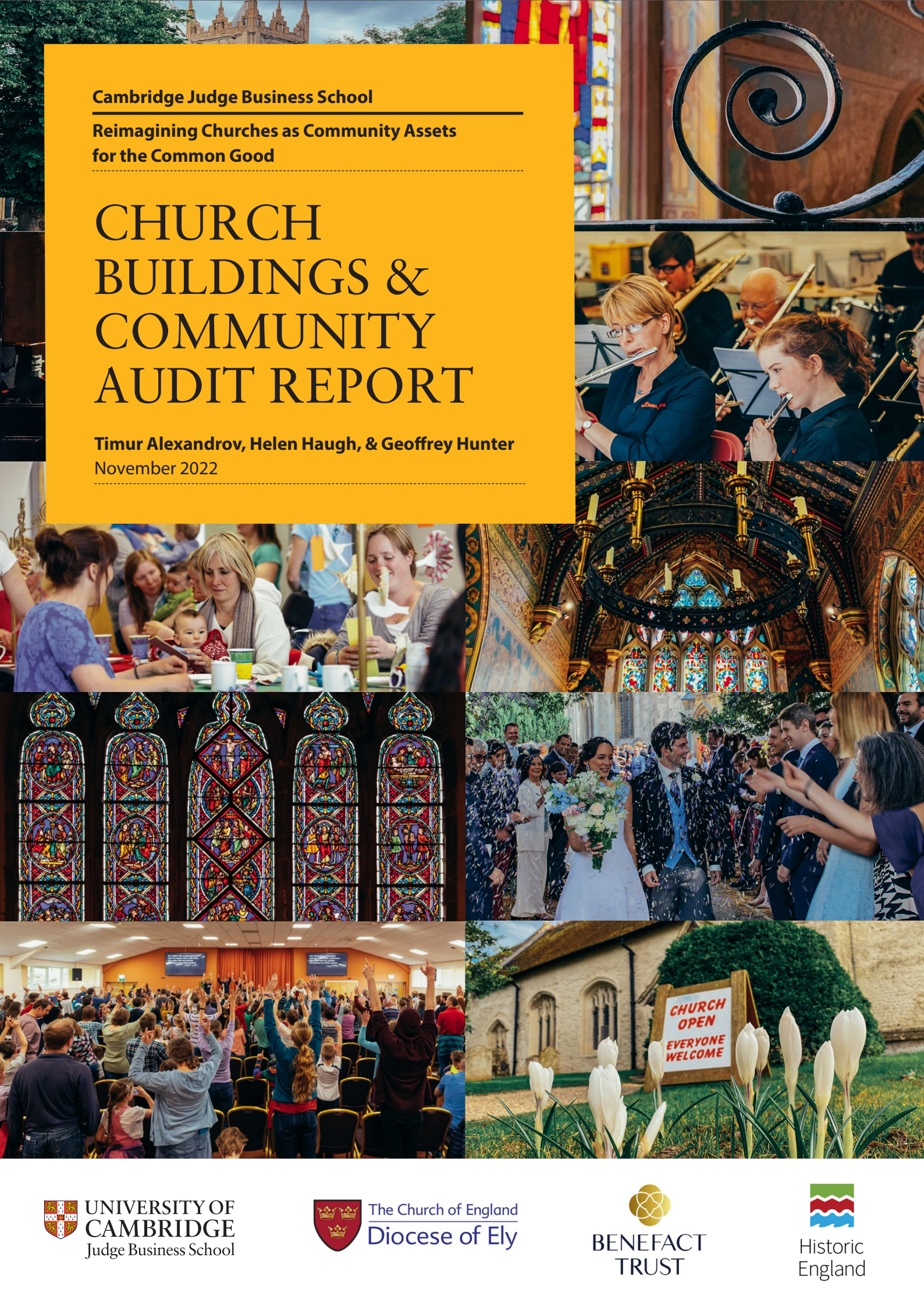


Cambridge Judge Business School

Reimagining Churches as Community Assets
for the Common Good

CHURCH BUILDINGS & COMMUNITY AUDIT REPORT

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This **Church Building and Community Audit Report** provides a summary of the findings, supplemented with information from the REACH Ely case studies, on church and community interaction, and community use of church buildings and church halls within the Diocese of Ely. The audit findings thus demonstrate the extent to which participating churches serve their local communities. The data shows that the majority of **churches value their church buildings as a space for religious worship, a quiet place for reflection and prayer, a setting for occasional offices, and a space for cultural events.**

An **Extended Audit Report** and Appendix will be available for download as separate documents.

Illustrations on the cover page (clockwise from top-left):

- *Tower of St Peter & St Paul church, Wisbech*
- *Interior décor at Holy Trinity, Hildersham*
- *Outdoor concert at St Mary, Bartlow (Photo by Bartlow church)*
- *Lantern and East window at Holy Trinity, Hildersham*
- *A wedding procession (Photo by Trumpington church)*
- *Church Open sign at St Andrew & St Mary, Grantchester*
- *Church Weekend away event at Christ Church Cambridge (Photo by Christ Church Cambridge)*
- *Stained glass window at St Mary, Feltwell*
- *Mothers of pre-schoolers meeting at St Mary & St Michael, Trumpington (Photo by Trumpington church)*

Illustrations on page 11 (clockwise from top-left, photo courtesy of churches):

- *Children choir at St Andrew, Histon*
- *Children's event at St Laurence, Foxton*
- *Bell-ringing at St Wendreda, March*
- *Concert at St Mary the Virgin, Feltwell*
- *Dance and Christmas events at Holy Trinity, Hildersham*
- *Cornerstone Café at St Philip, Cambridge*
- *Medieval Fair at Fen Ditton*

**Photography, design and typesetting by
Timur Alexandrov**



About REACH Ely

REACH Ely (Reimagining Churches as Community Assets for the Common Good) is a multi-partner research project that aims to help churches to engage with their communities and make fuller use of their church buildings.

The project is implemented by:

the Centre for Social Innovation, Cambridge Judge Business School and the **Diocese of Ely** with the generous support of **Benefact Trust** and **Historic England**.

Benefact Trust (<https://benefacttrust.co.uk>) is one of the UK's largest grant-giving charities that supports the repair, restoration, protection and improvement of church buildings, cathedrals and other places of Christian worship, especially where those changes support wider community use.

Historic England (<https://historicengland.org.uk>, officially the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England) is an executive governmental non-departmental public body that protects the historic environment of England by preserving and listing historic buildings, registering historic parks and gardens, scheduling ancient monuments, and advising central and local governments.

www.reachely.org



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INTRODUCTION

The research project 'Reimagining churches as community assets for the common good' (REACH Ely) was established by Cambridge Judge Business School and the Diocese of Ely with the support of Benefact Trust and Historic England. The REACH Ely project investigated how churches engage with their communities, how communities value church buildings, and the contribution that churches make to the common good.

The project investigated how communities valued the churches in their midst and sought to understand how such value could be used both to support the long-term sustainability of church buildings and help the church succeed as a Christian presence in every community.

The challenges facing communities in how they care for their church buildings are severe and growing. Looking to the future following the Covid19 pandemic, it is important that churches gain an understanding of how communities value and use church buildings, consider new uses for church buildings, and strive to be sustainable.

The Church Buildings and Community Audit (hereafter Audit) was designed to gather data on how church buildings are used for community activities. Since the national Covid-19 lockdowns (2020-21) stipulated that church buildings be closed to the public, the Audit gathered data on typical usage of church buildings prior to March 2020, and plans for post Covid-19 church buildings use.

The terminology used in the audit:

- *Church/Church building* – a physical structure used for formal public worship, weddings, funerals and baptisms, and community activities;
- *Church hall* – a venue belonging to the church, either attached or separate from the main church building, and used for mission and community activities;
- *Congregation* – a worshipping community.

