

Some of the Inspired Futures team

An initiative of Inspired North East – a church building support scheme set up by the Church of England Dioceses of Newcastle and Durham – Inspired Futures will see the team use their creativity and expertise to help six priority churches develop sustainable futures.

The team will help with everything from developing business plans and looking at ways forward with repairs, to building on fundraising opportunities and new ways to engage communities in their heritage.

The project has also been working with 12 other churches and they will continue to be offered a helping hand. A training and skills programme – including web development and collections care – will also be offered to other places of worship across the North East.

Ivor Crowther, Head of HLF North East, said: “Places of worship are among our most historic buildings, with so many stories of architectural, social and community heritage behind them. Thanks to money raised by National Lottery players we’re pleased to offer our support to this project which will engage communities in those stories and secure sustainable futures for some wonderful sites.”

Inspired North East has worked with over 200 places of worship over the past six years, enabling them to see what works and develop models of best practice.

Peter Robinson, Archdeacon of Lindisfarne and Chair of the Project Group, said, “This grant from HLF is going to have a tremendous impact on the communities whose local church will be transformed and renewed for the benefit of all who visit or worship and live there. We’re thrilled that the grant will support us in bringing to bear a great deal of expertise and commitment on some outstanding buildings that will bring real and sustainable benefits for years to come.”

As focal point of communities (some for more than 800 years), the six churches will be connected by a heritage trail to tell the story of Christian heritage in the North East.

A focus on six historic churches

- St Chad’s in Bensham (Grade II*) Durham Diocese: designed by Newcastle architect William Searle Hicks, this Arts and Craft movement church is noted for its elaborate carved woodwork and exquisite stained glass
- St Cuthbert’s in Billingham (Grade I) Durham Diocese: there has been a church on this site since the 9th century, today’s building includes a Saxon tower and a 17th-century screen and font cover
- St Cuthbert’s in Darlington (Grade I) Durham Diocese: built in the 12th century, this church was restored in the 19th century by George Gilbert Scott and retains its medieval spire
- St Cuthbert’s in Elsdon (Grade I) Newcastle Diocese: dating from 1400, this site is said to have been a resting place of the body of St Cuthbert during the journey of Lindisfarne monks after they left the island in 875AD
- Church of St Thomas the Martyr in Newcastle (Grade II*) Newcastle Diocese: designed by John Dobson, this church is unusual in that it has no parish. Its additional galleries also provide an interesting reflection of the city’s growing population. It is on Historic England’s ‘At Risk’ register
- Christ Church in Shieldfield (Grade II*) Newcastle Diocese: built in 1861 by A.B Higham, its interior features include an arch-braced roof, mediaeval style floor tiles and a Gothic-style wood paneled altarpiece. It is on Historic England’s ‘At Risk’ register

The 12 other churches receiving support are:

- St Michael’s Alnham (Grade I) Newcastle Diocese
- St Augustine’s Alston (Grade II) Newcastle Diocese
- St Andrew's, Auckland (Grade I) Newcastle Diocese
- St John, Darlington (Grade II) Durham Diocese
- Our Lady, Delaval (Grade I) Newcastle Diocese
- St Mary & St Michael’s, Doddington (Grade I) Newcastle Diocese
- St Oswalds, Hartlepool (Grade II) Durham Diocese
- St Cuthbert’s, Haydon Bridge (Grade II*) Newcastle Diocese
- Haydon Old Church (Grade I) Newcastle Diocese
- St Michael’s, Heighington (Grade I) Durham Diocese
- St Edmund Sedgefield (Grade I) Durham Diocese
- St Thomas Stockton (Grade I) Durham Diocese

Notes to editors

Inspired North East was set up in 2010 involving Newcastle Diocese, Durham Diocese and part-funded at that time by English Heritage. It works with local congregations to help achieve a sustainable future for church buildings as living

places of worship, used and enjoyed by local communities, welcoming to visitors, and unique heritage assets.

For six years Inspired North East has supported over 200 churches across the North East with advice on grants for repairs, planning of new projects and enhancing the visitor welcome. Some churches have received more in-depth help to plan re-ordering and community activity projects to help improve future prospects for church buildings.

Further information

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St Thomas's Haymarket, Newcastle

Inspired Futures for historic North East churches