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Welsh Government

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# Strategic Action Plan for Historic Places of Worship in Wales

ACTION PLAN

 Cadw

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## Introduction

Places of worship occupy a special place in the historic environment of Wales. Many are fine buildings. No less than 3,000 places of worship are listed — including 214 at grade I — which demonstrates their architectural and historic significance. But the quality of their architecture and craftsmanship also reflects their importance in cultural life throughout Wales over centuries.

However, the sustainability of our historic places of worship across Wales is currently under threat for a number of reasons, including dwindling congregations, a reluctance to consider future options or the capacity to take them forward. At the moment, approximately 10 per cent of listed places of worship are at risk or vulnerable. This figure is based on current data from the all-Wales survey of the condition and use of listed buildings. However, without intervention, it is clear from the analysis of current trends that this figure will rise as more buildings fall out of regular use and the resources available to care for them diminish.

Despite the concerns about the increasing number of buildings becoming at risk, it should be recognised that many congregations across Wales are thriving and will continue to do so in the future.

The aim of this strategic action plan, therefore, is to find ways in which these cherished buildings can retain or renew their value at the heart of Welsh communities, with their significance sustained or enhanced. The plan should help support the management of change so that it is responsive to the breadth of value that buildings may have and allows a full range of options to be considered when identifying appropriate arrangements for future use and care. To this end, the focus of the action plan is on people and communities using, enjoying and looking

after our historic places of worship.

To achieve these outcomes, all stakeholders need to work together to promote the importance of this unique heritage and provide support for the congregations and communities who care for it. The action plan takes a cross-sector approach that brings together government, the denominations, other organisations and agencies, and individual communities which all have a role in caring for historic places of worship and an interest in their future. Discussions held with stakeholders have informed the development of this approach.

Although the priority for this plan is to secure a future for listed places of worship, we recognise the value of local heritage to local communities and the significance that unlisted buildings may hold. We also recognise that listed buildings may vary in the value they hold for local communities and their capacity for change may vary too. For example, a simple rural chapel may be less able to accommodate change or new uses than a large urban chapel with ancillary accommodation.

The action plan is intended to apply to all buildings whose primary use was a place of worship. It is not restricted by denomination or faith, or whether the building is in use or in need of a new purpose. It is intended to be applicable to any building of recognised value, which may include social and cultural value as well as architectural and historic significance.

The action plan is organised around the three themes of information and understanding, caring for buildings, and working with communities.

## Information and Understanding

Understanding the significance of individual historic places of worship helps people to enjoy and engage with them. Understanding their significance also informs the management of change.

Baseline data about condition, patterns of use and comparative value is needed when making strategic decisions about their future. A substantial body of information on both the value and the condition of historic places of worship already exists. Nevertheless, there are some gaps in our understanding (for example, late nineteenth- and twentieth-century buildings tend to be less understood than earlier buildings) and the information is not always brought together clearly. There is also a considerable body of available information about maintenance, care and adaptation. Making sure that this information is accessible to those who most need it, particularly at a congregational level, and in a form that supports sound decision-making should be a priority.

## Caring for Buildings

The focus of conservation is caring for buildings, securing their continuing role and a sustainable future — including through adaptation to accommodate new uses where necessary. Conservation also means making sure that their special qualities are protected, enhanced and enjoyed.

Existing arrangements for managing proposed change can work well, but are often reactive. In addition to these arrangements, the action plan promotes a collaborative approach to active asset management which will facilitate timely access to appropriate advice and guidance when considering the needs and options for the future of buildings. Successful conservation depends on people with the knowledge, resources and skills to care for buildings and maintain them in active

use so an important emphasis of the action plan is on building capacity through mentoring, guidance, networks and communication.

The action plan will promote greater consistency in decision-making, based on conservation principles that recognise the full range of heritage values and encourage sustainable management.

## Working with Communities

By their very nature, historic places of worship are a shared resource, but this can be undermined by pressures on their core users and barriers to access by new users. The action plan encourages inclusion, involvement and improved access to places of worship and the stories which bring them alive.

One important strand of activity is through faith tourism, which can bring significant benefits to local communities and the wider economy. The Welsh Government's Faith Tourism Action Plan, led by Visit Wales, was published in 2013. Continuing to widen access and to develop interpretation are two priorities for future activity.

Maintaining, conserving and sustaining buildings in active use for the future also depend on people using, enjoying and benefitting from them. This plan focuses on actions that support widening participation and involvement, or that add real value to existing activity; for example, by bringing stakeholders together to share and benefit from each other's experience.

## The Action Plan

The action plan takes a cross-sectoral approach to dealing with the challenges facing historic places of worship, drawing on experiences from elsewhere in the UK. Cadw will help to coordinate activity and help to deliver the action plan through focusing its resources on those issues where it can add most value, such as in the provision of advice and guidance and improving access to information. But, many actions can, and should, be taken forward by other partners.

As well as the specific measures highlighted in the action plan, Cadw will continue to support and advise those caring for historic places of worship through its normal course of business. Such work includes:

- offering advice and guidance, and pre-application discussions about cases concerning places of worship
- grants programme to help support places of worship most at risk; particularly focusing on projects that will keep buildings in use
- providing advice and guidance on listed buildings.

In addition, we recognise that key partners are already undertaking a range of day-to-day activities that will underpin this action plan. Information, advice and guidance are provided by a range of organisations such as the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW), the Welsh archaeological trusts (WATs), amenity societies, local authorities and denominations across Wales. There is also the vital contribution that organisations such as Ymddiriedolaeth Addoldai Cymru/Welsh Religious Buildings Trust and Friends of Friendless Churches make towards looking after our most important redundant places of worship. These activities, we hope, will continue regardless.

