



Our Places of Living

A guide for churches
on making the most
of heritage buildings
for community
activities



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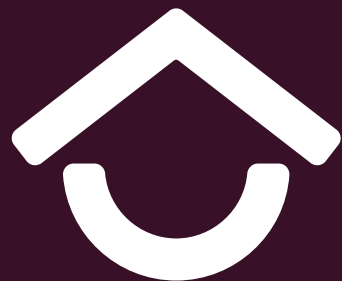


In the UK, we have heritage buildings in thousands of communities in the form of local churches.

Heritage buildings have a significant impact on our wellbeing¹.

These spaces may be historic or relatively modern but they all hold a cultural value that means they are places to be celebrated and preserved.

This guide summarises key insights from research carried out by ChurchWorks and funded by Historic England into how **churches can use their heritage to have a positive impact on the wellbeing of their local communities.**



Making the most of heritage

Know Your Strengths

What do you currently offer to the community?

Making the most of your heritage starts with being aware of what you already do in your community. Reflecting on these questions is a good place to start:

- What community outreach activities are you running, or have the desire to run?
- Where is your church located in your town e.g. in the town centre, by a school, by a park?
- What are the gifts and passions of your volunteers?
- What other organisations do you have relationships with already?

You could also host a community consultation with local community leaders and organisations to discuss what the community needs and how the church space can be part of the solution.



What makes your heritage space valuable?

You can also reflect on whether there are particular aspects or features of your building that are valued by your community.

Location

Heritage buildings are often in central places

Familiarity and belonging

Many people feel a connection to local churches through christenings, weddings and school services

Beauty

High ceilings, stained glass and wonderful art are things people often value about church buildings

Peacefulness

Churches are one of the few buildings that are available for sitting quietly

Historic Interest

Your building is part of the story of your community and the historical events that have shaped it

Understand

Understanding your heritage

It might be that you don't know much about your building or surrounding area. Identify a volunteer or local student who might be interested in doing some research on physical attributes of the building, history of the worshipping community, and the history of the community.

Understanding your community

Consider how others might feel about your community space:

1. Put yourself in the shoes of different people in your town (e.g. older people, parents with children, those lacking trust of faith institutions, people with disabilities).
2. Think about what they might think and feel as they arrive at the outside of your building. What might the barriers be to them coming inside with confidence, or at all?
3. What small changes can you adopt to make the first step into your space easier? For example, consider signage that emphasises a warm welcome for everyone or, having a volunteer at the door welcoming people and helping them up the stairs etc.



Innovate

Telling the story

Think about how you might be able to share the story of your heritage space.

Examples from other churches include:

- Create a gallery area in your church with photos and stories for people to look at.
- Create a booklet that guides people through your space, providing them with key information about the building.
- Create a slideshow that you can put on during community activities that gives people a bit of the history of your church.
- Create signage outside to encourage people to come in and find out more of your story.
- Explore the options of storytelling through having community sharing sessions or talks where local residents or local historians share stories of the local history.



Weave in heritage

How can you embody your heritage in the activities that you offer?

Some examples from other churches include:

- Explore the reasons for your church being established or the values you hold and how these could be embodied in activities, for example, the National Musicians Church (Holy Sepulchre London) offer tea and cakes while music students perform a weekly lunchtime concert.
- Consider hosting a 'Victorian games day' or traditional fair that reflects the age of your building.
- Provide art materials and take inspiration each week from a different element of the physical building.
- Create cards with guided trails that take people around the building and outside space and encourage them to reflect or pray at different parts of the space.

Consider how you can bring heritage into your existing activities.

For example if you run a coffee morning, you could integrate a talk from a local historian. Think about how you want to sensitively integrate faith. **Gardens, Dining Rooms and Kitchens** by Tim Smith was recommended by our workshop participants.



Adapting buildings

Consider how you can make your space cosy and flexible. You could section it using storage crates on wheels, curtains or room dividers. Find plants, soft furnishings and standing or table lamps to create a restful space.

The Crossing the Threshold Toolkit² is a helpful resource to guide you in the process of adapting a church building for wider community use.



Demonstrate your value

Impact Measurement

In order to access funding opportunities for your historic building, it's important that you can demonstrate your value to the local community.

