

News Release

24/11/06

Sacred Britain initiative given rapturous welcome

The National Sacred Britain Working Group unveiled this week their new '*Agenda for Action*' at the Churches Tourism Association (CTA) Convention 2006, the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire.

'Sacred Britain: Places of Worship and the Tourism Destination Experience – An Agenda for Action' aims to make churches and places of worship a 'must see' part of exploring Britain's destinations. To realise this vision, the strategy sets out priorities for action over the next three years (2007-2009). Under the project acronym 'ASPIRE', the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has recently awarded a £50,000 Project Planning Grant to enable key items on the agenda to be taken forward.

HLF's support was echoed and reinforced by the enthusiastic reception given to the strategy, following its launch at the CTA Convention on Monday 20th November, by government, tourism, church and heritage representatives from throughout the United Kingdom at national, regional and local level.

The Convention's action-packed programme enabled a thorough unpacking of the strategy - drawing upon the experience and specialist knowledge of a broad range of professionals, including representatives from VisitBritain, DCMS, DEFRA, The Civic Trust, The Churches Conservation Trust, the Open Churches Trust and many other regional and local church tourism initiatives.

Keynote speakers included The Bishop of Norwich and David Lammy, Minister for Culture, who recognised the crucial role which the rich heritage of Britain's church buildings play as valuable visitor attractions and community spaces - bringing holistic benefits to their local communities, especially in rural areas. Lammy gave his full endorsement of the strategy:

"In commending the Sacred Britain initiative, properly thought-out tourism strategies, such as this, will be vital for the well being of our country and it should form part of a wider strategy to cover the next decade. My Department will need to support this sort of tourism commitment if the initiative is to succeed."

Delighted by the success of the Convention and encouraged by the inspiration, momentum and guidance which the event and the strategy will give to practitioners at all levels, the Chairman of CTA, The Reverend Canon John Brown, concluded:

"This year has been a milestone for church tourism and the CTA. We are proud of the contribution we have made to the development of the *Sacred Britain* strategy and are delighted by the resounding support it has received. By way of this contribution and through delivering such a high-calibre national event as this year's Convention, we have successfully raised our profile and strengthened our position as the national body championing church tourism. We look forward to continuing to support our cause in the future."

Building upon the Convention's success and in order to commend and support the strategy's practical implementation, CTA is now planning a series of regional events in 2007 followed by a convention of international significance in 2008.

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FOR FURTHER ENQUIRIES

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EDITOR'S NOTES

1. Please find attached a low resolution digital photograph of keynote speakers, from left to right: Crispin Truman (Chief Executive, The Churches Conservation Trust) , John Mills (Director of Rural Policy, DEFRA) , David Friesner (Director of Tourism, Leicestershire Promotions) , The Right Honourable David Lammy MP (Minister of Culture), Peter Bembridge (Managing Director, The Civic Trust), Deirdre Livingstone (Head of Project for the Jamestown Campaign 2007, VisitBritain), The Right Reverend Graham James, The Bishop of Norwich, The Reverend Canon John Brown (Chair, Churches Tourism Association), Colin Shearer (Director of Development, The Churches Conservation Trust). A high resolution image is available upon request.
2. A copy of the *Sacred Britain* strategy is available from The Churches Conservation Trust.
3. Interviews with Andrew Duff, author of the strategy, and The Reverend Canon John Brown John Brown, Chair of the Churches Tourism Association, can be arranged upon request.
4. The Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded a £50,000 Project Planning Grant to enable some of the main recommendations of the Sacred Britain agenda to be taken forward. Under the project acronym 'ASPIRE' – Audience Development for Sacred Places in the Regions of England, this will enable 5 or 6 regional 'pathfinder' projects to be worked up during 2007.

5. The Sacred Britain Working Group was set up in November 2005, involving representatives of the following churches and tourism interests at national and regional levels: The Civic Trust, The Churches Conservation Trust, the Church of England's Cathedral and Church Buildings Division, VisitBritain, English Heritage, the Open Churches Trust, the Churches Tourism Association, the Churches Tourism Network Wales, Scotland's Churches Scheme, the Methodist Church and the Pilgrims' Association.

The tourism destination perspective was provided by LeicesterShire Promotions Ltd, whilst representatives of some successful regional or diocesan churches tourism initiatives have also taken part, including Sacred Sussex, Lincoln Diocese and Yorkshire Churches Regional Commission.

6. The Churches Tourism Association (CTA) is England's leading body for faith heritage tourism. It seeks to value, present and develop the tourism potential and a quality visitor experience for this unique component of our heritage, interpreting the past, making the most of the distinctiveness of each locality and faith community in the present and securing a sustainable future.
7. The CTA Convention was sponsored and supported in practical ways by:
 - The Churches Conservation Trust (main sponsor) – caring for over 330 historic churches that are no longer needed for parish use but are of architectural and historic importance.
 - The Department for Culture, Media and Sport
 - Visit Britain - the national tourism marketing agency for Britain.
 - The Church of England, Cathedral and Church Buildings Division
 - The Civic Trust - umbrella body for over 800 civic societies
 - The Tourism Society - the professional body for people working in all sectors of the visitor economy.

