Maintenance Co-operatives Project

**Second External Evaluation Report
April - December 2015**

Prepared for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

February 2016

Contents

Introduction

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) commissioned Oakmere Solutions Ltd. to carry out external evaluation of the Maintenance Co-operatives Project for the duration of the project (October 2013 – December 2016). This report summarises the outcomes of external evaluation for the period April – December 2015. The report builds on previous reports covering the period from start-up to March 2015.

The Maintenance Co-operatives Project aims to:
- Create and support a series of maintenance co-operatives to bring together groups of people caring for places of worship in five regions: Cumbria, the North East, Herefordshire & Worcestershire, Lincolnshire and the South West;
- Carry out training of staff and volunteers including a networking conference;
- Recruit volunteer co-ordinators to set up local co-operatives and encourage maintenance of places of worship;
- Develop a national maintenance network supported by an improved website.

The Maintenance Co-operatives Project is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the reported project aims are also the HLF 'Approved Purposes'.

The Maintenance Co-operatives Project runs from October 2013 to December 2016. The project is working to achieve the following outputs:
- the creation of a minimum of 25 local maintenance co-operatives that are self-sustaining and will therefore continue to operate after the project ends;
- an increase in the number and diversity of people who take an active role in looking after historic places of worship;
- the recruitment of at least 25 volunteer co-ordinators;
- the delivery of a high quality training and activity programme that increases the sharing of good practice, knowledge, skills and understanding of project participants;
- the creation of a simple pack of maintenance worksheets and aide memoires specific to each place of worship taking part in the project;
- the creation of an online resource bank to share ideas, maintenance tools and other resources etc.;
- the development of tools and methodologies to assess the impact of training and support for volunteers on the maintenance and condition of historic places of worship;
- a measurable improvement in the condition of historic places of worship looked after by those involved in the local maintenance co-operatives (e.g. gutters and drains being cleaned more regularly and maintenance inspections being carried out annually);
- increased community awareness of the importance of maintaining historic places of worship.

The project outcomes identified for **people** are:
Volunteer co-ordinators will:
- have gained greater skills and confidence and the ability to take on a role as a community leader and mentor;
- have increased knowledge and understanding of maintenance issues and the ability to communicate this to others;
- have a sense of well-being gained through volunteering their time to help others;
- feel that their personal motives for volunteering have been fulfilled;

- feel that their contribution towards looking after their local heritage is valued and celebrated;
- be proud of their achievements and impact on the care of historic places of worship.

The project outcomes identified for **communities** are:
Local faith organisations will:
- be more resilient as local maintenance co-operatives become self-sustaining;
- be able to capture and share information, skills and resources more effectively;
- be able to make the wider community more aware of the value of historic places of worship;
- be better able to understand and act on the need for regular maintenance with regard to the long term care of historic places of worship;
- be more capable of using existing resources effectively by making sound decisions with regard to prioritising maintenance and repair needs.

The project outcomes identified for the **heritage** are:
Places of worship will be:
- better managed;
- better resourced;
- in better condition.

As the external evaluator Oakmere Solutions Ltd. is providing external scrutiny, validation, and evaluation against the aims of the project, and making recommendations during the project for development and legacy.

Evaluation Methodology

For the purposes of this report we are defining 'monitoring' as the systematic and routine collection of information to improve practice, ensure accountability, inform decisions and empower beneficiaries, and 'evaluation' as systematic and relevant processes to assess relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

During the period to December 2015, Oakmere Solutions has worked with the project team to evaluate data gathered by the team from:
- feedback from attendees at training events;
- feedback from attendees at the annual conference;
- monitoring data on co-operatives.

To supplement this data, Oakmere Solutions has carried out:
- an online survey of people who had attended project training events to explore the impact on them and their place of worship (August 2015);
- nine individual stakeholder interviews (November 2015);
- eight individual interviews with team members (December 2015).

During the final project year (2016), Oakmere Solutions will carry out an online impact survey with participants, work with the project team to gather volunteer data, carry out telephone interviews with volunteers, and support the project team's development of case studies of practice.

This report for the period to December 2015 builds on earlier reports and findings. It will form part of our summary evaluation report to be completed in 2016. However, its primary purpose is formative. Specifically, it is designed to support the project team to learn from experience and improve practice during the project, focus efforts during the final project year and consequently improve and promote future sustainability and the dissemination of good and interesting practice.

The report summarises project activities, successes and challenges before making a number of recommendations for immediate consideration by the project team. Evidence to support these summary points and fuller detail is presented in a series of Appendices.

Project Activities

During the period to April to December 2015 the project has delivered a number of activities, products and services to address its aims. Specifically:

- Established 25 co-operatives;
- Recruited and trained volunteers;
- Delivered 61 training events during the period across all project geographic areas and attended by 680 people. These events have been wide-ranging and include project launch events, taster days, baseline survey training days, and skills days covering topics such as dealing with damp, setting up Friends Groups, preventing theft and vandalism, housekeeping and object conservation;
- Produced publicity material, a development toolkit and provided technical advice;
- Delivered a second national conference attended by 86 people held in Birmingham in November 2015 promoting the project and best practice in maintaining places of worship;
- Launched a project web site **-** www.spabmcp.org.uk

Successes

Event feedback, survey responses and stakeholder and staff interviews identify a number of project successes including:

- 25 maintenance co-operatives, either fully established or started (Hereford and Worcester five fully established, two start-ups; North East two fully established, two start-ups; Lincolnshire four fully established, three start-ups; Cumbria two fully established, three start-ups; South West one fully established, one start-up). In addition, a further three potential co-operatives are being supported by the team;
- Engagement with over 300 volunteers;
- Delivery of a wide range of training events that are well regarded, meeting the needs of attendees and leading to positive impacts on their knowledge, understanding and confidence, and on their maintenance of places of worship;
- Enthusiasm from training event attendees for most of the resources made available by the project;
- Evidence of some positive actions leading to immediate improvements in the condition of places of worship, and the further potential for improvement when the products of training had been fully implemented;
- Evidence of general interest in the maintenance co-operatives model and explicit interest from many volunteers in being part of a co-operative;

- Enthusiastic support from stakeholders, who endorse the aims of the project, the co-operatives model, and the high quality training and resources being delivered;
- Stakeholders value the experienced, enthusiastic and professional project delivery team who are identified as being committed to the project aims and having established productive local partnerships;
- Stakeholders view established co-operatives as being effective and likely to have a positive impact on the condition of places of worship;
- The team has responded to local need to develop equipment boxes for the co-operatives as a practical way of supporting volunteers.

Issues

- While 25 co-operatives have been established, the project has limited remaining time and resource to develop them all as fully functioning, autonomous and self-sustaining groups;
- It is proving challenging to consistently involve a wide range of volunteers. For example, young people, people from ethnic minorities and those who are not already part of faith communities. Friends Groups linked to places of worship, involvement of local schools and youth groups, and engagement of church outreach groups have however provided useful ways of broadening the volunteer base;
- There is variation in the number of co-operatives that have been established across the five areas and the reasons for this will be explored in the final year of evaluation with the project team;
- Localised co-operative delivery models have enabled the project to respond effectively to different contexts. However, the consequent variations in practice makes the identification of the generic characteristics of a successful co-operative potentially more difficult, and may in turn limit the transferability of the model more widely in the heritage sector;
- The value of strong local leadership of co-operatives and achieving this through recruiting volunteer co-ordinators is endorsed by stakeholders and the project team as a good model for future sustainability. However, recruiting to the volunteer co-ordinator role is proving to be difficult and stakeholders suggest that volunteers will need support from an organisation, or be part of a facilitated network to maintain momentum in the longer term;
- Whilst the team are working with a range of faiths, they identify the Church of England's need as greatest. This is primarily because building maintenance is devolved to parish level and there are significantly more buildings to look after. While there are notable examples of strong support where priests in charge have been active change agents, the team and stakeholders have experienced challenges with aspects of how the Church of England works. For example, respondents report: difficulty accessing effective communication channels to ensure that publicity reaches the right audiences; some poor training of church wardens, priests and volunteers in looking after buildings; some perceived under-valuing of the contribution of volunteers; resistance to engaging people outside the congregation to help with building maintenance. In addition, the team have found it difficult to generate engagement with the project from the Church of England at a national level;
- There is limited evidence to date of the embedding of the project in SPAB structures and its work;

- There is little evidence to date of the project's impact on improving church buildings. What evidence that exists is largely anecdotal.

Recommendations

A review of previous evaluation reports and an analysis of findings presented in the Appendices has identified areas for further reflection and development. These have informed the following set of recommendations for consideration by the project team during the final year of the project. Additional detail of recommendations from stakeholders is presented in appendix 4:

- Identify volunteer co-ordinators where not currently in post and provide training and mentoring to support them in developing each co-operative. This should be identified as a priority given the importance of this role as a project deliverable;
- Using evidence from practice, identify ways of engaging people who are not regular worshippers in maintenance activities;
- Refocus regional activities from training so as to release resource to put in place intensive nurturing of 'prototype' co-operatives in different localities so that they become resilient and sustainable by the end of the project;
- Produce publicity about the project both regionally and nationally which reports and celebrates the project's achievements;
- Develop additional good practice guides to inform and inspire the sector and include these on the 'co-operatives toolkit' web pages. A number of themes for these have emerged including setting up and engaging Friends Groups to help with building maintenance, involving and training volunteers, working with local community partners;
- Identify the characteristics of an effective co-operative as part of the development of case studies of practice to be produced as a final project deliverable;
- Engage with senior national individuals and structures within faith organisations using evidence from the project to promote its value and open up dialogue about how the co-operatives can be supported after the project ends. A number of suggestions for groups to engage with include the Church Buildings Council, archdeacons, rural deans and diocesan structures within the Church of England and similar national structures within other faiths, other church building initiatives such as Caring for Gods Acre, Shrinking the Footprint, Churches Together in England, Future for Religious Heritage;
- Ensure that the project is known about and valued within SPAB and, where appropriate, that steps are taken to embed project activities, services and products such as the website, within SPAB's core activities;
- Incorporate regular analysis of feedback into project team dialogue so that it informs practice on a constant and consistent basis;
- Explore ways to achieve the project output of increasing community awareness of the importance of maintaining places of worship;
- Gather evidence that places of worship are in better condition as a result of project activities and disseminate these findings to inform practice.

Appendix 1: Summary feedback from 2016 conference

The second conference 'Working Co-operatively – maintenance and more' was held at the Friends Meeting House in Birmingham on 20 November 2015.