The action plan therefore focuses on new activities that will help retain historic places of worship as community assets at the heart of our communities. It will be implemented at a time when the new organisation, Sanctaidd, is emerging dedicated to supporting places of worship in Wales. This organisation follows from discussions with stakeholders coordinated by the National Churches Trust, the Church in Wales and Churches Tourism Network Wales. Its aims include:

- providing support and training in caring for Welsh places of worship
- raising money for Welsh places of worship and making grants to help give them a better future
- increasing public understanding and appreciation of Welsh places of worship
- acting as a conduit for knowledge sharing.

The new action plan and the establishment of Sanctaidd will complement each other.

The action plan identifies actions for the short, medium and longer term. It recognises that the problems facing historic places of worship have developed over a number of years and that some time will be needed in which to develop appropriate solutions. Therefore, it is not intended to be a 'task and finish' activity. We consider the first new action — the establishment of a forum — to be crucial to support the delivery of the action plan, monitor its progress and propose new actions as the need arises.

The action plan does not promote a 'one size fits all' approach to every difficulty faced by congregations and communities, but we hope that the approach it advocates has something to offer all those who are responsible for our places of worship.

Issue	Action	Lead	Partners	Priority (short, medium or long term)
<b>I. Information and Understanding</b>				
<b>Accessibility of Information</b>				
Accessible information is necessary to support general understanding and appreciation of places of worship, as well as good curatorial practice and sustainable management decisions. Scoping of the action plan has indicated that a significant amount of information is already available but that it is not necessarily easily accessible or pitched at the right level.	a) A forum representing all sectoral interests will be established to share information and best practice, review ongoing needs and help steer delivery of the action plan.	Sanctaidd	Cadw	S
	b) Cadw will improve access to information about historic places of worship by making list descriptions more easily and publically accessible.	Cadw		M
	c) Continue the exercise to synthesise information about individual assets to enable better understanding of the comparative significance of individual buildings and easier understanding of the connections between sites and buildings across Wales. As well as the RCAHMMW's existing work on chapels, there will be scope for other partners such as universities and amenity societies to support further work.	Cadw	RCAHMMW Amenity Societies WATs	L
	d) The Historic Wales portal will be developed as a single point of entry to records of places of worship.	RCAHMMW		S/M
	e) The National Monuments Record of Wales will be enhanced and the record of places of worship will be made publically available. This will include a focus on nineteenth- and twentieth-century places of worship and a review of twentieth-century listed places of worship.	RCAHMMW	Cadw	M
	f) A 'one stop shop' site will be developed to signpost information for those responsible for places of worship. It will be tailored to a range of needs from large denominations to individual congregations.	Sanctaidd	Sanctaidd Cadw Denominations	M
	g) Denominations will work with Cadw to identify further information needs and channels for dissemination to grass-roots level.	Denominations	Cadw	S

Issue	Action	Lead	Partners	Priority (short, medium or long term)
<b>2. Caring for Buildings</b>				
<b>Sustainable management</b>				
Historic places of worship need to be managed so that their significance and character is sustained but that new or supplementary uses can be identified and facilitated where appropriate. Currently practice is varied amongst denominations and congregations.	a) New guidance on understanding the significance of historic places of worship will be developed to support the management of change.	Cadw	RCAHMW	M
	b) Ecclesiastical Exemption in Wales will be reviewed and new guidance will be produced.	Cadw		M
Congregations often lack the capacity to respond to the challenges they face in maintaining places of worship	c) Exemplar models of best-practice responses by congregation-led projects will be identified and shared.	Cadw Sanctaidd	All	S
	d) A 'people' database will be established to support congregations and help them identify the expertise they need such as architects, project managers, mentors, congregations who have been through the process and found solutions.	Sanctaidd	Cadw Local authorities Denominations	S
	e) Greater hands-on support for congregations in the form of development officers will be explored, subject to availability of budgets.	Cadw Sanctaidd		M
<b>Redundancy</b>				
Better planning for the needs of buildings facing dwindling congregations is needed.	f) Denominations will be encouraged to undertake an audit of their current building stock to help identify important historic assets that will be at risk due to redundancy in the medium/ long term. This could be done centrally, where appropriate, or at a local level. Cadw will support this process by some making available information from the survey of the condition and use of listed buildings.	Denominations	Cadw Local authorities	S

Issue	Action	Lead	Partners	Priority (short, medium or long term)
	g) Pre-application discussions with local authorities will be encouraged when disposal of a building is proposed. Guidance to assist congregations and estate agents in marketing buildings for sale will be developed, building on existing factsheets produced by some local planning authorities.	Denominations	Cadw Local authorities WATs	M
	h) A tool kit or route map to support options appraisals will be developed to assist in the consideration of future uses for a building.	Cadw	All	M
	i) Guidance on asset management and disposal of buildings will be produced.	Cadw		M
Those organisations responsible for existing redundant places of worship are stretched and lack the resource to take on new buildings	j) Cadw will work with Ymddiriedolaeth Addoldai Cymru/ Welsh Religious Buildings Trust and Friends of Friendless Churches to review their acquisitions processes, future funding and sustainability.	Cadw	WRBT FOFC Denominations	S

### 3. Working with Communities

#### Sustainable management

Community engagement is vital to sustaining places of historic worship both in use and in alternative use. Often engaging local communities can be key to securing sustainable solutions for buildings.	a) Disseminate guidance and training materials produced by Visit Wales to assist and encourage access to visitors.	Visit Wales	Cadw Denominations WATs	S
	b) Encourage those responsible for places of worship to engage in the annual Open Doors programme.	Cadw		S
	c) Produce guidance to support congregations in 'marketing' the building as a useful asset for other community uses, including guidance on potential funding support	Sanctaidd	Cadw HLF	S



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