

Places of Worship Renewal Fund

Briefing by the Diocese of Exeter, Church Buildings Office

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Introduction

- Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme closed earlier this year.
- Replaced by the Places of Worship Renewal Fund.
- New fund is administered by Historic England based on priorities from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).
- Diocese are not involved in administering the scheme or directing funding.



Department for
Digital, Culture
Media & Sport



**Historic
England**

1. About the Scheme

A replacement?

Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

- Grant to reclaim VAT on capital projects
- Non-competitive
- One fund, one application process
- £42m budget in 2024/25 reduced to £23m in 2025/26. All funds allocated before the fund was closed.
- Rolling application window – no deadlines.
- Estimated 5,000 places of worship supported annually.



Places of Worship Renewal Fund

- Grants of £10,000 - £1,000,000 for capital works that keep buildings safe, open and in public use.
- Three streams for different project sizes.
- Competitive, with areas of England with the greatest need for investment and those that bring most community benefit prioritised. **Not all applications will be successful.**
- £92m allocation, over a four-year period. £23m per annum.
- Two application rounds per year, with set deadlines.
- Estimated 100-150 projects supported annually.

Grant streams

Small grants
£10,000 - £50,000

Medium grants
£50,001 - £350,000

Large grants
£350,001 - £1,000,000

The £23m per year is a national pot – it has not been split between regions

Requirements

Any listed place of worship can apply...

BUT

This is a **competitive** grant scheme

Your application must align with Historic England's priorities **and** the fund's objectives and criteria if your application is to be successful.

You will need to demonstrate that the works are **necessary, deliverable** and **aligned** with the fund requirements.

Reference these when writing your Expression of Interest (and your full application, if invited to apply).

The full list is available on Historic England's website.

Fund requirements

At both the expression of interest (EOI) and full application stages, projects will be assessed in line with how they meet Historic England's priorities and the fund's objectives and criteria.

Priorities



Objectives



Criteria



Start an EOI now

Prioritisation of funds

- Projects that are in areas of England with the greatest **deprivation**.
- The **urgency** of repair and **risk of loss** and/or the **community benefit** the project brings.
- The project's **deliverability** and **value for money**.
- Projects from places of worship with the **lowest available budget** and capacity to raise funds.

Your church does not need to be on the Heritage at Risk Register – but if it is, then you should mention it when applying!

You need to tell Historic England how your project matches with these priorities – specifically mention them in your Expression of Interest and be ready to expand on this if you are invited to apply.



Priority for deprived areas

- Priority will be given to projects in areas of England with the highest level of deprivation and need for investment. Prioritisation will focus on:
 - Firstly, projects that fall within (or serve) areas of **Indices of Multiple Deprivation** (IMD) 1-3 **AND** fall within areas identified through the Community Needs Index (CNI)
 - Next, projects that fall within (or serve) areas of IMD 1-3
 - For projects that do not fall within (or serve) the above defined areas of deprivation, we will then prioritise those projects which have the greatest financial need and urgency of repair and provide the greatest community benefit.

Whilst every place of worship is entitled to apply, the fund is competitive and likely to be oversubscribed. Areas of most acute need are therefore more likely to be successful in their applications.