86 people attended the conference with 71 attendees providing feedback on their experience. Of those providing feedback 37 were already volunteers at a place of worship.
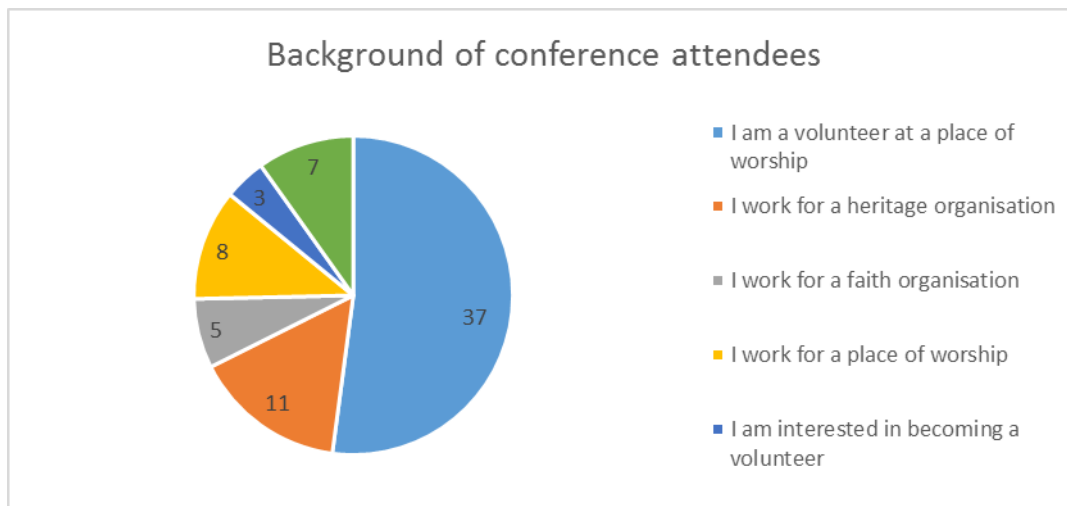
For 73% of respondents this was their first Maintenance Co-operatives event compared to 95% of respondents attending the 2014 conference.
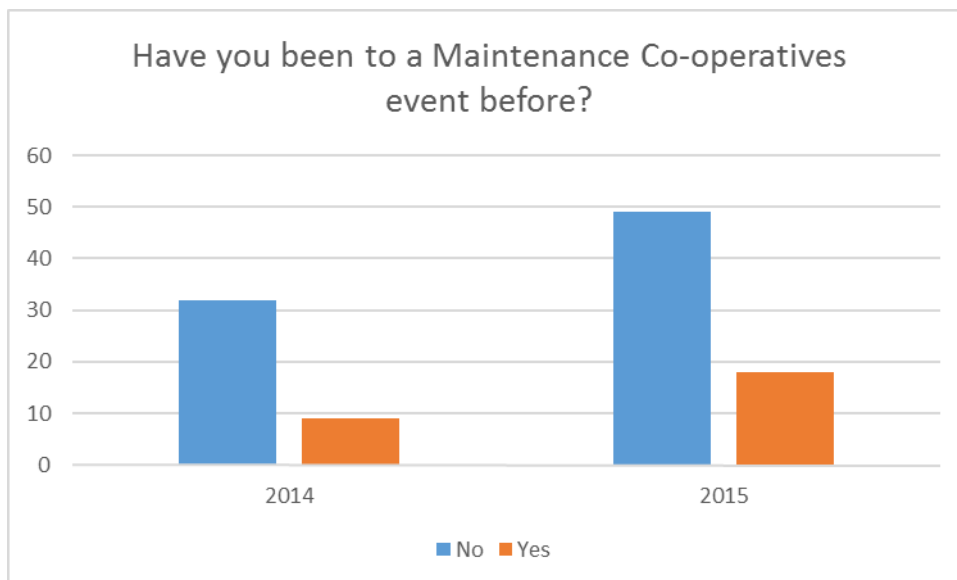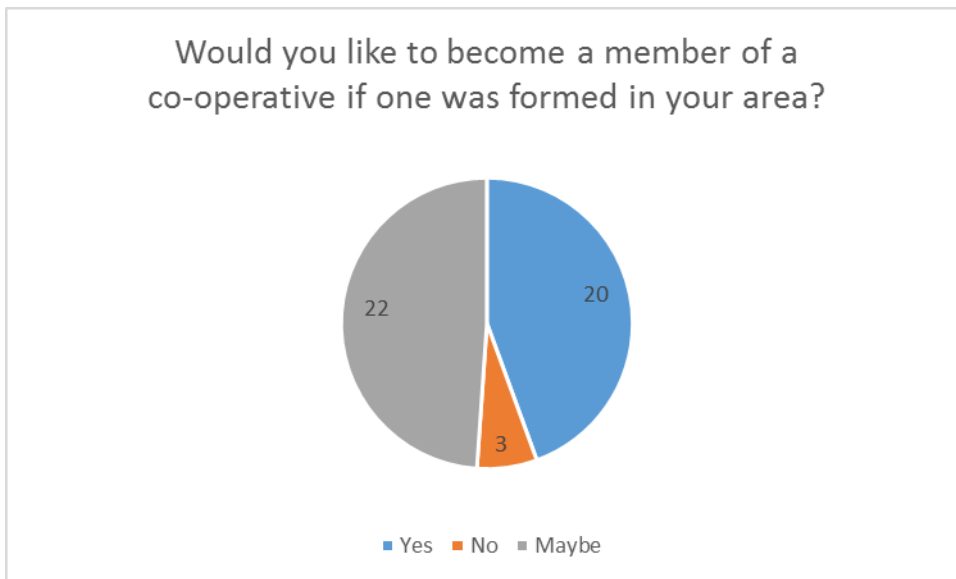

As with the 2014 conference, there was an overwhelmingly positive response from attendees about the quality of booking, pre-conference information, facilities, catering, quality of speakers and overall organisation (99% rating these as excellent or good).

Attendees were asked what they hoped to get out of attending the conference and provided a wide range of reasons including, developing maintenance skills and knowledge and finding out about funding opportunities. 26% explicitly wanted to find out more about co-operatives and the project in general and a further 18% wanted to network and share practice with others. 96% of responses confirmed that the conference 'completely' met their expectations.

Attendees were asked to select from a list of possible future training topics which generated a helpful list to inform the future training offer.

Twelve attendees were already involved in a co-operative. Of those who were not there was significant interest in finding out more about getting involved.

Would you like to become a member of a co-operative if one was formed in your area?

22   3   20

■ Yes   ■ No   ■ Maybe

Appendix 2: Summary feedback from training events April - December 2015

The project team currently use two types of feedback forms – one for introductory talks and one for all other training. Of the 680 people who attended 61 training events held between April – December 2015, 133 provided feedback on introductory events and an additional 324 provided feedback on all other training. The outcomes are summarised below.

All those who provided feedback on introductory events felt that the aims of the Maintenance Co-operative project were very or quite relevant to their place of worship and 44% said that they would be interested in being a member of a co-operative if one was available in their area. Attendees reported a wide range of activities that they carried out to maintain their place of worship. 51% reported that log books were used to record maintenance.
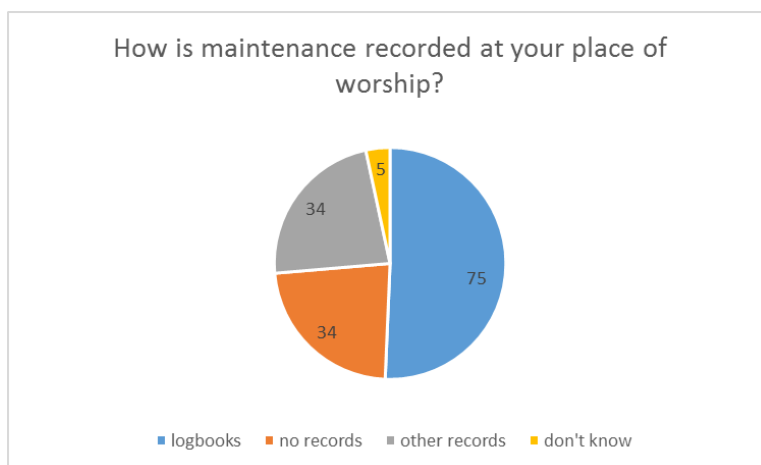
291 (91%) of those completing feedback forms on training events reported that they had learned something 'useful' during the event (giving the rating of 4 or 5 on a five-point scale). 90% said they would be able to make use of the skills and knowledge they gained. This shows an improvement on feedback from 2014.
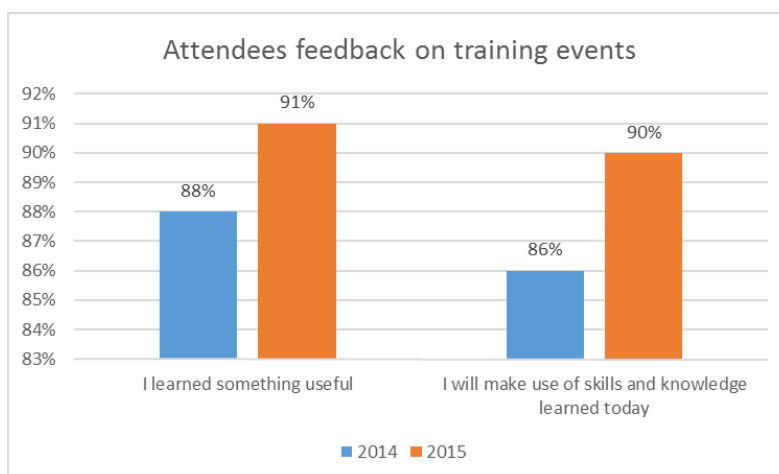
Of those completing feedback forms on training events, 33% (88) were members of a maintenance co-operative and 67% (179) were not.

Are you a member of a co-operative?
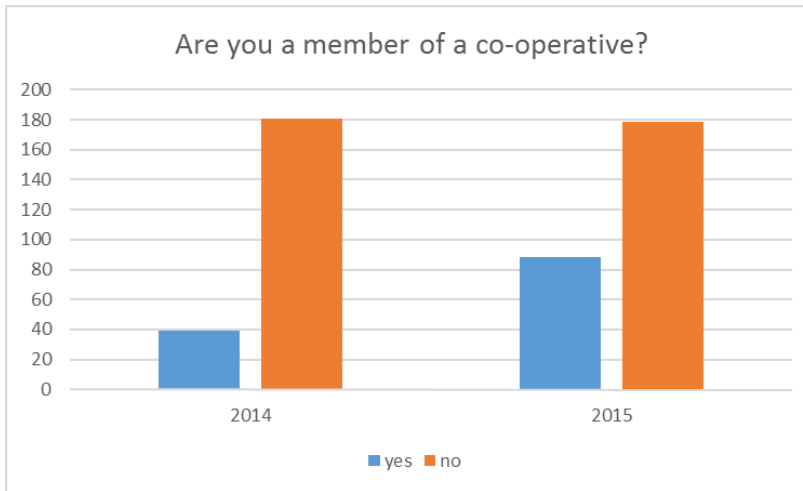
Of the 179 who were not members of a co-operative, 31% (53) said that they would be interested and 60% (101) said they might be interested in being a member of a co-operative.

