

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT

First Delegated Legislation Committee

DRAFT GRANTS TO THE CHURCHES  
CONSERVATION TRUST ORDER 2020

*Monday 16 March 2020*

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**Friday 20 March 2020**

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**The Committee consisted of the following Members:**

*Chair:* SIR GRAHAM BRADY

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|---|--|
| † Baron, Mr John ( <i>Basildon and Billericay</i> ) (Con)   | † Lamont, John ( <i>Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk</i> ) (Con) |
| † Bradshaw, Mr Ben ( <i>Exeter</i> ) (Lab)  | † Lopresti, Jack ( <i>Filton and Bradley Stoke</i> ) (Con)         |
| † Cates, Miriam ( <i>Penistone and Stocksbridge</i> ) (Con)   | † McGinn, Conor ( <i>St Helens North</i> ) (Lab)                   |
| † Caulfield, Maria ( <i>Lewes</i> ) (Con)   | † Matheson, Christian ( <i>City of Chester</i> ) (Lab)             |
| † Coutinho, Claire ( <i>East Surrey</i> ) (Con)   | † Mayhew, Jerome ( <i>Broadland</i> ) (Con)                        |
| † Davies-Jones, Alex ( <i>Pontypridd</i> ) (Lab)  | † Nichols, Charlotte ( <i>Warrington North</i> ) (Lab)             |
| † Gullis, Jonathan ( <i>Stoke-on-Trent North</i> ) (Con)  | Tarry, Sam ( <i>Ilford South</i> ) (Lab)                           |
| Harman, Ms Harriet ( <i>Camberwell and Peckham</i> ) (Lab)  | Peter Stam, <i>Committee Clerk</i>                                 |
| † Huddleston, Nigel ( <i>Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport</i> ) | † <b>attended the Committee</b>                                    |
| † Kruger, Danny ( <i>Devizes</i> ) (Con)  |  |

# First Delegated Legislation Committee

Monday 16 March 2020

[SIR GRAHAM BRADY *in the Chair*]

## Draft Grants to the Churches Conservation Trust Order 2020

4.30 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Nigel Huddleston):** I beg to move,

That the Committee has considered the draft Grants to the Churches Conservation Trust Order 2020.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. The order is required so that the Government may continue to provide funding for the Churches Conservation Trust. I will start with a little background on the trust's work. The CCT takes into its care some of our finest churches—mainly grade I and grade II\*—that are no longer required for regular worship. The trust currently cares for more than 350 churches, encompassing 1,000 years of English history, architecture and archaeology. These include churches large and small, from isolated gems to urban Victorian buildings in villages, towns and cities across England.

The trust is a charity and was established by ecclesiastical legislation in 1969 as the Redundant Churches Fund. It demonstrates a successful partnership between the Church, the Government and the community, aimed at protecting an integral part of this country's heritage. The Government presently provide 66% of the trust's statutory funding and the Church Commissioners make a 34% contribution. The CCT has increasingly made use of its statutory grant to raise new income from donations, legacies and grant-giving foundations. This independent income now makes up more than 68% of its expenditure, and it has shown great initiative in developing activities and bringing its buildings back to life at a time of pressure on public funding.

Some interesting examples include champing—church camping—offering overnight stays in historic places of worship. This is developing into an important revenue-generating activity for the CCT, and it is a crucial route to engaging a new and younger audience with our cultural heritage. In the inaugural champing season of May to September 2015, almost 300 people champed overnight in four CCT churches in the south-east. Guests came from all over the world, with an additional revenue of £15,000 generated for the charity.

Another initiative is Discover Churches, supported by a special capital grant from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whereby larger CCT churches in towns and cities are setting a new standard in church heritage visiting. The programme is increasing community engagement with local heritage assets, as well as bringing in additional income for the CCT.

Filming has also been an important contributor to diversifying the CCT's income streams and offers another creative route to supporting and conserving the estate.

In the last year, the organisation has facilitated across its sites film and TV productions from the BBC, Sky, HBO and Netflix, and there remains still more potential to leverage the estate and attract international productions.

Consultancy work is a new and promising income stream for the trust. Over the past three years, it has earned £329,000. The CCT is working on projects with diocese, churches and community groups, as well as new maintenance business initiatives. The CCT recently signed a three-year contract to oversee the maintenance of the Quaker meeting houses in Norfolk, for example. This initiative looks set to expand and be rolled out further afield, with scope for further income generation. The trust is also investing in the Old Black Lion pub in Northampton, driving the regeneration of the area and providing diversified services and recreation as an income stream for Northampton's St Peter's church next door.

Historic places of worship are a valuable and vital part of this nation's heritage. About 45% of all grade I listed buildings are Church of England churches or cathedrals. They represent some of the finest of our historic buildings and are showpieces of the most accomplished design and workmanship. As iconic buildings, they help to define our cities, towns and villages. They can be magnets for tourists but are also vital in their communities, as they might be the only community space left and are highly valued.

