



The Friends of Hellingly Church

Email address: hello@hellinglyfriends.org.uk

Friends Newsletter

January 2026

RESCUE PACKAGE

Hellingly has a Grade One listed treasure, the Church of St. Peter and St Paul, one among many of the most prominent and beautiful buildings in England. Together they are its civic inheritance, its local memory and its place of repose. They are also its greatest conservation crisis. The Treasury, via The Department of Culture, Media and Sport is on the brink of withdrawing its deal to repay the VAT on repairs to Listed Places of Worship*. The Church of England cannot pick up the burden, reluctant to divert money from its national ministry to prop up local historical buildings. Charities can aid a church here and there but nothing remotely meets the need - an accumulated repairs bill of £1billion. Churches will soon crumble the way medieval castles crumbled in times past.

There may be a straightforward solution as is applied across Europe. Local churches could be 'denationalised', like the local hall, the local museum, the local sports pavilion and then owned and used by the community to which it belongs.

Anglican churches, perhaps all of them, could be transferred by diocesan authorities to parish or town councils, with appropriate arrangements for shared use.

Crucial, of course, is money. After some intense lobbying the 2023 Levelling Up and Regeneration Act specified that Parish Councils are permitted to support places of worship. They may levy a church precept on council bills, as they do with parks and gardens. One could expect church officials, of course, to go into rigor mortis at the idea of change, and plead for central government help, which is as likely as the North Sea freezing over.

Did you know that continental churches, Germany, Norway, Sweden and elsewhere are supported by maintenance taxes? The tax is usually voluntary. Those who object can tick a box and not pay, or stipulate another charity. Perhaps our Parish Council and the Parochial Church Council can get their heads together on this one. The church building then will not be in need of Friends as an organisation as everybody in the community (minus those opting out) will be Friends. (I am indebted to Sir Simon Jenkins (author, England's Thousand Best Churches) for facts and figures).

*The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme applies to all places of worship of any denomination that are listed by English Heritage.

COMMITTEE OF FRIENDS

An excellent committee of Friends has been in operation for eight years now. I was persuaded to be its chairman. A mark of its success has been the continuous membership of the committee, working well together, providing a varied programme much enjoyed by a wide range of supporters. I am extremely grateful for their superb support, especially when my body strength ran out. We have raised over £73,000 in those last eight years so it has all been worthwhile after all.

Thank you too, to our wide body of Friends and friends of Friends.

My resignation date from the committee is 31st December 2025. But I have no successor and the committee still want me to continue to write the quarterly letter that keeps us together and provides information and publicity. I will try to do so as long as possible. What shall I be called? The Chairman, but not quite gone? Anyway, always glad to help in my limited way.

FUTURE EVENTS

Spring - Quiz at Charles Hunt Centre

Summer - Afternoon Tea

A Happy New Year to you all

REMEMBER OUR MOTTO

'WHEN THE ROOF LEAKS AND THE WALLS SAG WE ARE THERE FOR YOU'

RONALD