Deprivation

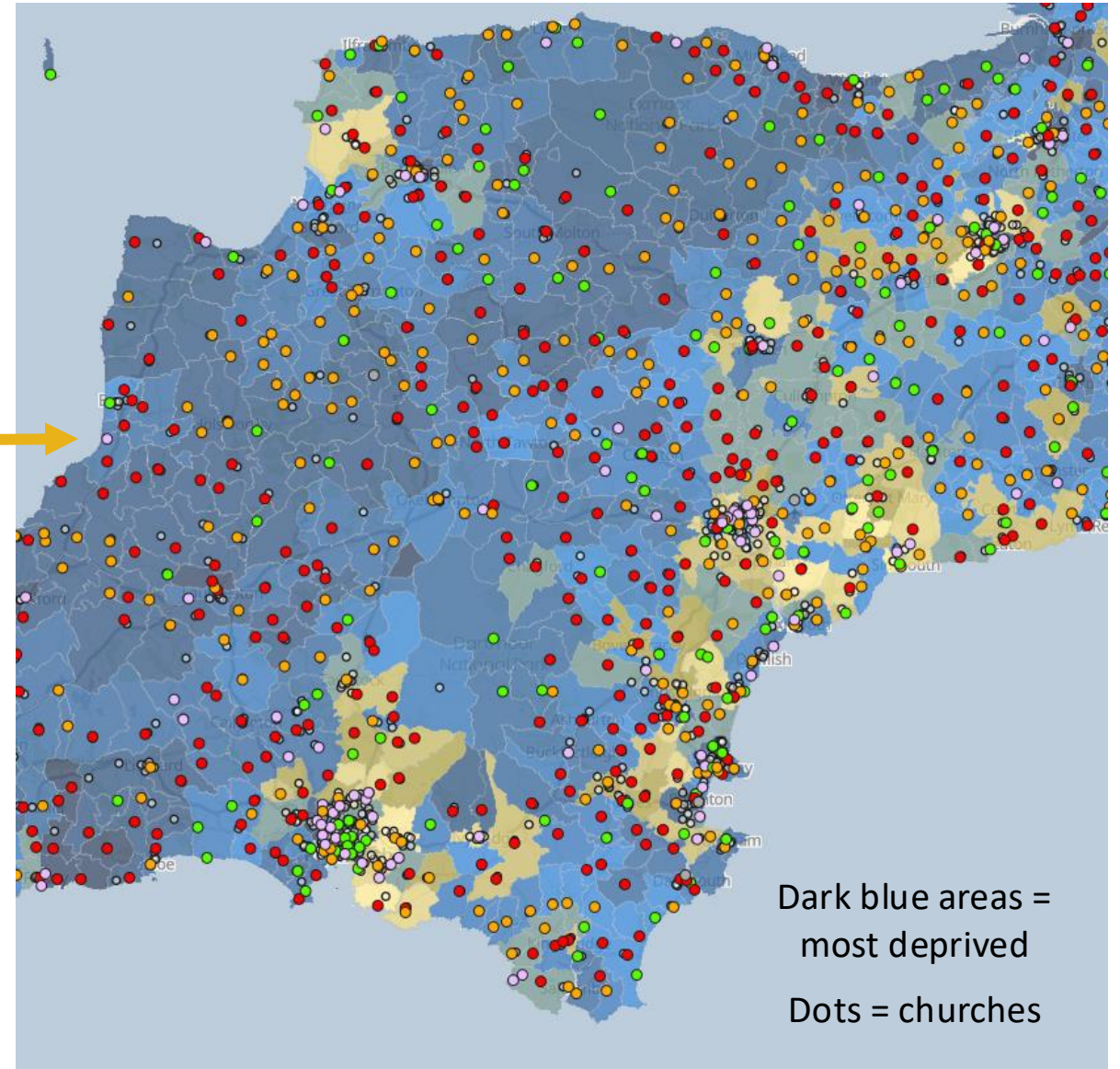
Historic England are using two sets of national statistics to assess deprivation:

1. Index of Multiple Deprivation
2. Community Needs Index (next slide)

There are issues with overlaying the geographical spread of this data with parish boundaries. Your parish may encompass varied levels of deprivation.

If part of your parish is in the 30% most deprived areas of England, you are a priority for this funding.

You can view IMD data for your parish using the Church of England's interactive map [here](#).

