

Dear Friend and Supporter of the Norfolk Churches Trust,

I write to inform you of a recent development and request your assistance on behalf of the Norfolk Churches Trust.

I am not sure whether you are already aware but we have very recently been informed that The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) have confirmed that their dedicated grant programme (called the Grants for Places of Worship (GPOW) programme) for major repairs to listed places of worship is to close later this year. The HLF plan going forward is that Churches and other places of worship will still be able to apply for lottery money using two other existing HLF grant programmes. As part of this it is understood that a targeted minimum spend will be set aside for places of worship applying for these two schemes. The schemes are called 'Our Heritage' and 'Heritage Grants'. However churches will have to compete for funding with other organisations, which may be better resourced or more experienced at making funding applications; such as community centres.

There was a considerable lack of consultation in coming to this decision which is very disappointing. It appears that they did not consult Historic England at all. In particular, the HLF decision was taken in isolation from the work of the Department of Culture, Media & Sport's Church Sustainability Review, which has been examining issues including maintenance costs and repairs and funding from lottery and central government grants, and is expected to report shortly. Furthermore their announcement came in the middle of a Government review into the work of the HLF and before the HLF's own consultation on its next Strategic Review. It was received on 4 April with a deadline to express views of 6 April at 12 noon.

The cancelling the GPOW grant scheme is a retrograde step. It is the only grant scheme using public money which is designed especially for, and dedicated to, major repairs to listed places of worship. It is hard to overstate the importance that the GPOW programme and its predecessors have had in supporting historic religious buildings. It will impact directly upon the Norfolk Churches Trust as the HLF (and its predecessor grant schemes) has been a major and vital source of funding which has enabled us to do a lot of the work required on our leased churches. If this is no longer available we will have to find funds from other sources, which may well be part of our core money raised through our regular fundraising events which we usually use to primarily support other churches within the county by offering grants. It also means the churches as a whole are going to be less likely to be able to make a successful direct application to the HLF themselves. So the County's Churches overall will suffer.

Through our President, General The Lord Dannatt, we have written centrally from the Trust to the Secretary of State at the Department for Culture Media and Sport; Sir Peter Luff, Chairman, National Heritage Memorial Fund and Heritage Lottery Fund, Sir Tim Laurence Chairman English Heritage and all 9 Norfolk and Norwich MPs to make our views known to them. I would also however encourage you, despite the calling of the General Election, to write to your MP as the more people who contact them about this situation the more likely they are to sit up and take notice, and we might be able to do something about it, Sir Peter Luff (whose address is: Chairman, National Heritage Memorial Fund and Heritage Lottery Fund, 7 Holbein Place, SW1W 8NR) and also to anyone else whom you might know who could possibly influence such a decision. In writing I would suggest that the main points to emphasise are:

1. The ending of the HLF GPOW scheme in England, Wales and Northern Ireland means that for the first time since 1977 there will be no dedicated or 'ring-fenced' Government or Government heritage body funding for churches. That is bad news for a sector that has such a large number of historic buildings that are well liked by the public. (The programme may continue in Scotland, as it is a joint

initiative with Historic Environment Scotland). Churches are the UK's single most important category of historic buildings, with 12,500 listed church buildings for the Church of England alone and 45% of all England's Grade I listed buildings cathedrals and churches. They are unmatched for history, architecture and sheer variety anywhere else in the world. They are also much loved by the public. A poll commissioned by the National Churches Trust in December 2016, showed that four in five Britons (83%) agree that the UK's churches, chapels and meeting houses are an important part of the UK's heritage and history. The poll also showed that 57% of British adults believe it is the government's responsibility to help to fund repairs.

2. Although the HLF have said that funding for churches will be maintained at similar levels under the 'Our Heritage' and 'Heritage Grants' schemes, churches will have to compete for funding with other organisations, which may be better resourced or more experienced at making funding applications. The HLF have also argued that this new scheme is more simple to apply for and as a result of this decision they have listened to concerns raised about the complications of the GPOW scheme. Surely it would have been more straightforward to alter the GPOW scheme so that it mirrored the Our Heritage and Heritage Grants schemes?

3. The manner of the HLF consultation on these changes was not ideal. Indeed, it appears that they did not consult Historic England at all. In particular, the HLF decision was taken in isolation from the work of the Department of Culture, Media & Sport's Church Sustainability Review, which has been examining issues including maintenance costs and repairs and funding from lottery and central government grants, and is expected to report shortly. And their announcement came in the middle of a Government review into the work of the HLF and before the HLF's own consultation on its next Strategic Review. Furthermore the deadline given to express views once the notice of the decision was made was woefully short – little more than 48 hours.

4. The HLF GPOW grants for churches has enabled basic traditional and vernacular techniques in skills such as stonemasonry, leadwork, thatching, mortars and pointing, plasterwork, glazing and carpentry to be recovered. Many were on the verge of being lost, and they have been rejuvenated and applied to great effect under the guidance of a new generation of highly qualified conservation architects. Some of these techniques are of specifically local importance, like flint galletting. These skills have enjoyed such resurgence in the last few years there are now apprentices joining these professions which in turn is a benefit to the local rural economy and employment. The GPOW scheme was the only Lottery scheme to insist on qualified professional specification and supervision of work to historic buildings and the standard of workmanship is now far higher than it was in the 1960s and even 1970s, with a lot of the work from those years is now having to be redone. This could all now be at risk.

5. There is an argument that direct Government help should be given to churches in a scheme similar to the Roof Repair Fund, which was substantially oversubscribed. An annual fund of £10million would be very helpful.

Many thanks for all your support.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Lonsdale

Chairman  
Norfolk Churches Trust

