

Supporting Paper for P-04-322 A call to revise Cadw's hold upon churches in Wales

Petition wording:

We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to investigate the inflexible way in which Cadw enforces its regulations upon active, vibrant congregations using listed buildings across Wales, thereby keeping them in a state of architectural inertia, unable to take advantage of modern developments in building materials and making it difficult for churches to make changes necessary for them to serve the coming generation and the local community.

To Petition Committee Membership,

CADW's role is supposed "to manage change". However a substantial number of churches whose leaders have signed the petition consider CADW's behaviour as harmful to their mission and aims as churches. Churches are not museum pieces like castles, but active centres for the local community and the faithful members who sustain them.

We need a realistic review of the blanket application of laws to active centres of worship. Otherwise there is a distinct possibility of churches abandoning these architecturally listed buildings, leaving them to rot and decay, for CADW will certainly not pick up the bill.

I can mention one congregation in Pembroke that deserted Mount Pleasant Baptist Church building and now meet in a school because they found CADW's restrictions unrealistic and a distraction from their central work of outreach.

In our own church building at Ebenezer CADW have insisted on architecturally historic wooden windows with no double glazing, but leave the congregation to pick up the larger power costs to heat these places and the maintenance required to scaffold and repaint these windows regularly. Another church in Swansea did not consult CADW and installed modern, good-looking uPVC windows with double glazing. They were served with a court order to remove them, and replace them with wooden ones, at great expense

Managing change? I don't think so. Hindering change, preventing advances, failing to understand the use of buildings they list? Yes, most definitely.

May I suggest a two tier system which allows greater liberty to buildings regularly and actively used by the public and maintained as a charity? Most free churches are now registered charities, or on the road to becoming one.

Active use is easily defined. For instance in our own building this weekend we anticipate a total of about 200 members of the public, as three people are baptized and confess their new found faith in the Lord Jesus as their Saviour. There's also a children's Sunday school. The following week there will be a mothers and parent group, ladies meetings, a church AGM for members and a midweek Bible study and prayer meeting for everyone. On Thursday a local Swansea choir uses our buildings, on Friday between 6pm to 10:30pm we run three meetings for young people and children from 4 years old to 18, and on Saturday there will be a children's birthday party using the hall.

These are a few local churches that I can mention with little time to gather accurate information. But I've picked this up across Wales and as former secretary of the Associating Evangelical Churches of Wales. A perusal of the petition addresses will show names from Welsh speaking Wales and the North, as well as across the rest of South Wales and Mid-Wales. People feel this is a real problem in our churches, and the poor relation they have with CADW.

Graham John

(Lead Petitioner)

17th June 2011