

Churches need our prayers

THE National Churches Trust has launched a consultation, *The Future of Churches*, which will explore the buildings' benefits—from economic to spiritual and as meeting places for parents and babies, AA groups and so on—and discuss survival tactics in adapting to the needs of modern communities and fundraising. Sixteen leading figures, including *The Oldie* editor Harry Mount and Andrew Stokes, director of Visit England, make impassioned cases for the future of churches in the charity's manifesto.

Over the past decade, the number of churches in use has fallen from about 42,000 to 39,800, according to The Brierley Research Consultancy. With no support from central authorities, it's the congregation's responsibility to find funds for repairs, which can be particularly problematic in inner-city areas or remote countryside where there are fewer worshippers. In England, 350 Church of England churches are at risk of being closed or demolished within the next five years and the institution needs to find £1 billion for repairs to its 16,000 parish churches within the same time frame—a figure that makes the Government Cultural Recovery Fund of £12 million seem



paltry. Alarm bells are also ringing over proposed measures to speed up the process by which dioceses can close churches, sack clergy and sell parsonages to be decided at this month's General Synod.

'More than 900 churches are on the Historic England Heritage at Risk Register, with many more in a dire state in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland,' explains National Churches Trust CEO Claire Walker. 'It would be a huge mistake to let them decay when we know that they provide at least £50 billion in economic and social value to the UK each year... Please do take part.' Visit www.nationalchurchestrust.org/futureofchurches