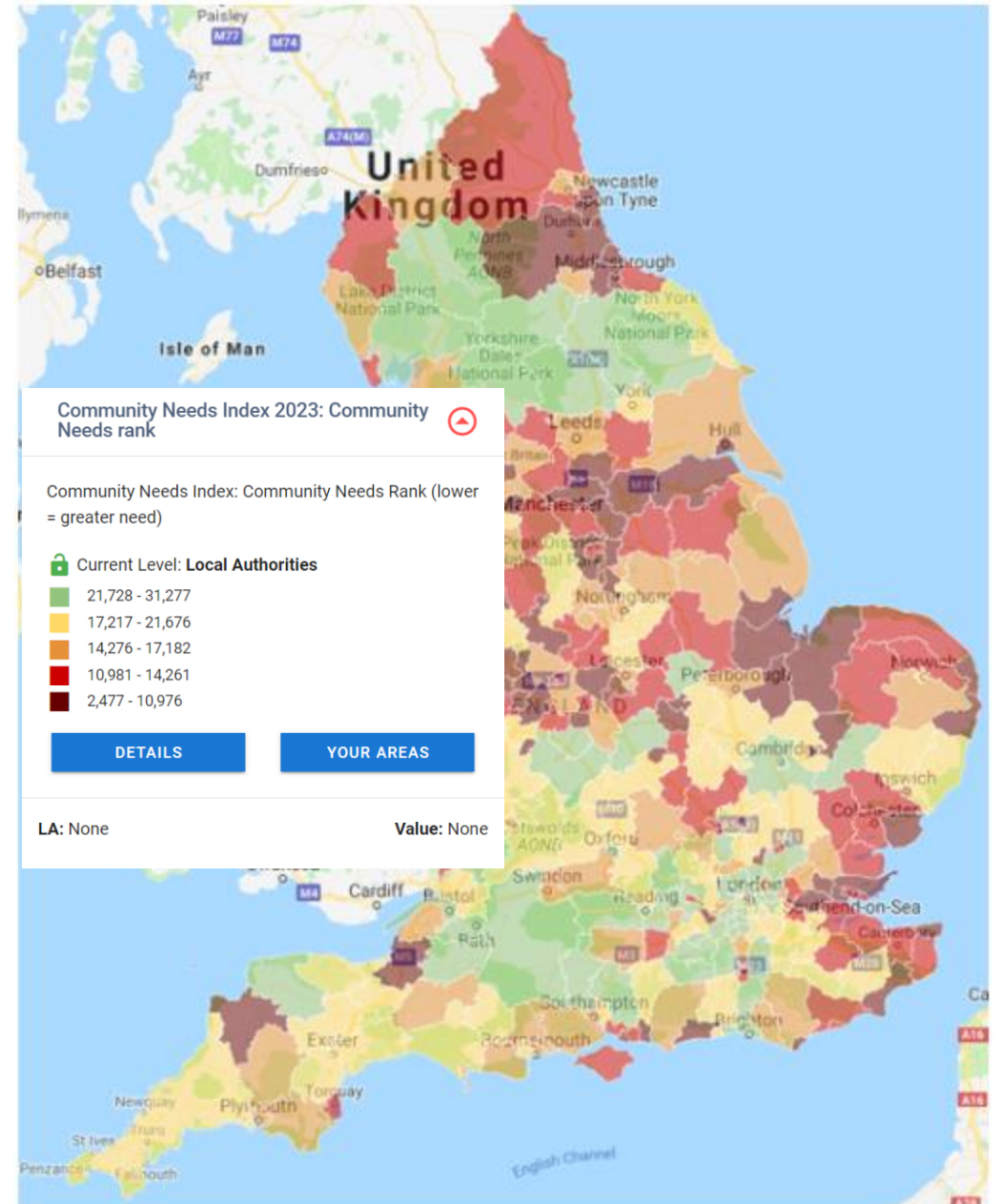


Community needs

A secondary method of identifying communities in need – focused on

- Civic assets (community centres, libraries, churches, pubs etc)
- Connectedness (access to essential services, digital infrastructure, strength of the local job market)
- Active and engaged community (charities, civic participation and volunteering)

This data is available [here](#) (as of June 2026) but is not mapped to parish boundaries



No 'improvements' without 'repairs'

New heating, access related projects, reordering, improved facilities, conservation of fixtures/fittings etc. will not be eligible unless they form part of a broader repair project.

Repairs must be the **majority** of the cost of your project

This means you may need to change your focus to identify a fundable project.