¹ Church Buildings Review, 2015. http://www.hrballiance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/church_buildings_review_report_2015.pdf

² Church Buildings Review, 2015.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

75% of audited churches are located in rural communities, hence **the findings reflect the predominantly rural nature of the Diocese of Ely. 85% of audited church buildings are listed** either Grade I or II*, and 84.3% are categorised as ancient, tracing their origins to the period before AD 1500. 20% of audited church buildings have been extended and include facilities and auxiliary spaces; and 66% completed repairs in the year prior to the Audit (2018-19).

The Audit respondents reported that church buildings play a significant role in their communities. More than 75% noted that **closure of their church would have a devastating impact on their community**. Audit participants reported that **church buildings are most valued for:**

- providing rites of passage services that mark life; events, such as baptisms, marriages, and funerals (77.6%);
- being a place for religious worship (72.2%);
- offering a quiet space for reflection, thinking, and meditation (68.8%).

The Audit found that the number of services per week in 2019 was higher at urban churches when compared to rural churches, and **more than half of audited churches held between 2 and 4 services per month**. Concerning church leadership, **77.5% of services were led by clergy** and at 13.1% service leadership was shared by clergy and laity. In 4.5% of rural churches, 70% of services were led by laity. The average number of **volunteers involved in church governance is five**.

The Audit found that whereas almost **20% of churches are financially sustainable, approximately 33%** spend more income than they generate. **The principal sources of income are offertory**, donations, and Parochial Church Council (PCC) fundraising. The main expenditure categories are insurance, maintenance and repairs, and utilities. Although 50% of audited churches do not invest in marketing and communication, 25% produce a welcome booklet for visitors.

Concerning the daily use of church buildings, the Audit found that **75% of church buildings were used for community activities in 2019**, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. The **top five most frequently organised community activities are:** culture, e.g., art, music, theatre, dance, exhibitions, rehearsals, plays and concerts; fetes and festivals; religious educational visits by children; bellringing and organ-playing; and informal meetings, e.g., coffee morning, parent and toddler groups. Activities organised around culture, celebration, mission, skills and socialisation

are the most attractive to communities and generate the highest footfall (attended by more than 100 people). Less frequently organised **community activities (less than 4% of church buildings)** include homeless support, nursery and pre-school, sports events, farmers markets, blood donation, and debt counselling.

Post the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the audited churches plan to resume organising community activities, but with the recommended safety guidelines in place. However, 25% of audited churches remain undecided about the extent to which community activities will be resumed.

A major insight from the Audit is that **the absence of facilities, e.g., kitchen, washroom, and heating, is not an impediment** to the organisation of community activities. Notably, **35.6% of church buildings without facilities are used for community activities**.

The Audit data confirm that church success lies beyond financial performance and weekly worship attendance. To help churches reach out to communities **we recommend the following:**

- To learn from the experiences of churches that organise community activities with the highest community participation;
- To consider the provision of range of cultural, social, educational and skills community activities;
- To partner with local organizations, e.g., schools, and co-organise events for specific age groups, e.g., children;
- To increase the attractiveness of the church to younger people by exploring socially innovative community activities, e.g., farmers markets, IT clubs and sports activities;
- To encourage church community engagement by creating volunteering opportunities e.g., involvement in church marketing and communications, social media, heritage and history;
- To budget for church marketing and communication, e.g., to promote worship services, community activities and opportunities to view historic church artefacts;
- To explore how to use social media to engage with communities, e.g., Twitter, Instagram, and ExploreChurches.org;
- To explore co-marketing and communication opportunities with local organisations, e.g., with a community or village group;
- To consider publishing a welcome booklet or guidebook for visitors to their community;
- To investigate opportunities to increase church building environmental sustainability, e.g., green tariffs, and EcoChurch certification.

METHODOLOGY

The REACH Ely project began with a literature review of church and community engagement, and church buildings and their use. Field visits to Diocese of Ely churches were conducted and the data employed to produce **forty case studies** (2019-2021) of diverse church experiences in renovating and envisioning their buildings as missional and social spaces. Drawing on the case study data, the project team designed the Audit to collect information on church context, church building condition and use. The Audit was completed by the PCC or equivalent church management group.

Design

The audit consisted of 80 questions about churches, communities and church buildings, and 31 questions about church halls. Accordingly, the questions were arranged into two main sections relating to church buildings and church halls, and covered themes concerning **church context, sustainability, financial performance, worship and other services, and the community use of church buildings pre and post Covid-19 pandemic**. The audit required about an hour to complete, and respondents were advised to use data from their 2019 church accounts, church services register, and the most recent quinquennial report.

Data Collection and Analysis

The web-based audit was conducted by utilising Qualtrics software. A paper version was provided for participants unable to submit an online version. Both versions of the audit were distributed via the diocese website. The data was collected from 18th December 2020 until 31st May 2021.

The responses were analysed using Qualtrics Report analytic tools, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel. The responses to the open questions were analysed by the research team.

Response Rate

From 334 churches in the Diocese of Ely, we received 244 responses, thus **the overall response rate was 73%**.³ Some questions have responses from fewer churches.

50% of audited churches (122 churches) represent communities with more than 1 000 residents, and **75% are located in rural villages**.

Approximately 83% of audited churches are **listed buildings**,⁴ the majority are Grade I (115 churches, 47%), 93 are Grade II* (38%), 27 are Grade II (11%) and 9 are ungraded (4%).



³ Response rates for a previous church building survey reached 55% (Source: Diocese of Ely). Academic research of response rates in organisation studies shows that the average response rate in surveys utilising data collected from individuals was 52.7%, while the average response rate in surveys utilising data collected from organisations was 35.7% (Source: Baruch, Y., & Holtom, B. 2008. Survey response rate levels and trends in organisational research. *Human Relations*, 61: 1139–1160).

⁴ The listed status signifies a church building's special architectural and historic interest. Rare old churches with exceptional interest (only 2.5% of listed buildings in the UK) are Grade I listed. Grade II* are particularly important building and the majority are Grade II of special interest (Historic England, 2021. Listed buildings, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/what-is-designation/listed-buildings>).

KEY FINDINGS

Community activities in church buildings

- 75% of audited churches held community activities in 2019
- Culture, celebration, mission, skills and socialisation are the most frequently organised community activity types in church buildings
- On average a church offers four types of community activities

Church buildings and missional success

- Church congregations in urban, suburban and market town communities are more demographically, ability and minority ethnically diverse than those in rural communities.
- The laity are important partners in the delivery of worship services in rural churches
- On average, five volunteers are involved into church governance per month

Sustainability of church buildings

- Almost 20% of churches are financially sustainable and approximately 33% spend more income than they generate
- The main heating fuel sources are electricity, gas and oil
- 44% of churches have switched to LED lighting technology and 16% have secured Eco Church Certification

Contribution of church buildings to common

- On average, between 3 and 5 volunteers per church are involved in cleaning, governance, hosting and fundraising activities
- The provision of social support, e.g., counselling, mental health, anxiety, loneliness, isolation, is delivered by 7.2% of audited churches
- 25% of audited churches have an active Friends of the Church group, and 23% of churches are considering establishing such a group

Church buildings as community assets

- More than 90% of church buildings are in a location with an alternative venue for community activities
- Nearly a quarter of churches receive regular financial support towards their running costs from their civil parish council
- 75% of respondents consider that church closure would have a significant or devastating impact on local community

Impact of Covid-19 on community use of church buildings

- 90% of audited churches are able to comply with social distancing guidelines
- Approximately 85% of audited churches are confident that they will resume their most popular community activities
- The number of churches open on request increased from 4% to 15% after the Covid-19 lockdowns

Church marketing & communication

- The top three social media used by churches are their own website, A Church Near You portal, and Facebook
- Rural churches partner with local organizations to share website facilities
- 25% of churches produce a guide book for visitors

CHAPTER 1. COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES IN CHURCH BUILDINGS

This section presents findings about community activities organised in church buildings and church halls during 2019. The data helps assess the social value of church buildings to their communities. The audit listed 29 community activities tailored to different demographic groups that help build and maintain the relationship between the church and community.