The trust has saved for the nation nine additional churches of exceptional merit since 2016, costing £4 million in total to bring these valuable places back into public use. The trust's primary objective, and the greatest call on its funds, is the conservation of its churches, particularly on initial vesting, when buildings may have been out of use for a number of years. The trust has an excellent reputation for the quality of its conservation work. In 2015, the CCT won the European Union prize for cultural heritage/Europa Nostra award, in recognition of its role in promoting the architectural significance of historic places of worship and their essential function as centres of community life.

The work and the expense do not end there. With an estate of more than 350 buildings that could and should be serving communities, there is a rolling programme of repairs and new facilities across the estate. The trust's work catalyses local economic growth through investment. Commencing in August 2019, Seventeen Nineteen, based in Sunderland, is an ambitious £4.3 million project to conserve and regenerate Holy Trinity church and reconnect the city with its past. It aims to bring the heritage of the church and old Sunderland to life through immersive events and performances. It will provide a cultural and community hub for local residents, connecting to the wider city and surrounding areas through a range of events, alongside a programme of heritage activities, markets, music and stories.

Additionally, the CCT is overseeing a £2.4 million project at St Swithun's in Worcestershire. "Sound and Art at St Swithun's" will be an inspirational sensory space to creatively demonstrate the potential of sound and art to engage, enthuse and inspire a greater connection with heritage and history, and the work will repair and conserve the building's rare Georgian architecture.

In the year to September 2019, nearly 1.7 million people visited a CCT church. The trust's churches are run by an army of 1,600 volunteers and I offer my thanks to those people, without whom events as diverse

as fashion shows, concerts, flower festivals and farmers' markets would not be able to take place. The trust offers its volunteers support and new skills through networking and training. All new volunteers are supported by the trust and taken through a volunteer welcome process. They receive a regular, regionally specific e-newsletter and can choose to subscribe to the CCT's individual membership at a much reduced rate. The CCT hosts an annual gathering for the volunteers at which they recognise particular volunteer achievements.

The trust has shown that it is excellent at partnership working and is at the forefront of saving buildings by looking beyond the traditional heritage solutions. I am also aware of the CCT lending its expertise in the development and delivery of workshops on caring for historic places of worship, as part of the £1.8 million Taylor pilot scheme set up and funded by the Government to help to build a sustainable future for listed places of worship. I take this opportunity to personally thank the CCT for that support.

Finally, I should mention that there are three CCT churches in my constituency: St Michael's church in Churchill, All Saints' church in Spetchley and St Lawrence's church in Evesham, which I had the pleasure of visiting just a few weeks ago. I hope that the Committee feels able to share my enthusiasm for the work of the trust and the vital role it plays in preserving and promoting a key aspect of our nation's heritage, and that it will consent to approve the order.

4.38 pm

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Graham, and to see my good friend the Minister on the Government Front Bench. He and I spent many a happy hour together in the Select Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, so I can confirm that he is well worthy of a position in Government. I pay tribute to him most generously for the promotion.

Churches play such an important role not only in our community, but, as the Minister stated, in marking our history and heritage. My church, St Werburgh's, in Chester, is a fine example of an Edmund Kirby design. We also know that churches are under pressure, because they are historic, to maintain the original structures and design as well as their structural integrity. Our beloved Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkin, late of this parish, made her name when she held a rooftop protest at her church in east London to highlight the dilapidated state of its roof. The churches I have referred to are in use, but I understand—I am sure the Minister will confirm this—that the order is for churches that have fallen out of use yet still have a role to play in the community.

The Minister mentioned a list of churches. Sadly, he did not mention St Paul's church in Boughton, in Chester. When a similar Committee meets in a future Session of Parliament, I hope he will be able to list it as one of the churches that has received support. I call on the Committee to picture the scene: it sits high on the bluff above the bend in the River Dee on Barrel Well Hill, looking out over the meadows of Chester. It is a fantastic view and it is a fantastic church, but it is not occupiable at the moment because it is not safe. We have been trying to win some money to make the roof and structure safe so that we can use the church, and that example from my constituency demonstrates just how

important the trust is. I join the Minister in thanking CCT for its work, although I am concerned that perhaps it is not funded by as much as it might be, which means that only a few churches a year can benefit. Perhaps the Minister might consider that.

The Churches Conservation Trust carries out crucial work to protect and regenerate beautiful historic churches across the UK, and it is important that we protect and support the heritage and architecture of such churches. For this reason, we will support the statutory instrument. I recognise that historic churches have a role to play at the heart of communities. In my constituency of Chester, there are 200 churches and many of them play a big role in bringing communities together.

