

C of E wants unconditional government support for church repairs

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The National Secular Society has urged the government not to submit to a Church of England demand for at least £30m per year of unconditional financial support for church maintenance.

According to a [Church Times](#) report published on Friday, the outgoing head of the Church Buildings Council has asked for the money for "the repair and maintenance of listed church buildings".

Sir Tony Baldry claimed the government would soon need to decide "how the state gives some consistent, and regular, financial support towards the repair and maintenance of listed church buildings".

Responding to the call, CEO Stephen Evans said the NSS would write to ministers to urge them "to see the bigger picture and avoid giving in to Sir Tony Baldry's scaremongering".

"No institution can reasonably expect the government to give it unconditional financial support, and the Church of England should be no exception. Maintaining buildings of value is a legitimate aim, but the government must treat the C of E like any other wealthy institution which owns properties of value.

"The church is once again pleading poverty when in reality it has plenty of money which is often hidden within its labyrinthine financial structure. It already benefits from generous tax breaks and state support.

"It would be completely unacceptable for the government to submit to the church's demands for unneeded subsidies, particularly in times of austerity when public services are subject to cuts."

Earlier this year the NSS [urged](#) the government to allow the Church of England to find its own level of sustainability in response to a government-led review.

And in April the NSS [said](#) a government decision to fund minor repairs in Manchester and Suffolk was inappropriate given the C of E's wealth. Today *Church Times* has [reported](#) that this is one of two government-funded programmes for repairing places of worship which are currently underway. The schemes are worth £3m in total.

Baldry made his comments in an address to the C of E's [DAC conference](#) in Salisbury. The conference brings together committees which advise on the architecture of places of worship.

In 2014 Baldry [said](#) the government had been "incredibly generous" towards the church when it decided to give £30m extra per year to fund VAT on repairs to listed church buildings. In his latest speech he called on churches to lobby to ensure they did not have to pay VAT on such repairs after Brexit.

Since 2014 the government has allocated around £221m to repairing places of worship. The vast majority of the money has gone to the Church of England – despite it having estimated assets of

[over £20bn.](#)

The proportion of Brits who described themselves as 'belonging to the Church of England' fell to a [record low](#) in 2017, according to the most recent British Social Attitudes survey.

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