Organisation of Community Activities

From 242 audited churches, **182 churches (75.2%) reported hosting community activities in their church buildings during 2019**. Scaling this figure for the total number of churches in the Diocese of Ely (182 from 334 churches) equates to 54.5% of churches. **Among rural churches, 132 (72.9%) organised community activities.**

To identify the most frequently organised community activities, we asked about specific activities organised in church buildings.⁵ **The top five most frequently organised community activities in church buildings are:**

- Culture, e.g., art, music, theatre, dance, exhibitions, rehearsals, plays and concerts (126 churches, 69.2%);
- Celebration, e.g., Fetes, community festivals and fairs, e.g., flower festival, Christmas Fair (122 churches, 67%);
- Mission, e.g., Religious educational visits by children (115 churches, 64.2%);
- Skills, e.g., bell-ringing and organ playing (107 churches, 58.8%);
- Socialisation, e.g., coffee mornings, over 60s clubs, parent and toddler groups (85 churches, 46.9%).

In addition, 34 churches reported holding 'other' types of community activities not listed in the audit. We grouped these into seven clusters (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Other community activities held in church buildings. Source: Question 74.⁶

Groups of activities	Number of other activities (n=34 churches)
Community and charity	13
Social and Private	11
Entertainment and Art	8
Heritage and history	9
Children and youth	6
Religious-related	5
Hobby	4

On average a church offers four types of community activities (mean = 4.25). The highest recorded number of community activities is 17.

Community activities that generate highest community engagement (attendance by more than 100 people) are: (number of churches):

- Celebration, e.g., Fetes and festivals (57);
- Culture, e.g., art and music performances (40);
- Mission, e.g., religious educational visits by children (43);
- Non-religious educational visits by children (16);
- Socialisation, e.g., coffee mornings and parent-and-toddler groups (8);
- Celebration, e.g., Private family social events (8).

⁵ The list of activities was derived from REACH Ely case studies and newsletters produced by churches participated in case studies.

⁶ Further in the text all references relate to questions from the Audit.



“The Grade I listed building stands centrally in the village and is a major historical feature in the landscape. It is used for festival services by the primary school. The church is filled to capacity at festivals with 300 plus in the congregation bringing the wider village community together. The congregation is multi-generational and provides pastoral outreach in people’s homes. Outreach from the congregation includes online groups for meditation and worship and a cafe youth group.”



“The community was very sorry that the church was closed in 2019 and pleased when it re-opened just before Covid hit. Many see [the Church] “as their church”, but don’t attend other than weddings and funerals. A familiar story...”

“Village enjoys large funerals and the use of an open churchyard. Very little interest in religion.”

—Audit participants’ comments



Community Activities in Church Buildings Without Facilities

An important audit finding is that 87 churches without kitchen or washroom facilities (35.6%), organise community activities.

Figure 2 presents the number of churches without facilities that organise community activities attended by more than 50 people in 2019.

Figure 2. Community activities organised in churches without kitchen and washroom facilities.

Source: Questions 19, 20, 47, 48, 52, 58, 63.

Top five community activities in a church building	No kitchen			No washroom facilities			Total respondents
	Did not organise	Organised	More than 50 people attended	Did not organise	Organised	More than 50 people attended	
Art, music, theatre, dance	22	37	25	22	33	23	182
Fete, or other community festival or fair	23	36	27	19	36	24	182
Religious educational visits by children	25	31	14	27	27	13	179
Bell-ringing and organ-playing	31	28	2	29	26	2	182
Informal meetings	45	13	0	39	15	1	181

We asked about the impact of a heating system on the organisation of community activities. Only a small fraction of churches (between 1 and 2%) did not hold community events because of the lack of heating.

Less frequently organised community activities (at less than 2% of churches), are debt counselling services, blood donation, farmers markets, sports, and nursery and pre-school activities.

The two major challenges to organising community activities are:

- Difficulty in attracting young people (63.5% of audited churches);
- Difficulty of recruiting new volunteers (77.2% of audited churches).

Community Activities in Church Halls

From 243 churches, 60 reported having a church hall.

The five most frequently organised community activities in a church hall are:

- Celebration, e.g., private events (51 church, 85%);
- Socialisation, , e.g., coffee mornings, over 60s clubs, parent/toddler groups (48 church halls, 80%);
- Culture, e.g., art, music, theatre, dance, exhibitions, lessons, or concerts (39 church halls, 65%);
- Healthy living support, e.g., slimming groups, personal fitness, yoga, meditation (35 church halls, 58.3%);
- Celebration, e.g., fetes, Christmas tree/Community/Flower/Scarecrow festivals (33 church halls, 55%).

In comparison with community activities held in church buildings, there is a **similar percentage of culture, celebration and socialisation community activities**. The distinctive community activities organised in church halls are private family events (85%) and healthy living and fitness activities (58.3%).

As in church buildings, the **less frequently organised community activities at church halls** are blood donation, post office, farmers market, family history, genealogical research support, and debt counselling services.



1st row: Interiors of St John's March church hall.

2nd row: Entrance and interior of St George's Chesterton church hall, Cambridge.

CHAPTER 2. CHURCH BUILDINGS AND MISSIONAL SUCCESS

This section presents summary findings about congregation size, and the church use by different demographic groups. The findings in this section help understand the spiritual value of church buildings. The missional success of the church goes beyond financial sustainability and worship attendance to include the relationship between a church and its community, and the value that community members attribute to the church, making the church both the site for worship and a tool for mission.

Church Congregation

130 churches (53.8%) host between 2 and 4 services per month, and the frequency of worship services differs between rural and urban churches. Five out of seven urban churches hold either 2 or 3 services per week, the same frequency is found at 30 of 181 rural churches (16.6%). Whereas more than a quarter of rural churches hold regular weekly worship services (28.7%), 34.3% host either 2 or 3 services per month.

The estimated congregation at main formal public worship on a typical Sunday in 2019 is the following:

- The mean average of audited churches is 39 people;
- 17 churches (7%) host more than 100 people;
- 24 churches (9.8%) host less than 10 people;
- 3 churches host 5 or fewer people.

The **demographic profile** of typical Sunday worship attendance shows that, on average, a congregation comprises under 18 (5 people), age 65 and older (19 people), and age 18 to 65 (17 people).

Demographic Diversity and Church Building Use

Analysis of the audit data finds that demographic diversity is greater in churches in suburban, urban and market towns than churches in rural and other locations.

Churches in rural locations in particular reported difficulties in engaging with young people and people with disabilities.

Audited rural churches reported that 2.8% of minority ethnic groups regularly attend weekly church services and 25% of rural churches are used by other Christian denominations.

Involvement of Laity in Worship, Mission and Governance

There is increasing acknowledgement of the importance of involving **the laity in church life** and governance. With the guidance and support of the clergy, members of the laity share an “equally valued role” in building the church,⁷ and spreading the principles of the Christian faith into work, schools, and homes, as well as taking part or leading some of the sacred church rituals.

On average 77.5% of worship services are led by the clergy (236 churches responded to the question) and **13.1% of church services are led by clergy and laity together**.

At 25% of rural churches (44 of 176 churches) all services are led by the clergy.

Other variations in sharing service leadership with laity include:

- Equal division of services between clergy and lay people was reported by 28 rural churches (15.9%);
- Most of clergy-led services (70% of services) were reported by 27 rural churches (15.3%);
- Most of services led by laity (70% of services) were reported by 8 churches (4.5%).

The data on volunteers also records **the involvement of lay volunteers in church governance each month**:

- On average, five volunteers are involved in church governance;
- Across 239 churches, the total number of volunteers involved in church governance is 1 281 people;
- On average between 3 and 5 volunteers per church are involved in works such as cleaning, hosting, fundraising and other activities.



*From left to right: Group activity at St Andrew's Caxton; Event for older adults at St Martin's, Cambridge
(Photo credit: St Andrew's and St Martin's churches).*

⁷ Church of England, <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/diocesan-resources/ministry/developing-lay-ministries>

CHAPTER 3. SUSTAINABILITY OF CHURCH BUILDINGS

This section presents summary findings about the structural, financial and environmental sustainability of church buildings. Sustainability is particularly important concerning ancient church buildings that exemplify the timeless role of parish churches as well as contemporary places for mission.