'Repairs' does not include work such as redecoration.

Top tips for tight deadlines

Deliverable

Choose a project it is realistic to deliver within the tight timeframe.

Communicate

Speak to your church architect and the Church Buildings Office as soon as possible.

Avoid choosing something 'new'

Projects in their very early stages are going to be difficult to deliver in the timeframe.

Use your Architect

Speak to your architect about identifying a suitable project and developing it to application stage. Make it clear you intend to apply for a PWRP grant.

Keep focused on your outcomes.

It's easy to expand a project or lose focus once ideas take hold – avoid this temptation.

Competitive?

Is this something that is 'necessary' or 'urgent'? Will it be competitive in an oversubscribed field?

'Sense check' your project at regular intervals. Is it still deliverable and competitive? Ask other people to review your progress.

“

25. Do I need match funding to apply?



You are normally expected to contribute towards project costs (around 20%). In cases of clear need, including smaller congregations or those in deprived areas, higher levels of grant (up to 100%) may be considered on a case-by-case basis. You should explain your financial position and fundraising constraints as part of your submission.

Match funding sources

Small grants - sources to consider:

- Devon Historic Churches Trust
<https://devonhistoricchurches.co.uk/>
- Archdeacons' rural repair fund – ask your Archdeacon for more info
- Have a fundraising event/open day

Medium/large grants - sources to consider:

- National Churches Trust
<https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/get-support/grants>
- Benefact Trust
<https://www.benefacttrust.co.uk/grants/building-grants/>

Very large grants - sources to consider:

- National Lottery Heritage Fund
<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/>

For a searchable database of grants – ask the Mission Resources Team for access to Cornerstone

Complete the form at <https://exeter.anglican.org/resources/generous-giving/cornerstone/> or email Mission.Resources@exeter.anglican.org

Letters of support

A letter of support is required to accompany your application.

The letter will clarify whether you have permission in place, or whether you have obtained advice from the DAC on your project. It will also briefly mention the valuable work happening at your church, and our understanding from the statistics of where you sit within the deprivation statistics.

Your application will not be judged on the contents of the letter of support.

A letter can be obtained by contacting the Church Buildings Office.

A tight deadline for you also means a tight deadline for us!

Please use the 'DAC@exeter.anglican.org' mailbox – we all have access to this, and it will mean you get a prompt response.

Please do not make the request over the phone or in a voicemail. It is helpful for our records to have an email correspondence.

Permissions

- Permission does not need to be in place when you apply. DAC support for the project 'in principle' should be evidenced through the letter of support.
- It is essential that you contact us **now** about your project if you have not done so before.
- Remember that the project may be 'new' to the DAC, even if it isn't new to you.
- If the work needs Faculty permission – and this is not yet in place – you are unlikely to obtain permission in time for you to deliver a project in round 1 of this grant fund.
- List B's for like for like repairs are quicker and easier to get through the system.

2. Choosing your Project

Priority works – focus on repairs

Consider 'hat and boots'

- Urgent fabric repairs to keep the water out – roofs, masonry, timber, drainage.
- Go through your last Quinquennial Inspection report – if this is out of date, either get your architect booked in asap or ask them to do a condition report on the specific element you are concerned about e.g. the roof.
- If you can't afford to get an out of date QI updated, speak to your Archdeacon.
- If you need help understanding your QI, get in touch with the Church Buildings Team.

Improvements

- Only funded as part of a larger repair project (repairs must make up the majority of the project costs).
- Should increase the future resilience and useability of the building.
- Includes accessibility adaptations.
- Includes heritage interpretation.

Be realistic



Keep it manageable

- Focus is on 'essential' repairs.
- Give the funders confidence that your project can be delivered on time and in budget.
- Don't overstretch your capacity - it might be best to avoid applying for a grant to cover the whole five year's worth of recommendations from your QI in one go, unless you're confident this can be delivered.
- You can apply for more than one grant during the four year programme.

Estimating costs

- Ask your architect.
- You only need a rough idea of cost at Expression of Interest stage.
- If you need to pay for architect input in order to get to a position where you can apply for grant funding, you could ask your Archdeacon to contribute towards professional fees from their rural repair fund.

