



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

The Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer KCB KC MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

20 January 2025

Dear Prime Minister,

RE: Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

We are writing to you in your capacity as our Member of Parliament for Holborn and St Pancras to express our concerns about the future of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (LPWGS) and the devastating impact that the loss of this scheme would have on our ability to protect and preserve our shared cultural heritage.

VAT relief on costs incurred in relation to essential repairs and maintenance of places of worship is crucial, providing a much-needed boost to project budgets to undertake these works. Closing this scheme would effectively lead to a 20% increase in the cost of care and maintenance, which would ultimately mean that many of the 20,000 listed places of worship would fall into a state of disrepair, potentially leading to closure.

In addition to the significant impact on communities who access these facilities, the closure of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme would have a devastating ripple effect on the UK's conservation sector, which is primarily made up of micro-businesses operating on a knife edge. This risk is even more alarming when you consider that there are just 109 practicing accredited conservator-restorers in the UK with the technical skills to conserve stained glass, monuments, wall paintings, stone, and wooden objects.

Many of these small studios are already under immense financial pressure, and a reduction in repair work funded by the LPWGS would lead to widespread closures. The loss of these studios would not only affect the livelihoods of highly skilled professionals but would also drastically limit the UK's ability to care for historic collections, artworks, and interiors.

The conservation and restoration of places of worship must be carried out by individuals with a high degree of technical skill and in-depth knowledge of conservation practice and theory to ensure that work is completed to the highest possible standard. The risk is that the closure of conservation studios will not only result in a reduction in the workforce but also lead to work being carried out by individuals without the necessary skills, further impacting the longevity of buildings and sites with immense local cultural and spiritual value.

This is particularly alarming given the scale and importance of what is at stake. The conservation sector is critical to maintaining Britain's rich heritage, and the closure of studios would severely weaken our capacity to preserve these irreplaceable assets for future generations.

Similar risks are also a concern for the broader heritage construction sector—a risk well-recognised by Historic England and Historic Environment Scotland, both of whom are actively supporting the development of traditional building skills, which are also under significant strain.

We very much hope that, as our Member of Parliament, you understand the risks and devastating impact of any funding changes. We strongly urge you to offer your support for the extension of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick White". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patrick White
Policy and Programmes Director
Icon, the Institute of Conservation

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