The majority of audited churches (206 out of 244) are categorised as ancient, parts of some church buildings were constructed before 1200 (31.1%) or between 1200-1500 A.D. (53.2%). The condition of such ancient buildings can be fragile and at risk of decay.

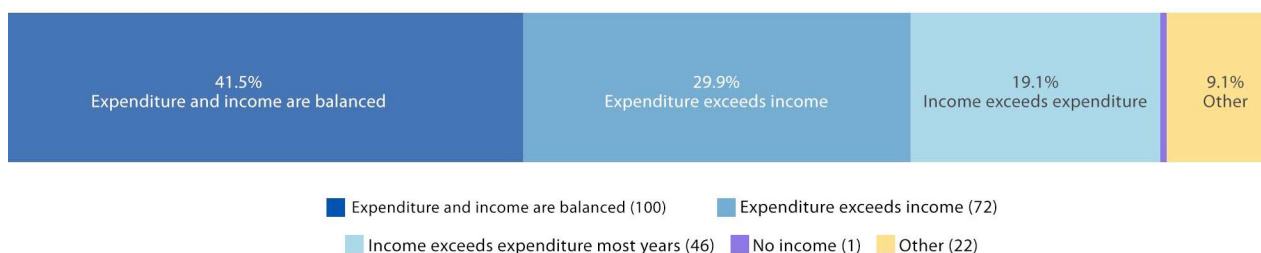
Figure 3 shows that **two major problems with the condition of church buildings** are visible damp (46.2% of churches) and water ingress (33.3%).

Figure 3. The condition of church buildings. Source: Question 12.

Church building condition	Yes %	n	No %	n	Don't know %	n	Total churches
New cracks appeared in the walls in the past 3 years	21.2%	51	75.8%	182	2.9%	7	240
Visible damp or green patches on the internal walls	46.2%	111	52.9%	127	0.8%	2	240
Water enters the church building at high level or through the roof	33.3%	81	64.2%	156	2.4%	6	243
Asbestos is known to be present in the church building	10.1%	24	73.9%	176	15.9%	38	238

60.7% of churches reported that they had made repairs in the year prior to the survey (2019), and 39.7% had made repairs more than three years ago. Church building maintenance, repair and improvements are substantial financial outlays, and impact on **church financial sustainability.** Figure 4 illustrates the period of 2014-18.

Figure 4. Financial sustainability of churches. Source: Question 40.



Whereas 19.1% of churches reported that they were financially sustainable, **30% reported an excess of expenditure over income.** The main sources of income are offertory collections (at services as entered in service registrar) and donations (money given by church visitors in the wall safe or via the card reader).

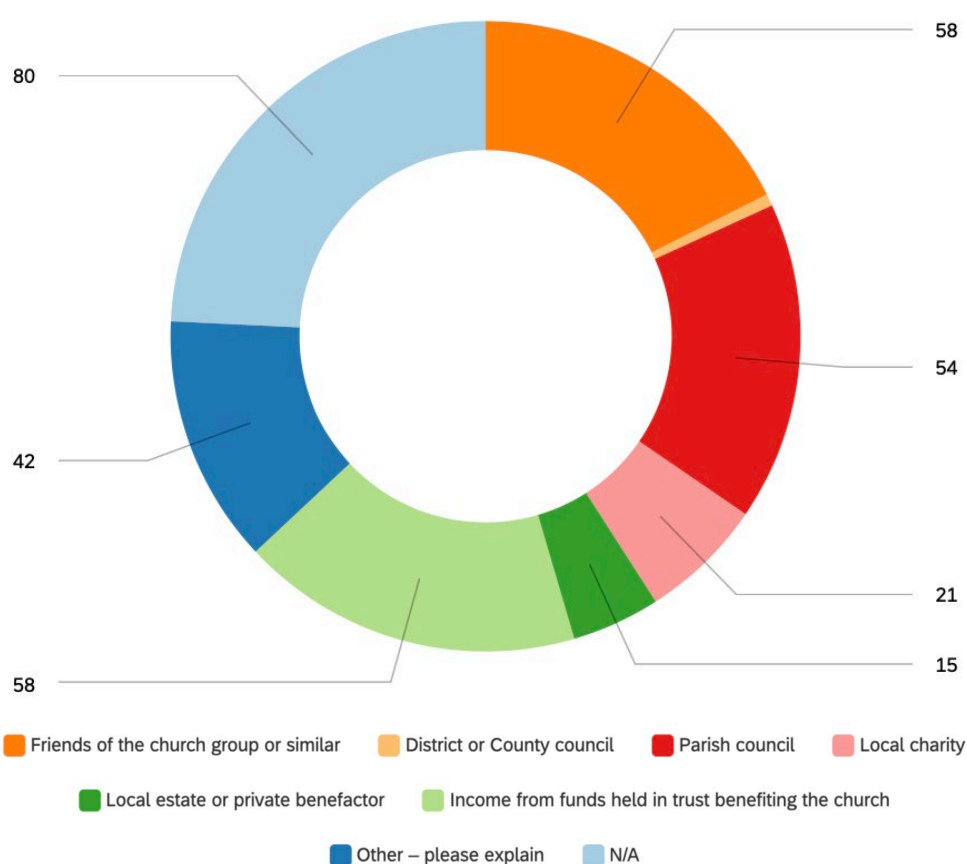
The analysis of income and organisation of community activities revealed that that the **churches that receive the largest offertory collections and donations organise the most community activities.**

Analysis of church expenditure found that **insurance, maintenance, and utilities** were the main costs. While 38.8% of audited churches reported that they invested less than £500 per year on **church marketing and communication**, e.g., website and posters, **46.8% did not budget for such costs.**

To meet their costs, churches can seek support from a range of public, private and third sector organisations. Our findings illustrate (Figure 5) that churches receive regular financial support from a Friends of the Church group (24.1%) or a Trust benefiting the church (24.1%).

Figure 5. Number of churches (N=241) receiving regular financial support from various organisations.

Source: Question 36.



Church Building Heating and Fossil Fuel

The heating system in use is a key factor in the environmental impact of a church building. From 244 audited churches, ten church buildings are **without heating**, and 80 churches (33.2%) reported **inadequate heating.**

In terms of the **primary heating fuel source**, the most used sources of heating are electricity (42.9%), gas (36.5%), oil (17.6%). To contribute to energy saving, 44% of the audited churches have switched to the LED lighting technology. **More than a quarter of churches (26.3%) are signed up for a green tariff**, and three are early adopters of solar-electric technology and have installed panels on their church buildings.

In addition, 26 out of 239 churches are **working towards applying for the EcoChurch Bronze award.**

CHAPTER 4. CONTRIBUTION OF CHURCH BUILDINGS TO THE COMMON GOOD

The contribution of churches to the common good is associated with achieved, shared and beneficial outputs for the wellbeing of community members as a result of collective participation.⁸ In this section we present summary findings about community appreciation of church buildings, church volunteering and Friends of the Church Groups.

We enquired about **social support activities** that churches provide, such as counselling and advice, supporting people with mental health problems, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and isolation. We found that only **7.2% of churches provide these activities** organised by congregation members (13 out of 181 churches responding to this question). In church halls, the proportion of social support provision was higher than in church buildings – 21.7% of churches (13 out of 60 respondents) reported organising counselling and support in their church halls.

Concerning the regularity of church building use pre-Covid-19 by older adults (65 years and above), **46.6% of churches reported that older adults used the church on a regular weekly or monthly basis.** **The use of church buildings by young people** (under 18 years) is lower at 19.2%.

To understand the how communities value the church building in their locality, we asked audit respondents about the **potential impact if their church was to close.** The majority of responses show that the impact on the local community would be serious – **75.2% consider the impact on the community would be either ‘significant’ or ‘devastating’.**

In terms of collective participation in sustaining community and contributing to the common good, we examined data on volunteering. Volunteers not only look after the church building but also share their time, talents, and skills in a diverse range of church-related work and activities, e.g., helping with organising community activities, fundraising, church building maintenance and repair, extending links with communities, and welcoming church visitors.