Building the case

Case for Support

- Is there a long-term issue you've wanted to fix, but haven't been able to because of funds?
- Is the issue likely to get worse if left?
- Have changing weather patterns exposed or exacerbated an issue?
- Is repairing the issue likely to safeguard the building?
- Will carrying out these repairs improve your use of the building?
- How will these repairs contribute to the sustainability of your church?

How is your project supported?

- You have a professional adviser – use them.
- Are there any historic reports on the issue?
- Have the DAC visited?
- If you need help deciding whether you are ready to submit an Expression of Interest, contact Historic England.

Other sources of funding

It might be that your project is a better fit with other funders...

Repairs under £10,000:

- Minor repairs and improvements grant scheme (Buildings for Mission)
- Devon Historic Churches Trust
- Archdeacon's rural repair fund

Facilities and accessibility:

- Garfield Weston Foundation
- Benefact Trust
- National Lottery Community Fund
- Forte Charitable Foundation
- Joseph Rank Trust

Accessibility only:

- Church of England Parish Accessibility Fund

Conservation of monuments, bells, organs, stained glass, brasses, rood screens, wall paintings, clocks, listed lychgates/walls/railings:

- Church of England Conservation Grants
- William & Jane Morris Grant
- Devon Church Bell Restoration Fund

Large projects incorporating facilities, repairs, interpretation, engagement:

- National Lottery Heritage Fund

Net zero initiatives:

- Give to Go Green
- Parish Decarbonisation Fund
- Boiler Hardship Fund
- Benefact Trust

3. How to apply

Two steps

1. Expression of Interest

- Deadline for round 1: **14 June 2026**
- Four key questions
- Show that your project is ready to progress to a full application
- Upload your last QI and the letter of support
- For round 1 – you will be told if you are invited to make a full application by 3 July 2026
- Unsuccessful applicants will receive signposting to resources

2. Full application

- Deadline for round 1: 26 July 2026
- Invitation only
- Proportionate to the size of the grant requested
- Historic England will provide guidance, templates and access to project support officers
- Unsuccessful applicants will receive feedback and signposting to resources

There will be a second round of grants in September – deadline for these EOIs is 27 September 2026

Expression of Interest

Guidance

- You will need an online account with Historic England.
- If you aren't confident with working with online forms, ask someone else in your parish for help.
- Draft your answers in Microsoft Word or Google Docs – then copy and paste into the online form.

Main questions (500 words limits)

- What are the aims and outputs of your project?
- Why is this project needed?
- Who will benefit from this project and how?
- Why do you think Historic England should support this project?

You also need to be able to say:

- How does your project meet the requirements of the Fund?
- When will your project start and finish?
- What is the **estimated** total cost?
- What financial contribution are you making?

EOI tips

Keep it simple – don't be afraid to state the obvious – use the 'key terms'

Aims and outputs

- What are the main activities/what do you hope to achieve?

Example

- Aim: Complete urgent repairs to the nave roof to stop water ingress and safeguard the building for the future.
- Output: A dry church that can be used for weekly toddler group, community café and twice weekly services.

Why is this project needed?

- State if your church building is on the Heritage at Risk Register.
- Give the evidence for the need e.g. *Our 2023 Quinquennial Inspection recommended the urgent replacement of our central lead valley due to significant splits letting water into the church. We have water staining on the ceiling and in wet weather need to have buckets out to catch the drips.*
- If you are unable to use part of the church because repairs are needed, say so e.g. *We are currently unable to use this part of this church, which means we can't hold our weekly café/knit and natter etc.*
- If this project is essential to keep your church building open to all, say so.
- If the repair has been needed for some time and your QI reports show it worsening, say so.

EOI tips

Keep it simple – don't be afraid to state the obvious – use the 'key terms'

Who will benefit?

