

Homeowners angered at prospect of having to pay for church repairs

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An archaic law left over from the reign of Henry VIII has caused anger in a Shropshire village after a number of households found out they could be liable for paying for repairs at their local church.

Notices informing residents that claims against their properties had been made by their local parochial church council has left villagers in Stottesdon reeling.

Michael and Eunice Evans, who are a third generation family to farm land in Stottesdon, told the *Shropshire Star* that the letter had caused great anxiety.

"It's not a very Christian thing to do at all," said Mrs Evans.

"Our families are rooted in Stottesdon and we've always supported the church, but we've been put off now. We feel badly let down because of the financial implications for us and future generations."

Mrs Evans added: "The notice we had was quite frightening and we've lost sleep over it."

Under ancient ecclesiastical law, chancel repair liability gives ancient churches the right to demand financial contributions towards repairs to its chancel from local property owners.

Since October 2010 the Government and the Charity Commission have enabled parochial church councils (the churches' charity trustees) to register chancel repair liability against affected property titles. Owners of properties with registrations against them are likely to see a fall in the value, or even saleability, of their property.

According to the Land Registry, properties in around 5,300 parishes in England and Wales are subject to chancel repair liability. Registration notices have recently been served on around 12,000 properties in around 250 parishes. Another 5,000 parishes that are eligible to do so have not registered any interests.

Elaine Hession, one of the organisers of a [local campaign against chancel repair liability](#) in Stottesdon, told the National Secular Society that she was shocked when the letter came through the post.

"We had no knowledge of this liability whatsoever so it came as a total shock to receive a Legal Notice from the Land Registry advising us that the local church were registering this claim against our property.

"In our correspondence with the Hereford Diocese, not once have they addressed the pain and suffering caused by this decision to register or expressed any regret for the distress this has caused. This has been one of the most stressful things we have had to deal with and has had a very negative impact on our health and happiness. I know the others affected here in Stottesdon feel the same."

Jonathan Hill, another resident whose home subject is to registration, said: "I am deeply distressed by the situation I find myself in. Behind every faceless Land Registry title number, of the properties that have had chancel repair liability registered against them, are ordinary people deeply affected by the registration against their home and property."

The National Secular Society has been actively campaigning for the abolition of chancel repair liability, and have involved parliamentarians and senior figures in the Ministry of Justice and the Church.

Stephen Evans, NSS campaigns manager, said: "Real hardship is being caused, and both the Government and the Church of England need to recognise this.

"Most people will acknowledge ancient churches are part of our heritage, but it is completely unfair that money for repairing them can be demanded from local property owners, often unconnected with the church. It's time this ancient law was consigned to the annals of history where it belongs and a fairer way found to preserve our common heritage."

A [petition](#) urging the Secretary of State for Justice Chris Grayling to abolish chancel repair liability can be signed at [Change.org](#).

[Please sign the petition to abolish chancel repair liability](#)

[Find out more about Chancel Repair Liability here](#)

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