Would you like to become a member if a co-op were available in your area?
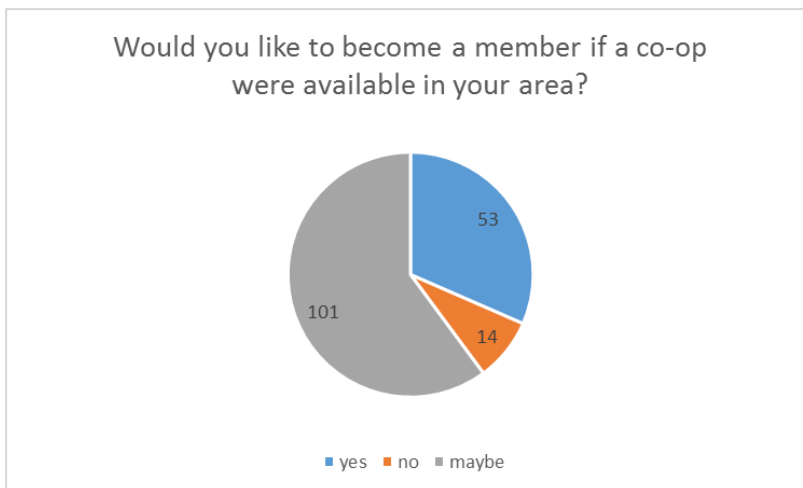
Appendix 3: Impact review August 2015
(Previously submitted to the Project Team with full appendices: 24 August 2015)

Executive summary

This report presents the results of an online survey carried out in June 2015 by Oakmere Solutions Ltd for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings Maintenance Co-operatives Project to review the impact of training delivered between October 2014 and March 2015. This survey forms part of the external evaluation of the project carried out by Oakmere Solutions Ltd.

Overall the 2015 survey found:
- Training events that are valued by attendees, meet their needs and lead to positive impacts on their knowledge and understanding and on their maintenance of places of worship;
- Enthusiasm from training event attendees for most of the resources made available by the project;
- Evidence of positive actions leading to immediate improvements in the condition of places of worship, and the further potential for improvement in the future.

Based on findings the report makes a set of recommendations for consideration by the team:
- The findings are broadly consistent with those in 2014 and suggest an area for further reflection by the team. Specifically, whether 71% (15 out of 21 respondents) represents an appropriate level of impact and how subsequent monitoring can seek to secure a more qualitative insight into the impact of training. The team may also like to reflect on whether the reported findings on impact are consistent with their own anecdotal and other evidence;
- Reflect on the value of incorporating further advice, encouragement and support for the recruitment of volunteers to facilitate the development of maintenance co-operatives and other forms of collaborative working with similar community networks;
- Further consider how to promote the use of social media, the new website and other project resources during training events to both showcase the benefits and support volunteers gaining confidence and skills in using them;
- Consider how future training events might further encourage attendees to put their learning into practice at their place of worship;
- Reflect on how to further support the local promotion of the training events and the project more generally;
- Reflect on the target audience for training events and whether this needs further definition or extension to attract more, and a wider range of attendees;
- Reflect on how future training events might encourage attendees to give post-event feedback when contacted to support monitoring and evaluation of the value of training and how it has impacted on their place of worship.

Methodology

This is the second impact survey completed for the project. Outcomes of the first survey were reported in January 2015 and a final survey is scheduled for June 2016. An online survey using

SurveyMonkey constructed by Oakmere Solutions and agreed by the maintenance co-operatives team was used to gather data. For consistency the survey used the same questions as the first survey, with minor modifications made to facilitate answers to question 4. An explanatory email with link to the survey was sent on 22 June 2015 to 195 people who had attended training events offered through the project between October 2014 and March 2015. A follow up reminder email was sent on 8 July 2015. A total of 21 people accessed the survey representing 11% of those approached. Not all respondents completed all questions. The email made explicit that views were being sought on the *impact of*, and *behavioural changes associated with* the training and not on the quality of the training event itself (this having been captured by an end of event questionnaire). While 21 responses represent a relatively small sample, the analysis is useful in drawing inferences to inform the teams' reflection on project operation and to provide cumulative and trend data and analysis on the impact of the project.
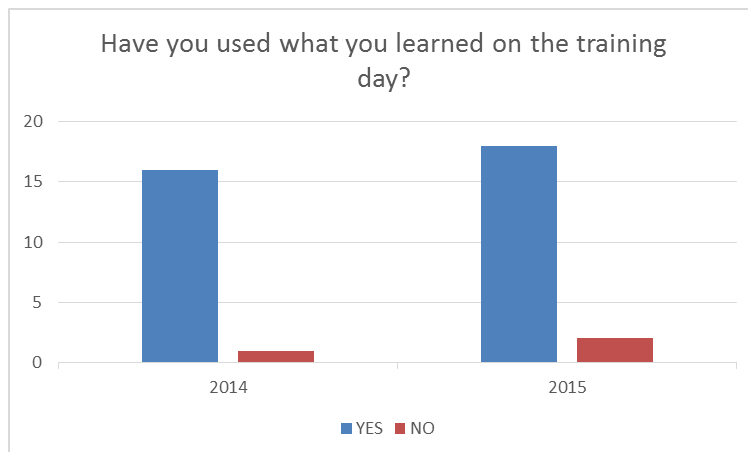
Findings

Findings are presented for each question posed with direct quotes from respondents provided where these add insight. Detailed responses to each question, including the numbers responding and respondents' comments are included in Appendix 1. Where appropriate, data from the previous impact survey report of January 2015 has been included to show trends.

Question 1: Which training day did you attend?

Of the 20 responses to this question, 35% (7) had attended two or more training days and one person had attended five. This is similar to findings in the first impact survey where 30% (5) had attended two or more training day and one person had attended four.

Question 2: Have you used what you learned on the training day?

Of the 20 responses to this question, 90% (18) replied positively and 10% (2) negatively. This is consistent with 2014 findings.

Respondents identified a number of practical activities they had undertaken such as putting in place monthly checks, carrying out surveys, organising maintenance. Others reported being more aware of maintenance issues and being alert to potential problems:

> *"Groups can take ownership of a repair project by learning to look closely at their building and take a methodical approach to surveying basic issues"* Survey respondent

Responses suggest that participants had gained increased knowledge of how to carry out surveys of buildings and tackle preventative maintenance:

> *"Excellent training which really opens your eyes to what your building needs"* Survey Respondent

Of the two respondents who had not used what they had learned on the training day, one had just started as a volunteer Verger and had not had an opportunity to put learning into practice, the other was a Building Control Officer who reported an increase in knowledge.

Question 3: Has attending the training day had an impact on how you look after your place of worship?
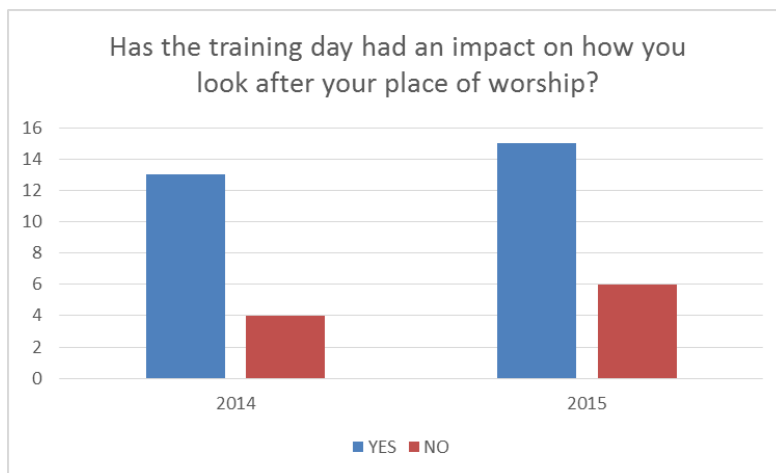
Of the 21 responses to this question, 71% (15) believed training had had a positive impact and 29% (6) believed it had had no impact.

Respondents cited a number of positive impacts on their practice including: taking photographs as a monitoring device; knowing what to look for and what materials to use to make repairs; being thorough in inspecting the building and recording findings; carrying out regular checks, and *"taking a more methodical approach"* (Survey Respondent). Two respondents reported positive impacts in taking a more collaborative approach to maintenance and awareness raising in the community:

> *"We are at an early stage of using a co-operative. The most helpful impact has been to deliver an awareness to the community about the effort and resource required to maintain the church"* Survey Respondent

Of those who answered negatively, two were not church goers, one advises places of worships rather than looking after a specific site, and three said that they already have processes in place to look after their buildings but were complimentary about the training received:

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"We have looked after our building but now do it in a more systematic way" Survey Respondent

The findings are broadly consistent with those in 2014 and suggest an area for further reflection by the team. Specifically, whether 71% (15 out of 21 respondents) represents an appropriate level of impact and how subsequent monitoring can seek to secure a more qualitative insight into this important project outcome.

Question 4: Please tell us whether you have used any of the resources and how useful you found them?

