:105 increase overall or 30.2% decrease:25.2% increase overall).

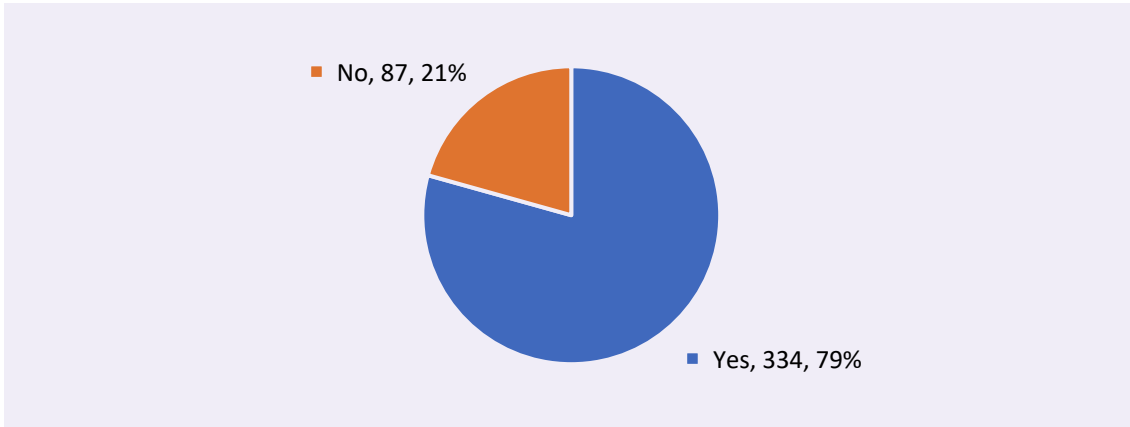
## 2.6 How often is your church building open to members of the public?



Most churches (70.5%) are open to members of the public “Always” or “During the day”. A relatively small number (8.0%) are kept locked other than for organised visits. There was a range of bespoke answers to this question, included under “Other” (9.2%). These tended to combine elements of the options presented in the questionnaire, e.g. “Advertised times” and “Upon request”.

### Section 3: Your church community

#### 3.1 Do separate people carry out the roles of churchwarden, fabric officer, treasurer and PCC secretary for your church?



Four-fifths of churches (79.3%) recorded separate people fulfilling the various roles. However, this figure might mislead if it is interpreted to mean that all roles are filled and filled by different people. For example, one church replied “Yes” but wrote

*We do not have a churchwarden and no one is willing to take on the role.*

In other words, the churchwarden role is not shared, but then again, no one is fulfilling this essential role.

Almost one-fifth of churches (20.7%) replied “No”. It should be noted that in this case this answer described a range of situations from where only two roles were shared to others where all roles were taken one by a single individual e.g.

*Treasurer, churchwarden, fabric officer & deanery synod rep are all done by one person.*

##### 3.1.1 If applicable, please give details about any roles which are shared.

Two main types of reply were received in response to this question, depending on how the word ‘shared’ was interpreted. These different interpretations meant that this question was answered regardless of whether the previous question was answered ‘Yes’ or ‘No’.

The first type of response listed the roles carried out by one person, e.g.

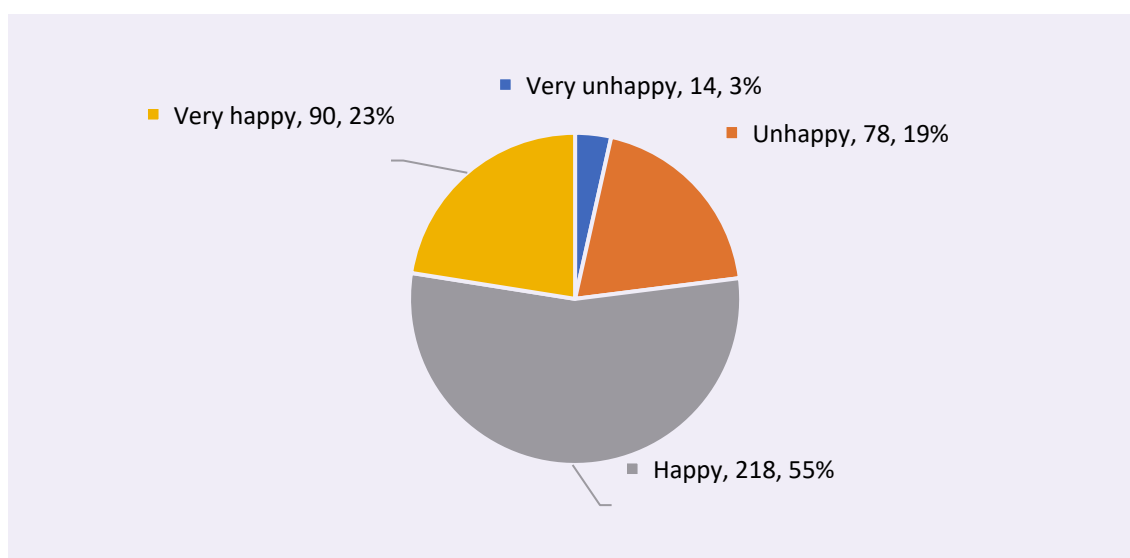
*I am currently the only churchwarden and I am fabric officer.*

The second type of response listed the roles that were carried out by two or more people, e.g.

*Fabric is now a shared role between three people. The PCC are sharing the other duties of a churchwarden.*

The two answer types lead to some confusion in the results. However, what is clear from the responses is the variety across the Diocese of Norwich. In some PCCs a very small number of people (sometimes a single person) is responsible for carrying out the full range of usual duties. In others, several people help carry out the tasks of just one role.

### 3.2 How happy would you be to relinquish your current church role if someone else offered to do it?



More than three-quarters (77.0%) of those completing the survey would either be "Happy" or "Very happy" to relinquish their role. Not all the people completing the survey were volunteers such as churchwardens. Several incumbents completed the survey on behalf of one or more of the churches they serve. This might have implications for the way in which this data is interpreted.

### 3.3 What things empower you in your church role?

Many expressed how their faith empowered them, e.g.

*God's love for us.*

*Believing that it is part of my service to the Lord.*

Some highlighted the experience they had gained in previous role that they are now able to employ in their present tasks, e.g.

*A career in insurance involving administration – forms & paperwork – has given me skills.*

Good working relationships with the clergy, members of the PCC and others in the church community were also regarded as empowering, e.g.

*An excellent and collaborative incumbent.*

*The incumbent and the PCC members.*

*Good relationships – support and encouragement from the congregation.*

Many stated that their love of the building and their village empowered them, e.g.

*Caring for this significantly old and beautiful building.*

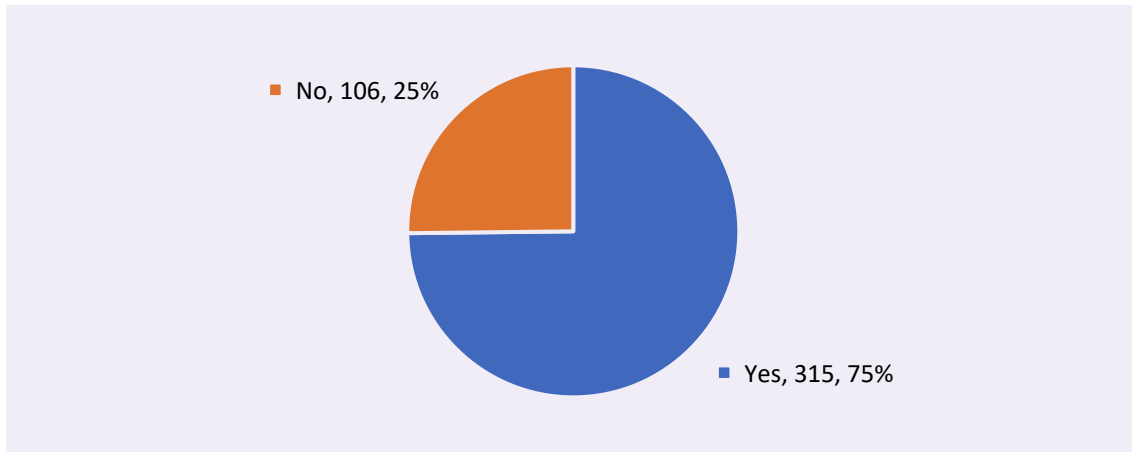
*A determination for the church to continue to serve the village, as it has done for the last 500 years.*

### 3.4 What things are barriers for you in your church role?

Limited finance, advancing age, declining congregation, lack of human resource, time pressures, bureaucracy creating delays in decision making and a lack of skills (including IT skills) were all cited as barriers to fulfilling PCC roles.



### 3.5 In your opinion, does your parochial church council (PCC) have enough members to function effectively?



Almost one-quarter (25.2%) of churches do not have enough members to function effectively, according to the responses received.

#### 3.5.1 If you answered Yes to the last question, please explain your last answer.

Many responses described the essentials of an effective team, e.g.

*A cohesive team which brings essential skills together.*

*A variety of experience and expertise.*

*We work well together and are respectful and appreciative of everyone's ideas.*

Some responses suggested that a smaller PCC worked more effectively than a large one, e.g.

*In the past we have had a very large PCC which was quite unwieldy. Now everyone has a job and we work as a really good team.*

*Small church, too many fingers in the pie would complicate matters.*

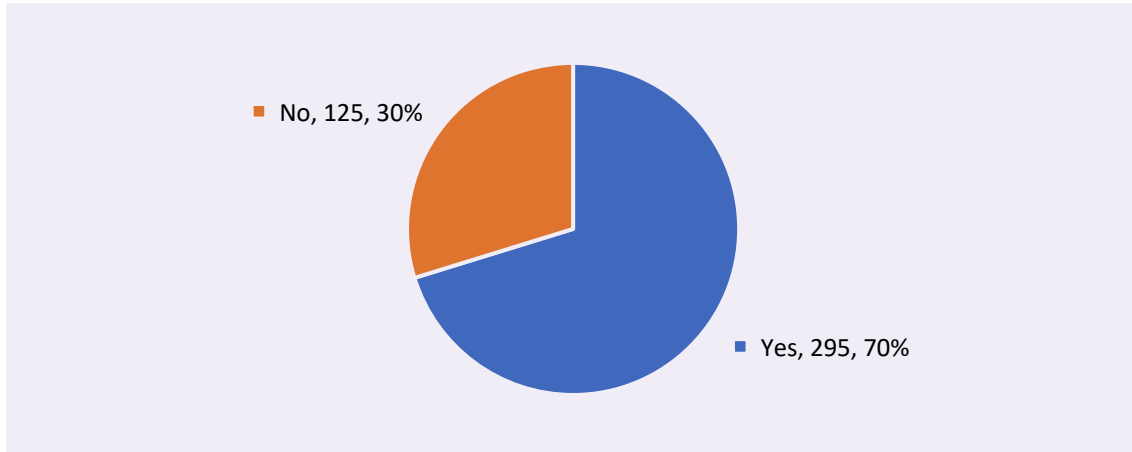
*We are a very small congregation and so we do not need a talking shop.*

Other responses suggested that their PCC was working effectively, although some roles were vacant and would benefit from extra volunteers coming forward, especially younger individuals, e.g. some more members would help it be even more effective.

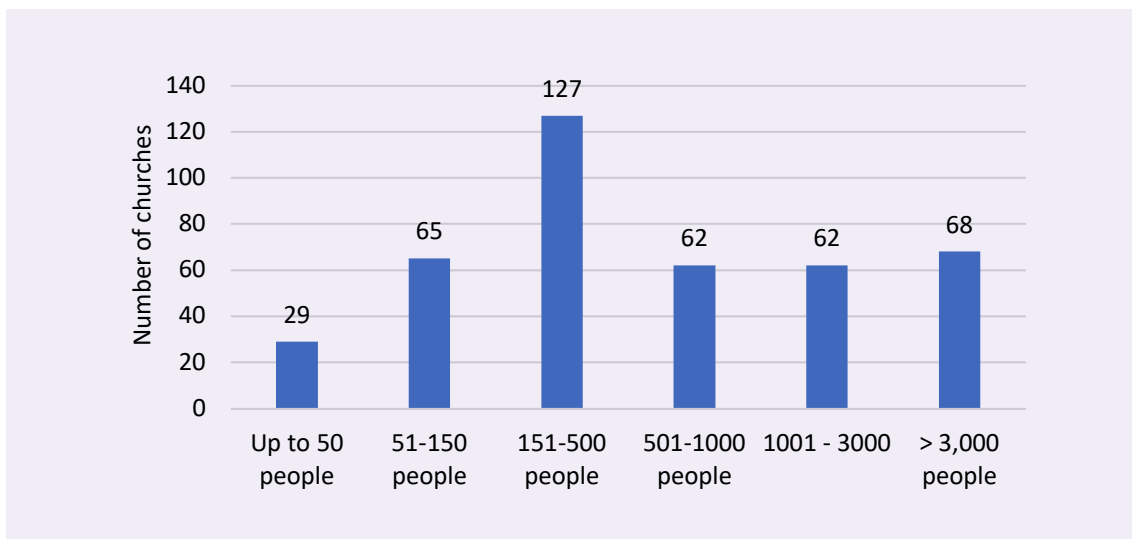
*Have required number on PCC, but all except two are in 70s or 80s. Need some younger, keen members to do grant applications, organise fundraising, etc.*

*Several members have chronic health issues and we really need to recruit a wider set of members – preferably younger and fitter!*

### 3.6 Do you usually have sufficient volunteers from the community to support regular and occasional events?

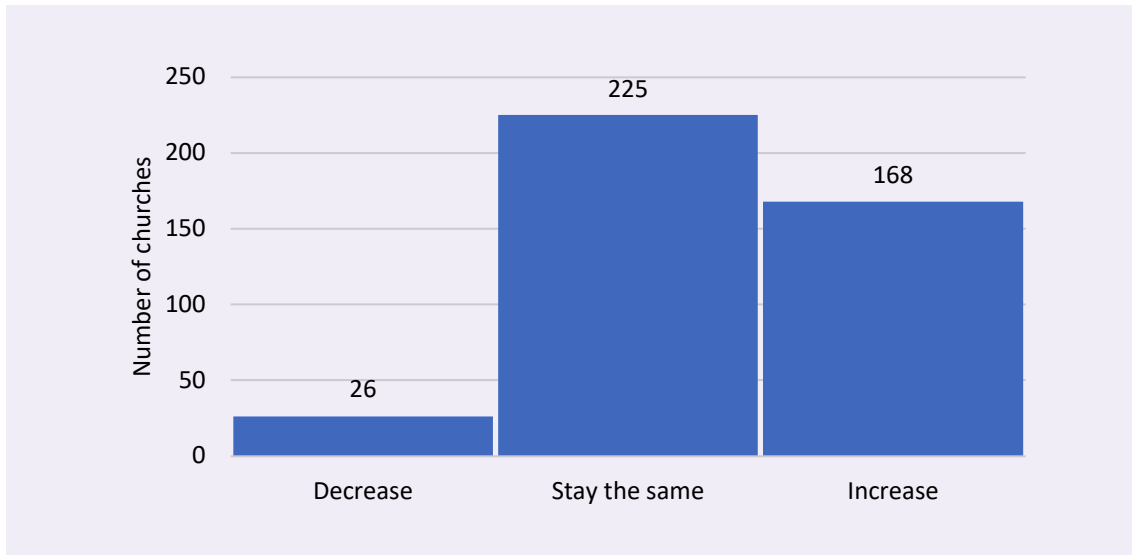


### 3.7 What is the approximate population size of the area served by your church?



Over half (53.5%) the churches which responded to the survey serve a population of 500 or less. Perhaps surprisingly, 68 churches (16.5%) serve populations of over 3,000 (cf. only 14.2% of churches being in 'urban' locations or 'town').

