

## Churches Conservation Trust

### Summary

This paper accompanies a presentation from Loyd Grossman OBE (Chair of Trustees) and Crispin Truman (Chief Executive), of the Churches Conservation Trust. The paper provides background information to support members' discussion.

### Recommendations

That members note the report and use it to inform discussion following the presentations.

### Action

Subject to members' comments, officers to take forward suggested actions.

Contact Officer: Steve Skelton  
Phone No: 020 7664 3074  
Email: [steven.skelton@lga.gov.uk](mailto:steven.skelton@lga.gov.uk)

## Churches Conservation Trust

### Background

1. The Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) is a quango protecting historic churches at risk. It receives £3.16m per annum in grants from DCMS. It is constituted as a charity and has over a thousand volunteers involved in its work. They have, to date, saved over 340 buildings, which continue to attract more than 1.5 million visitors a year. The CCT estate is the largest single collection of historic churches in the country, ranging from the virtually untouched medieval in idyllic rural settings, to ornately impressive Victorian in busy town centres. It includes ten challenging inner urban churches, which will need new uses and significant funds to survive.
2. Local authorities play an important role in the work of the CCT. This is both through their statutory planning function, but also as community leaders and place-shapers, in bringing together and supporting coalitions of interest around specific conservation projects.

### Case Studies

3. The CCT and the LGA are both interested in preserving historic buildings through developing them in a manner which retains them as a unique part of our heritage, but which provides opportunities for their continued and active use by local groups. Some excellent examples of the CCT's work in this area are:
4. **St Pauls Church, Bristol**, where a redundant Grade 1 Gothic church was transformed into a circus school. St Paul's was one of the first major contemporary reuses for a church lead by The Churches Conservation Trust. Prior to its rescue St Paul's had stood empty for 15 years; derelict and vandalized. Over 14,000 people visited the church between 2007 and 2008, and the project has won a number of prestigious awards including the Georgian Group's 'Best Re-use of a Georgian Building' in 2005; a Europa Nostra diploma in 2006 and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors' Community Benefit Award 2007.
5. **All Souls Church, Bolton**, which has recently been awarded £3.3 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund to transform the currently redundant 19th-century building into a state-of-the-art facility providing training, education, youth activities, and health and welfare services to the local community. Restoration plans include taking out the existing pews and replacing them with a community centre, made up of two 'pods' that will sit within the church building. These innovative new structures will be the first of their kind in the UK, with high-level walkways giving people a unique perspective on All Souls' architecture and

stained glass windows. An area dedicated to the history of the building and the local area will give the town's diverse population an opportunity to explore and understand the church and its role within the community more fully.

## **Local Authority and LGA Engagement**

6. Following the presentations, there will be an opportunity to discuss the role of the CCT and its relations and engagement with local authorities. Members might wish to direct their discussion towards issues that include:
  - What are the unique characteristics of churches in relation to other historic buildings and heritage assets? And do these characteristics add or detract from the challenge of conserving churches?
  - CLG and the DCMS are currently developing a new Planning Policy Statement 15: planning for the historic environment, in conjunction with English Heritage. What would the CCT like the headline messages about councils' duties towards the historic environment be?
  - We have seen, in the St Paul's Church case study, how reimagining the use of historic buildings can be an excellent and sustainable means of preserving them. What is the relative importance in schemes such as this of a strong, visionary local leadership and access to funding? And given the current public spending prognosis, how can we support elected members to provide more of this leadership?
  - In the experience of the CCT, are Churches are given adequate and appropriate consideration in relation to other heritage assets?
  - How can the LGA assist the CCT in promoting positive success stories to our member councils?

## **Financial Implications**

7. None arising from this report.

## **Implications for Wales**

8. The remit of the Churches Conservation Trust extends only to England.

Contact Officer: Steve Skelton  
Phone No: 020 7664 3074  
Email: [steven.skelton@lga.gov.uk](mailto:steven.skelton@lga.gov.uk)