

Dawn Bowden AS/MS
Dirprwy Weinidog y Celfyddydau a Chwaraeon, a'r Prif Chwip
Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Mike Hedges MS
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
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16 June 2022

Dear Mike,

Thank you for your contribution to the Member debate on disused religious buildings on 23 March, where you raised the issue of establishing a National Museum of Religion.

Clearly initiatives that raise the profile of our nation's faith history, the diversity and multi-faiths of Wales and historic places of worship, that draw attention to their value as a precious part of our heritage, and foster interest in them are to be welcomed.

The network of open places of worship across Wales tells a story of religion in Wales. Amgueddfa Cymru National Museum Wales and many of the c.100 local museums (local authority and independent) already have items relating to religion, faith and places of worship within their collections and displays. Similarly, the National Library of Wales and the 13 Welsh local authority archive services have collected archival material from religious communities across Wales for many years. These collections are held close to their local communities and are heavily used for family and local history research. Both Cadw and Amgueddfa Cymru's St Fagans site care for religious buildings and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales records and photographs significant buildings at risk, including religious buildings, and maintains a database of all chapels in Wales.

There are also numerous initiatives which promote faith tourism, both at a local and national level; encouraging visitors to places of worship and helping to make the story of religion in Wales accessible. Visit Wales and the National Churches Trust both promote faith tourism at the national level, and there are numerous local initiatives, such as the *Saints and Stones Pilgrimage* (Pembrokeshire), *Sacred Doorways* (Conwy valley), *Meini Bywiol Living Stones* (North Montgomeryshire), *Peaceful Places* (North Ceredigion). Faith tourism will be a key theme within the planned review of the strategic action plan for places of worship which is being led by the Historic Places of Worship Forum. The Secretary of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (a Welsh Government sponsored body) chairs this Forum, and Cadw funds the National Churches Trust to organise the Forum's meetings.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

There is clearly a lot of activity already being undertaken by various organisations and communities. The review of the Historic Places of Worship Forum action plan provides an opportunity to explore how these existing initiatives might be better coordinated so as to raise the profile of historic places of worship and the story of religion in Wales. Supporting this existing activity and encouraging greater connectivity is arguably a more effective way to raise the profile of historic places of worship and the history of faith than by creating a new museum. Our commitment to ensure the history and culture of our Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities are properly represented in our cultural sector and museum network and the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan will also play a part in ensuring Wales' faiths are collected and interpreted in our nation's museums, archives and cultural venues.

The current Programme for Government already contains an ambitious agenda for the development of our museums for this Senedd term, including major new developments such as the Football Museum for Wales based at Wrexham Museum, the National Contemporary Art Gallery (a distributed model across 10 sites in Wales), and the redevelopment of the National Slate Museum at Llanberis, which will include establishing a Museum of North Wales. With this in mind, and acknowledging that the costs attached to establishing new museums are significant in terms of initial capital expenditure and the on-going revenue needs, I do not believe that we can progress plans for a physical National Museum of Religion at this time.

I am copying this letter to Delyth Jewell MS, Chair of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dawn Bowden'.

Dawn Bowden AS/MS

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