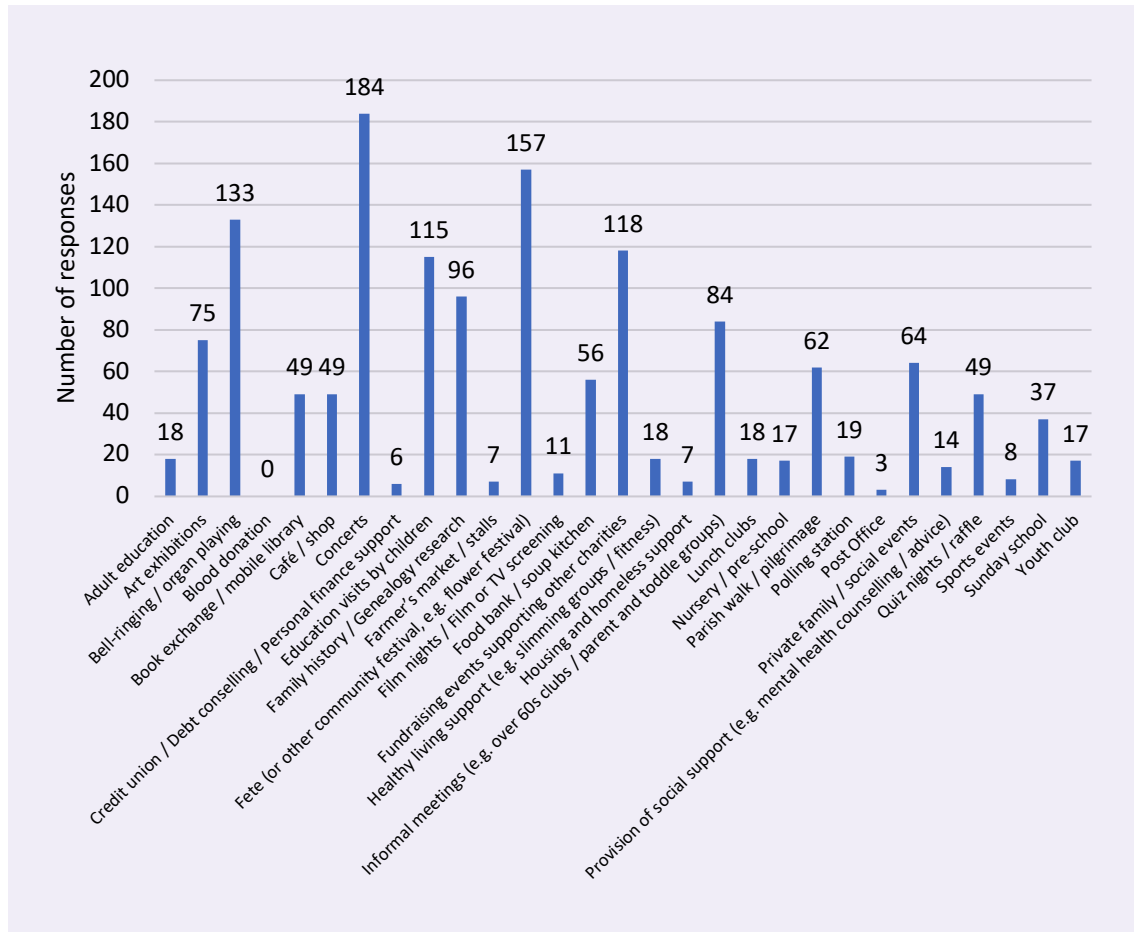
### 3.8 How do you expect the number of people in the area served by your church to change in 5 years' time?



Most churches (93.8%) are expecting the population they serve to either remain stable or increase in the next five years.

## Section 4: Community activities at your church

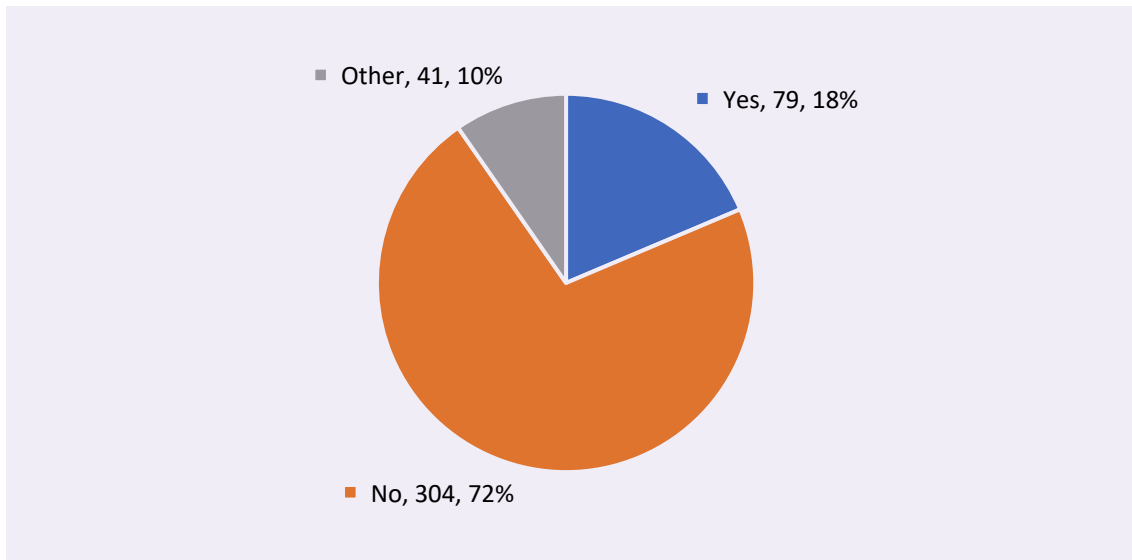
### 4.1 Which community activities is your church building currently used for?



Additional activities were suggested by 133 respondents. Most of these were variations on the activities on the original list, e.g. coffee mornings, messy church, music practice/choir rehearsals. Novel activities included bat nights, series of lectures, and parish council meetings.

## Section 5: Church finances

### 5.1 Does your church have a 'Friends of' group?

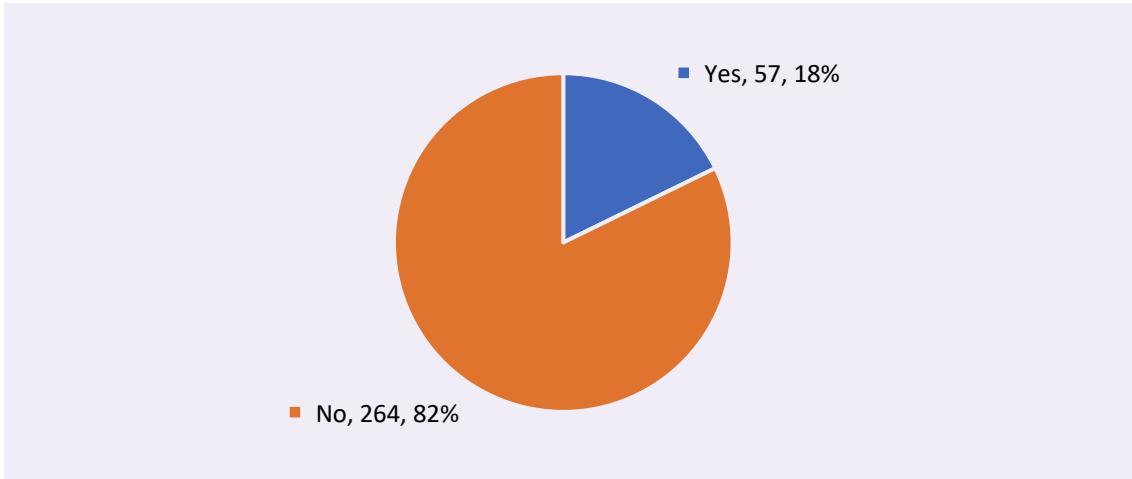


Most churches (79.4%) stated that they do not have an official 'Friends of' group. While only 20.6% of churches stated that they had an official 'Friends of' group, 10.7% gave a bespoke response under 'Other'.

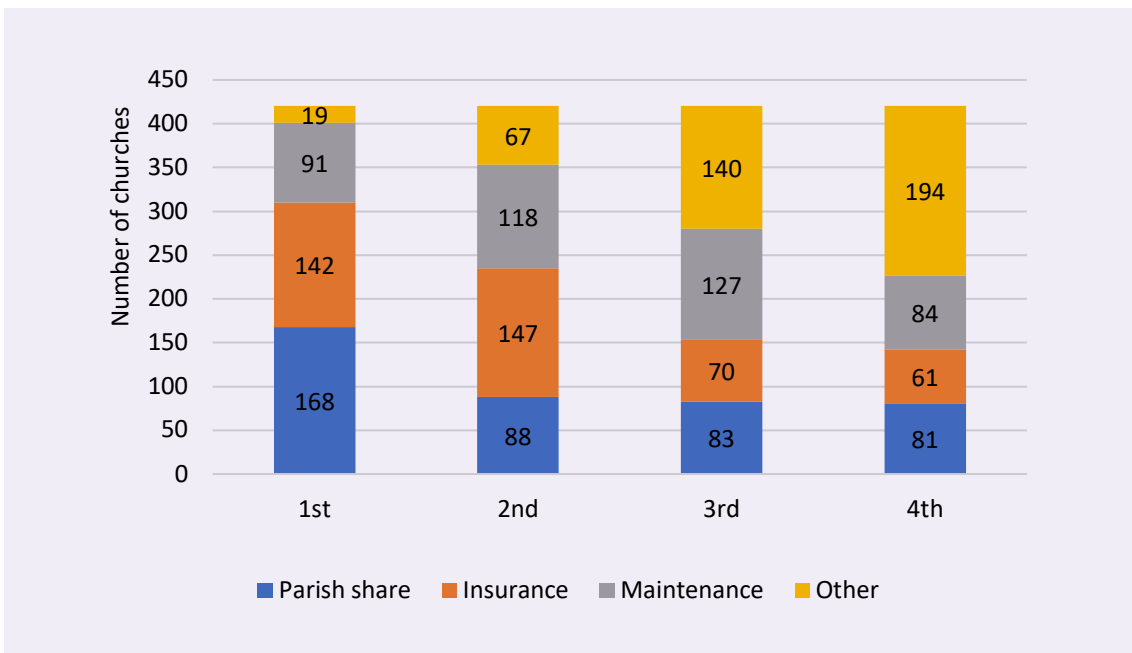
Some bespoke responses referred to former 'Friends of' groups having been "disbanded", current efforts to "revive" old 'Friends of' groups and several

*unofficial one[s] for fundraising and general help such as cleaning.*

**5.1.1 If you answered 'No' to the last question, does your church have plans to establish a 'Friends of' group?**



**5.2 Rank the following in order of priority where 1 (top) is the most important and 4 (bottom) is the least important)?**



**5.2.1 Please explain your reasons for choosing that order.**

Although a range of different priorities was evident from the responses to the previous question, most respondents were very clear about why they chose the order they did. For those that chose parish share as a priority it seemed self-evident that without parish share there would be no mission, e.g.

*Paying the parish share ensures we have an incumbent in the benefice.*

*Parish share has to be No 1 or we won't have the incumbent to hold the services.*

Those who placed insurance first usually referred to their legal responsibilities, e.g.

*Insurance covers public liability and needs to be paid.*

*Insurance is also necessary, without it we would be in trouble.*

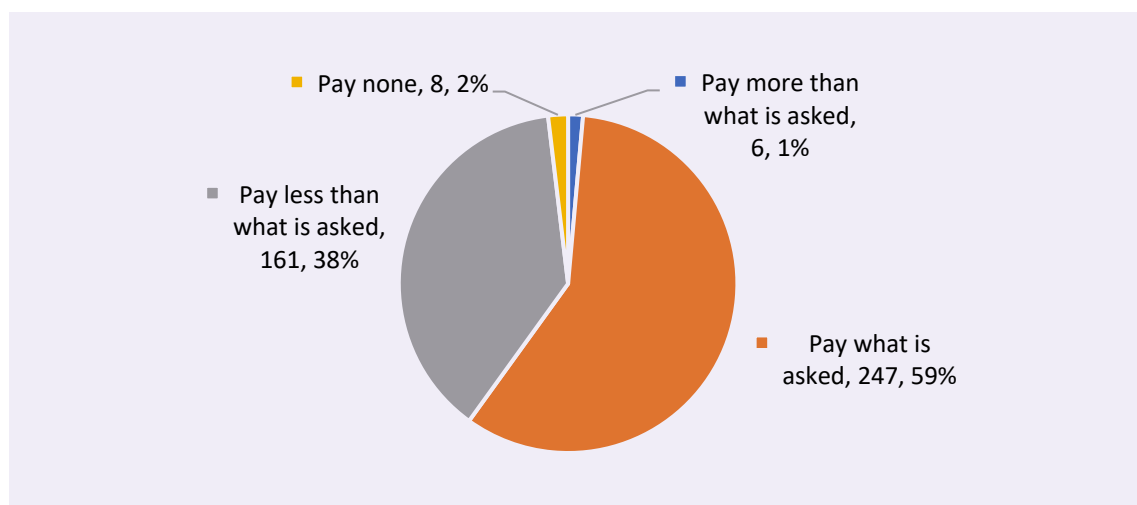
For some, maintenance of the building was vital, and spending on that was the priority, e.g.

