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From the Chair
Sir Peter Luff

26 April 2017

The Rt Hon Sir Hugo Swire KCMG MP
(East Devon)
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

LETTER FROM SIR PETER LUFF
TO DEVON'S MPs.
[SAME LETTER TO EACH MP]

Dear Hugo,

National Lottery funding for places of worship

Thank you for writing to my Chief Executive, Ros Kerlake on behalf of Mr John Mills (Hon Secretary and Trustee – Devon Historic Churches Trust). As a former Parliamentarian I know how important faith groups, and the buildings they use are to you and your constituents, and so I wanted to respond to you personally.

Mr Mills has raised similar queries via other avenues as well, and so we thought that it would be best to discuss his concerns and comments with him and his Trust directly. We will be writing to him separately.

In the meantime, I would also like to take this opportunity to offer you some assurance of our commitment to the funding of places of worship. I hope that this information may be useful in the eventuality that you are contacted on the same topic by others.

We have invested over £850 million raised by the National Lottery in places of worship since 1994. We are immensely proud of what this has achieved in terms of ensuring that the building fabric is in better condition but also that people have greater access to and involvement with these superb buildings, helping secure them for future generations. For this National Lottery players deserve our sincere gratitude. But congregations have been telling us they want to access our funding more easily so we are implementing some changes - there is no reason this should alarm potential applicants.

We are not scrapping grants for places of worship, but rather merging them into existing open programmes. As we do this we will ensure that places of worship receive the same proportion of our funding – in 2017-18 we have earmarked £20m specifically for place of worship projects across the UK. We will be making applications significantly less onerous for grants up to £100,000 and will offer places of worship more flexibility and scope in terms of what they can apply for. We will also provide support and guidance for the new process – all of which we believe will enhance the sustainability of the places of worship themselves. Larger grants will still be available to individual places of worship where more significant schemes of repair are needed.

As a member of the English Cathedrals and Churches Sustainability Review Panel, it became clear to me during the early investigation and analysis stages of the Review that the evidence being gathered chimed with HLF's understanding of the challenges faced by those charged with the sustainable care of historic places of worship. There now appears to be widespread agreement that in order to move towards sustainability congregations should be encouraged to use their wonderful heritage to engage more actively with people in their local community with a view to increasing the role that local people play in their upkeep. We fully expect to see this theme reflected in the Review Panel's report. However, it is inevitable that any recommendations made by the Review will take time to implement and therefore we wanted to act faster to make it easier for congregations to build capacity and take the steps they need to move towards sustainability. This is why we are now introducing changes to offer easier access to grants of up to £100,000 and greater flexibility in what we are able to fund. Essentially we want to make it simpler for congregations to seek the help they need now. In addition, because we are implementing this change at a relatively quiet point in our strategic cycle there is the added benefit that we have the staff resources to put in place additional support measures in order it help applicants make the transition to our open programmes at this time.

To ensure that the benefits of these changes are fully understood and that that they are implemented as smoothly as possible we will continue to engage with relevant denominations and faith representatives and those organisations involved in supporting the fabric of places of worship right across the United Kingdom. We have published a statement on our website and created a blog, FAQ page and dedicated webpage for places of worship, all of which are designed to allay any concerns and demonstrate the benefits of the new approach. Please do share these with anyone who raises concerns with you.

Please be in no doubt of our undimmed commitment to the heritage of places of worship and our willingness to support projects that will improve the condition of the fabric and deliver benefits for people and communities, as I hope this letter demonstrates.

With best wishes.



Sir Peter Luff
Chair
Heritage Lottery Fund and National Heritage Memorial Fund