21 Responses but only nine people answered the future intention question.

Usefulness of project resources

Views of project resources

I intend to use this in future
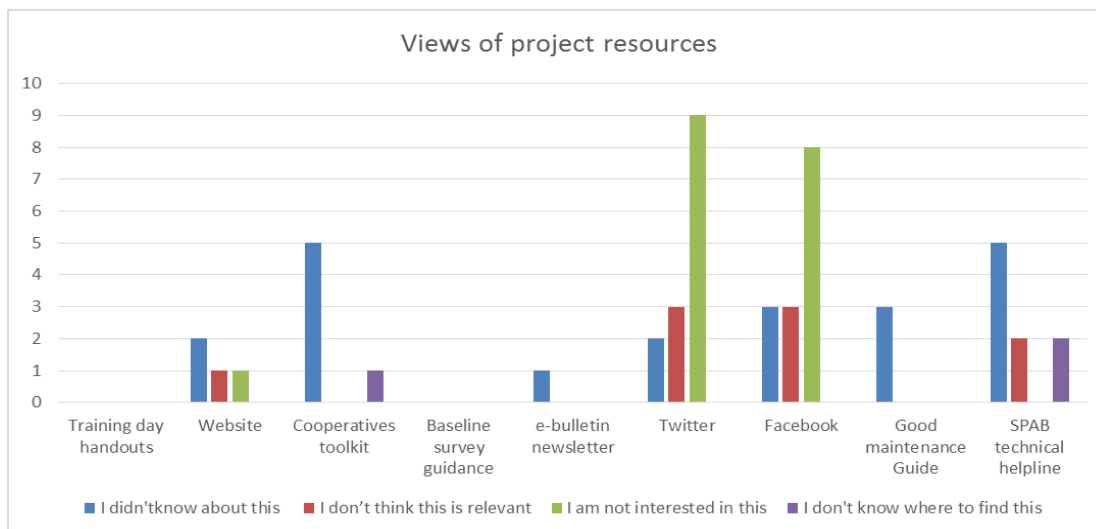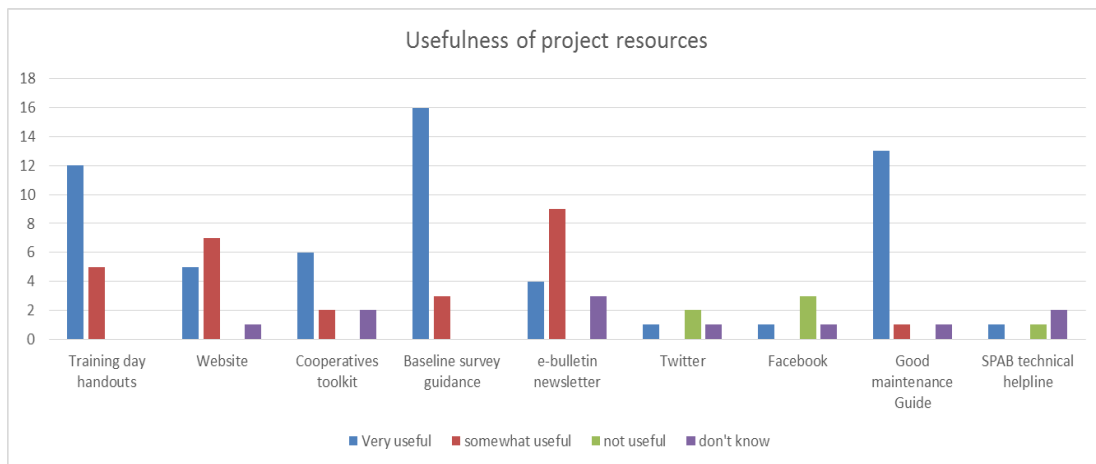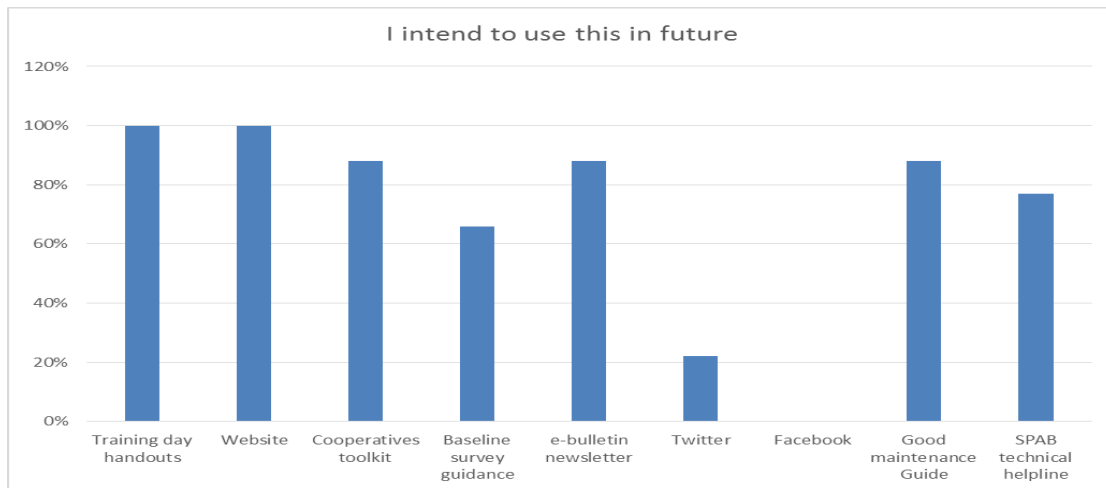
Practical, 'how to' resources such as the training day hand-outs, the baseline survey guidance and the good maintenance guide were identified as the most useful resources by respondents. This is consistent with findings in the first survey.

> *"Our church had its quinquennial survey in September 2014. I was able to walk through with the Architect and appreciate what he was looking for and remedial actions that may be necessary"* Survey Respondent.

Survey evidence suggests that there is a sufficient level of internet skills amongst attendees to make effective use of online resources. No attendee cited lack of access to the internet as a reason for not using on line resources and three respondents cited having resources available on line was very helpful and enabled them to share these effectively with others.

As in the first survey, social media resources which support dialogue between volunteers (Twitter and Facebook) were identified as being of least interest to respondents, although two people did identify Twitter as a resource they intend to use in the future.

A total of 10 individual respondents either 'didn't know about' or 'didn't know where to find' the SPAB technical help line and/or the Co-operatives toolkit. The team may wish to reflect on how they can provide more promotion of these resources and how to access them during the training events.

Question 5: What has the training day has led to?

Respondents to this question identified that training activity had directly led to the following:

	2014		2015	
	(14 respondents)		(21 respondents)	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Recruitment of additional volunteers	6	42%	4	19%
Carrying out a baseline condition survey of your place of worship	8	57%	11	52%
Developing a maintenance action plan	7	50%	10	47%

|				
Prioritising how you carry out maintenance tasks	9	64%	14	66%
Setting up regular maintenance inspections	10	71%	13	61%
Clearing gutters/rainwater goods	10	71%	15	71%
Working more closely with your local community on maintenance	4	28%	6	28%
Working collaboratively with neighbouring Places of worship on maintenance	2	14%	3	14%
Setting up or becoming more actively involved in a maintenance Co-operative	4	28%	6	28%
Making contact with other volunteers involved in maintaining places of worship	2	14%	6	28%
Other	1	7%	2	9%

Findings are broadly consistent between the 2014 and 2015 surveys. The two areas of difference relate to the 'recruitment of additional volunteers' which shows a decline and 'making contact with other volunteers' which shows an increase.   Only seven respondents provided comments, six of which offered positive evidence of activities such as:

> *"We now have a team of maintenance volunteers and we work on the church at least four times a month."* Survey Respondent

Comments suggest variable experience in adopting a collaborative approach to maintenance. One respondent cited *"growing support for the collaborative approach",* another that *"alternative ways of finding volunteers still to be explored"*, while for another *"there has been little support for maintenance co-operatives in my area".* The last respondent identified a need for better, more attractive and eye catching publicity, such as leaflets and posters, to be available at a local level to raise awareness of training events and collaborative volunteering opportunities.

Whilst the numbers involved are small the project team may wish to reflect on how the training programme and subsequent feedback encourage the identification and training of new volunteers and networking with other volunteers given the importance of volunteering and sustainable maintenance practice as project outputs. The team might also consider how events are promoted and the possible use of publicity 'templates' for posters and leaflets which can be adapted locally to promote the project's ambitions if these are not already available.

Question 6: Has the training and subsequent actions you have taken led to improved condition of your place of worship?

Has the training and subsequent actions led to improved condition of your place of worship?
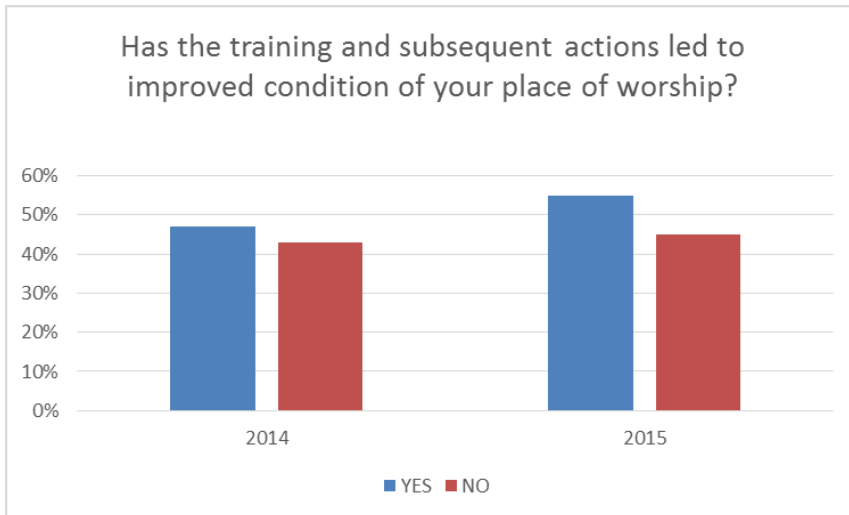
Overall the 2015 responses are consistent with those of 2014 with some 55% (11 out of 20 respondents) identifying improvements. Examples given by those who answered 'yes' include: consulting the local fire officer and acting on advice; clearing weeds; clearing gutters and downpipes (three replies); upgrading a lightning conductor; reviewing outcomes of a baseline survey; accessing a grant for churchyard maintenance; maintaining doors and locks; and making the church a safer environment:

> *"… at this stage limited to low key actions such as work on drainage channels, but the importance of this type of activity is better appreciated"* Survey Respondent

Of the comments made by the nine people who answered 'no' to this question, two did not attend a place of worship, two were awaiting completion of repairs before taking any other action, two had 'not yet' taken action, and three provided no comments. It should be noted that respondents to this questionnaire included professionals and people who do not attend a place of worship or who do not help to maintain a place of worship. Nonetheless, given the importance of 'practical physical improvements' as a project outcome the team may wish to reflect on whether an 'impact rate' of 55% is consistent with their ambitions for the project or whether it under-represents anticipated actual impact estimated anecdotally or by other means.

In addition, given these responses the team may wish to reflect on the project aim of providing training to 'staff and volunteers' and whether there would be benefit in more clearly identifying target audiences for training so as to support the project in meeting its output of 'achieving a measurable improvement in the condition of historic places of worship'. Indeed, there may be additional value in expanding definitions of the target audience in order to widen and deepen the impact of the project.

Question 7: We would like to know what impact the training has had on you. Has the training helped you to:

	Very much/ Somewhat		Not very much/Not at all	
	2014	2015	2014	2015

Feel more confident in caring for the place of worship	94%	100%	6%	0%
Have increased knowledge and understanding of maintenance	100%	100%	0%	0%
Have increased skills in carrying out basic maintenance	79%	80%	21%	20%
Feel better able to carry out basic maintenance	87%	100%	13%	0%
Feel a greater sense of ownership and responsibility for the place of worship	88%	75%	12%	25%
Feel less isolated and able to participate in maintenance	60%	80%	40%	20%
Know where to access information about maintenance	87%	90%	13%	10%
Know how to make contact with other volunteers	64%	62%	36%	38%
Devote more time to volunteering activity	33%	42%	66%	58%

Responses to this question generally demonstrate improvements on the 2014 findings. The main exception being 'feel a greater sense of ownership' which the team might reflect on. Two individual respondents raised concerns about their capacity to put right previous repairs which have had a negative impact on the building, an area which the team may wish to incorporate into training.