*Maintain the building for church and community use, as a listed building. Then parish share and insurance would be equal.*

*Maintenance of the fabric is crucial to the village and to ministry.*

To these respondents, without the building there would be no mission.

**5.3 Which category best describes your usual payment of parish share?**



### 5.3.1 Please explain your reasons for choosing that answer.

Some respondents suggested that payment in full was a responsibility, e.g.

*Paying the parish share is important to us, and feel it is our duty to do it.*

Many responses stated that parish share was paid in full prior to the pandemic but that the recent situation had made this difficult, e.g.

*Whilst capable we paid our full parish share but since the pandemic we have struggled to continue but have paid 90% plus.*

Some answers were more nuanced, e.g.

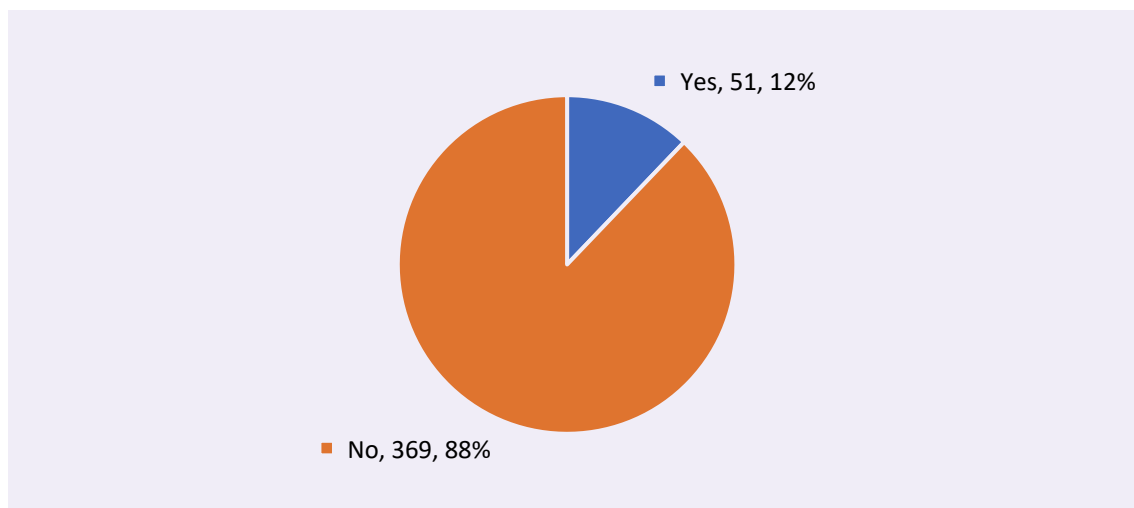
*Paying less than asked reflects the size of congregation, and the fact that non-attenders want to give for the fabric.*

For some churches, it was simply that the money was not available, e.g.

*Hard as we try are unable to achieve the full amount once general bills paid.*

*We cannot raise the money to pay the full amount. We are willing but the money is just not there even with fundraising.*

### 5.4 Are there any ruins associated with your church for whose maintenance your church is responsible?





### 5.4.1 If you answered yes, what impact does this have?

Only 12% of churches had ruins associated with them. For some of these, ruination is so advanced that there is little impact on the PCC, e.g.

*Not much: it is so ruined that there is no maintenance required.*

However, for a small number of churches, the additional responsibility of caring for a more substantial ruin is problematic, e.g.

*It is another task that is beyond a small PCC.*

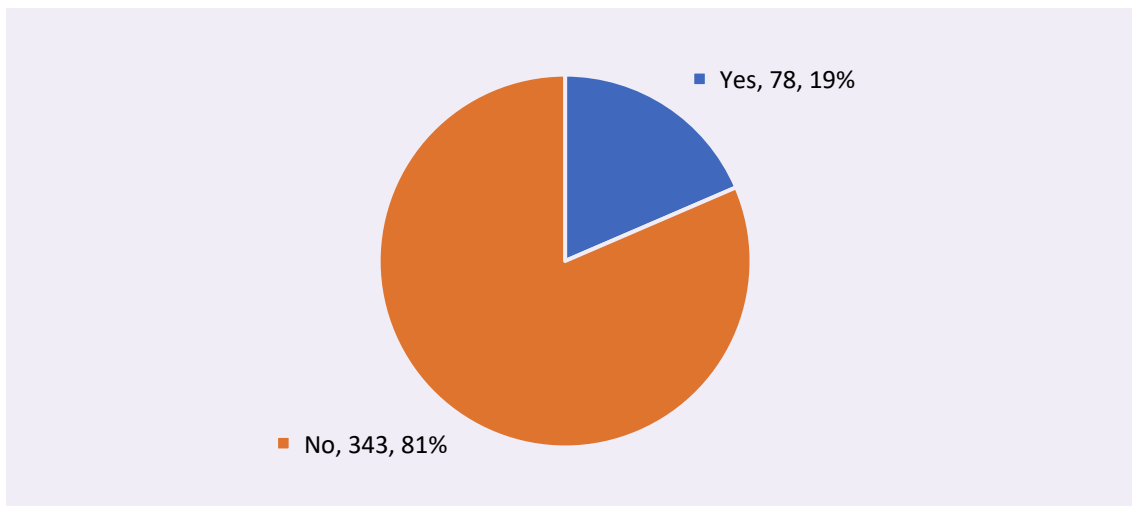
*It's been a constant source of angst for 20 or 30 years.*

*Paying insurance which we cannot afford.*

There are other stresses in addition to the financial and administrative burden carried by PCCs, e.g.

*We have a ruined tower which, despite the past expenditure, is not correctly capped and therefore flints regularly fall, which is a danger to the public. We constantly fear injury to the public and the health and safety responsibility we have.*

### 5.5 Does your church have a church hall?

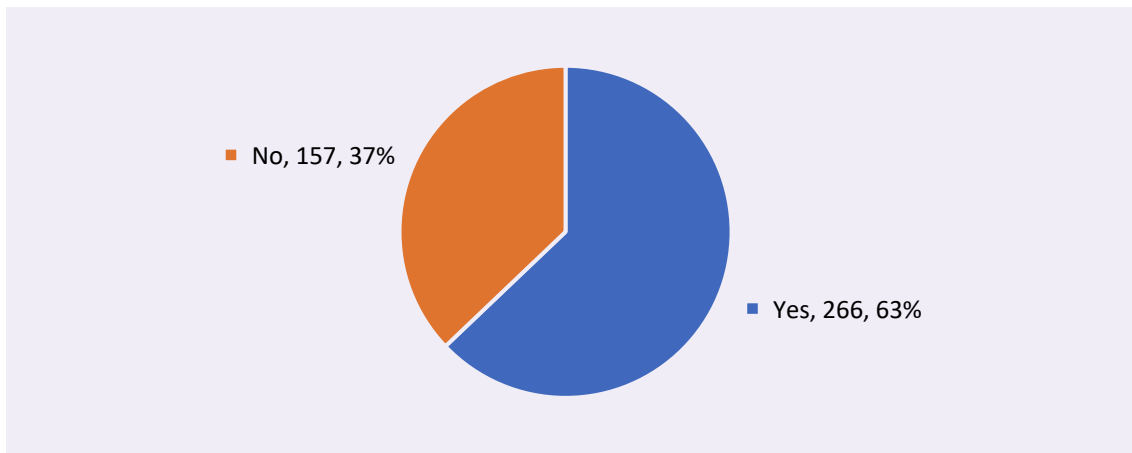


## 5.6 How much money has been awarded to the church in grants for building in the last 5 years (in £)?

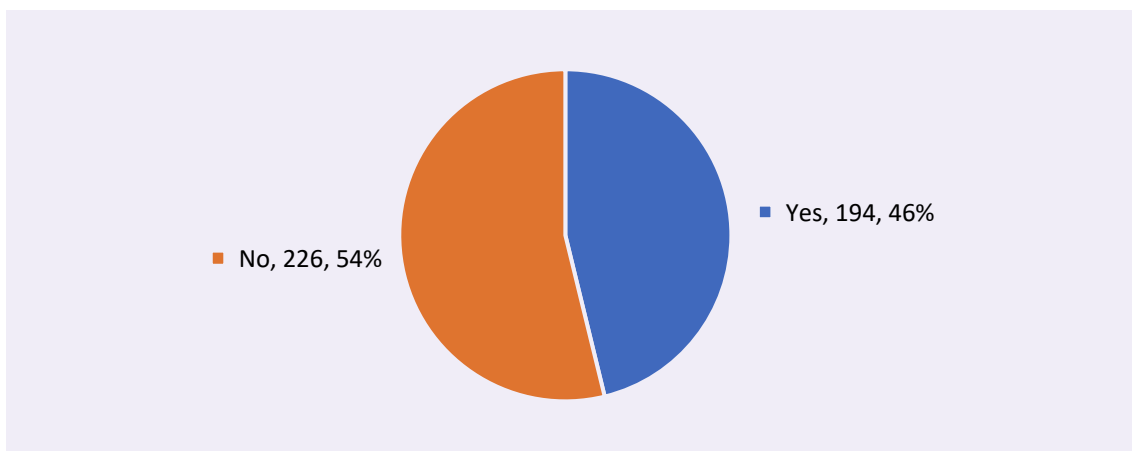
Many churches (well over 100) responded that they had not been awarded any grants in the last 5 years. The question did not ask whether grants had been applied for during the same period. Of the churches that had been provided with grants, figures ranged from several hundred pounds to several hundred thousand pounds.

### Section 6: Your church building

#### 6.1 Do you have a maintenance plan for your church building?



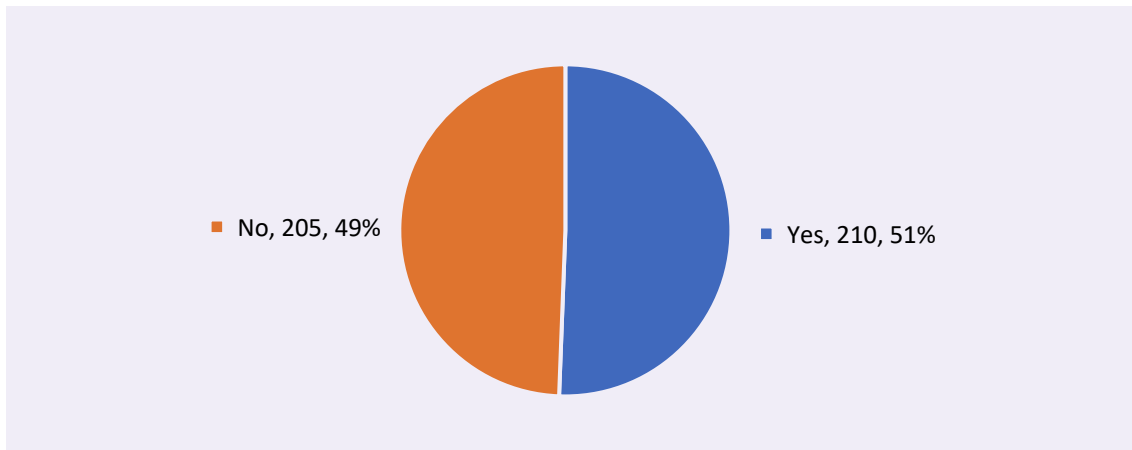
#### 6.2 Have any large capital works taken place in the last 5 years?



**6.2.1 If yes, please give a brief description of the work and the approximate cost.**

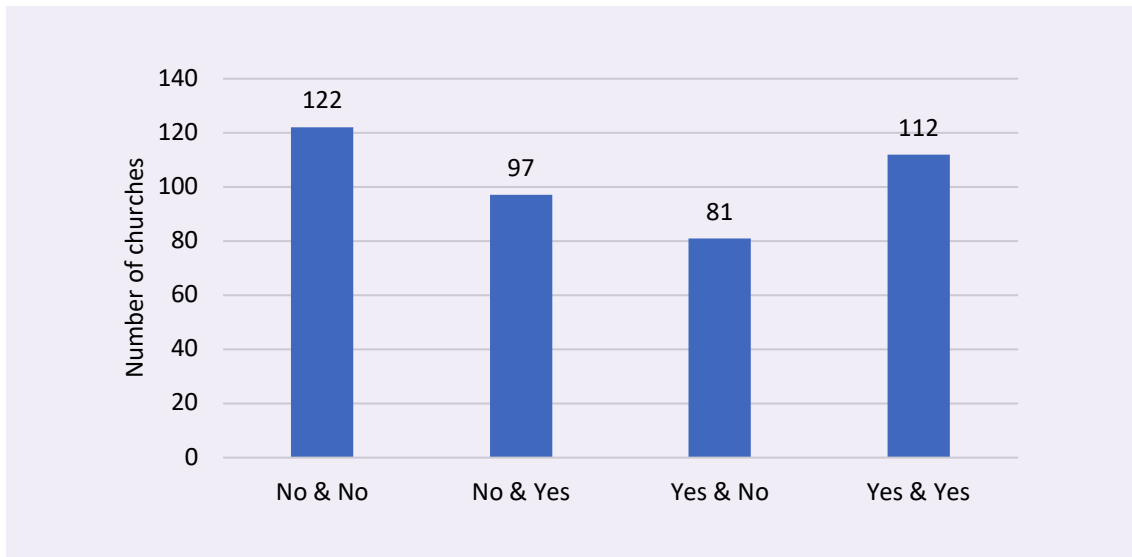
A range of projects were described. Three types of project were usually mentioned:

1. repairs to buildings (e.g. rethatching, tower repairs, window restoration);
2. repairs to furniture (e.g. restoration of organ, repair and rehangings of bells, replacement of pews); and
3. Improvement/provision of facilities (e.g. heating, kitchen facilities, toilets, etc.)

