

This is a copy of an article by Laura Linham which appeared in the Wells Journal, Central Somerset Gazette, Cheddar Valley Gazette and Shepton Mallet Journal about the visit by the judges for the Playfair Prize.

A FORMER Bishop of Bath and Wells, and former Archbishop of Canterbury was back on his old stamping ground last week.

Lord George Carey is one of the judges of the Somerset Churches Trust's Playfair Prize, a competition which offers Christian churches and chapels a £5,000 award for the best improvement scheme carried out by them in the last 10 years.

Both St Cuthbert's Church in Wells and St Peter's Church in Evercreech are in with a chance of winning the contest.

"It's all about bringing new people into the building," Lord Carey said.

"For me, professionally, as a member of the clergy I have seen some of the most fantastic buildings.

"They are Grade I and Grade II buildings that have stood since time immemorial.

"We want to look at the churches who have done what they can to maintain their buildings – but also made changes to make them better used, to bring more people inside them.

"Churches should have an open door philosophy, and we want to celebrate those which have done what they can to use the buildings creatively to make them more welcoming to all sorts of people."

He said that in the past the church had been inhibited by deep conservatism.

"There is a place for traditional worship, but we need to work to make church relevant to a new generation.

"We don't want religion to be dull or too solemn.

"We need to be open to new ideas, and new trends."

Lord Carey added that he encouraged all churches to have an 'open door' philosophy.

"We need to break away from the idea that worship is just for Sundays," he said.

"Worship is a seven day a week affair. There are these beautiful, big buildings. In some villages they are the biggest buildings around. They could be a vital community facility – so why are some of them only being used one day a week?

"We want to reward those churches that have found ways to use these buildings to their full potential, and to cement the idea of the church service not just being a religious service, but something that can serve our communities."

He also pointed out that food banks and recent collections for refugees were good examples of the lifelines the church could offer people.

"We want to teach people to trust that the church will be there for them," he said.

"That we will look after the poor, the people who need it, and look after one another.

"That is what open door religion should be about."

The results of the Playfair Prize will be announced at a gala evening in Wells Town Hall on October 30.