Although the trust protects churches that are no longer viable for worship or congregation, these churches still carry a very high historical and heritage value. Indeed, a church is not simply a space designed for religion but a focal point for community and tourism activities. In Chester, the parish church of St John the Baptist is in an historic part of the city. The vicar there will always describe it as the first and original cathedral of Chester—although the clergy and chapter at the current cathedral might disagree—and it attracts visitors from across the country and the world.

Heritage sites are not only intrinsically valuable to a community; they carry economic value as well, contributing to economic growth, regeneration, education and tourism in an area. But there is no denying that funding for heritage projects is chronically lacking, leaving some historic churches, such as St John the Baptist, without adequate funding, and others, such as St Paul's, empty and sadly a wasted space.

Generally, historic cities such as Chester and York—I see my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter in his place, so I will include Exeter in that list—struggle to protect these valuable historic sites because of the deep central Government cuts to local authorities. Local authorities are being forced to choose between providing basic services for vulnerable people and ensuring that ancient sites remain open and protected for future generations, so although this funding for the conservation trust is welcome, it is time that the Government recognised the urgent need for similar funding for grade I listed ancient sites across the UK, which are gradually suffering because of a lack of investment. Indeed, my own local authority, Cheshire West and Chester Council, has had more than £330 million removed from our budget since 2010, forcing it to prioritise funding for those most in need as opposed to maintaining historic sites in our city.

We will support the SI in the spirit of celebrating and funding heritage. However, may I ask the Minister to clarify two points? First, how is funding through the Churches Conservation Trust disbursed and what is the mechanism for overseeing that disbursement to ensure that it goes to the most deserving cases? Secondly, may I make the case for the Government to reassess their strategy to protect heritage more broadly and to allow local authorities to bid for funding for specific ancient heritage sites, including old former churches that are in desperate need of protection?

4.43 pm

**Nigel Huddleston:** I thank my good friend the hon. Member for City of Chester for his kind words in his introduction, and I would like to reciprocate. It has

*[Nigel Huddleston]*

been a genuine pleasure to work with him over many years on the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee and on other matters. I hope we will continue this kind of relationship for many years to come. I would certainly like to be in this role for quite a few years; I do not know whether he wishes to stay in the same role, but I know that his interest in all DCMS matters and in heritage is genuine. I look forward to working with him on a cross-party basis, as is the case with so many DCMS matters.

The hon. Gentleman raised a few points about the scale of the problem and he is absolutely right. He mentioned many churches in his constituency, and I would love to come and visit, if he can show me around. Perhaps we could visit the zoo as well. The scale of the heritage challenge is immense. The Church of England, for example, cares for more than 12,208 listed places of worship, and every single year many churches come up for potential change of use. This relates to the questions he asked about the finances and other matters, which I shall address first.

On ensuring that the money is spent wisely, my officials hold regular meetings with the CCT, both independently and with the Church Commissioners, which jointly fund the CCT, to discuss its strategy, the maintenance of buildings and new acquisitions. In addition, the CCT presents its annual reports and accounts to the Secretary of State, and they are examined before being laid before Parliament every year.

The Secretary of State also holds the CCT to account through a funding agreement, which sets out its priorities, along with the indicators that are used to measure its performance. The CCT has found its share of efficiency savings over the past few years. It has developed a number of successful new initiatives in order to generate additional income, as I mentioned, which now makes up 68% of its income and is a testament to its innovation.

On managing an increasing supply of redundant churches, we are realistic about what the trust can cope with, and need to ensure that the trust's resources can

meet the repair needs of buildings to be vested. Of the 20 to 25 churches becoming redundant each year, only two or three of the most significant ones will come to the trust, and the number is being carefully managed through co-operation among the trust, DCMS and the Church.

On Government funding, the hon. Member for City of Chester may wish to know that between 1 April 1994 and 31 March 2019 the National Lottery Heritage Fund awarded more than £985 million to more than 6,400 heritage projects. That money has been used for such things as urgent conservation work, new facilities, the conservation of contents, and heritage outreach projects, including skills and education programmes. Furthermore, £115 million of that money was awarded to 61 cathedrals through 133 projects, and £44 million of it has been spent on building conservation. The National Lottery Heritage Fund therefore also plays a major role in the sector.

Government funding for the CCT is an effective and successful part of the support that we give to heritage. The CCT is committed to ensuring that these exceptional buildings remain in good repair—open now and for future generations. I thank the trustees, under the leadership of Peter Ainsworth, the staff and the many volunteers who ensure that the churches are open and welcoming.

I have highlighted some of the programmes put in place by the trust to generate independent income from philanthropic endeavours and appropriate commercial use of the buildings. We support those endeavours, which increase the use of the buildings in a way that anchors them more firmly in their local communities, which love and use them. The endeavours also increase access, use and protection, and reduce their dependence on public funds. That, in the end, is how those historic buildings will come to thrive, and continue to thrive: through the people and communities that love them and want to see them continue in use.

*Question put and agreed to.*

4.47 pm

*Committee rose.*