More than one thousand volunteers are involved in church activities. Specifically, the **number of volunteers per month** involved in hosting religious activities (1,295) and other fundraising works (1,153).

The data on **actual number of volunteer hours** in particular activities finds that in each month on average, amongst 238 surveyed churches, volunteers contribute 15.3 hours for hosting religious activities, 14.2 hours for church governance, 12.7 hours for hosting community activities, and 12.1 hours for raising church funds.

⁸ Albareda, L., & Sison, A. 2020. Commons organizing: Embedding common good and institutions for collective action. Insights from ethics and economics. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 166: 727–743.

In the audited churches, **the highest number of volunteers** per month:

- Hosting community activity – 85 people (St Mary, West Walton);
- Other fundraising – 89 people (St Peter & St Paul, Walpole);
- Hosting religious activities – 59 people (All Saints, Cottenham);
- Cleaning – 20 people (St Mary, Bartlow);
- Writing grant applications – 8 people (St Mary, Beachamwell).

Friends of the Church Groups

The responsibility for maintenance, repair and upkeep of church buildings rests with the local community. An important benefit of an established group of volunteers, such as Friends of the Church, is the additional skills and experiences they can bring to complement those of church employees, volunteers and benefactors.⁹

Amongst all churches, a **quarter (25.3%) have an active Friends of the Church group that had been established recently, or some years ago.** Figure 6 illustrates that 55 churches (22.9%) are considering setting up a Friends of the Church group soon.

“The community and the Friends group are working hard to establish the church as a Festival Church. The theft of the lead roof and Covid have had a major impact on our fundraising and keeping the Church alive in the community’s mind as an asset.”

–Audit participant’s comment

Figure 6. Friends of the Church groups.
Source: Question 77.

Answer	%	Count
Yes – established more than 10 years ago	18.8%	45
Yes – established between 6-10 years	1.7%	4
Yes – established between 1-5 years	2.1%	5
Yes – established in the last financial year	2.9%	7
No but thinking of setting one up	22.9%	55
No – it was closed down	9.6%	23
Don't know	2.5%	6
Other – please explain	39.6%	95
Total	100%	240

- 12 churches reported having an alternative group, e.g., established donors in the community, active PCC, community support, informal group of friends, congregation and volunteer support, a preservation trust, electoral roll and a local club as substitutes;
- 6 churches reported lack of interest, and the difficulty of finding the right person in the local community to motivate, lead, and initiate the formation of Friends group;
- 4 churches have a Friends that is inactive.

⁹ National Churches Trust: A Friends Group Toolkit, www.nationalchurchestrust.org/get-support/buildings-maintenance/friends-group

CHAPTER 5. CHURCH BUILDINGS AS COMMUNITY ASSETS

Church buildings are traditional community spaces, the significance and success of which depends on the congruence between church and community interests. As an asset, a church building can be employed to help maintain the community’s wellbeing, social interest, and belonging. This section presents summary findings on the cultural value of church buildings, driven by the local, historical, and architectural significance of the church.

We enquired about the availability of **alternative community gathering places** in a neighbourhood. 75.4% of respondents (184 churches), reported the presence of a community hall in their neighbourhoods. A minority, twenty churches (8.2%) reported that there were no alternative meeting spaces in their communities

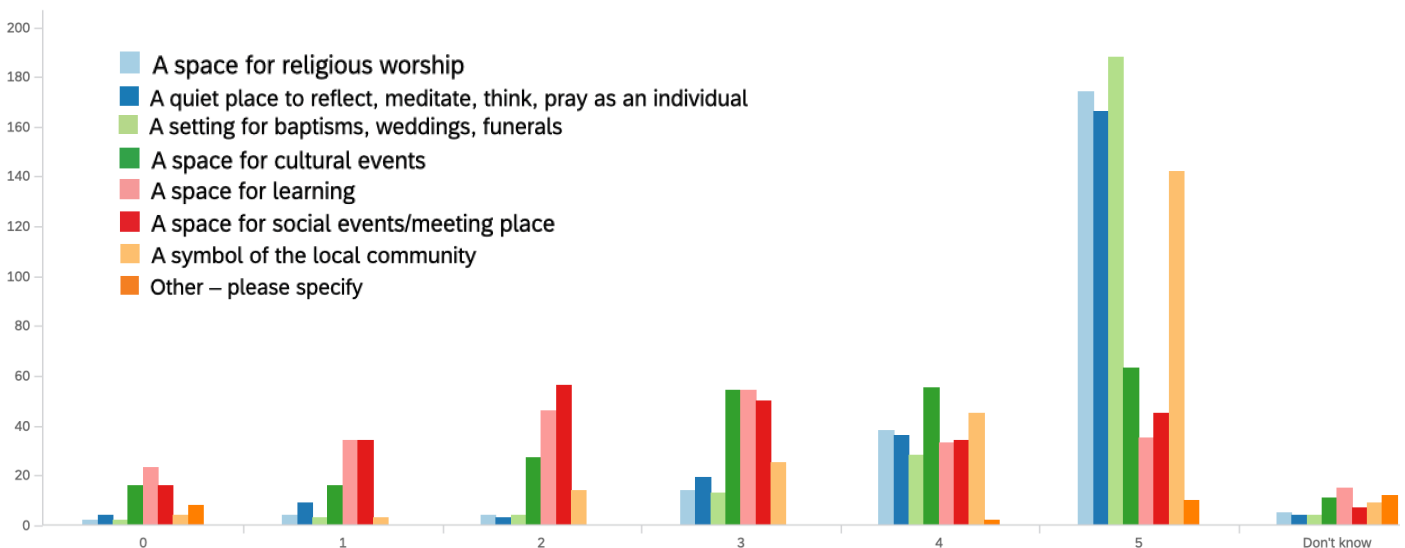
Local, Historic, and Architectural Significance of Church Buildings

To determine the aspects of a church building that communities value the most, we asked audit participants to indicate what they valued most about their church building. Figure 7 illustrates that the church is most valued for being:

- A setting for occasional office services (e.g., baptisms, weddings, funerals) (77.6% of churches);
- A space for religious worship (72.2%);
- A quiet place to reflect, pray, meditate, and think (68.8%);
- A symbol of the local community (58.7%).

Opinion scores (ranged from 0 = ‘Not applicable’ to 5 = ‘Absolutely agree’) related to appreciating churches as spaces for learning, cultural and social events are more varied between ‘somewhat’, ‘moderate’ and ‘most valuable’ (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Opinion scores (0-5) and valued aspects of church buildings.
Source: Question 78.

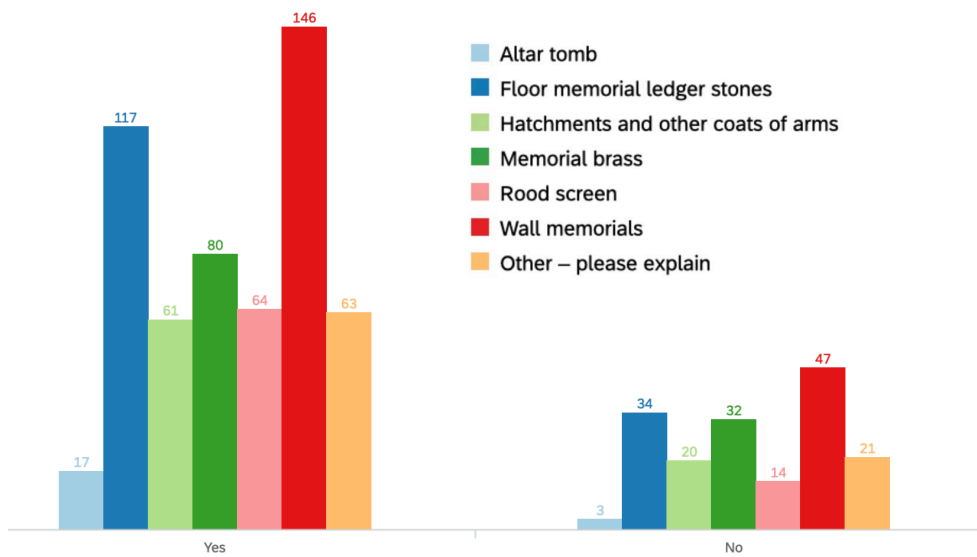


Church Artefacts

Many churches, particularly older churches, are filled with Christian iconography and artefacts – objects with religious meaning that also reflect local community history and memory. By analysing data about artefacts and community activities, we found that **churches with more significant artefacts held community events in 2019 than those with fewer artefacts** (Figure 8). This suggests that artefacts might enhance the attractiveness of a church building as a place for community activities.

