



7th December 2017

The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee's Inquiry into the Historic Environment 2017

Response of Addoldai Cymru

Thank you for permitting Addoldai Cymru to make a late response to the above consultation.

Addoldai Cymru (the Welsh Religious Buildings Trust) is a charity brought into being by Cadw and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action in 1999 in response to the alarming scale of redundancy amongst Wales' historic places of worship.

Its principal remit is to take into care a selection of redundant non-Church in Wales religious buildings that are historically and/or architecturally significant. In practice, the Trust's focus is on Wales' rich heritage of Nonconformist chapels, and on their value to their local communities. The Trust undertakes any necessary repairs to its acquired buildings, and endeavours to make them available for appropriate community use. The Trust currently owns eight chapels (7 freehold and 1 leasehold), representing a variety of denominations across Wales. The Friends of Friendless Churches, meanwhile, has a remit for redundant churches belonging to the Church in Wales.

The Trust's secondary remit is to act as an advisory body for active congregations and to raise awareness and appreciation of Wales' Nonconformist heritage and the story of chapel building.

The Trust is dependent on a variety of sources for its funding. From the outset, the Trust has received an annual grant from Cadw (core funding) towards its running costs, including insurance and basic maintenance of its portfolio of buildings. In the past, grant aid to support capital works and projects has also been received from a variety of sources including other Welsh and UK Government departments, various local authorities, the national lottery, and numerous grant-making trusts and bodies, as well as donations from businesses and private individuals. The Trust faces a worrying future as external funding is becoming reduced, whilst the rate of redundancy of chapels is accelerating.

The Trust wishes to comment on certain aspects of the consultation as follows:

Implementation of the Historic Environment Act.

We are appreciative of the ongoing implementation of the Act and welcome the guidance documents published to date, which will provide some help to users of religious buildings in terms of their conservation and management of change. We hope to see specific guidance on understanding the significance of historic places of worship, and on asset management, options appraisals, and disposal of redundant religious buildings, as promised in the Strategic Action Plan for Historic Places of Worship in Wales. There is a need for consistent guidance both for professionals and for those caring for historic buildings.

We also wish to highlight the problem of capacity within the professional sector across Wales. Few local authorities now have qualified building conservation staff, which for the Trust is evidenced in the lack of knowledge of chapel architecture and its history amongst planning department staff. We feel that Cadw is best placed to ensure that these gaps are filled, and we support Cadw in its initiatives to share resources across Wales. With the raft of new legislation and guidance, it is hoped that these initiatives will result in an appropriately consistent and streamlined approach by the public sector.

Protection of listed buildings and assets at risk.

The Trust welcomes the increased enforcement powers afforded to local planning authorities, even if we, as owners of vulnerable buildings at a time of austerity, are at high risk of being at the sharp end of such powers.

Many of Wales' listed places of worship are at risk and their future sustainability is dependent upon the efforts of dedicated volunteers. There is an urgent need for a training and capacity building programme for church and chapel volunteers. Addoldai Cymru itself is actively pursuing its concept of Associate Status whereby we will endeavour to build a relationship with the current congregations and owners of significant chapel buildings, offering a range of facilities, support and advice, in order to assist the continuation in use of the buildings by the congregations.

There is a need to address in more detail the process of redundancy and the options available to congregations including the assistance of relevant bodies, notably Addoldai Cymru. At present the disposal of redundant chapel buildings is chaotic, with chapels going to the market before the Trust is able to start a dialogue re potential acquisition. This difficulty is most pronounced with non-centralised denominations such as the Independents. A much smoother path is needed to avoid stripping of assets prior to formal redundancy and to highlight other options beyond that of the open market.

Facilitating collaboration within the sector.

The Trust welcomed Cadw's initiative which led to the publication of the Strategic Action Plan for Historic Places of Worship in Wales, and it supports most of its ambitious proposals. One major output has been the establishment of the Welsh Places of Worship Forum, of which Addoldai Cymru is pleased to be a member. The Forum does, however, face the challenge of being relevant to the denominations and without adequate resourcing and clear successes, there is a danger of it losing momentum.

In pursuance of its Associate Status project, the Trust has undertaken detailed work, using rigorous criteria, to identify what it considers to be Wales' most significant chapel buildings. This work has been done in collaboration with the RCAHMMW, who assisted in the creation of the Trust's website, which itself houses the RCAHMMW's Chapels Database. The Trust is in the process of sharing its conclusions with the denominations, in the spirit of the Strategic Action Plan, which exemplifies the benefits of coordinated activity.

Maximising the value of heritage tourism and Cadw's work to meet income generation targets.

The Trust is well placed to engage in heritage tourism, since all of our chapels are of high historical/architectural merit, and most lie within areas that are popular with tourists or have the potential of being so. Faith tourism and pilgrimage trails are a growing tourism vehicle, and the Trust has already published a tourist guide to Wales' Unitarian meeting houses, featuring two of its own buildings. Despite being synonymous with Wales' unique cultural heritage, particularly in relation to the Welsh language, Nonconformist chapels have to date not featured strongly in

Wales' tourism offer, when compared with its castles and industrial monuments. The Trust would welcome any initiative to rectify this.

The Trust is concerned at the ongoing prominence given to Cadw's income generation targets. Whilst this undoubtedly assists the Welsh Government's balance sheet, more emphasis needs to be placed upon Cadw's rather more important role of protecting and championing the entire historic environment of Wales, regardless of ownership or status. It is ironic that the enhanced income from visitors to Cadw's protected monuments is celebrated at the very time that Cadw's grants to the thousands of historic buildings elsewhere in Wales have been suspended. Assembly members are urged to ensure that Cadw's grant schemes are restored and properly resourced.

It is important to recognise that visitor experience is as much dependent on enjoyment of the everyday historic environment as on a handful of iconic monuments. A nation's historic buildings provide a sense of place and identity for local communities and equally for visitors. However, tourism is only one ingredient of the heritage economy, whose management and maintenance relies on skills and supplies in the conservation/ construction sector, and on adequate financial resources.

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