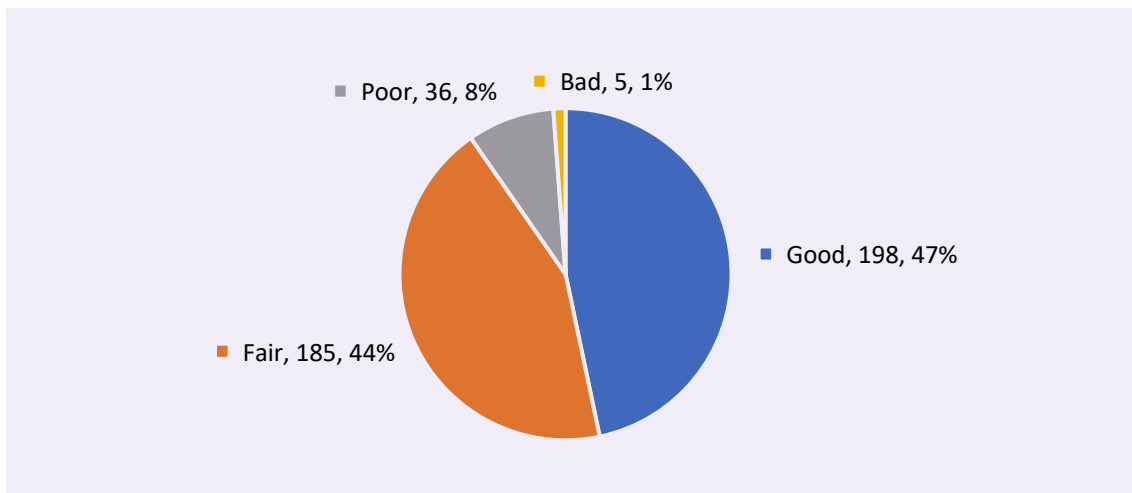
**6.3 Are any large capital works ongoing / planned to take place in the next 5 years?**

### 6.3.1 If yes, please give a brief description of the work and the approximate cost.

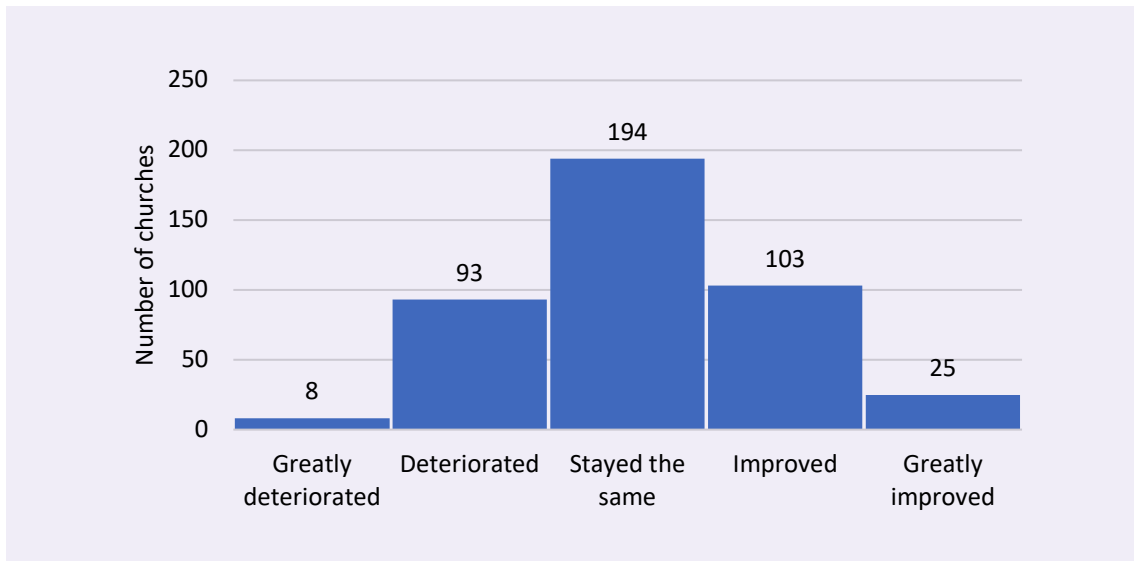
The answers provided were similar to those for work that had taken place in other churches in the previous 5 years. See Q. 6.2.1



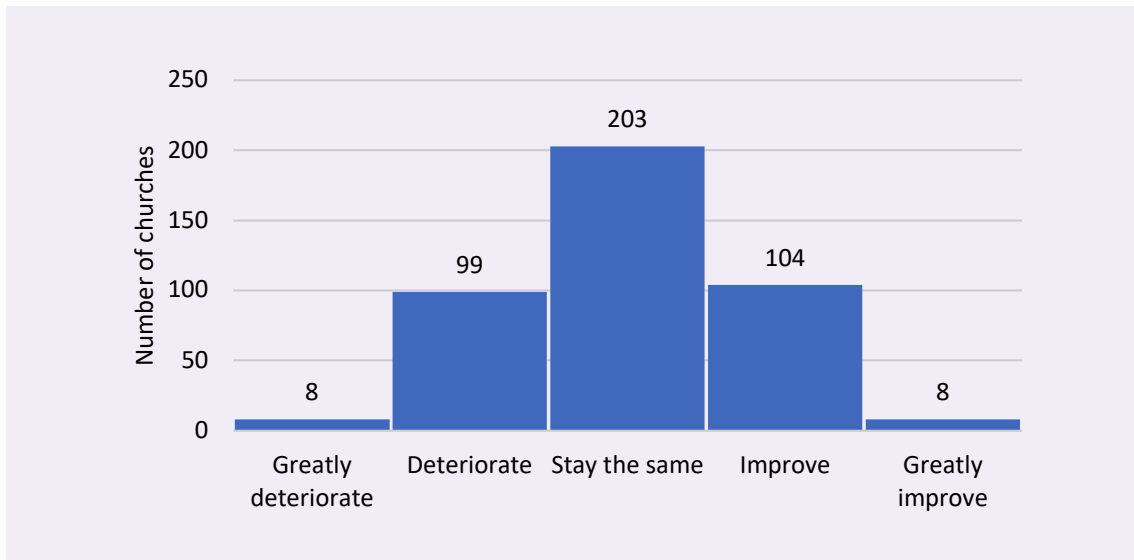
### 6.4 How would you describe the current condition of your church building?



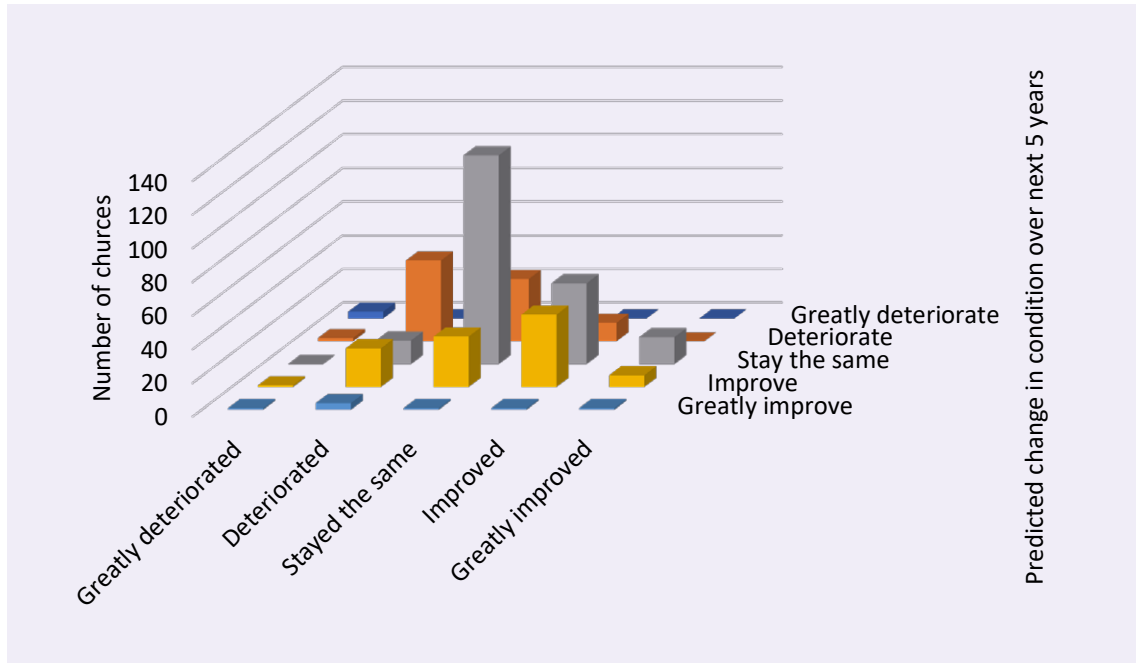
### 6.5 How has the condition of your church building changed over the last 5 years?



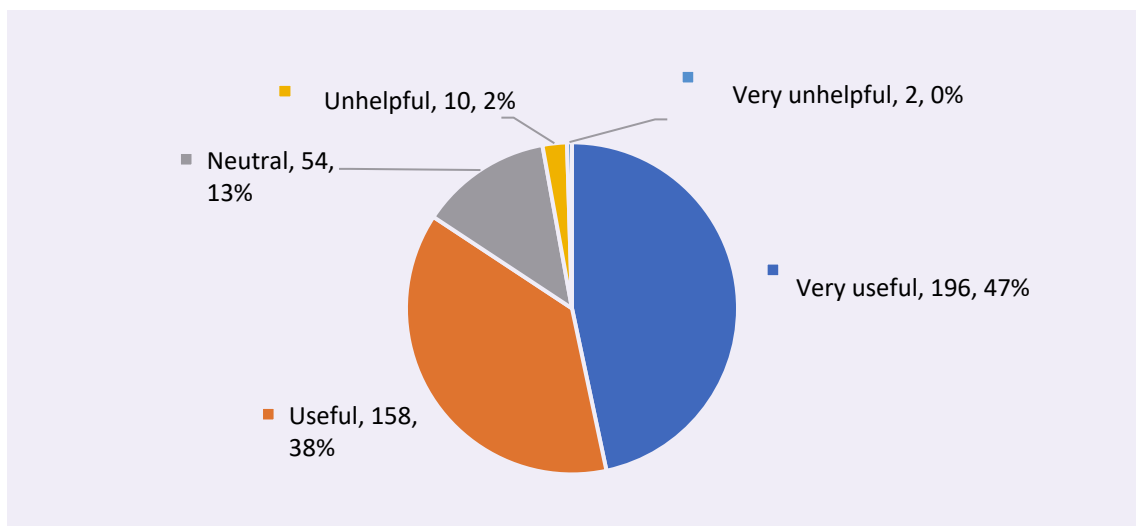
### 6.6 How do you think the condition of your church building will change in the next 5 years?



**How has the condition of your building changed in the past 5 years and how do you predict it will change over the next 5 years?**



**6.7 How useful do you find the Quinquennial Inspection reports?**



### 6.7.1 Please explain your answer about Quinquennial Inspection reports.

Several reasons were given for why QIs were viewed as being useful, e.g.:

*It gives professional advice to us amateurs looking after the building.*

*With a professional report we are able to prioritise and plan maintenance with a planned programme of work, and receive advice on specialist contractors.*

*It keeps our feet on the ground – we don't miss or neglect big problems and we don't stress over things that the architect isn't worried by.*

Some, who find them “unhelpful” put it in different terms, e.g.:

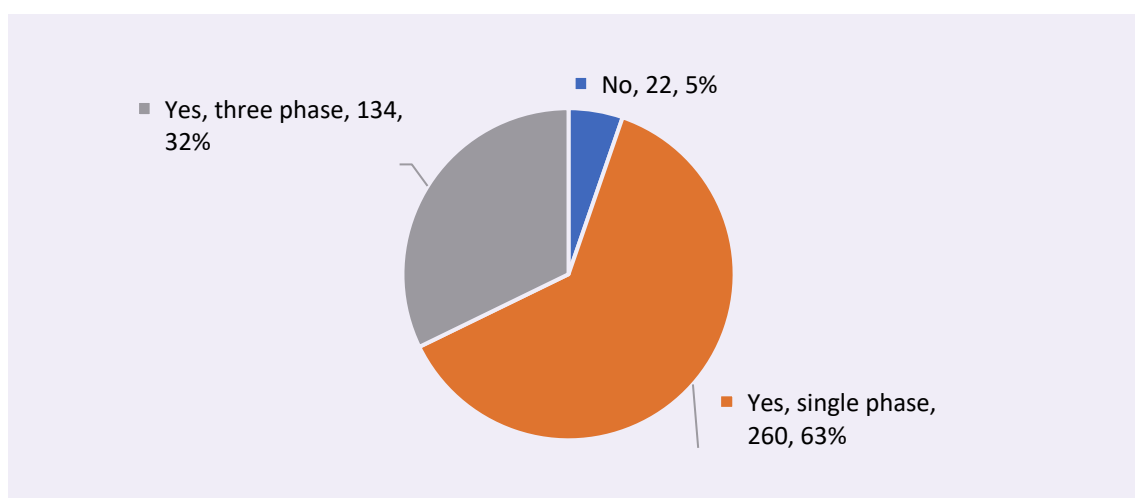
*There are 7–8 pages of items listed ranging from ‘replace leaking roof’ through to ‘repaint tower’. On the whole we are aware of what we should do, but don't have the finance to do it. Although each item is listed in priority order – it is impossible to achieve most of them.*

*...ridiculous and totally unaffordable projects... Time to simplify and radically alter the inspection to be a more practical and focused approach.*

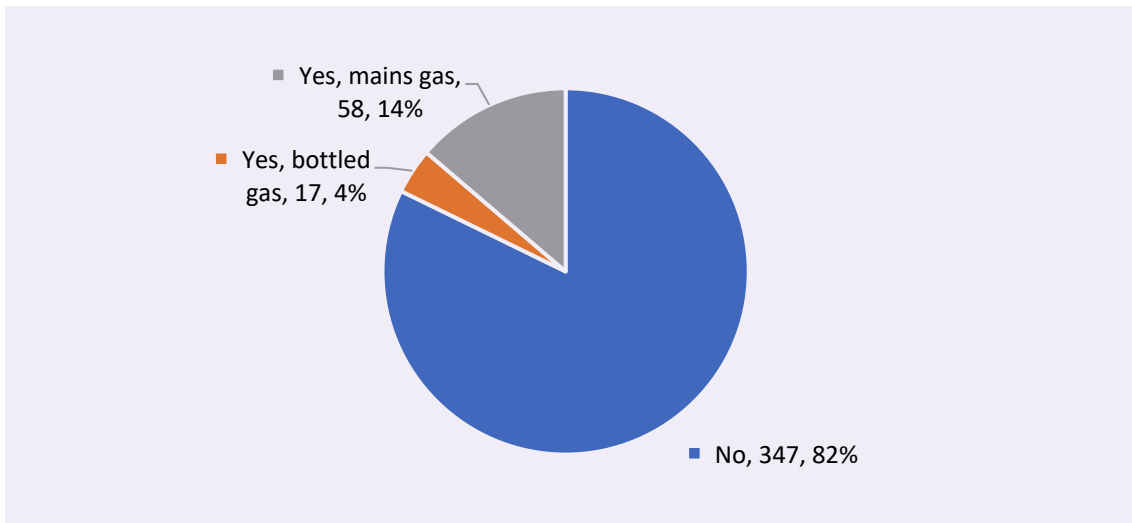
One respondent who had a “neutral” opinion of QIs suggested that:

*If there was a conversation after the report with the churchwardens some areas could be explained. It would be useful to have [an] understanding of some priorities.*