Figure 8. Artefacts at churches with and without community activities.

Source: Questions 16 & 45.



Clockwise from top-left: Rood screen at St Peter & St Paul, Little Gransden; Medieval brass at Holy Trinity, Hildersham; Wall paintings at St Mary, Bartlow; Marble memorials at St Mary the Virgin, Linton.

CHAPTER 6. THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON COMMUNITY USE OF CHURCH BUILDINGS

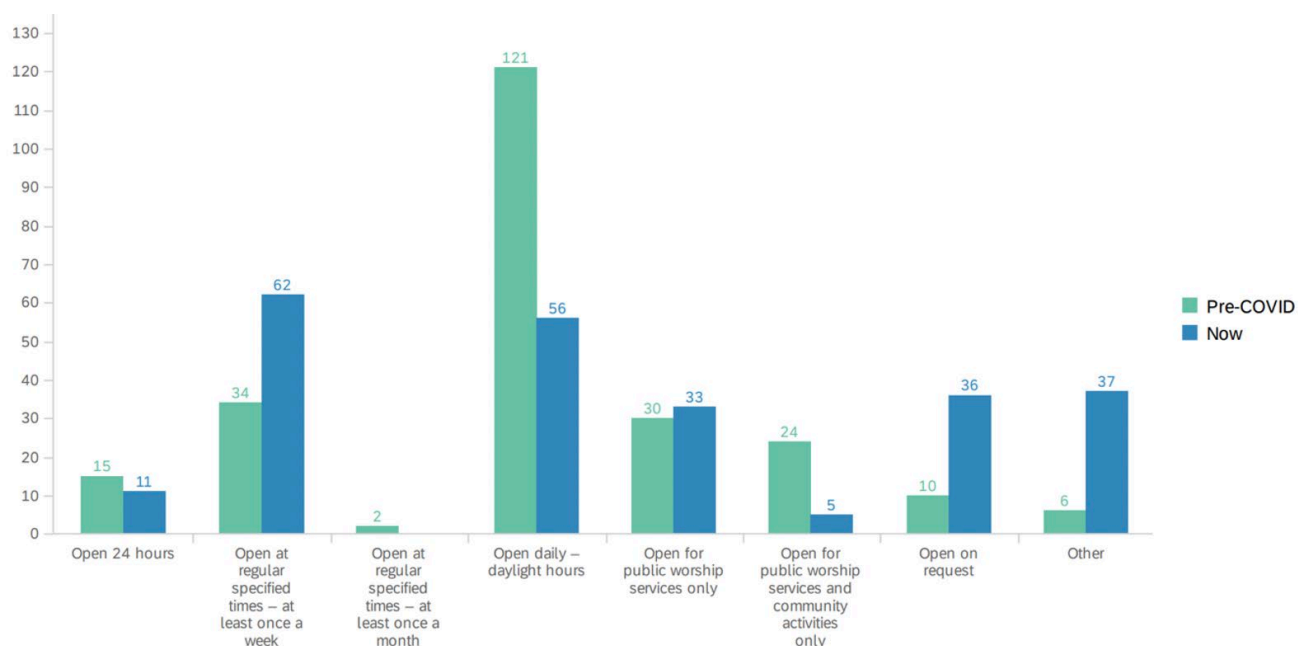
This section presents summary findings on the impact of Covid-19 on community access to and use of church buildings. The Covid-19 pandemic has been a serious disruptor to individual and community life, and has had a major impact on the use of church buildings as places for public gatherings. The immediate effects of the pandemic were a major decline in offertory and donations, loss of tourism and its associated income, and the cancellation of community activities and fundraising events.¹⁰

All church buildings were closed to the public during the first national lockdown – despite being places where people would traditionally have sought comfort in troubling times. Since the lifting of national lockdown restrictions, people have been able to gather in churches again, however, the social distancing guidelines persist as a disruptor to the full congregational and communal use of church buildings.

Our participants reported on the seating capacity in churches before and after the national lockdowns. Figure 27 illustrates that for most churches (75.8%) **seating capacity of the church building in post-Covid conditions** of social distancing has been reduced to, on average, less than 50 people per church.

The practice of **keeping church buildings open to the public** has also changed since the pre-Covid period. Most church buildings are now open at regular specified hours (62 churches) or during daylight hours (56 churches). About one-third of churches (30.4%) are now open only on request (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Openness of church buildings pre- and post-Covid-19. Source: Question 14.

