

Heritage at Risk

A Guide to Historic England's programme of Heritage at Risk



Church Architects, Surveyors and other Professionals, along with the Diocesan Church Buildings Team may suggest that it is appropriate for a Church to be included on the 'Heritage at Risk Register'. This guidance note helps to explain more about Heritage at Risk, the Heritage at Risk Register (often referred to as 'the HAR') and to provide some background to Historic England's Heritage at Risk programme.

As a country we have a huge number of historically important sites and places (known as 'Heritage Assets') which range from archaeological and wreck sites to buildings of all types, including churches. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (advised by Historic England) designates some buildings as 'listed' in recognition of their special architectural and historic interest: Grade I (of exceptional special interest), Grade II* (more than special interest) and Grade II (special interest).

The Diocese of Ely is blessed with 334 churches, 43% of which are Grade I listed and 40% Grade II*. Looking after these buildings can be a huge challenge and the problems that they present are often of significant magnitude. By capturing and assessing the state of the nation's heritage assets in their annually published Heritage at Risk Register, Historic England is in a position to identify where and what these challenges are and to help focus resources where they are most needed.

It's important to say that being on the Heritage at Risk Register is in no way a criticism of those responsible for looking after a building. Rather, it is an indication that those who are caring for an important part of the country's heritage are facing significant challenges, which may require more resources than they can find locally. The aim of the Register is to keep attention focused on these buildings, to act as a working tool to help define the scale of the problem, and to prioritise action by Historic England, local authorities, funding bodies and others who can play a part in making these irreplaceable buildings safe and sustainable for future generations.

Why might our church be a suitable candidate for the Heritage at Risk Register?

Heritage at Risk only takes the condition of the church building fabric into consideration and each church is assessed on a case by case basis.

Typical reasons include significant problems with one major element e.g. the tower or spire, and/or other factors such as failing roofs, metal roof theft, rainwater goods and high-level masonry. When your Quinquennial Inspection is carried out, the Inspector may identify factors which indicate that the church should be assessed for inclusion on the register.

How can we find out if our church is already on the Heritage at Risk register?

You can search the list at <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-at-risk/search-register/> or contact the Church Buildings team at the Diocese of Ely.

What are the benefits of being on the Heritage at Risk register?

There are three key benefits to being on the HAR:

- It can assist with funding applications.
- It helps to demonstrate the needs that your church is facing.
- Churches may be able to access further specialist advice from Historic England that would not otherwise be freely available.

Taken as a whole, the Register provides evidence for Historic England to demonstrate to Central Government the needs that churches and other parts of the historic environment face, particularly with respect to funding repairs.

What is the process for adding a church to the Heritage at Risk register?

In the first instance, please speak to the Historic Church Buildings Support Officer (HCBSO) at the Diocese of Ely. The HCBSO will visit the church to make an initial assessment, if the church seems a likely candidate, a report will be sent to the HAR team at Historic England for them to make the final decision. They will either carry out a desk-based assessment based on the information provided and/or may wish to make a site visit after which they will make their decision.

What happens if our church is accepted on to the Heritage at Risk register?

If the church is eligible, the HAR team will write, typically to the incumbent and churchwarden, to notify you and let you know the reasons and the priority category. The entry will then appear when the register is published in October, unless it has been accepted after the closing date for publication which is generally in May/June.

Is there a cost for being on the Heritage at Risk register?

No, absolutely none.

Are there set times when churches can be considered/added?

No. Churches can be accepted onto the register at any point in the year. There is a cut-off date for publication, so although the church may miss the published list it is still on the register.

How can our church be removed from the register?

The register will list the reasons why a church has been included. Once these have been attended to, contact the HCBSO who will liaise with Historic England in order for the church to be reassessed.

Can our entry be updated and/or changed?

Yes. Particularly where large or phased projects are being undertaken, it may be that some of reasons that a church has been placed on the HAR have been attended to but some remain outstanding. It is entirely appropriate for the register to be updated accordingly.

In other cases, it may be that the original works have all been undertaken but in the course of carrying out these works, further issues have been identified which would mean that the church remains eligible for inclusion on the HAR but for different reasons. In this instance the entry would be reassessed to reflect the present condition.

Does being on the Heritage at Risk Register help with funding?

Being on the HAR Register can help to attract funding with bodies such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund using it as a way of prioritising where they allocate their funding. It isn't a guarantee of success but it is another factor which helps to identify need.

Does being on the HAR make you eligible for funding from Historic England?

Unfortunately, not. Historic England do not have any funding to support Places of Worship. There may be an emergency fund to support immediate urgent repairs, but grants are only available once all other funding options have been exhausted. If your church is on the HAR and you are particularly concerned about its state, please contact the HCBSO.



What does Historic England say about their Heritage at Risk Programme?

The following has been taken and adapted from Historic England's website, where you can find further information on this and related topics. <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-at-risk/>

What is the Heritage at Risk Programme?

The Heritage at Risk programme helps us understand the overall state of England's historic sites, which covers a wide range of heritage assets.

Every year Historic England updates the Heritage at Risk Register. The end result is a dynamic picture of the sites most at risk and most in need of safeguarding for the future.

When did the Heritage at Risk programme start?

The important process of checking the condition of our heritage goes back more than two decades to the birth of the London Buildings at Risk survey.

Why is it important?

People regularly say how much the historic character of where they live, work and play contributes to their lives. With competing demands on public and private funds, we need to focus on the heritage assets that are at greatest risk and that offer the best opportunities for positive development.

The Heritage at Risk Register tells communities about the condition of their local neighbourhood. It encourages people to become actively involved in looking after what is precious to them. It also reassures them that any public funding goes to the most needy and urgent cases.

The Buildings at Risk project proved that the Register works. We published the first national Register of Buildings at Risk in 1998. We have now been tackling heritage at risk for more than 20 years, and over two-thirds of England's historic sites on the 1998 Register have since had their futures secured.

Regularly reviewing and updating our assessments of heritage assets allows us to pinpoint trends. We then explore why change is happening and how we can bring about more positive change in the future.

How does Heritage at Risk apply to Places of Worship (which includes churches)?

We continue to make the case for listed places of worship as heritage in their own right, as cultural centres for communities and as faith buildings. We support the people who look after them so they can share them with their communities and make them open as places of wellbeing for people of all faiths and none.

The 14,800 listed places of worship in England provide spaces for worship as well as social and community events, allowing people to gather for a wide range of practical and spiritual reasons. They provide a haven for individuals needing a quiet, safe and peaceful place to take a break from daily worries, irrespective of their own beliefs or circumstances.

They continue to accommodate celebration and grief, shared and private experiences, art, music and sculpture, toddler groups, political hustings, and self-help and addiction support sessions. These are significant spaces in which human experience has been, and continues to be, welcome.

What is Historic England doing to help?

Historic England recognises that the care of historic places of worship relies heavily on worshipping congregations.

Since 2008, we have given grants to create 34 Support Officer posts throughout England. Support Officers help congregations look after their buildings, giving them access to a wide range of skills and advice.

Further information and advice

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