Responses to this question suggest that most respondents are already heavily involved in volunteering and do not feel able to devote more time to it. Given that the focus of the project is on the creation and support of collaborative approaches to maintenance including bringing in more people to participate in this task, the team might usefully review the promotion of the training events to broaden the target audience to attract new potential volunteers.

Question 8: Would you recommend the training to other people and if so why?

19 out of 21 respondents would recommend the training to others and gave a number of reasons for this including: the high quality, practical and inspirational nature of the training day; the resources made available; and the relevance of the training for people engaged in looking after historic places of worship:

> *" It is well presented, encouraging, good training, gives plenty of time to ask questions. Expert and very helpful trainers give confidence in being able to make a difference."*
> Survey Respondent

The two people who replied negatively also gave the following positive comments: *"I would recommend the training to anyone thinking of setting up a maintenance team to work on a church building"*; *"information provided is excellent, it also helps participants to share their experiences"*.

Question 9: Any other training or support that you would find useful?

Respondents made the following suggestions:

- A workshop on lime mortaring/plaster (two respondents);
- Short session on stained glass repairs/conservation;
- Finding sources of income;
- Process of inviting tenders;
- Dealing with DACs;
- Access to a list of church suppliers of paint, plaster, downpipes, gutters, cherry pickers;
- List of contractors who specialise in repairs to churches (2 respondents).

Question 10

Seven respondents left their details to be contacted for telephone interviews in the future.

Successes and recommendations

The 2015 survey findings suggest a number of project successes including:
- Training events that are valued by attendees, meet their needs and which lead to positive impacts on their knowledge and understanding and on their maintenance of places of worship;
- Enthusiasm from training event attendees for most of the resources made available by the project;
- Evidence of positive actions leading to immediate improvements in the condition of places of worship, and the further potential for improvement in the future.

2015 findings also identified or reinforced areas for further reflection and development. These have informed the following set of recommendations for consideration by the team:
- The findings are broadly consistent with those in 2014 and suggest an area for further reflection by the team. Specifically, whether 71% (15 out of 21 respondents) represents an appropriate level of impact and how subsequent monitoring can seek to secure a more qualitative insight into the impact of training. The team may also like to reflect on whether the reported findings on impact are consistent with their own anecdotal and other evidence;
- Reflect on the value of incorporating further advice, encouragement and support for the recruitment of volunteers to facilitate the development of Maintenance Co-operatives and other forms of collaborative working with similar community networks;
- Further consider how to promote the use of social media, the new website and other project resources during training events to both showcase the benefits and support volunteers gaining confidence and skills in using them;
- Consider how future training events might further encourage attendees to put their learning into practice at their place of worship;
- Reflect on how to further support the local promotion of the training events and the project more generally;
- Reflect on the target audience for training events and whether this needs further definition or extension to attract more, and a wider range of attendees;
- Reflect on how future training events might encourage attendees to give post-event feedback when contacted to support monitoring and evaluation of the value of training and how it has impacted on their place of worship.

Appendix 4: Outcomes of evaluation April – November 2015

(Edited version of the report previously submitted to the Project Team: 8 November 2015)

Purpose of this report

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) commissioned Oakmere Solutions Ltd. to carry out external evaluation of the Maintenance Co-operatives project for the duration of the project (October 2013 – December 2016). This draft report summarises the outcomes of external evaluation for the period April 2015 - November 2015 and has been prepared to support the project team provide content and insight on evaluation at the projects' national conference on 20 November 2015. Feedback on the content of this draft report from the project team and conference delegates, and findings from further interviews with project team members and stakeholders undertaken throughout November and December 2015 will inform the Second External Evaluation Report which will be completed in January 2016.

Evaluation Methodology

During the period April 2015 - November 2015, Oakmere Solutions has worked with the project team to:
- Undertake a second project impact review using an on-line survey methodology. This was published in August 2015 and its outcomes and the project team's responses to it are presented below;
- Contact 14 regional and national organisations drawn from a list provided by the project team and who have engaged with the project. From these we have undertaken nine stakeholder interviews with colleagues from the following organisations:
  - Diocese of Worcester
  - Churches Conservation Trust
  - Heritage Trust for Lincolnshire
  - Inspired North East
  - North East Civic Trust
  - National Churches Trust
  - Historic England
  - Church Buildings Council
  - Historic Religious Buildings Alliance

During November and December 2015 Oakmere Solutions will carry out further evaluation activities including one to one telephone interviews with the project team, follow up telephone conversations with a sample of training event attendees to assess impact on individuals and the heritage, and produce a case study template for use by the team to generate case studies.

Project Activities

Since its inception the project has delivered a number of activities, products and services to address its aims. Specific changes during the period April 2015 – November 2015 are shown in brackets and italics:

- Recruited the project team of Project Manager, five Regional Project Officers, Technical Officer and Administrator;
- Commissioned external evaluators and web-developers (*project website launched summer 2015);*
- Established 24 Maintenance Co-operatives *(7 during the period April – November 2015);*
- Recruited and trained volunteers. 250 unskilled, 11 skilled and 10 professional people volunteered with the project by the end of June 2015;
- Volunteer co-ordinators have been recruited;
- Delivered 47 training events held between May 2014 – March 2015 across all project geographic areas. These have been wide ranging and include project launch events, taster days, baseline survey training days, and skills days covering topics such as dealing with damp;
- Produced publicity material, development toolkit and provided technical advice;
- Delivered a national conference in York in November 2014 (attended by 85 people) and second national conference in Birmingham scheduled for 20 November 2015.

Evaluation Findings during the period

1) Second project impact review published August 2015

In summary, the second project impact review published in August 2015 found a number of project successes including:

- Training events that are valued by attendees, meet their needs and which lead to positive impacts on their knowledge and understanding and on their maintenance of places of worship;
- Enthusiasm from training event attendees for most of the resources made available by the project;
- Evidence of positive actions leading to immediate improvements in the condition of places of worship, and the further potential for improvement in the future.

The report also identified or reinforced areas for further reflection and development. Specifically:

- whether 71% (15 out of 21 respondents) represents an appropriate level of training impact and how subsequent monitoring can seek to secure a more qualitative insight into impact;
- the value of incorporating further advice, encouragement and support for the recruitment of volunteers to facilitate the development of Maintenance Co-operatives and other forms of collaborative working with similar community networks;
- how to promote the use of social media, the new website and other project resources during training events to both showcase the benefits and support volunteers gaining confidence and skills in using them;

- how future training events might further encourage attendees to put their learning into practice at their place of worship;
- how to further support the local promotion of the training events and the project more generally;
- whether the target audience for training events needs further definition or extension to attract more, and a wider range of attendees;
- how future training events might encourage attendees to give post-event feedback when contacted to support monitoring and evaluation of the value of training and how it has impacted on their place of worship.

In response the project team identified the following:
- Regional Project Officers (RPOs) are mailing a printed version of the online survey to training event attendees to canvass a broader range of responses which will be incorporated and included in subsequent reporting;
- An intention to gather qualitative data by putting in place evaluation sessions led by RPOs with each co-operative to provide rich data on impact;
- Actions to continue to recruit volunteers with methods for doing so explored through one-to-one interviews between the external evaluators and the project team during November and December 2015;
- RPOs will continue to use social media but believe few co-operative members use this facility and, as such it has not delivered results in terms of attracting additional volunteers or event attendees;
- RPOs will continue to encourage and support the practical application of training content during training events. Once co-operatives are established the RPOs will get groups together to do baseline surveys, and carry out practical activities. Achievement of this will be monitored through team discussion with each co-operative;
- The project team will continue to reflect on how to better promote training events and volunteer recruitment on a local basis;
- The project team will provide examples of how expanding the target audience for training is being achieved and these will be explored further by Oakmere Solutions in evaluation interviews with RPOs. The project team have identified their primary target audience as church wardens, stewards and fabric officers, but are aware that attracting new and diverse volunteers is likely to require different recruitment approaches. For example, by promoting a focus on heritage rather than faith as a way of involving new volunteers;
- RPOs will further promote to training attendees the value of post-event feedback which will support the effective monitoring and evaluation of the value of training and how it has impacted on their place of worship.

2) Findings from stakeholder interviews

Nine one-to-one telephone stakeholder interviews were undertaken during early November 2015 following initial contact with 14 regional and national organisations who have engaged with the project drawn from a list provided by the project team. The successes and issues identified during these interviews are summarised below. Where appropriate direct quotes are used to inform or reinforce points made (presented in italics). To ensure a level of confidentiality the source of comments and the origin of the points made have been anonymised.

During interviews the stakeholders identified a number of significant project successes including:

- The project is offering high quality, relevant, and inspiring training which is likely to develop the knowledge and skills of attendees, provide reassurance and *"support a can do attitude by demystifying maintenance"* and generally raise awareness of the importance of regular checks and maintenance to look after historic places of worship;
- The project leadership role of SPAB was generally seen positively. SPAB is perceived as independent and a non-religious organisation which has a reputation for expertise in built heritage conservation;
- High quality resources are being provided by the project which are of immediate value to volunteers and of lasting value to the heritage sector;
- The project's aim to create local self-sustaining co-operatives was felt to be a good model to support volunteers in looking after places of worship but potentially difficult to achieve:

    "Local small scale is the spirit of the age" Stakeholder interview November 2015

- The project is generally achieving good communication with its target audiences and has developed some effective local partnerships and networks recognising that:

    "*it's very difficult to get the right information to the right people*" Stakeholder interviewee November 2015

- Where co-operatives are established, they are generally felt to be effective and likely to have a positive and sustainable impact on the condition of church buildings.

