

Government must not prop up the Church of England, says NSS

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The National Secular Society has urged the Government to allow the Church of England to find its own level of sustainability, in a response to a Government-led review.

The English Churches and Cathedrals Sustainability Review was commissioned by the Government in March 2016 to consider the challenges faced by Anglican church buildings and their long term sustainability.

Over 2000 Anglican churches have congregations of fewer than 10, and two-thirds of church buildings are in rural areas, home to just 20% of the population.

Attendance at Church of England services has plunged to its lowest level ever with official figures showing that only 1.4% of the population of England now attend Anglican services on a typical Sunday morning.

The Government's church buildings task force is seeking to explore "creative and innovative ways" of using available resources more effectively to ensure churches "continue to be an integral part of local life" while not increasing the overall level of Government funding.

Since 2014 the Government has allocated around £221 million to repairing places of worship, with the vast majority of the money going to the Church of England – despite it having estimated assets of over £20bn.

The survey asks whether the local community – whether they attend their local Church of England church or not – has a "responsibility" for the preservation or upkeep of church buildings, and asks what churches need to offer in order to be attractive as venues for wider events and ventures.

In a response to the Department for Culture, Media & Sport, which is coordinating the survey, the NSS said it would be wrong for the Government to excessively subsidise buildings if there was little local demand.

Churches are not ideal substitutes for community buildings, the Society said, and may prove alienating to some.

A spokesperson for the NSS said: "While there is a secular case for protecting buildings of cultural and historical significance, the Church of England is an extremely wealthy organisation which should not shirk its responsibility."

Arguing that the Review should not support claims that church buildings are unsustainable without wider financial and community support, the NSS pointed to the Churches' [assets](#) and [priorities](#), stating that: "If the Church chooses to continue to withdraw support in order to focus on mission and church growth, then it should expect to lose control of such assets – which may be of interest to some community, local government or private developers."

You can [respond to the English Churches and Cathedrals Sustainability Review here](#). The survey will close at noon on Tuesday 31st January.

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