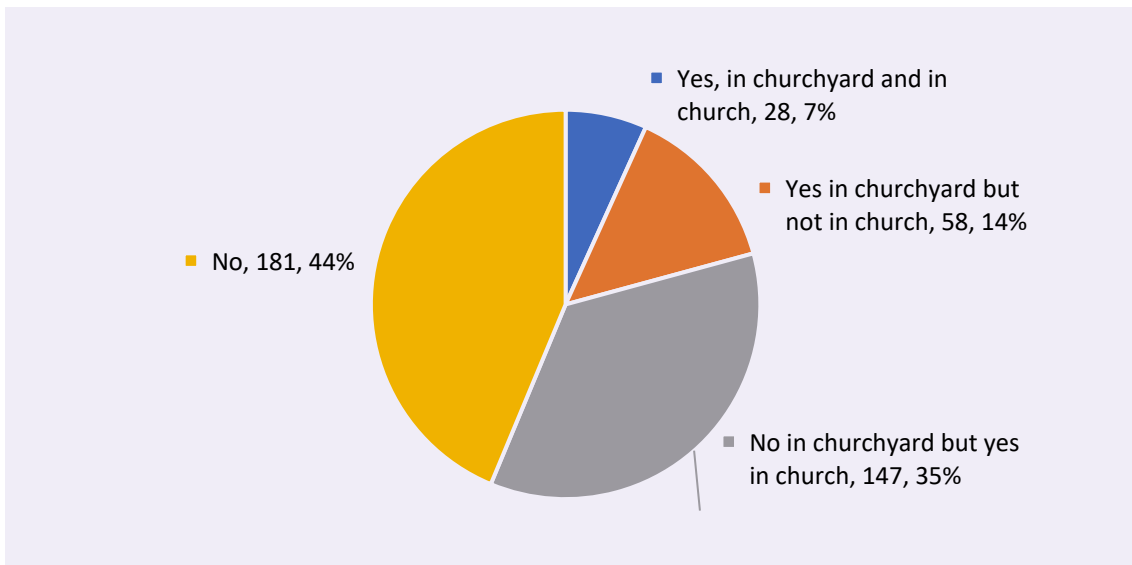
### 6.8 Is your church building connected to mains electricity?



### 6.9 Does your church building have a gas supply?

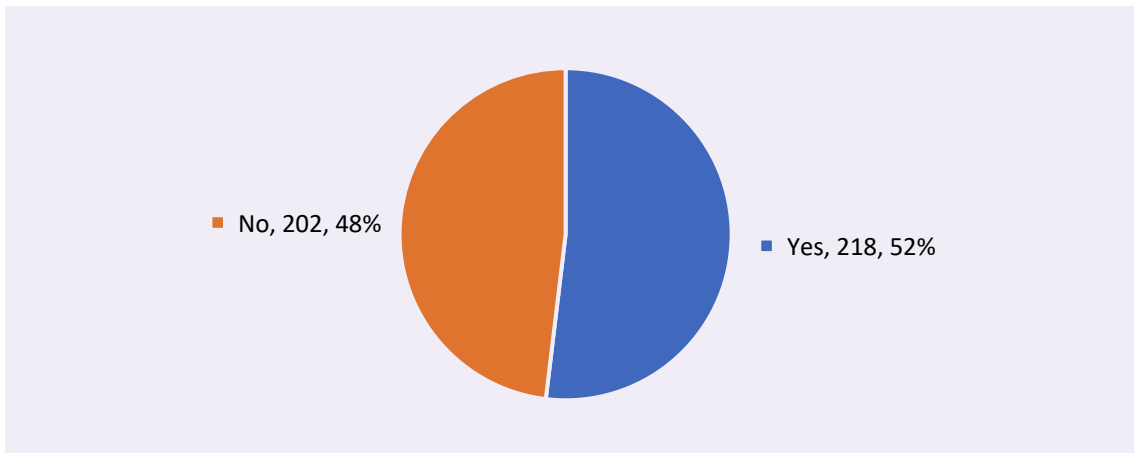


### 6.10 Is your church connected to mains water?

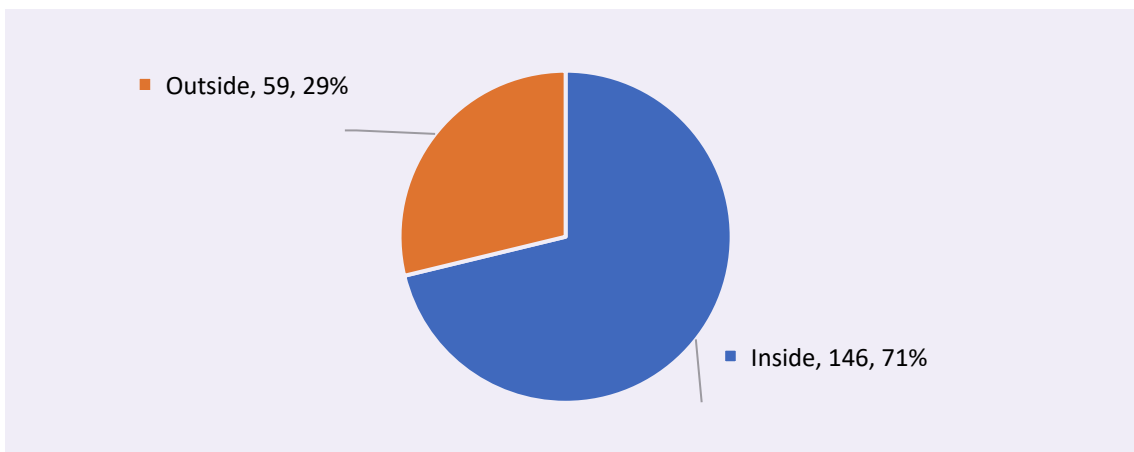




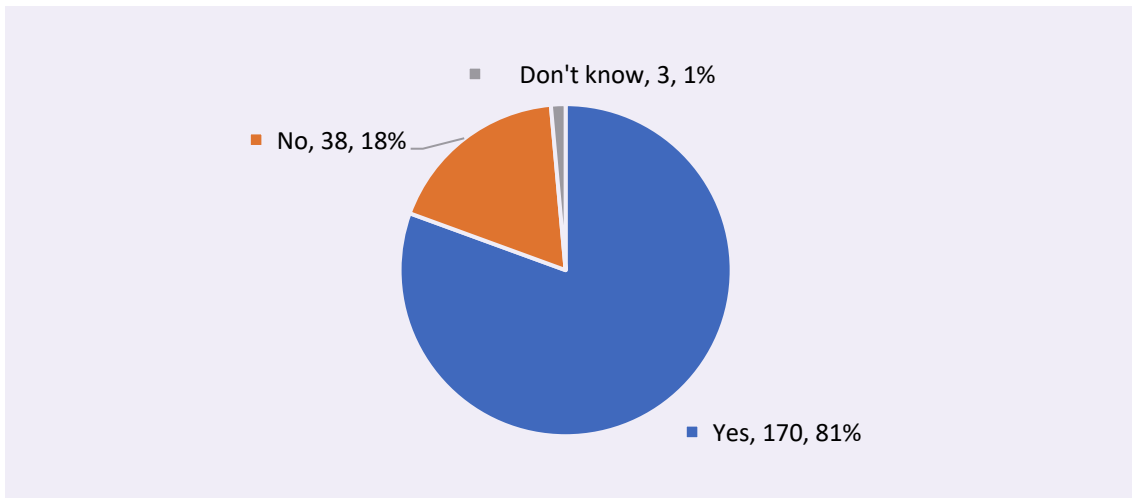
### 6.11 Does your church have access to its own toilet facilities?



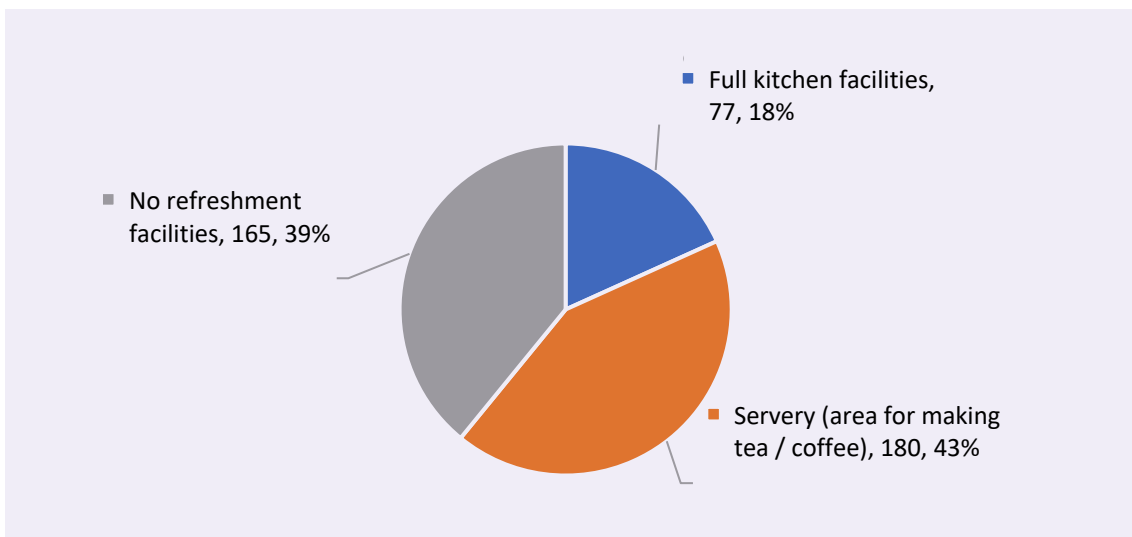
#### 6.11.1 If your church does have toilets, are they located inside or outside the church building?



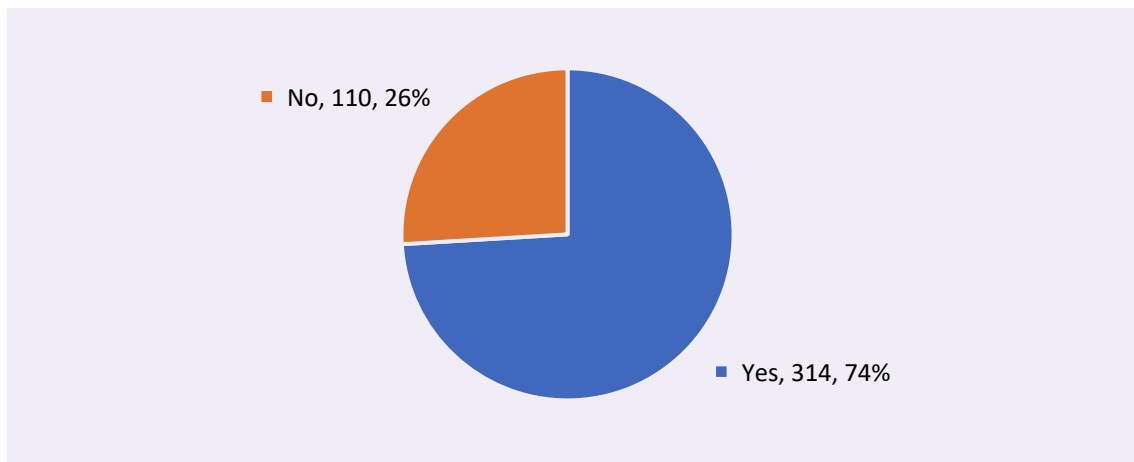
### 6.11.2 If your church does have toilets, are they wheelchair accessible?



### 6.12 What facilities for providing refreshments does your church have?



### 6.13 Does the church have access to off-road car parking?

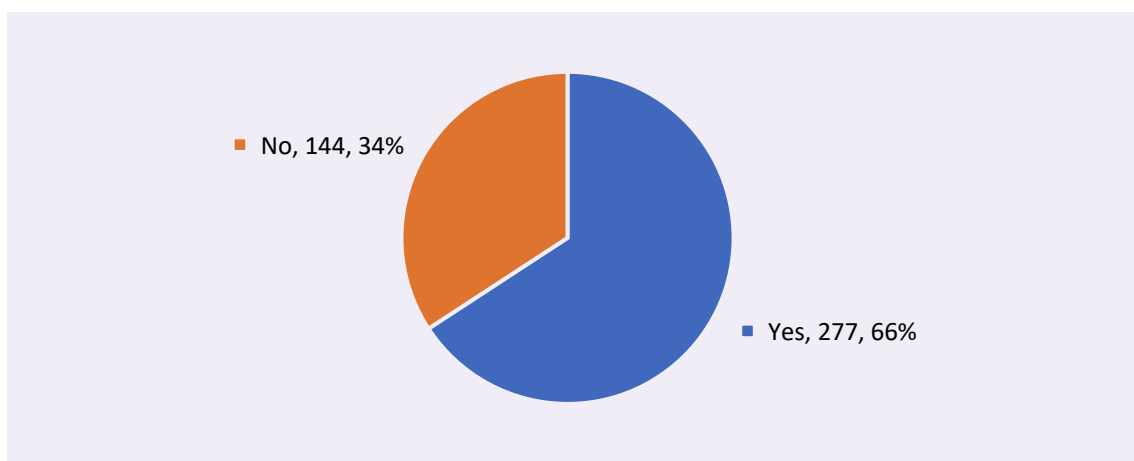


#### 6.13.1 If yes, how many cars can be accommodated (approximately)?

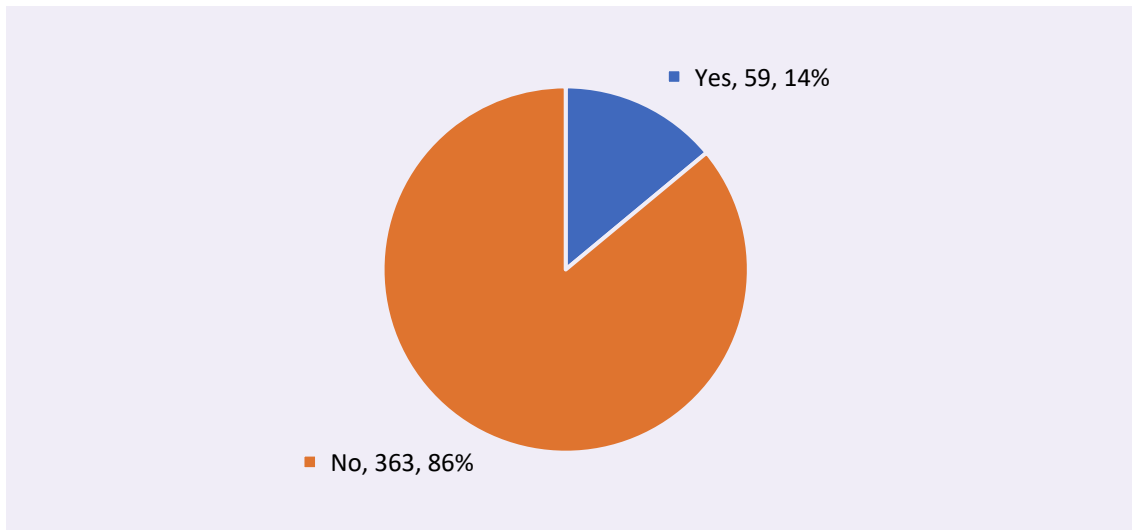
Of the 74% of churches that had off-road parking, the number of available range from low single figures to some with 50 or more. Most stated that between 10 and 20 spaces were available.