Interviews with stakeholders also identified the following issues and areas for further consideration by the project team:

- While in general stakeholders felt the project was achieving its aims and strong local co-operatives were emerging, some commented that the project was running out of time to empower these groups to become self-sufficient and effective without project team support. A minority of stakeholders were concerned that the focus on training and capacity building would not bring about *"a step change in building maintenance"* and had hoped for the development of other co-operative approaches, for example co-operative approaches to procurement. In addition, capacity building focused on Church Wardens which was seen by some as problematic given the turnover of people in these roles and as such this represented a threat to the project's legacy:

    "Project has great potential, not sure if that potential has come fully to light yet" Stakeholder interview November 2015

- Stakeholders welcomed the ambition for volunteer co-ordinators to lead maintenance co-operatives but felt that, in the longer term, volunteers would need support from an organisation or to be part of a facilitated network to maintain momentum:

    "Volunteers leading volunteers is a good model but they do need back up" Stakeholder interviewee November 2015

- Stakeholders welcomed the intention for the project to provide case studies of practice. These should be robust, detailed and provided replicable, diverse models of practice which show how co-operatives can work and how they can positively impact on the condition of places of worship;
- Stakeholders valued the project website and would find it helpful if a mechanism can be found to maintain and sustain it long-term and provide links to useful sites after the project ends;

- Around half of the stakeholders expressed the view that the project faces challenges related to the attitude of some church organisations towards volunteers. It was felt that effective work with volunteers required management, nurturing and celebration of volunteers' contributions. It was felt that the project could make a positive contribution by identifying some good practice guidelines on how to work effectively with volunteers in places of worship;

- Most stakeholders felt that there was value in exploring how Friends Groups could provide an effective route to funding and supporting maintenance co-operatives in the future. Friends Groups can encourage support from local people who are not members of a congregation, and provide a vehicle for promoting general community engagement with places of worship. One stakeholder added that: *"Friends Groups are a recruiting ground for Maintenance Co-operatives"*. Establishing a network of Friends Groups was identified as a helpful way of supporting and sharing practice. Some reflection from the project team on their experiences of working with Friends Groups and the potential value of establishing a network on a regional or national basis would be helpful and potentially offer an enhanced outcome from the project;

- Stakeholders encouraged the project to continue to build strong relationships with local organisations and networks and in particular to work closely with Historic England's 'local heritage at risk teams';

- Stakeholders encouraged the project during its final year to use its emerging body of evidence to work within church hierarchies to engage and facilitate project legacy. It was felt that the October 2015 Church of England review of church buildings was timely in providing an opportunity for further discussion on the future maintenance of church buildings. The project team were encouraged to participate in the consultation which runs until January 2016. The project team were also encouraged to make contact with the team at Historic England who are supporting the Quakers in reviewing their buildings;

- Stakeholders had a number of ideas for the project team to consider during the final project year to support the project's legacy. These include:

  - to work more closely with Church Buildings Council, archdeacons, rural deans and diocese structures to ensure project value is known and ways forward develop;
  - To work with Diocese to identify a "*project Champion*" to carry on project legacy, to help Diocese to "*own"* the project, to work with co-operatives, provide training and to ensure momentum is not lost;
  - To work with individual Parochial Church Councils to promote church buildings as a community resources not solely as a place of worship;
  - To identify other organisations who can provide support for co-operatives once the progress finishes. To quote one stakeholder: "*Find a home for that group of people – they would feel part of something*". All stakeholders felt that these were likely to be local organisations available to take on this role, ideally outside of a particular faith community. Suggestions include local Civic Trusts, local Historic Churches Trusts, SPAB groups, the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance. The project team were advised to explore links with Civic Voice as the umbrella organisation for local societies;
  - To explore synergies with other church building initiatives such as Caring for Gods Acre and Shrinking the Footprint. Shrinking the Footprint has local

groups such as Churches Green Action Group and Eco-churches South West who are likely to have common interests;

- o To explore whether funding might be available for a transition phase for the project to hand over to co-operatives. Failing this it was suggested that co-operatives be encouraged to seek their own funding through small scale local applications which might be more successful than a large scale national focus;
- o To provide intensive nurturing of established co-operatives to help them to deliver practical maintenance activities, deliver community events and "*showcase themselves to their communities*". Provide some "*inspirational visits for co-operatives to build group cohesion*". The view was that such support would help co-operatives to develop a firm identity which will encourage them to become self-sustaining;
- o To explore European examples of practice for example through engaging with the "Future for Religious Heritage" project;
- While in general Stakeholders felt that the project was working well with volunteers who were already involved in church activities, it was felt that it was making less progress in engaging new and more diverse volunteers with the project and its activities:

    "To be sustainable the project needs to reach a wider group of people than regular worshippers" Stakeholder interview November 2015

    Stakeholders had a number of suggestions including: recruiting volunteers to a specific task (e.g. through a 'gutter clear weekend') rather than an open ended commitment; provide community activities which focus on skills activities that are useful to home owners (e.g. prepare your home for winter) and ask people to deploy these skills in maintaining places of worship; work with other volunteer organisations or initiatives who might have shared interests such as Churches Conservation Trust, local Civic Trusts, local amenity societies, local history groups, local Historic Churches Trusts, Wildlife groups, people who attend SPAB general training days, National Trust volunteers; explore links with other schemes such as Community Payback and local initiatives such as that operated by the Lincolnshire Police and Crime Commissioner who has called for heritage volunteers to combat vandalism and theft from church buildings; engage with organisations that work with young people such as Duke of Edinburgh Award, Cathedral Camps, National Citizenship Service;

- Most stakeholders felt that the project had made less progress in achieving its aim to make the wider community more aware of the value of historic places of worship. Stakeholders suggested that working with other organisations to pilot a few initiatives would be helpful, and cited the West Lindsey Churches Festival as an example of practice alongside Heritage Open Days, local Historic Churches Trust open events and Churches Conservation Trust initiatives. Other ideas included developing specific events linked to engagement with communities of interest such as wildlife groups, genealogy, and archaeology;

- Stakeholders felt that the project needed to keep focused on promoting its work, through regular good news stories of achievements both to encourage new volunteers and to promote its work in general.

    "Jump up and down and shout about it" Stakeholder interviewee November 2015 .

    Stakeholders had a number of suggestions including: placing stories with local partner organisations to reach a wider group of potential volunteers; work with local newspapers in areas which have established co-operatives to promote them and

encourage involvement in "work parties" or community events to attract a wider range of local people; placing project updates with every Diocese and with other faith communities to raise general awareness of the project;

- Stakeholders in general felt they had little evidence to judge whether or not the project was having a positive impact on the condition of church buildings. They felt that improving the skills and knowledge of maintenance volunteers was likely to have a positive impact but assessing such impact is a long term issue. It was suggested that working with Historic England to plot where co-operatives exist and whether places of worship enter or are removed from the buildings at risk register in those locations could provide some evidence of impact over the longer term;
- The project's building condition survey was not well known amongst most stakeholders. Historic England is launching a smart phone app which can be used by volunteers to make a site assessment and feedback to a database and it was felt that it would be worth the project keeping in touch with this initiative.

Next steps in evaluation

Following the publication of the Second external evaluation Report in January 2016 evaluation endeavour will move primarily from formative to summative activity.

Most specifically:
The Project team will:
- Undertake a volunteer survey to identify individual volunteer characteristics, skillsets, confidence and activities carried out;
- Hold evaluation review meetings with each co-operative
- Analyse the impact on heritage through assessing baseline condition surveys carried out, actions identified, and maintenance plans in place;
- Gather feedback from volunteer co-ordinators and co-operatives to generate a range of case studies;

Oakmere Solutions will:
- Undertake a final online survey to assess the impact of training events on attendees;
- Work with the team to support the design and use of the volunteer survey;
- Support the team by reviewing drafts of the case studies of practice;
- Produce a final summative report which evaluates the project's achievement of its aims and approved purposes.

Appendix 5: Outcomes of interviews with staff December 2015

Individual telephone interviews were conducted in December 2015 with the following team members:

- Kate Andrew, RPO, Herefordshire & Worcestershire
- Sheila Christie, Project Administrator
- Judith Eversley, RPO, South West
- James Innerdale, Technical Officer
- Stella Jackson, RPO, Lincolnshire
- Sue Manson, RPO, Cumbria
- Alaina Schmisseur, RPO, North East
- Kate Streeter, Project Manager.

The interviews focused on nine topics and responses summarised below. Unattributed quotes from the interviews are presented below in italics.

1. Could you tell us about your role with the project, its aims and outcomes to date. For example, co-operatives established, volunteer co-ordinators in place, public engagement events and initiatives.

All staff except one were in post from the beginning of the project. The RPO, South West joined the team in April 2015 following the departure of the previous RPO. All staff work from home offices except the project administrator who is based in the SPAB offices in Spittal Square, London.

The project team confirm that 25 co-operatives are underway (13 fully established, 10 new and holding their first events and under development and two in the early stages of development).

> *"We made it work! Proved the model is OK and has made a difference to buildings"*

> *"Getting it going and good to have 25 co-operatives in place. Great to get to that point".*

The majority of the co-operatives are based on pre-existing structures, for example linked to a priest in charge or a benefice, or other collectives of Church of England and other faith organisations such as Churches Together.

While the co-operatives have been successful in engaging a group of volunteers to participate in church maintenance this has primarily been through the leadership and direct actions of the RPO. In some instances, 'natural leaders' are emerging within the co-operatives, however all RPOs report difficulties in encouraging and persuading people to take on the role of Volunteer Coordinator. In one area, two volunteers are taking responsibility for communicating with groups across a county (both retired professional people, one a member of the congregation and the other a SPAB member), but in undertaking this role they work closely with the RPO and do not initiate activities.

All RPOs report difficulties in establishing meaningful engagement with places of worship who are not within the Church of England. However, there are examples of Methodist, Roman Catholic and United Reform Church buildings being involved in individual co-operatives.

2. Who are the key partners you are working with in your area?

All team members reported a wide range of partners, from local organisations who are supporting activity to strategic relationships with national organisations including funders and policy makers. These include:

- Architectural Heritage Trust
- Arthur Rank Centre
- Caring for Gods Acre
- Church of England Dioceses relevant to the project geographic areas, including Area Deans, priests in charge and the relevant Diocesan Advisory Committee
- Churches Together in Cumbria
- Community payback schemes
- Cumbria action for sustainability
- Heritage Lincolnshire
- Historic Churches Trusts (county organisations)
- Historic England
- HLF regional offices
- Lincoln Castle Heritage Skills Centre
- Local archaeological services
- Local authority councillors
- Local Authority officers
- Local Museums
- Men in Sheds (originally an initiative through AgeUK and now run through local groups)
- National Churches Trust
- North East Civic Trust
- Parochial Church Councils
- Places of Worship Support Officers
- Quakers
- Shrinking the Footprint
- The Churches Conservation Trust

There were many examples of productive partnership working. For example, the Heritage Skills Centre in Lincoln Castle has delivered training events for co-operatives. Churches Together Cumbria, the Institute of Historic Building Conservation and local Historic Churches Trusts have been helpful in providing publicity for the project and associated events.