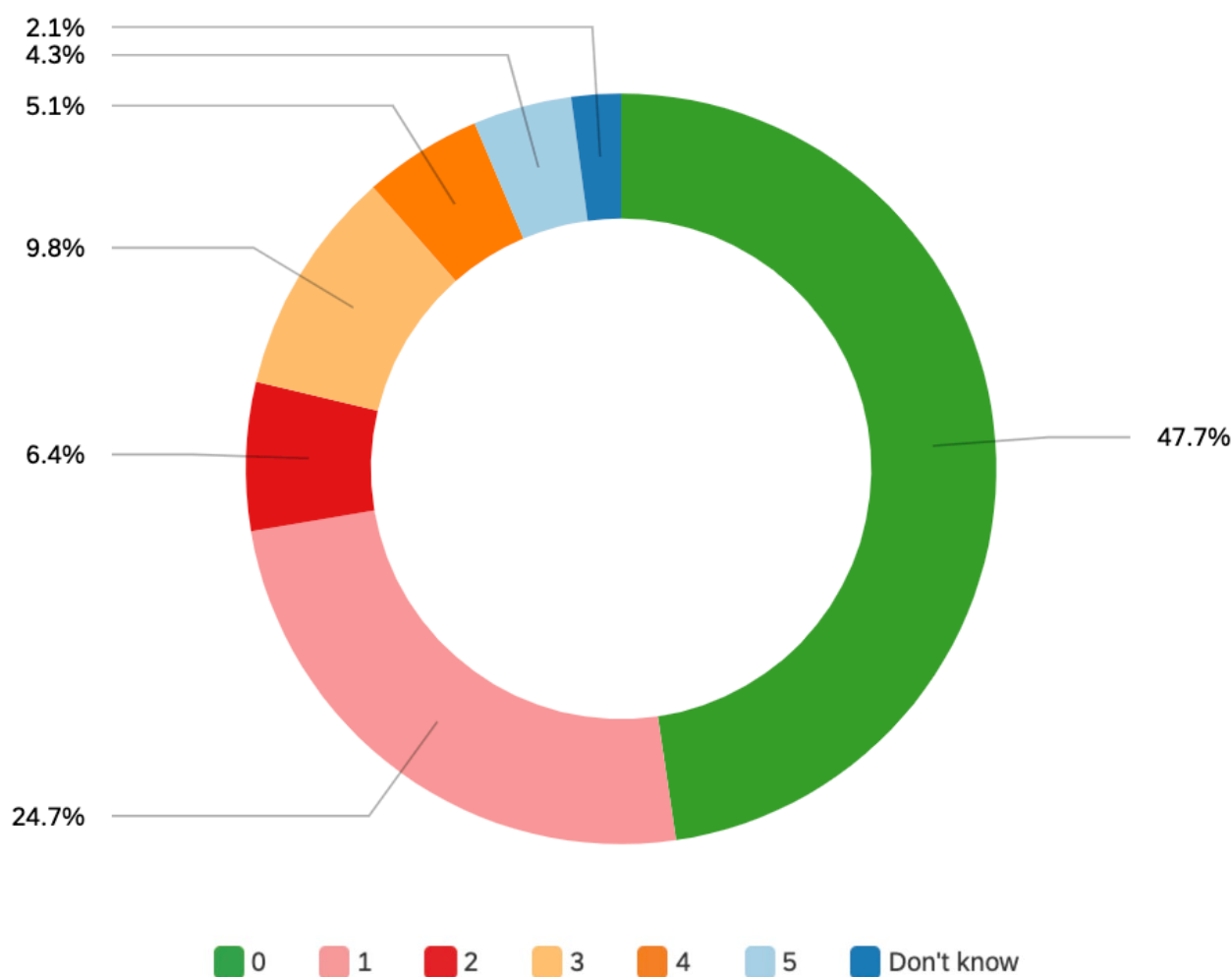


¹⁰ The Church of England estimates a loss of between £8m and £11m per week. Source: The impact of Covid-19 on historic religious buildings in the England, <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/7153/html>.

With the re-opening of churches to congregations and the public, the focus of clergy and the PCCs is how to plan efficiently to move forward, resume worship services and navigate how to safely open church buildings for community activities. Our data finds that communities plan to resume **some of the most popular activities** (see Chapter 1 of the report). A smaller percentage of churches (between 15 and 25%) remain undecided about resuming community activities.

In providing safe environments for public worship services and community activities in church buildings, **the ability to comply with social distancing requirements** is a serious consideration for 9.4% of churches (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Church buildings and social distancing guidelines. Source: Question 76.



“In 2012, we re-ordered the inside of the building to create flexible community space. Over ten years the building has been increasingly used as a community hub, which is appreciated by a lot of people. Covid has had a significant effect on use of the building as we have had to close down our activities, whether for tots or for older adults. We so hope that as the Covid threat reduces, we shall be able to resume many of the activities. Our income from lettings and many social events has considerably dropped too.”

—Audit participant’s comment

CHAPTER 7. CHURCH MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

This section presents findings on church use of online and print marketing and communication about church worship services and community activities. The audit results found that information about church worship services and community events is shared via different media, ranging from online communication to neighbourhood noticeboards and church publications.

Online Communication

The most **popular online media** is the A Church Near You website (77.4% registered an account at www.achurchnearlyou.com), followed by a **church website** (76.6% of churches) and a **Facebook page** (59.4%). Figure 11 presents other media.

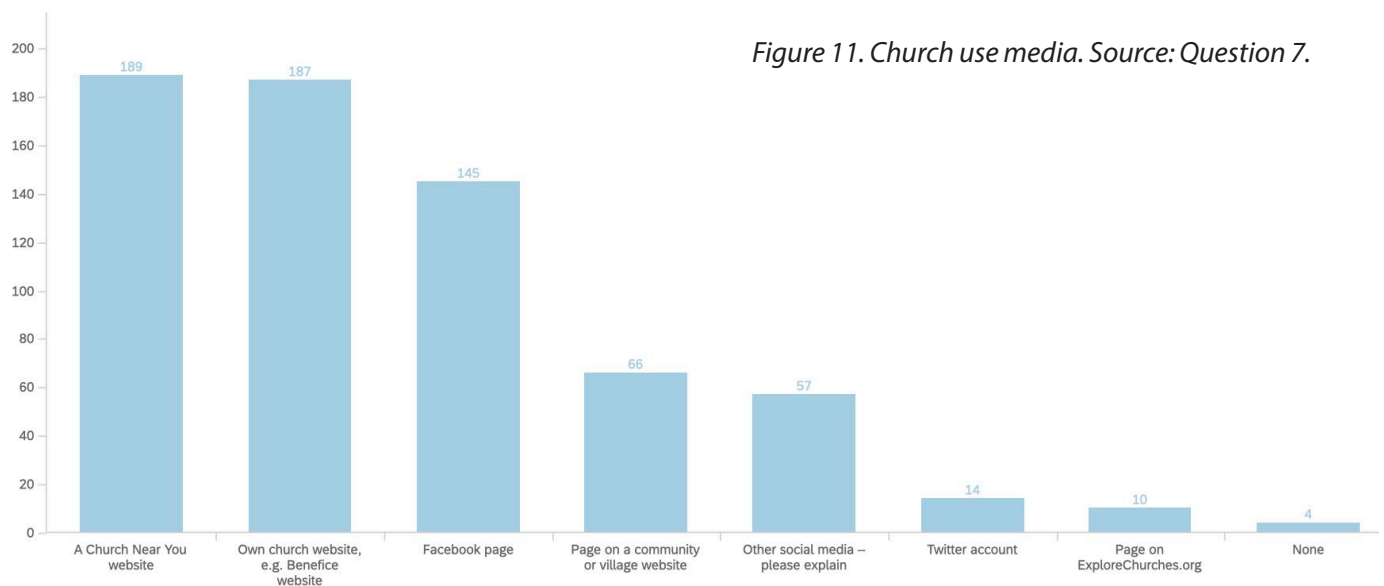


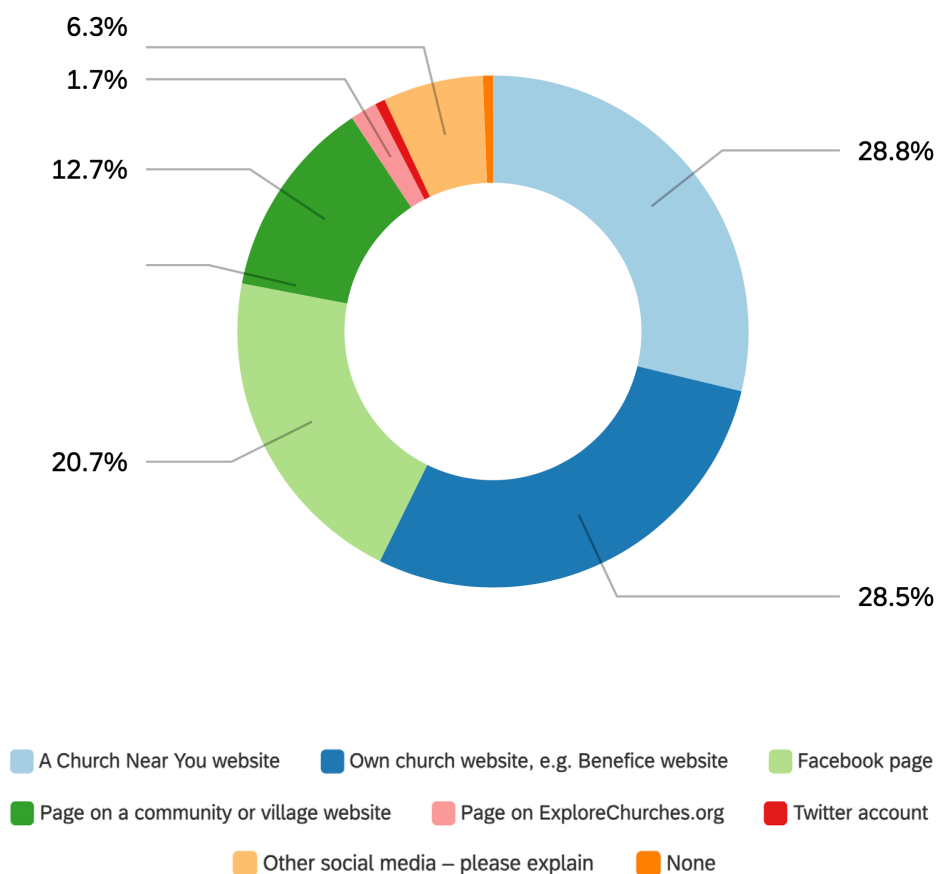
Figure 11. Church use media. Source: Question 7.