## Section 7: Collaborations between your church and other groups

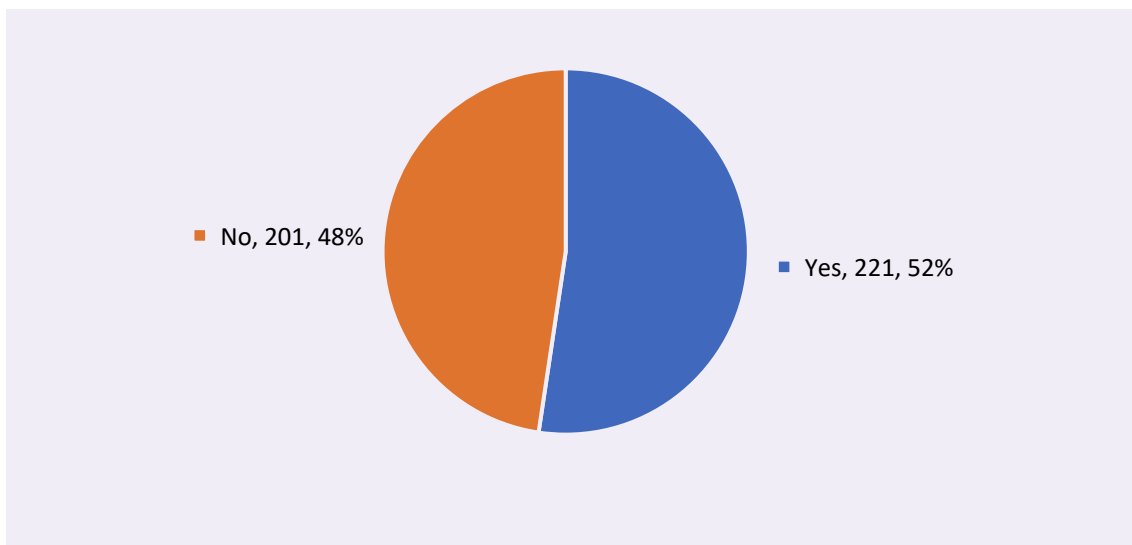
### 7.1 Does your church work with your parish council, district council or city council?



## 7.2 Does your church work with a community centre?



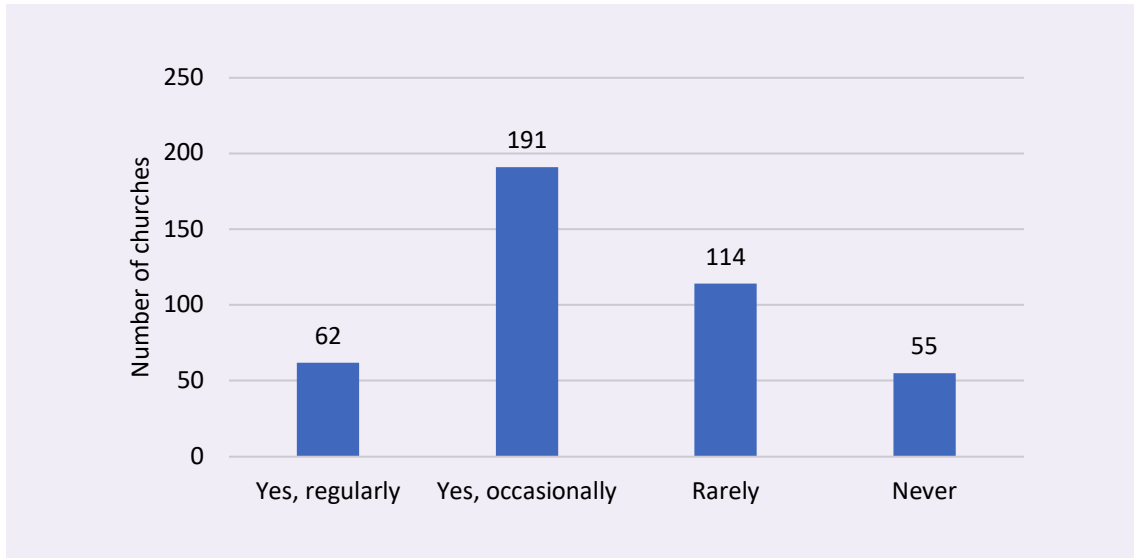
## 7.3 Is there a primary school local to your church?



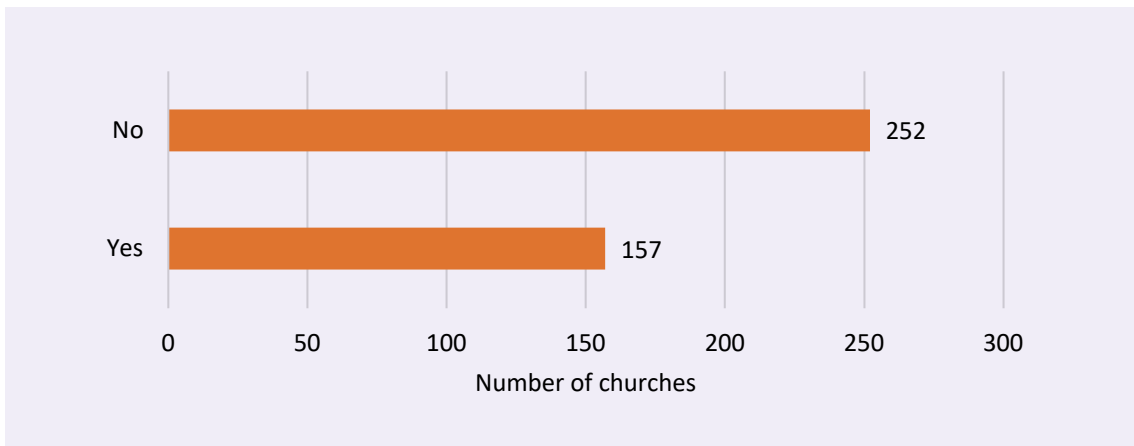
### 7.3.1 If yes, are the primary school and your church actively engaged in collaborative projects?

There were 260 answers to this question (more than answered 'Yes' to Q7.3). Twice as many churches simply replied 'Yes' (129) than replied 'No' (64) to this question, while 67 churches gave written descriptions of their projects. Many of these described projects that had been running pre-Covid but had yet to re-establish. The most common project was attendance by school pupils to festival services and visits to local schools by incumbents.

**7.4 Do you collaborate with other parishes to share knowledge and experience about applying for grants?**



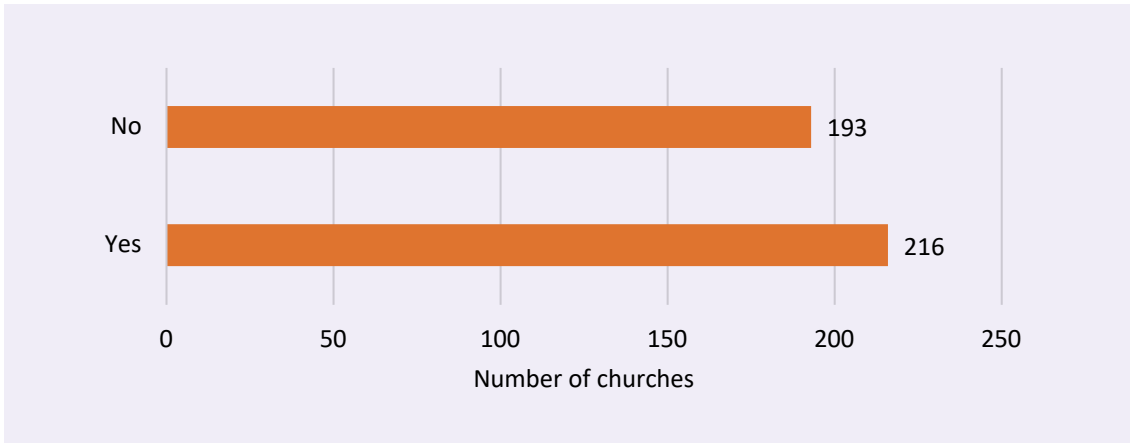
**7.5 Do you have examples of successful fundraising projects at your church that you would like the Church Buildings Commission to be aware of?**



**7.5.1 If yes, please provide details.**

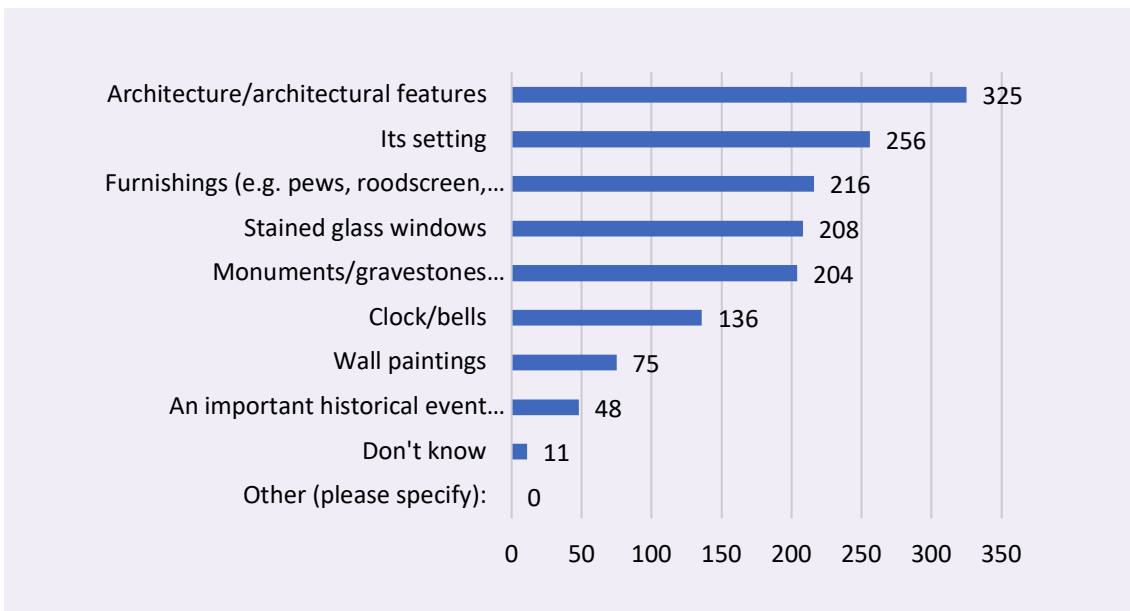
Most fundraising projects referred to activities similar to those listed in 6.2.1.

**7.6 Would you like your benefice to be considered for a visit from a Commission member(s) so that they can understand your specific issues in more detail?**  
(The Commission will not be able to visit every benefice so please also look out for opportunities to attend one of the regional drop-in sessions).

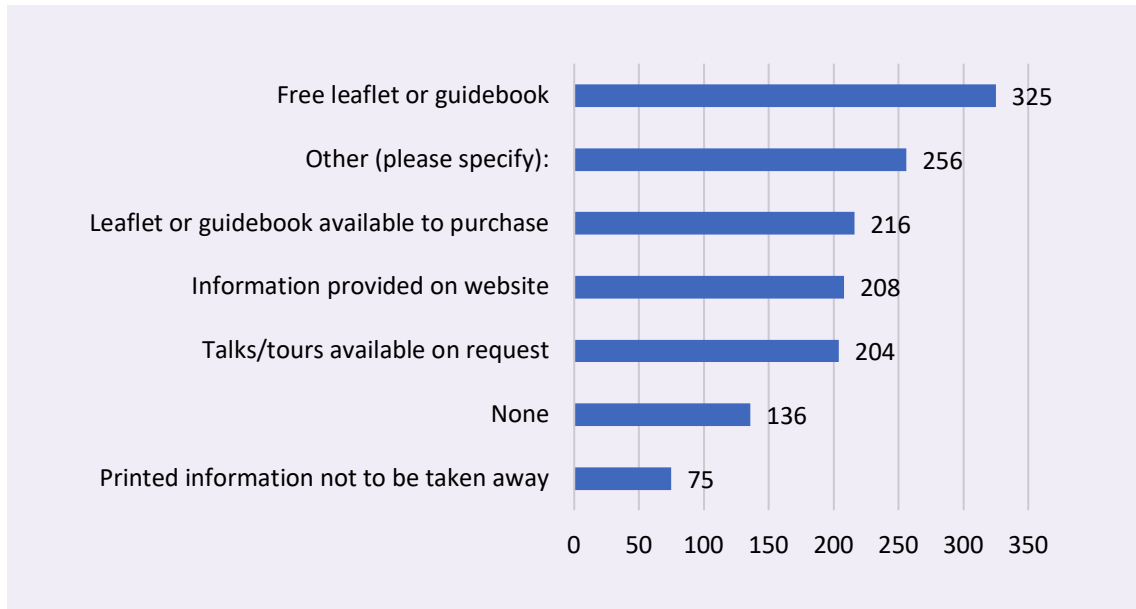


## Section 8 – Architectural and historic value of your church

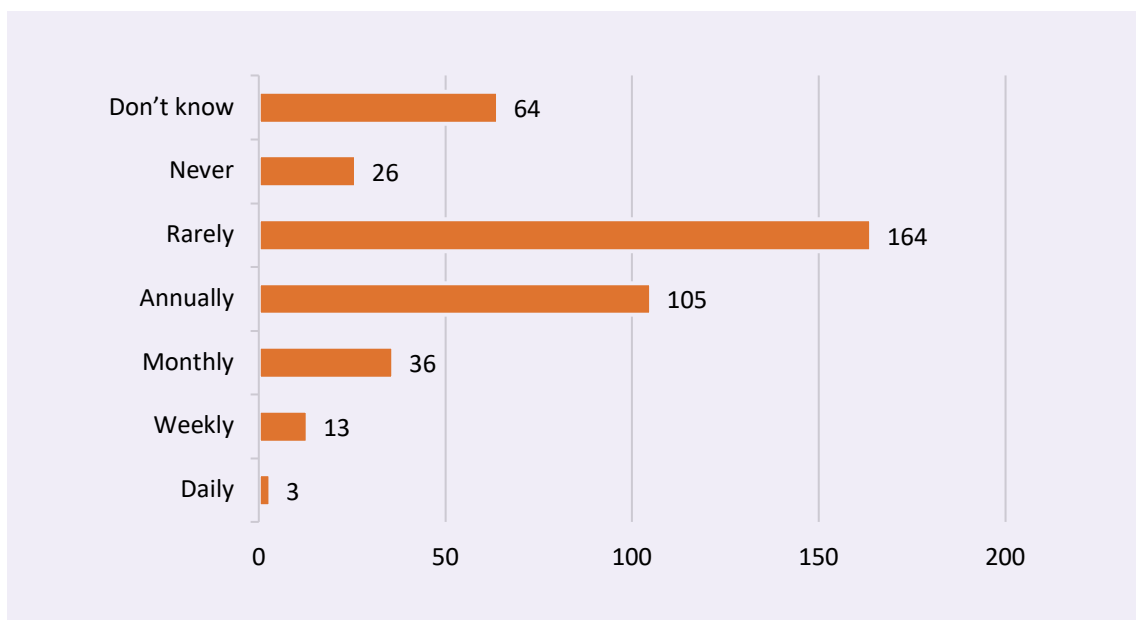
**8.1 What do you feel is significant about your church as a historic building?**  
Please tick all that apply.