Gathering quantitative data is particularly important:

- Record the number of visitors who come to your space.
- How many on average come to an activity?
- What is the total across a month or a year?
- Have you seen an increase across the year?
- Record the number of volunteer hours given to your community activities.
- Consider producing a short survey to gather your visitors' experiences of the space. You could also create a 'suggestions box' for people to input into how the space is used.
- Use the National Churches Trust's House of Good: Local calculator to find out the social and economic value of your church³.

Case Studies

Real life stories also help build the picture of the value of your space. You may hear anecdotes and stories from your visitors or your volunteers.

Get into the practice of writing them down and ask for consent for them to be shared in funding applications. Stories that illustrate transformation in the individual, for example in wellbeing or engagement with community activities are particularly useful.



Building Relationships

Identifying key partners

There are lots of partners who may value using your space.

You can also charge these partners reasonable rates to use the space, enabling you to reinvest into the building and your activities.

Other local community groups such as scouts, peer support groups, or hobby groups.

You could put up a poster on your door and on local noticeboards to advertise the use of your space.

Other local charities

You can find your local community infrastructure organisation through NAVCA⁴. Through getting in touch with them, you can connect with other organisations in your local area who may benefit from using your space, such as parenting support groups, sports and art clubs for disabled people, and food sharing schemes.

Social Prescribing Link Workers (SPLW)

SPLWs may be interested in using your space to host drop-ins. Use ChurchWorks' 'How-to' guide⁵ to explore this.

Health and Care Professionals

You could get in touch with your GP surgery to offer your building as a space to run community drop-in services, for example vaccine clinics, or blood pressure checks. You can also offer your space or activities to be used by their Neighbourhood Health Team.

Community Hubs & Family Hubs

You could develop your space to become a community hub. The resources from the Christian Community Hub Movement⁶ could help with this. You could also explore offering activities as part of your local Family Hub. The ChurchWorks Family Hub Toolkit⁷ offers support on this.

Clarity and consistency are key in building partnerships.

Be clear on what space you have to offer, where you are located, the types of people who might find your space accessible, the charge for using the room, and how you or volunteers could be involved. Make sure you know who is responsible for safeguarding in the partnership and be clear on what explicitly religious content might be offered as part of the activity.

Get to know other church and faith leaders in your area and discuss how you might signpost well to each other and avoid duplicating activities.

Our workshop attendees also suggested getting in touch with your local councillor as they can help you connect with other local groups and be an advocate for your role in the community.





Fundraising

Key funding opportunities

Sign up to the Warm Welcome website⁸ for free access to funding resources and a directory of available funds.

The National Churches Trust⁹ have a directory of relevant funds for historic churches. The Heritage Funding Directory¹⁰ may also be helpful.

Key grant making bodies to explore are National Churches Trust Grants¹¹, National Lottery Heritage Fund¹².

Retrofitting and energy saving

Historic England¹³ has advice pages on improving energy efficiency in your historic building.

Your denomination may have their own Net Zero plan to offer support for example, the Church of England has Net Zero Officers¹⁴ and the Methodist Church has webpage for Historic Churches and Climate Change¹⁵.

Effective fundraising

If you want to learn more about effective fundraising, we recommend our ChurchWorks Accelerate Wellbeing webinar on 'Effective Fundraising' with Jonathan Buckerfield.



Footnotes

1. historicengland.org.uk/research/heritage-counts/heritage-and-society/mental-health
2. hereford.anglican.org/crossing-the-threshold-toolkit
3. nationalchurchestrust.org/houseofgood-local
4. navca.org.uk/find-a-navca-member
5. theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/HowToGuide_FaithLeaders.pdf
6. christiancommunityhubs.uk
7. churchworks.org.uk/family-hubs-toolkit
8. warmwelcome.uk
9. nationalchurchestrust.org/get-support/buildings-maintenance/support-organisations
10. heritagefundingdirectoryuk.org
11. nationalchurchestrust.org/get-support/grants
12. heritagefund.org.uk/funding
13. historicengland.org.uk/advice/find/a-z-publications
14. churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/contact-details-diocesan-environmental-officers-and-net-zero-carbon-officers
15. methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/conservation-listed-buildings/historic-places-of-worship-and-climate-change





Thank you to the churches who attended our workshop and fed into the creation of this booklet.

This guide is part of a research project carried out by ChurchWorks and funded by Historic England into how churches can use their heritage to positively impact the wellbeing of local communities. We call for greater recognition of the role of heritage churches in community wellbeing and for investment in their sustainability and integration into community services.