

CLAS CIRCULAR
2009/03 (23 February 2009)

FAITH AND SOCIETY

Church bells and noise pollution

In answer to a very broad question about noise pollution from Eric Pickles MP, Environment Minister Huw-Irranca Davies said that complaints about noise from church bells would be subject to part III of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (as amended), “but we would expect common sense to be applied to the handling of complaints not least because church halls [*sic*] are part of our culture and heritage”.

So would we – and we assume he meant “bells”, not “halls”.

[Source: HC Deb (2008–09) 9 February c1584W]

Faith in Affordable Housing

Faith in Affordable Housing is a joint initiative of Housing Justice (a Body in Association with CTE which is chaired by Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor), the Homes and Communities Agency and the Tenant Services Authority (non-departmental public bodies sponsored by DCLG), the Commission for Rural Communities and representation from the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodist Church and the University of Gloucestershire. Its purpose is:

- to demonstrate practical Christian concern and action in the community at a time when many young people and low-income families are experiencing great hardship;
- to give practical help to churches by sharing good practice and showing what can be done;
- to provide solutions to some of the problems faced by churches wishing to develop affordable housing;
- to reconcile the dilemma faced by many churches of balancing social objectives (such as valuing everyone, justice for the poor and placing morality before wealth) with the pragmatic objectives of meeting the duties of trustees and maximising investment returns;
- to highlight options for the stewardship of church assets;
- to encourage churches to make the most of partnership opportunities; and
- to explain what action church property and finance personnel can take both to contribute to affordable housing and to benefit church and community.

The new [website](#) was launched on 12 February at Church House.

[Source: *Ekklesia* – 13 February 2009]

Places of Worship Grant Scheme

A written parliamentary question about the possible extension of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme beyond March 2011 was answered by Stephen Timms as follows:

The Government's long-term objective is to secure the necessary agreement at European level to allow the introduction of a reduced rate of VAT for church repairs, which is not currently permitted by EU VAT agreements. The European Commission has proposed changes to Directive 2006/112/EC to allow a reduced VAT rate to be applied to church repairs, as part of a broader proposal on reduced VAT rates, but member states' discussions of the proposal are ongoing. The Government will take into account any changes to EU VAT agreements when reviewing whether the current arrangements should be extended beyond 2011.

[Source: HC Deb (2008–09)10 Feb 2009 c 1851W]

FUNDING

Third sector action plan

The Government has announced its long-awaited action plan for the voluntary sector under the title [Real Help for Communities: Volunteers, Charities and Social Enterprises](#). The package is worth £42.5 million – far less than the sector was hoping – and consists of:

- up to £10 million investment in a volunteer brokerage scheme for unemployed people which, it is hoped, will create over 40,000 opportunities for people to learn new skills to equip them for volunteering;
- a £15.5 million Community Resilience Fund to provide grant funding to small and medium providers in the most deprived communities, in addition to the £130 million already committed to the Grassroots Grants programme;
- a £16.5 million modernisation fund to help with the cost of mergers, partnerships and moves to more efficient sharing of back-office functions for third sector organisations; and
- £0.5 million investment in the School for Social Entrepreneurs to double the number of people it trains.

There will also be “a national campaign to raise awareness of the Government’s commitment to pay all invoices within 10 days, which will improve cash flow for small organisations”. It is not entirely clear what this is designed to achieve – it is *Government* that needs to be aware of this commitment, not the sector at large.

[Source: *Cabinet Office News* – 9 February 2009]