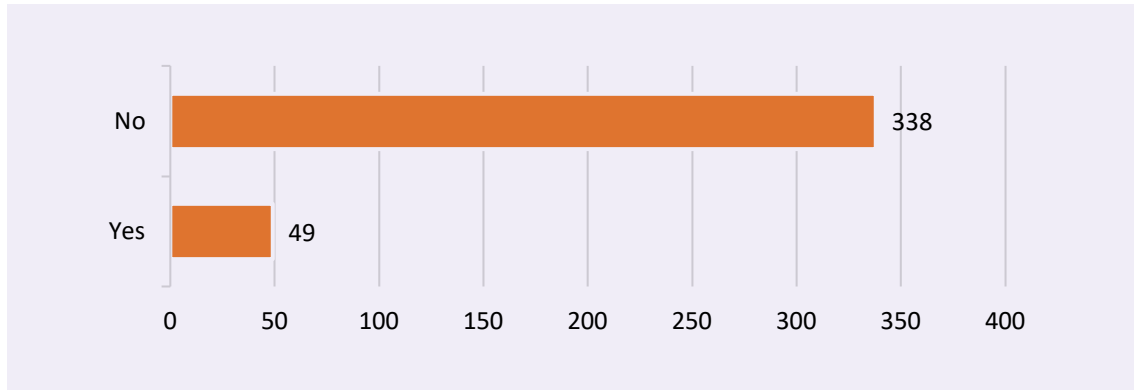
**8.2 What information is available at your church for visitors to find out about its architectural and historic value?**



**8.3 How often do special interest groups (of any age) visit your church?**



#### 8.4 Do special interest groups visiting your church make a significant contribution to church finances?





## Section 9 – End of survey questions

### 9.1 If you have any other comments please write them below.

Many 'other' comments provided additional details to specific questions asked in the survey and described the situation of the particular church being represented. Some respondents criticised the structure of the survey, e.g.

*Some of the questions here were a bit ambiguous.*

*Far too many yes or no answers required, I could have written a clear statement of all the needs in less time that might have been more informative.*

Others were supportive, e.g.

*Nothing to add. A very comprehensive questionnaire.*

*The survey was a timely reminder to get the church booklet updated, printed and put online.*

Many respondents took the opportunity to mention the difficulties caused during the Covid-19 pandemic and their concerns for the future.

In their conclusion, one respondent wrote:

*We love our church, and feel proud that we manage, despite such a small congregation, to keep it going. After 700 years we cannot be the ones to allow it to close.*

*However, my fellow churchwarden and I do worry about the money running out, and what will happen then. The general population of the village (about 300 people) don't understand the difference between Diocese and parish, and that all the money for running the building and grounds is coming from a very small congregation. They think that the Diocese pays for repairs (we wish), and we constantly get complaints if the grass hasn't been cut etc. Having said that, we have some wonderful volunteers in the village, who don't attend services but are happy to help if we ask. It gets quite tiring asking though!*

*We don't want our building to close, but we could do with more help and less paperwork!*

## 9.7. Annex G: Trusts and grant aiding bodies

It was not a primary objective of the Commission to investigate or promote sources of funding for churches. There is already advice readily available online. The Diocese of Norwich also directs PCCs to the Church Grants website to help them identify potential funders ([www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/finance/external-grants-funds/](http://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/finance/external-grants-funds/)).

However, some of the trusts and grant aiding bodies that have provided most support to churches in the Diocese of Norwich are listed here.

Some trusts play a role in caring directly for church buildings when they have fallen out of use for regular worship, while others award grants to support particular projects.

### 9.7.1. Trusts that care for buildings

- **Diocesan Churches Trust:** responsible for insuring and maintaining 14 churches in the Diocese of Norwich on a time-limited basis. [www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/buildings/diocesan-churches-trust/](http://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/buildings/diocesan-churches-trust/)
- **Norwich Historic Churches Trust:** responsible for 18 redundant medieval churches in Norwich. [www.nhct-norwich.org/](http://www.nhct-norwich.org/)
- **The Norfolk Churches Trust:** responsible for 13 redundant churches in the county. Of these, 12 are leased from the Diocese of Norwich and one from the Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia. <https://norfolkchurchestrust.org.uk/>
- **The Friends of Friendless Churches:** responsible for two Norfolk churches (both in the Diocese of Ely). <https://friendsoffriendlesschurches.org.uk/>
- **Norfolk Historic Buildings Trust:** responsible for two former places of worship (Becket's Chapel, Wymondham and Oulton Chapel (nonconformist)). [www.nhbt.org.uk/](http://www.nhbt.org.uk/)
- **Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust:** takes on historic buildings at risk in Great Yarmouth and restores them, offering training opportunities for volunteers in the process. Buildings once repaired and capable of an economic use are sold or managed to finance further projects. [www.greatyarmouthpreservationtrust.org/](http://www.greatyarmouthpreservationtrust.org/)
- **Churches Conservation Trust:** this national charity is responsible for 350 churches, 28 of which are redundant churches in Norfolk. [www.visitchurches.org.uk/](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk/)

### 9.7.2. Grant aiding trusts

- **The Norfolk Churches Trust:** provides grant aid to churches in use, usually around £100,000 annually. The Trust also offers advice on how to manage projects and assess the risk to churches across the county. <https://norfolkchurchestrust.org.uk/>
- **The Round Tower Churches Society:** has provided grants up to £23,000 in recent years but this distributed to all such churches, not just Norfolk (in which there are 124 round tower churches). [www.roundtowers.org.uk/](http://www.roundtowers.org.uk/)
- **The National Churches Trust:** grants over £5 million a year to historic churches across the country, prioritising those on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register. [www.nationalchurchestrust.org/](http://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/)
- Several **independent charities** in Norfolk give money for the repair of churches. This can be either from applications by the churches themselves or via grants that they give directly to other organisations, e.g. the Norfolk Churches Trust, to use as they see fit.
- Some **independent charities** give money for church repairs and improvements across the country, e.g. **Garfield Weston** (<https://garfieldweston.org/>), **Wolfson Foundation** ([www.wolfson.org.uk/](http://www.wolfson.org.uk/)), etc.
- Several other independent trusts have particular remits, e.g. **The Mausolea & Monuments Trust** ([www.mmtrust.org.uk/](http://www.mmtrust.org.uk/)) has a focus on mausolea and funerary monuments while **The Society of Antiquaries** ([www.sal.org.uk/](http://www.sal.org.uk/)) gives grants for specialist conservation work through its Morris Committee.
- **The National Lottery Heritage Fund** is the principal source of state funding for major projects in churches and other historic buildings. Its criteria attempt to balance heritage interest and social value.
- **Historic England.** Under its predecessor (then called English Heritage) direct state aid was once offered to churches and other historic buildings of outstanding interest. Heavy budget cuts by central government curtailed this programme and what remains are grants for buildings on the register of Heritage at Risk. This remains a vital funding source for emergency assistance to imperilled churches. Historic England also has an advisory role on repairs and alterations.

## 9.8. Annex H: Glossary and abbreviations

We are grateful to the Taylor report for use of some of the definitions listed here.

**Church Buildings Council:** Works with and advises churches and dioceses on care, conservation and development of church buildings and with government to advice on policies that affect church buildings.

**Consistory Court:** A type of ecclesiastical court, especially within the Church of England.

**Charitable or philanthropic funding** is provided to places of worship through the generosity of individual donors, local and national charities.

**Church of England** is the established church in England. Sometimes referred to as 'Anglican', but this descriptor is not used in this report as it can also refer to the worldwide Anglican Communion.

**Churches Conservation Trust (CCT)** is a statutory body and national charity caring for closed churches of particular historic or architectural interest transferred to it by the Church Commissioners. Its core funding is provided jointly by the Church Commissioners and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

**Church Commissioners** is a registered charity managing an investment fund which supports the work and mission of the Church of England; it also has a role in parish reorganisation and settling the future of closed church buildings.

**Congregation** means the regular worshippers who use the building, some of whom will be on the church's electoral roll. In the Church of England this group is formally represented by an elected body known as the parochial church council (PCC) that includes the responsible post-holders of the parish: churchwardens, a secretary and treasurer.

**Ecclesiastical Exemption** is an exemption from Listed Building Consent for works to listed buildings in use for ecclesiastical purposes for the religious bodies that have in place satisfactory internal systems of control approved by the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, as equivalent to the secular system. The terms are set out by the Ecclesiastical Exemption Order 2010. This is not an exemption from planning permission for external changes.

**Faculty Jurisdiction** is the Church of England's system of operating Ecclesiastical Exemption for regulation of works to church buildings, contents and churchyards. It ensures that churches are properly cared for and that any changes are thoroughly considered and carried out in the most appropriate way.

**Faculty:** is a licence to carry out work.

**Government funding** is money that is provided by the government though it is often distributed by other agencies such as Historic England or, in the case of the Roof Repair Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund. The source of the money is income generated from general taxation.

**Inspired Classroom:** is a set of teaching resources designed to enable schools to use their local parish church as a multi-media cross-curricular learning and discovery resource for all subjects in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.

**National Lottery Heritage Fund** is the Lottery distributor that has historically been most likely to award grants for projects that involve the repair and development of places of worship, in fulfilment of its aim to create a lasting difference for heritage and people.

**Norwich Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC)** offers advice at Diocesan level to parishes, the diocesan chancellor and others in relation to church buildings, their contents and churchyards. DACs particularly advise on proposals for works in buildings that require permission in the form of a faculty.

**The Norwich Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd (NDBF)** hold the assets of the Diocese and are responsible for its finances.

**Listed Places of Worship** are buildings that are designated by the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport as having special architectural and historic interest. Listing celebrates their importance. It also puts them under special consideration within the planning system and Ecclesiastical Exemption, so that they can be conserved for future generations to enjoy. Listing does not prevent changes but seeks to ensure that changes are managed carefully so that the special quality of the building is retained.

**Listed Places of Worship Scheme (LPOW)** is a grant scheme run by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The scheme makes retrospective grants equal to the amount of VAT paid on repairs, maintenance and alterations to listed buildings in use as places of worship.

**Lottery funding** is money that is distributed by the 12 independent lottery distributors. The funding comes from people who buy lottery tickets. All lottery distributors are 'arm's length' from government and only fund projects additional to those that would otherwise be funded through general taxation. This is the principle of 'additionality' and makes clear that lottery funding is not a substitute for government funding.

**Parish Council:** Civic local authorities within England which are the lowest tier of local government. Not to be confused with Parochial Church Councils.

**Parish Share** is money paid by parishes to dioceses to contribute to the costs of clergy stipends and pension contributions, in addition to other overheads and specialist ministries across the Diocese such as education. The way the share is collected varies across dioceses.

**Parochial Church Council (PCC)** is a body elected from members of the electoral roll of the church. It is responsible for promoting in the parish the whole mission of the church. It is responsible for the financial affairs of the church and the maintenance of the fabric.

**Quinquennial Inspection (QI)** is a legally required inspection of a church building carried out every five years by an architect or chartered building surveyor recognised as appropriately qualified and experienced by the Diocesan Advisory Committee. The terms are set out in the Inspection of Churches Measure 1955.

**Round Tower Churches:** there are 186 round tower churches in England. 124 of these are in Norfolk .

## Abbreviations

<b>CBSO</b>	Church Buildings Support Officers
<b>CCT</b>	Churches Conservation Trust
<b>CW</b>	churchwarden
<b>DAC</b>	Diocesan Advisory Committee
<b>DCMS</b>	Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (government department)
<b>EDP</b>	Eastern Daily Press
<b>LPOW</b>	Listed Places of Worship
<b>LUN</b>	Launditch and Upper Nar
<b>NDBF</b>	Norwich Diocesan Board of Finance
<b>NLHF</b>	National Heritage Lottery Fund
<b>PC</b>	Parish Council
<b>PCC</b>	Parochial Church council
<b>QI</b>	Quinquennial Inspection
<b>SPAB</b>	Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings
<b>STAR</b>	St Andrew's Restoration
<b>STEM</b>	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths

## 9.9. Annex I

### Case study 1: Norfolk rural churches: Launditch and Upper Nar

The joining together of several parishes into one benefice has long been used as a solution to the problem of having too many small parish churches situated close together without the means to pay for ministry, particularly in rural areas. Launditch and Upper Nar (LUN) is made up of three former benefices joined together (in 2016) and comprises 19 medieval church buildings in 17 parishes. All churchyards remain open.

Each of these parishes has a unique identity: of our 19 church buildings, very few can be counted as 'ordinary', and most are remarkable in some way, such as being connected to an important historical figure, or having unique architectural features.

Each parish has its own PCC. A joint council is strongly resisted, largely because people fear losing their own parish identity, but also because of deep suspicions that 'the Diocese' is trying to take away their control, ultimately resulting in the loss of their church.

There is a strong sense of identity in each parish. Thriving PCCs are unwilling to amalgamate with parishes with non-existent or struggling PCCs; in this rural area with small populations it is difficult for a proactive and mission-minded PCC to balance the needs of the congregation and parishioners with responsibility for the fabric of the building, let alone having the additional burden of a neighbouring parish and under-used building.