3. What do you see as the key successes of the project so far?

The project team were proud that they had *"got the scheme off the ground"* and were gratified to see the positive impact on volunteers and on the condition of places of worship:

> *"Convincing people that they can do it … like seeing a light bulb go on. During the training day there is often a palpable shift in people realising that it's not rocket science, it's doable by ordinary people"*

"It's reassuring that if in doubt the co-ops can ask SPAB experts who are so good and enthusiastic and well informed …. SPAB involvement is so helpful as it's a respected organisation which can offer independent expert advice"

"Camaraderie is great and very important to a successful co-op"

"Successful co-ops build on pre-existing groups"

"People meeting each other and becoming friends and feeling part of a group".

"Empowering people to understand there are things they can do to their building that will improve things that aren't going to cost a fortune and showing them how to do it. For example, last Saturday, a very long ladder up to a valley gutter, one volunteer baling out huge tubs of muck including a small tree and the curate was holding the ladder at the bottom. Then they checked the hopper and after a lot of poking around using a drain unblocker and lots of watering cans and nothing coming out, and then a rumbling noise and all this muck rushed out and a loud cheer went up! They now know it's pretty straight forward and the reason the plaster was falling off inside at that point was because nothing had been getting down that pipe for probably over 15 years".

"Spreading the importance of regular maintenance – how much churches can save by taking action through maintenance"

"… [volunteers have] learned so much looking at our buildings in a completely different way"

"One of our coordinators is a SPAB member and the other is a handyman so leadership is in the hands of skilled people."

"Once they get used to looking at the building themselves they realise they don't have to be an architect, they don't have to be a building expert, they have enough knowledge using their own eyes to see what needs to be done"

"Most of them are using the log book to good effect".

The team also report that the Good Maintenance Guide and the Maintenance Calendar have been well received and there was a general feeling that project resources are being well used. The team report feeling proud that general awareness of the importance of regular maintenance has been raised, and that volunteers have been trained and enabled to network with each other leading to the sharing of good practice.

Some team members felt that having different models for co-operatives was a concern early on in the project but the conference presentations showed that having a diversity of models works well:

"A big moment at the conference (was) to have five volunteers from established co-operatives who all stood up and said that it was a bit of a hard sell in the first year and the work took a couple of days to do, but a year on they know exactly what they are doing and the work took a fraction of the time and… the co-op has a really confident and clear understanding of where the building is and what's happening."

> *"… great that the [maintenance co-operative] concept has been picked up but also that it is taking on a very local feel and the volunteers tailoring it so that it is useful to them, including having their own titles for the co-ops".*

There was also satisfaction reported about how the project team itself has worked:

> *"We have developed a good skilled team, that works well together to achieve outcomes and targets"*

> *"Good project management and a terrific team to work with. The buddy system was very good and I have not had a moment's isolation because people made an effort to make me feel welcome"*

> *"The team has very solid central admin and works as a fully functioning team of mutually supportive professionals."*

Other successes reported include, supporting places of worship in knowing where to go for funding and helping them get it, and growing anecdotal evidence that individual co-operatives have taken ownership which is judged to be critical to eventual sustainability.

4. What do you see as the key challenges?

The team reported a number of challenges, particularly during the early days of the project which led to a slow start. These included: the challenge of communicating effectively the maintenance co-operatives concept to what was often a sceptical audience; the difficulty of producing and distributing publicity at a local level through existing Diocesan and other structures; and a sense that there was general reluctance of existing groups to get involved because they feared the co-operative would be an extra and additional burden:

> *"There has been little support on the ground to help groups to get going. It's been hard going through the Parochial Church Councils who often won't put it on their agendas"*

> *"Getting the right information to the right people and targeting people at all levels – team vicar, archdeacon, church warden. Team vicars are so busy and stretched. The best response has come from Church Wardens"*

> *"It's been slow to get going. Very frustrating. The project doesn't have a long enough timescale. It's now taking off and has reached a critical mass and I am getting enquiries all the time now"*

> *"Biggest fear people had [at the start of the project] was that having a co-op will increase their workload but actually it's not, it's more efficient and streamlined".*

Helping the co-operatives become sustainable was identified by the project team as the most significant challenge with this compounded by the difficulty felt by all the RPOs in recruiting volunteer co-ordinators:

> *"Getting things in place to support the co-ops so that people can continue to work [has been the greatest challenge]"*

> *"Getting people organised has been a challenge including getting agreement on when and where to meet. Sustainability will be difficult as there won't be an officer to*

prompt and organise the groups. The groups don't always see themselves as a group working together on each other's places of worship".

There was also reported frustration at the perceived *"rigidity"* and *"dysfunctionality"* of the Church of England, with poor communications and structures which may not support sustainable co-operatives. Examples of this included: changing Church Wardens every five years; poor training for Church Wardens; no training for priests on how to look after their buildings; perceived poor valuing and training of volunteers; reluctance of the Church to look outside the congregation for help and support:

"The communication channels within the CoE are very poor indeed for dealing with the church estate and this doesn't help local Diocese or churches take ownership or know that the co-operatives project is available to help. The Church Warden model is problematic – too much responsibility, too much change, little training".

The project has explicitly aimed to develop a diverse range of co-operatives with ways of working which reflect local need and context.   Some respondents felt that these has led to models of practice which are not easily transferable to other contexts and present a challenge to future promotion of the co-operatives concept as a whole and its roll-out to other areas of the country.

In some cases, local project partners have not been supportive because of lack of capacity or disagreement on the focus and purpose of the co-operatives, and this has hindered co-operative take up.

A three-year project was felt by most of those interviewed to be too short a period to deliver a sustainable end product:

"Three years is too short to make a long term difference. The early period of the project was planned to have taken two – three months but in fact took a year"

"The project has been too short – five years would have been more beneficial".

Interviewees suggest that a longer project period would have allowed more time to identify and develop local co-operative leaders, embed the co-operative approach as established practice, and empower co-operatives to be self-sustaining. There would also have been more time to assess the practical impact on church buildings.

Managing a project with a dispersed team working across seven locations has been identified as *"challenging",* particularly *"when all of members of staff are part time".* The original project champion, a senior post holder within SPAB, left early on in the project and this, combined with the project team not being based at SPAB offices, led to the project having limited visibility within SPAB during its first months of operation:

"The first three months were very difficult as the team was recruited but internal structures were not in place to support them and therefore they lost some time in getting going. The MCP concept was very new and needed selling but there was no branding, no leaflet, business cards or laptops, no emails and this took some time to get in place."

> *"The website was also slow to get going. SPAB was not really prepared or understood what needed to happen for a major remote working project which made [initial] progress slow"*

A view was expressed that delivering the project has been *"tricky at times",* and that staff changes within the team and staff and structural changes at SPAB led to the project losing its champion and voice in SPAB for a while. For one respondent, poor project presence including project staff not being named on the internal SPAB organisational structure diagram *felt "like the project is not important or valued by SPAB".* While links with the main SPAB structures are now felt to be *"back on track",* there is a concern that SPAB is going through a period of change which might not support project legacy.

The regional delivery approach was felt by most to be an appropriate model for an innovative project of this kind as it enabled different approaches to be tried and tested. However, it has also led inevitably to unevenness across the five areas and has proved frustrating to team members:

> *"Having a regions delivery approach when setting up something innovative like this is very sensible and enables local delivery models. But in the long term its really tough to be flogging a dead donkey in some areas and others areas to be flying"*

Most interviewees reported frustration with the pace at which particularly the Church of England works and identified a key issue of a mismatch between the Church of England year and the project year:

> *"This sector works to a long time frame – a snail's pace, and is quite resistant to change. Nothing happens in Christmas or Easter periods and then it's quiet over summer holidays which doesn't leave long to get the work done"*

The team report that ecumenical working is challenging and it has been difficult to gain access to, and influence wider faith groups without having an ambassador in those faiths. In some cases, different structures and different responsibilities for places of worship buildings makes maintenance less urgent for other faiths. For instance, in the Methodist church, buildings are a central responsibility, local groups report maintenance issues to a central team:

> *"Very difficult to break into other faith groups who might benefit".*

It was felt that the project would have benefited from a wider steering group of influential individuals within a range of faiths who could broker access for the project.

5. Do you think the project is bringing about an increase in the number and diversity of people who volunteer to take an active role in looking after historic places of worship?

While monitoring data on co-operative volunteers is not currently being gathered by the project, there is anecdotal evidence that the majority of volunteers are white, retired, and from professional backgrounds with a good gender mix. There was little involvement reported from people from Black and Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) backgrounds. Interviewees expressed the view that appealing to and engaging older retired men in the project was a positive outcome since this group are perceived to be at risk of social isolation. Some RPOs are actively seeking to engage with local networks as a way of reaching isolated older men. For

example, talking to the 'Village agents network'[1] (a lottery funded project based in North Cumbria) who are promoters of information on health and other resources, promotion through the 'Men in Sheds' initiative, and through a local men's breakfast group.

Those areas with co-operatives in urban settings were more hopeful of eventually attracting volunteers from broader BAMER backgrounds. In one example, a place of worship building had been used for a church outreach project working with homeless and vulnerable young people and the RPO had engaged people there as volunteers. The RPO reported that the volunteers had enjoyed the 'hands on' maintenance work but were less interested in attending training events and activities.

Most interviewees reported that while the training events are attracting a wide range of people, the majority of volunteers active in co-operatives are people already involved in church life, usually as members of a congregation. However, it was also reported that many of these volunteers would not have worked on church maintenance before the training, and those that had would generally only have worked on one church:

> *"People have worked on other churches which they wouldn't have done before"*

> *"There are a broad number of people coming along to training events but not many people outside the congregation getting involved"*

Supporting and encouraging the involvement of volunteers with a wide range of skills and interests was seen as a positive aspect of the project:

> *"Not all want to be involved in looking after the church itself but they are keen to look after the people that look after the church."*

Some examples were reported of positive involvement with other local initiatives which had similar aims. For example, a group of volunteers who were surveying Grade 2 listed buildings as part of a 'heritage at risk project'. In this instance the RPO was invited to contribute to the volunteers' training programme and took the opportunity to invite them to participate in the co-operatives project and around 12 people got involved. Other examples include work with offenders through a county community payback team where a group had been involved in removing bramble thickets and will continue to be involved.

One RPO had successfully introduced young people by engaging with a local school and Scouts group who carried out a 'litter pick up and leaf sweep' session. Other examples include: engagement with young architects from local practices, students from York university and from a building conservation course at Lancaster University. These had attended training days and four students had subsequently carried out a building survey at a place of worship:

> *"… conservation management students in York university really enjoyed the event as their university courses are theoretical and hands on experience is great".*

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[1]
http://www.cumbriaadvicenetwork.org.uk/can/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=140&Itemid=154

There was general enthusiasm for engaging Friends Groups as a way to involve a wider group of volunteers in looking after places of worship and interviewees reported that they had provided local training to help set up Friends Groups.