The results also show that Twitter and ExploreChurches.org are the least used media platforms. When analysed against community type, i.e., urban, rural, market town and others, urban churches use Twitter more (4 out of 7 churches) than rural churches (8 out of 183 churches). According to the church guide *Crossing the Threshold*,¹¹ a Twitter account can be useful in advertising events and highlighting church milestones, e.g., obtaining a grant, receiving an award, and keeping communities informed about worship services and community activities. The website ExploreChurches.org by the National Churches Trust could also be a useful platform to appeal to the wider population to inspire church visits, pilgrimage, and explore church artefacts.

An interesting insight from the audit is that **more rural churches than other types share a web page with a community or village website** (12.7%). In practice, this strategy is useful for reaching out to wider audiences, attracting visitors to the church web page, raising awareness of community activities organised in the church building, as well as enhancing the online visibility of the church. Regular updates on church activities, populated on a community or village web pages, are additional ways to keep the church community engaged and informed. Figure 12 illustrates an example of rural churches and their online communication.

¹¹ *Crossing the threshold: A step-by-step guide to developing your place of worship for wider community use and managing a successful building project*. 2017. London: Historic Religious Buildings Alliance & Diocese of Hereford.

Figure 12. Rural church use of different media. Source: Questions 4 & 7.



Other online media used by audited churches:

- Community help page 'whatwillhelp.org' administered by church office;
- Friends of village website;
- Gmail account;
- Instagram;
- NextDoor (<https://nextdoor.co.uk> is community online networking resource aimed to help community neighbours receive trusted information, share help, get things done, and establish connections with local organisations and public services);
- Village email;
- Village Facebook page;
- Village website;
- WhatsApp group;
- YouTube;
- Zoom.

Church Building Heritage and History

We enquired about how churches record visitors to their buildings, and promote their heritage and history. Most audited churches (81%) keep a **visitors' book** and 73.1% produce a **history of the church** booklet, and a **church newsletter** (57%). A **guidebook for visitors** and a **welcome booklet for newcomers** to the neighbourhood are offered by 58 churches (24%). Among rural churches, this type of publication is found at 44 churches.

At the audited rural churches, the **most frequently used information materials** are the visitors' book (163 rural churches), the history of the church booklet (137), and the church newsletter (99).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The Church Buildings and Community Audit was implemented as part of the REACH Ely project conducted by Cambridge Judge Business School and the Diocese of Ely with the support of Benefact Trust and Historic England in 2018-21. The Audit was designed to investigate church community engagement, community use of church buildings and the contribution of churches to the common good. The audit achieved a high response rate and, given the predominance of rural churches in the Diocese of Ely, the findings are influenced by the rural context.

Together with the REACH Ely case studies, the audit findings enrich our understanding of many aspects of church community engagement. The findings record that almost all audited church buildings are situated in communities where there are alternative spaces for public gathering, e.g., village halls, schools, town halls, and sports pavilions. Audit responses noted that communities value churches as for providing rite of passage ceremonies and as spaces for worship. Most importantly, churches offer communities something unique – a quiet place to reflect, pray, meditate, think, and gain personal and spiritual insight.

One of the important findings from the audit is that the absence of kitchen and washroom facilities is not an impediment to organising community activities in church buildings. Even though more than a third of audited churches reported not having these facilities, they organised community activities attended by more than fifty people. Bigger scale cultural and celebration activities, e.g. concerts, plays, music, art, Christmas Fair, church fetes and festivals, were successfully organised at more than thirty churches without both kitchens and washrooms.

Evidence that the future of church buildings lies in engaging with people beyond church communities is reflected in the types of community activities organised in church buildings and church halls. The most frequently organised community activity categories in church buildings are cultural, celebration, mission, skills and socialisation. Organising such community activities inside church buildings, promotes the role and mission of the church in their communities and also helps to generate income to fund church maintenance, repair

and running costs. Church halls are additional places for organising community activities, and increase the range of activities available.

The Covid-19 pandemic had a major impact on church community engagement as church buildings were closed to the public. While many churches transitioned to streaming online worship, the decline in offertory and donations reduced church income. Regarding the pre-Covid-19 most frequently organised community activities, most churches (between 70 and 80%) are confident that they will be safely resumed in due course.

The Covid-19 pandemic has created an opportunity to further reflect on the future use of church buildings. As the recent House of Good study found, 64% of respondents believe that churches are becoming more important in the future as a result of the pandemic, and that a “cultural shift in attitudes towards church buildings”¹² is needed for the sustainable future of churches. Such a cultural shift could be realised through marketing and communicating the range of community activities organised in church buildings. By engaging with the wider community, the full value of church buildings can be appreciated by all.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DIOCESE

The audit is integrated with the current diocesan strategy presented in People Fully Alive: Ely 2025, which acknowledges the existing expectation for change across the Diocese of Ely, as The REACH Ely project reimagines church buildings as one of the levers of change and key future priorities.¹³ We suggest three implications of the audit findings for the Diocese.

Mission. The review of church buildings provides data on individual church context and community value and use of church buildings. The audit thus equips the diocese with data to develop strategic pathways towards wider mission and ministry of its churches.

¹² Taylor Review: Sustainability of English churches and cathedrals, 2017. UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport, p.15.

¹³ People Fully Alive: Ely 2025. A strategy for growth. Church of England, Diocese of Ely, www.elydiocese.org/strategy

Supporting. The data enables the diocese to identify church communities that may be struggling with the sustainable management of their church buildings, and potential fundraising opportunities and partnerships with local organisations. Data about the context and condition of church buildings 'at risk of closure' and those transitioning to the 'festival' status is helpful in this regard. The diocese can provide individual congregations and PCCs with advice on feasible alternatives to closure, setting up Friends of Church groups, and sustainable buildings management.

Engagement. In its continuing effort in helping parishes develop and modernise their church buildings, the diocese can encourage learning between churches through sharing successful experiences between churches in different community contexts.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCH COMMUNITIES

A sustainable future for church buildings depends on both their structural maintenance and repair, as well as their use by congregations and communities. Five implications for church communities are derived from the audit.

Mission. To strengthen mission by learning from the experiences of other churches that organise community activities with high community participation. To collaborate with local organisations to organise community activities; and with different demographic groups to market and communicate such activities. Collaboration with other community halls and venues may also reach youth and families.

Context. To explore the potential of organising a range of community activities in their church buildings and church halls. Communities organise activities that build on the cultural, celebration, mission, skills and socialising value of church buildings. Less frequently organised community activities include sports, pre-school, and farmers markets. In addition, to strengthen community social capital by organising events that appeal to people with no religious affiliation.

Fundraising. To consider establishing a Friends of the Church group, and build relationships with charities, trusts and benefactors. In addressing the

challenge of attracting young people, learning from urban churches' experience in creating conditions for young people to get involved is recommended. For example, to offer creative opportunities to younger people or students with computer skills to help develop or maintain a church website and assist in community events.

Sustainability. To investigate the adoption of established and novel environmental innovations, e.g., green energy tariffs, Eco Church certification, and ecological value of church surroundings.

Marketing and Communication. To budget for marketing and communicating worship services, and cultural, social and other services organised in church buildings and church halls. A guidebook or a welcome booklet can engage newcomers and visitors in community life, as well as communicating the Christian presence in the community.

IMPLICATIONS FOR OTHER FAITHS

The audit provides data on church community engagement, organisation of community activities in church buildings and church halls, and the contribution of churches to the common good. Four implications for wider audience arise from the audit.

Economic common good. Churches have an important economic community role. Income is generated from offertory, donations and other sources and invested in mission and the community. Partnerships with local organisations in the private, public and third sector charities offer sustainable ways of generating economic community wealth.

Social common good. Churches also make important contributions to the social common good. New ways of supporting and caring for church congregations, communities and volunteers can strengthen community social capital.

Environmental common good. The environmental impact of church buildings is felt in the costs of their maintenance and repair, and heating and lighting. The adoption of environmental innovations in building materials, and heating and lighting technologies have the potential to impact positively on the environmental common good.

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