### The churches

Of the 19 church buildings, two are in the care of the Diocesan Churches Trust.

Of the 17 parishes, three have no PCC (except the incumbent) (group 1); 5 have 1–3 PCC members (group 2); 6 have a larger PCC, with varying degrees of activity, but all with either a primary focus on maintaining the church building or a deep suspicion of the Diocese and a determination to maintain their individual parish identity (group 3); and three have active PCCs who prioritise ministry and mission over maintaining the building (while still recognising their responsibility toward the building) (group 4).

Congregation numbers vary; unsurprisingly, those who prioritise ministry and mission over building maintenance have healthier numbers, which in turn has increased their income, enabling building maintenance to continue, alongside refurbishment and improvement projects.

### Group 1

The three with no PCC have declined gradually over the decades, losing their congregations and PCCs in the last four years. The incumbent is left to manage these buildings and churchyards, to try to hold services in them, to ensure that insurance is paid, and to find someone to clean the building in the event of an Occasional Office, with varying degrees of success.

### Group 2

The five parishes with 1–3 PCC members also have a heart for mission, but with so few (and ageing) people, some have recognised that they are losing or have lost the battle on church attendance, and with it the battle on financially maintaining the building. These church buildings are at great risk in the next decade or so as PCC members grow fewer and older. The burden of finding money for parish share as well as financing building maintenance causes great stress. Currently, some pay all of the parish share, and others pay what they can. It must be noted that population size of the parishes is small, and that statistically, a congregation numbering 4 or 5 is comparatively healthy. At festivals and for occasional services, the church is well used by parishioners and most value having the building in their community.

### Group 3

The three parishes with active PCCs who are generally more focused on building maintenance and repair present a particular problem in that unless more ministry and outreach occurs in those parishes, there will be a sharp decline in income over the next couple of decades as PCC members get older and less able, or die. At present there are great fundraising efforts made in these parishes, most of which is directed at the fabric of the building. There is a reluctance to pay parish share, as it is seen as going mostly 'into the Diocese'.

These parishes, along with a further three, have deeply held suspicions of 'the Diocese'; 'they' are perceived to be constantly asking for money which far exceeds the cost of ministry in the parish, and there is still resentment that monies from glebe lands and properties are not retained by the parishes.

Much of this arises from the fear of losing their parish church, as well as the fear engendered by the understanding that the PCC and churchwardens are responsible for the maintenance of the building, hence the prioritising of buildings over ministry and outreach. One of the parishes in this group has a large but sprawling population in two villages, two medieval church buildings and a tiny congregation, with little



interest from the parishioners. There is no possibility that this parish could ever afford the amount asked for parish share, so attempts to pay are abandoned. The small but faithful PCC are simply resigned to the fact that the task is too big for them and the future prospects are not good.

#### Group 4

These three churches maintain a healthy balance between care of the building and ministry and outreach and are a good example of how congregations grow.

While these parishes are a good example to hold up to the others, due to several factors (the historical divisions between parishes; the reluctance to believe that their story is true; the false belief that those churches are in better condition/better off financially, the vast size of the benefice geographically as well as numerically making it difficult to engage with all PCCs/churchwardens together very often), their success does not have an effect on the other struggling parishes.

#### Summary

It has become clear that in most of our rural parishes in Launditch and Upper Nar, the following statements are true:

1. In those parishes where parishioners value their church building (as a focal point / heritage / traditions / festival services) but are not regular churchgoers, there is an assumption that the church is 'centrally funded' (by government or church).
2. In those parishes where there are few residents (and therefore tiny / non-existent congregations), the financial burden of the church building falls on a very few, despite being the same monetary amount as buildings in larger / urban or suburban parishes.
3. The financial burden of the buildings leads some churchwardens and PCCs to become very protective of their finances to the point where no consideration is given to outreach or ministry. Where there is little outreach and a reluctance to work with the clergy of the benefice to that effect, those churches are in a downward spiral concurrent with the declining ability and number of the members of the PCC as they age.
4. Where PCCs are fearful of their church being forcibly closed there is a greater reluctance to engage with the Diocese on any level: deep-seated suspicion of the Diocese has made many churchwardens and PCCs inward-looking and fiercely protective of what they have.

5. Where PCC's have taken the decision that their church is no longer viable, and there is no support from the parish, nor opposition to the building being closed, there is no clear or easy way to close the church nor declare it formally redundant. These buildings then become a burden on the other parishes in the group: the incumbent may be personally liable in the event of there being no funds to pay insurance; the incumbent has responsibility for the building which takes their time and attention away from ministry in the rest of the benefice; a parish share ask is still allocated, resulting in the benefice share never being paid in full, with the threat of a consequent reduction in provision of ministers and subsequent further decline in mission and ministry in the parishes.

The Revd Miriam Fife,  
Rector, Launditch and Upper Nar, 16 January 2023

## 9.10. Annex J

### Case study 2: The rescue and reuse of St Peter's Corpusty

St Peter's Corpusty is a fine medieval church with a 14th-century nave and chancel and a 15th-century tower and porch. It is set dramatically on rising ground above the conjoined villages of Corpusty and Saxthorpe. Regular worship continues at St Andrew's Saxthorpe but regular services ceased at St Peter's in 1965 and the church was closed.

After closure, St Peter's fell prey to vandalism and theft. The font was knocked over and broken in two, crushing the medieval floor tiles. The bell of 1638 was stolen for scrap. The 17th-century communion rails were also taken and the partly medieval rood screen was deprived of its tracery and mutilated. Stained-glass windows were smashed and the clay pammments flooring the nave and chancel were ripped up by thieves. After a long period of dereliction and neglect in which tiles fell from the main roofs and the porch roof partially collapsed, the building was leased from the Diocese of Norwich in 1982 by the Friends of Friendless Churches and the work of repair began. The Norfolk Churches Trust took over the lease in 2009 and has continued to undertake major structural repairs. A small and dedicated group of local people has been closely involved with the project and has nurtured the recovery. The repair of the building has given back to St Peter's its dignity and the clearing of great quantities of undergrowth in the churchyard has greatly enhanced its presence in the landscape.



In 2022 the building and the part of the churchyard immediately around it were given a new use when a group of modern carved and lettered stones was installed in collaboration with the Lettering Arts Trust. Their national collection of letter cutting is distributed across seven sites in the United Kingdom. An exhibition in the church shows the different ways in which letters and carving, form and decoration can be combined to create distinctive and beautiful objects. In most cases these are memorials to individuals, but potential applications encompass history, ideas and ideals, poetry and memory, the celebration of place and of communities past and present. In the churchyard the stones are mingled with the existing 18th- and 19th-century memorials.



*Meditation Marker by Andrew Daish, 1998*

The display and the collection are intended as the beginning of a developing project in which the work of the letter cutter and the sculptor will continue to contribute to St Peter's and its landscape. This is a resource for the county of Norfolk, a place of quiet contemplation where the creativity of contemporary letter cutters and sculptors can be enjoyed and understood. The 17 works were installed in March 2022 through a generous grant from the Behrens Foundation. The Foundation has continued to support the project with a further grant that has funded the re-paving of the chancel, the flooring of the tower, the repair of the rood screen, the commissioning of a new lettered slab recording the work of restoration, and the publication of a book on the church.

People have been delighted by the new presentation of the church and its surroundings and the opening of the project, which attracted coverage on television and in the local newspapers, has led to a significant increase in visitors.

**The church is usually open all day on Friday. At other times the key can be obtained from the Spar shop in Corpusty.**

## 9.11. Annex K

### Case study 3: St Andrew's Church Deopham

#### Caring for our Roots project

Deopham is a community of around 350 people living in a 'linear' village close to Hingham, Wymondham and Attleborough in South Norfolk.

In March 2023 High Oak PCC was awarded a development grant of nearly £50,000 for restoration work and to deliver a range of new activities and resources at St Andrew's Church in Deopham, which has been on the Historic England's 'Heritage At Risk' Register, through the 'Caring for our Roots' project.



The project aims to transform the at-risk church into a sustainable heritage, community and worship hub for the village of Deopham and for the wider area. This will be achieved in partnership with local schools, the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, the Norfolk Record Office and others. Members of High Oak PCC, together with the Deopham St Andrew's Restoration group (STAR), have been hard at work for more than two years to turn this vision into reality.

'Caring for our Roots' will explore the importance of place, identity and inclusion to a community as expressed through the distinctive and valued heritage of its parish church. This will be achieved both through urgent repairs to the church's fabric in order to remedy its 'At Risk' status, and through a series of engaging new activities and resources, designed to explore, celebrate and nurture the 'roots' of community – its built, social and environmental heritage. These activities will culminate in the launch of a new 'Caring for our Roots' exhibition, co-created and co-curated by the most disadvantaged pupils from our local schools in partnership with the Norfolk Record Office.

The initial National Lottery Heritage Fund award will be used in the project's development phase, to pay for further investigations into the church's condition and to build project activity ideas. This will then lead to a further application to The National Lottery Heritage Fund for a grant to deliver the project and its outcomes. The group will appoint specialists to help them devise the best options to secure the future, among them an Activity Consultant and an Architect.

*We are thrilled that The National Lottery Heritage Fund has given us funding to develop our project further. This provides a fantastic opportunity for much wider and deeper engagement and inclusion with all ages across our community through a programme of new activities and interpretation at the church. Funding will also allow us to install better facilities, to keep it safe and in use for present and future generations. Our thanks also go to the National Lottery players.*

Project Manager Roger Cordey

High Oak PCC and the Deopham STAR group now have until 10 March 2025 to complete their work before applying to The National Lottery Heritage Fund for the larger delivery phase grant.

### **In consultation with the community**

The planning involved wide consultation within our local community (a community survey) and beyond in recognition that the project's activity outcomes will be for all ages, including adult learners and for those visiting Deopham. This advice included that from key heritage and conservation organisations who will be directly involved in delivering the outcomes of the project through informal partnerships. Those consulted and sought advice from include:

- The Norfolk Record Office
- The Norfolk Wildlife Trust
- Historic England
- The Inspired Classrooms project
- Caring For God's Acre
- The Gralix Hall, Deopham
- Hingham Toddler Group and Coffee Club
- Deopham Parish Council
- Norfolk County Council
- Informal consultations with groups and individuals already using the church

These consultations and advice created a clear and focused desire to deliver activities that focus on supporting skills, educational development and wellbeing in a heritage setting by using both the church and the churchyard of St Andrew's.

**Roger Cordey, Project Manager**



## 9.12. Annex L

### Case study 4: St Marys Church Wiveton

#### Eco-friendly community action and a church for the future



Following the collapse of a large medieval roof onto an altar in 2019, St Mary's Church was in need of urgent repairs. Wiveton PCC was granted £135,997 by the National Heritage Lottery Fund in April 2022. The money is being used for a programme of restorative work with a programme of nature conservation activities, and an environmental conference.

The funding will enable a series of conservation activities:

- a series of churchyard conservation tasks and activities, such as haymaking, bird and bat box installation, talks and guided walks led by staff
- activities for children and young people by hosting a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) day, as well as creating a heritage and nature trail
- volunteer training and learning to improve visitor engagement with the building and conservation areas.

**'Wiveton – A Church For The Future'** will culminate in the hosting of a conference to share ideas on reducing a building's carbon footprint, encouraging greater biodiversity. The conference will aim to encourage other places of worship in the Diocese to increase their positive impact on the environment.

*We will use this wonderful opportunity to fully engage with the local community of all ages and to share, promote and celebrate the built and natural heritage of the building.*

Charles Killin, member of Wiveton PCC

## 9.13 Annex M

### Case study 5: Burnham Breck Camping

#### Pop up camping near Burnham Market

Burnham Breck Camping is the trading arm of St Mary's Church in the parish of Burnham Market. The church is registered with the charity code 626542 by the Church of England.

The charity is in its 8th Summer season. They offer wild camping tents and plots for campervans/motorhomes up to 8.5m long. There are 32 pitches in five acres. It is a ten minute walk from Burnham Market pubs and restaurants.

They do not offer refunds. However unused bookings are donations to the church charity and customers can claim on their higher tax rate.

<https://burnhambreck.co.uk>

email us on [burnhambreck@gmail.com](mailto:burnhambreck@gmail.com)



## 9.14. Annex N

### Case study 6: Ruin at Bircham Tofts

The church of Saint Andrew's in Bircham Tofts is a ruined church. The tower is thought to date back to the 13th century, and was the subject of restoration in 1895. Regular services were held in the church until 1941, and in 1952 the church roof was removed by faculty. Over the last 70 years the graveyard around the church has become overgrown and the church building covered by a thick layer of ivy that extends to the top of the tower.

The building has become the haunt of local youths and is regularly boarded up to prevent access, only for the boarding to be torn down again. The church is not used and is a matter of some concern for the congregation at St Mary's, Great Bircham, who have oversight and responsibility for the building. The PCC and churchwardens would like nothing better than for the Diocese of Norwich to take the building and sell it for development.

To that end, over the course of the last 15 years informal discussions have been held between churchwardens and different Archdeacons and parish support staff, but to no avail. Understandably, the Diocese does not want to be saddled with the responsibility of oversight for a ruin – but then, neither do the PCC in Great Bircham.

In 2021 the incumbent was approached by a local property developer who has an interest in purchasing the site in order to develop the church as a dwelling. Discussions with the Diocesan Board of Finance resulted in little progress initially. The incumbent was then asked to approach surveyors to ascertain what might be the best price that could be obtained for the building and the plot on which it stands.

Surveyors approached could not provide a price and suggested that the building and plot be put up for sale by public auction with whatever price we obtained being listed as the best price obtainable. This seemed a ludicrous suggestion and not an option that the potential purchaser was interested in pursuing either.

With the arrival of a new Archdeacon, a meeting was arranged to view the ruin, and the developer was invited to explain something of his interest. The Archdeacon arranged an online meeting with two representatives from the Church of England central offices – people who have had more experience with a process that would be rather an unusual and unfamiliar one for most parish support staff who would rarely, if ever, be likely to have to deal with the sale of a ruin.

The involvement of these two Church of England representatives has helped to make the prospect of a sale seem more feasible – and we now have some practical processes to work through. The sale, however, is still a long way off and nothing will

happen quickly. Being directed to help from the Church of England a couple of years ago would have put us much further along the road sooner.

If the Church as a body is to deal with more such issues in the future, it would be a good idea if all diocesan offices were appraised of the best way to proceed so that the processes could be made a little less onerous. It is in nobody's interest for the church at Bircham Tofts to simply fall down when it could be incorporated into a building and the shell of the fabric preserved for posterity.

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# 10.

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