6. Do you think the project is achieving its aim of improving the condition of historic places of worship which are looked after by the local maintenance co-operatives?

In general interviewees felt that there had been a consequent improvement in the condition of places of worship because of action taken by the co-operatives. Identified examples included:

> *"… there is evidence in the Melbury group, during October 2015 they visited churches for a second time"*

> *"Anecdotal evidence – people report back that they have cleared gutters. Volunteer presentations at the conference gave rich examples of the positive impact being made on the condition of buildings"*

> *"Some re-surveys show this. In a couple of settings, the churches stank because there were never any windows open and now on re-survey, it doesn't smell as they keep windows open and the environment has improved. People were dubious about re-surveying. But now they can see the benefit of this"*

> *"… people are for the first time open to and noticing issues going on around them";*

> *"Most recently, at a church we were visiting it was mentioned that there was always a problem with this corner of a room in the building and we discovered it was an inside condensation issue and no ventilation and cured it through ventilation and opening doors – wonderful outcome – they have a room that they can use again!"*

> *"In one case, dry rot was found under the floor which had been covered up in the past- now this has been added to the list of major repairs to be carried out".*

As well as a positive impact on buildings, other positive conservation impacts were noted:

> *"There has been an impact on collections in buildings where groups have cleaned and conserved objects"*

All interviewees reported that it was difficult to convince co-operatives of the value of carrying out the baseline survey, writing a maintenance plan and re-surveying one year later and there were different experiences of how well co-operatives had adopted these practices:

> *"… [the co-operative] was not keen on doing the baseline survey as they use their own"*

> *"Baseline surveys – people have embraced them and see the point of them. But the weather is against carrying them out during the winter months. Mainly doing inside training at the moment"*

> *"Not aware that the co-operatives have organised work parties to carry out practical clearing gutters work – tend to get contractors involved in this work"*

> *"All seven buildings [in the co-operative] have now done a baseline survey"*

> *"… the group have regular once a month maintenance outings and the priest in charge is involved, out there clearing gutters and gullies"*

> *" The baseline survey has been received very well. Co-ops were a bit nervous at first but the survey is being well used and it supports the process of active looking and understanding the building. Having a bespoke survey form has helped encouraged groups to use it, it provides a good record and also some continuity to support succession of church wardens etc. However, getting the baseline surveys converted into maintenance plans has been rather slower to take off".*

Some interviewees felt that identifying explicit evidence of the positive impact of regular maintenance will take time:

> *"… the activities will have a positive impact on the condition of the buildings but not necessarily at present. It's [the project duration] not long enough for this impact to be visible"*

> *"Anecdotal evidence is important. Volunteers have said that the training was excellent and have taken lots of before and after photographs which demonstrate improvement. Baseline survey evidence is strong – buildings who have acted on their maintenance plan and done a second survey can see that their buildings are better managed and in better condition"*

It was felt that gaining evidence about the condition of places of worship requires long term evaluation beyond the scope of the current project. Using other evidence such as which buildings are on the 'heritage at risk' register was not felt to be very helpful since it is often in churches' interests to be on the register as this supports them gaining repair grants.

It was reported that the project has responded to need raised during training sessions by including any place of worship – not just 'historic' places of worship. It was noted that many modern buildings were particularly vulnerable to deterioration because of the building techniques used in construction. The project team estimate that around 80% of buildings involved in the project are listed buildings.

7. Do you think the project is increasing community awareness of the importance of maintaining historic places of worship?

All interviewees reported that this area has been the slowest to deliver, primarily because the focus of work has been on establishing co-operatives and providing training. However, there was a view expressed that the publicity produced for the project is beginning to have an impact and that awareness of the project and its work is spreading slowly through the projects' five geographical areas:

> *"Slowly, we provide lots of leaflets, banners, invites to non-church related groups. The recent Church buildings report generated lots of publicity which was helpful"*

> *"… [people in any community feel that] historic buildings make the landscape what it is so maintenance is seen as a good thing"*

It was reported that training events have attracted a wide range of people from outside faith communities and that this has had a positive impact on general awareness of the importance

of building maintenance and how to go about it. Not least as: *"attendees at training events go home and clear their own gutters"*. A more specific example was given of town councillors responsible for looking after a listed Moot Hall attended a training session and subsequently reported that the training had helped them to better look after the building*: "it's opened our eyes about what we need to be doing to our building"*:

> *"… people who come along [to training events] are inspired and understand and are saying that was amazing, thank you so much that really opened my eyes"*

> *"… helping people to improve the condition of the general housing stock as they are going home and clearing out their gutters".*

Links with church tourism initiatives were cited as good vehicles for raising general awareness of building maintenance and getting a broader range of people involved outside of the congregation:

> *"Inspire NE had developed a historic church route for tourism which included 16 churches [some of whom are involved in a co-operative.... All co-ops [in this area] are signposted to their training with some evidence that [tourism] church groups are being formed"*

Working closely with local networks has enabled RPO's to promote the project and its messages to a wide constituency. However, interviewees acknowledged that many people attending training events were not subsequently getting involved in co-operatives.

Some added value was reported as a consequence of the project having established good local networks. For example, being able to distribute SPAB information on dealing with flooding to those affected by the December 2015 floods through the network.

Interviewees felt that Friends Groups are a good way to involve the wider community in building maintenance. Different models for Friends Groups encountered by the team include one where instead of paying a subscription, members donate skills and have established a church history and archive group and a buildings group where people help maintain the church.

It was suggested by interviewees that in the final project year, more focus should be placed on publicising the project and its achievements.

8. Do you have any ideas or suggestions which will help the project achieve its aims?

Interviewees had many suggestions for the project's last year including:

- *"Continue developing the web presence and making it sustainable"* – ideally integrating it fully with the new SPAB website;
- *"Focus on strengthening existing co-operatives"*, rather than recruiting new ones;
- The co-operatives should be strengthening and empowered – with a clear message for churches not to wait for quinquennial inspection but to do regular maintenance;
- Consolidate the co-operatives to become self-sustaining;
- Establish email communications methods so that all groups have an accurate list of email contacts for their group;

- "*Improve relationships with the Archbishops Council to promote the project nationally*" and discuss sustainability;
- Establishing close liaison during the final year of the project with "*the Church of England hierarchy*" to encourage further development and long-term sustainability of the maintenance co-operative concept;
- Explore how to allocate some resource into supporting the co-operatives that are in place;
- "*Keep spreading the message and find ways to support new groups to set up co-operatives where there is interest, even if outside the project areas*";
- Provide a 'maintenance folder' with pre- labelled dividers to be available for each church member of a co-operative to provide a place to hold the QI report, maintenance plan, survey, names of contractors and log books in one place so that this is easily available in the place of worship rather than being spread around a range of people.
- Aid sustainability by working more with local partners to support co-operatives link with them. For example, to enable co-operatives to access advice and training provided by volunteer centres;
- Put effort into involving the priest and identifying and preparing leaders for the co-operatives, even though it is recognised that this is challenging:

> "*They need a strong leader to keep the co-operatives going and coordinate activities. Having the priest involved is very important*"

> "*The co-ops that are working, the really successful one, are ones where the priest comes along and takes a strong role*".

> "*The involvement of the priest in charge has been very beneficial as has strong local coordinators,*"

Existing activities in place or planned for the final year include: writing a project publication to include case studies; re-branding and reprinting the maintenance calendar; moving the national conference to September, and planning for project closure. The RPOs will review co-operatives with relevant stakeholders in their areas, establish what they need to be self-sustaining, and then put those elements into place where practically possible. The final year will continue to offer a training programme based on identified local need including support for carrying out baseline and follow up surveys.

A Maintenance Co-operatives Project equipment toolkit is now developed and will be distributed to all co-operatives as a way of supporting the work of volunteers.

9. How do you think the co-operatives can be supported and sustained after the project finishes? Are they likely to be sustainable?

Interviewees had mixed views about the future sustainability of the project outcomes:

> "*The model is good but is it called the right thing?*"

> "*Once people are in the habit of looking at their building regularly they will continue to do so*"

> *"Is the co-op model sustainable? The links being forged between people are sustainable"*

> *"Good volunteer co-ordinators are crucial to strengthening the co-operatives".*

Interviewees had a number of thoughts about the challenges of supporting the co-operatives post project including:

> *"Explore options with the HLF for a potential future project which builds on the achievements of this one"*

> *"No other obvious organisation that could manage the project without additional funding"*

> *"The Diocese should have a role in continuing to support co-ops after the project finishes"*

> *"… what galvanises actions is having people on the ground to keep the co-ops going. Costs will constrain other organisations taking up any management of the initiative once it ends"*

> *"There are lots of organisations giving advice and guidance on maintenance which is a waste and a duplication of effort".*

On further questioning interviewees identified a number of other organisations that might be able to provide support to the co-operatives at the end of the project, but these were most likely to be available on a local rather than national basis. Examples include:

- Local historic churches trusts
- Churches Together groups which are multi faith
- Heritage Lincolnshire – they work with other groups of volunteers
- Volunteer Bureau
- National Churches Trust
- Civic Trusts.

However, it was generally felt that the Church of England's need was greatest and therefore individual Diocese had ultimate responsibility for the buildings in their area and should do more to support the co-operatives.

Historic England's Places of Worship Support Officer roles based in some diocese were seen to be helpful in working with the project and could take on a coordinative role although they may need additional resource to do so:

> *"The situation is particularly acute with the CoE because of the large number of buildings and the way responsibility for church buildings is devolved to each parish. I think each Diocese should have a POWSO to help keep the co-ops going. Probably one day a week is sufficient for a Diocese if that person was solely working on the co-ops or could add time to a POWSO contract".*

Interviewees identified a number of practical actions through which co-operatives could be supported in the future:

"The web presence is important and should continue to be available at the end of the project. It can support co-ops make contact with each other as well as providing project resources. It will need to continue to be updated or it will reflect badly on the SPAB. SPAB should find a way to continue to support this project outcome. The Web data should be analysed to see how people are using resources"

"Sharing learning across groups via attending events such as scaffold tours and hands on workshops organised by other organisations such as the National Trust"

"… showcase what the co-operatives are doing. Volunteers are the project's best advocates"

"Advocate nationally for building maintenance to be included in priest training and in church warden training".

It was reported that actions were being put in place to promote the project through SPAB including the SPAB guardians and to work more closely with the education and training and conservation teams to join up the SPAB offer. Embedding the project work within SPAB was seen as an important element of project legacy.

Some interviewees expressed concerns about planning for the project wind-down period and the potential negative impact of individual officers moving on before the project has completed.