- Specifically state which groups use your church building and which groups you work with – they all benefit from it being in good repair.
- Where these groups include disadvantaged or under-represented groups, say so.
- If you provide or host a specialist service that means people in need from outside your parish are reached, say so.
- If your church will be able to be open to the public more as a result of your project, say so.
- A wide group of people will also benefit – local residents, wider community, school children, visitors etc.

Why should Historic England support this project?

- Explain why their funding is vital.
- Tell them about deprivation levels and community needs in your parish.
- If you wouldn't be able to finance the repairs without this, say so – tell them about your income and expenditure.
- If you don't have the capacity to carry out other fundraising, say so.
- Describe any non-financial benefits from Historic England input e.g. expertise on dealing with moisture ingress to the tower, or making heritage more inclusive.

Key terms

Try to include these (where relevant)

- Helping people benefit from the heritage/the historic environment.
- Improving civic pride, prosperity, wellbeing.
- Future sustainability.
- Safeguarding.
- Essential/necessary repairs.
- Keeping historic places of worship in use.
- Places of worship as community spaces.
- Reducing future repair costs.
- Deprivation – high need.

- Community need/benefit.
- Urgent.
- Cost effective.
- Deliverable.
- Improving useability of the building.
- Risk of loss of heritage.

4. FAQs

What we know

- Your church must be used for worship a minimum of 6 times per year to be eligible.
- Professional fees and surveys related to eligible capital works can be funded.
- You cannot claim back money you have already spent on professional fees.
- VAT on eligible works and costs can be funded where it is not reclaimable – see [ccb_zero-rated_vat_for_churches.pdf](#)
- Projects already underway are generally not eligible – except for in Year 1 where there is funding available to projects that lost out on LPWGS funding. Email PWRF@historicengland.org.uk if this applies to you.

- You can apply for funding for a discrete package of eligible works as part of a bigger project, as long as delivery of this package is not contingent on obtaining funding from elsewhere.
- You can reapply if you are unsuccessful.
- If you are awarded a grant, you will get support and guidance from Historic England to help you deliver your project.
- You can apply for more than one place of worship – but will need to make separate applications.
- You only need estimated costs at EOI stage.

Key messages

- If you've got over £10,000 worth of repairs needed – get an Expression of Interest in!
- This initial year of funding is likely to be the least competitive - £23m needs to be spent by the end of March 2027.
- Projects that can be completed quickly might be prioritised in the first year of funding.
- If your project needs Faculty permission – and you don't have this already – get in touch with us asap and consider applying for a grant in a later round.
- If your project needs List B permission – and you don't have this already – also get in touch with us sooner rather than later.
- Don't leave it until the last minute to apply – the Historic England website has been struggling at peak times

- In answering the key EOI questions, try to include:
 - Deprivation and community needs
 - How the building is/will be used for the community and/or work you do with those impacted by deprivation
 - Public access to your church as a heritage asset
 - Your funding position and capacity for raising money for repairs
 - The urgency of repairs
 - What will happen if they don't give you funding e.g. water will start damaging the highly significant interior, we will have to stop our toddler group...
 - The capacity of the PCC/others involved to deliver repairs on time and in budget

Answers to some FAQs

- Projects already underway are generally not eligible – except for in Year 1 where there is funding available to projects that lost out on LPWGS funding. Email PWRF@historicengland.org.uk if this applies to you.
- Redecoration works are not eligible.
- The grant is for gross costs.
- The conservation of objects, such as organs, can be included where it relates to repairs but only as a small proportion of the overall project
- Heating replacement would count as improvement and therefore must be a smaller proportion of a broader repair project. Given the tight timeframes, if you are approaching a new heating project 'fresh', we would advise that you are unlikely to be ready to apply this year.

- The DAC is unable to provide Project Management support in its role as an advisory body. We would suggest approaching your Church Architect if you require this level of support. The Church Buildings Office will provide support on the application and permission process for works.
- You can apply again if unsuccessful. You can apply for multiple projects across multiple years.

A list of FAQs on the Historic England website is being updated as more questions arise – see <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/grants/what-we-fund/places-of-worship-renewal-fund/#FAQ>