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Ms Gill Graham  
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18 May 2017

Dear Ms Graham

We write as co-chairs of Historic England's Places of Worship Forum (POWF) in connection with HLF's recent decision to close the Grants for Places of Worship (GPOW) scheme.

As you will see from the enclosed Terms of Reference, POWF includes representatives from the main Christian denominations in England and some members are from other faiths. You will of course know that Christian denominations other than the Church of England (CoE) care for over 2,500 listed places of worship in England, and there are a small number cared for by Jewish, Muslim and other faith groups. The CoE has some 12,200 listed churches in England, two-thirds of them listed Grade I or II\*. Overall, around 45% of all Grade I listed buildings in England are churches. Last year, Historic England's annual Heritage at Risk Survey 2016 identified some 925 listed churches as being at risk in some way due to issues with the fabric and in need of repair.

In the context of repairs to listed places of worship, we should first mention the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (LPW Grant Scheme) operated by the government which reimburses congregations for most of the VAT spent on repairs and alterations. Members of POWF are keenly aware and hugely appreciative of this scheme. It particularly helps the voluntary groups (congregations) - who have no financial stake in the buildings they care for - with their fundraising efforts, enabling each pound raised to go towards repairing the church building. Furthermore, being government funded, it is open those denominations and faith groups that are not willing to accept Lottery money. It is, however, currently time limited to the end of this Parliament. We very much hope that the new Government will continue this important grant scheme in the new Parliament.

Whilst the LPW Grant Scheme gives valuable support to congregations undertaking repairs, it does not, of course, provide the essential capital funding which churches need to undertake major repairs. In this regard it is hard to overstate the importance of HLF's Grants for Places of Worship (GPOW) programme in supporting historic places of worship when they face unusually large repair bills. The current scheme and its predecessors have played a key part in ensuring that the voluntary groups who look after these buildings have been able, year on year, to fund major repairs and keep the buildings accessible to anyone and everyone, whilst at the same time funding more normal repairs from their own pockets and through fundraising. Public funding for urgent repairs to historic churches has been available through a targeted grant scheme since 1977.

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Members of POWF are appreciative of the fact that HLF have funded GPOW during HLF's current Strategic Framework. Correspondingly, there is real concern that the GPOW programme is now being closed down without consultation, of which I believe we had a legitimate expectation. It is also disquieting that no equalities or impact statement was produced by HLF when making this change, a point confirmed by HLF at our recent POWF meeting last week.

At that meeting, members of POWF expressed a number of specific concerns about the arrangements which HLF advise will replace GPOW, including, for example, the fact that HLF are emphasising that unlisted places of worship will in future be given public money for repairs, as against GPOW's restriction to listed buildings. We find it surprising at a time of financial stringency that HLF should take the view that more public money should be spent on less important buildings. But it would not be productive in this letter to set out all our specific concerns about the new arrangements, many of which you will be already aware from other sources, especially during 'purdah' when we appreciate your capacity to reply substantively is limited.

We are deeply concerned at the closure of GPOW and are not convinced that the HLF's proposed new arrangements for funding churches through its other grant schemes will provide the kind of support for major repairs which listed churches need if they are not to be lost. That the HLF chose to make this change unilaterally is particularly worrying because it indicates that there is now no arm of government or quasi-government which is taking a strategic approach to the financial support of major repairs to this hugely important and distinctive class of heritage asset.

When the new Government is in place, the members of POWF would value constructive engagement with your Department to consider this strategic issue in more detail. We would not wish to lose these buildings by accident.

Yours sincerely



Sophie Andreae and Jane Kennedy

## **Places of Worship Forum – Terms of Reference**

### **Role**

1. The role of the Forum is to:
  - 1.1 enable all those faith groups pursuing the conservation and sustainable future of historic places of worship to exchange information and ideas; and,
  - 1.2 provide a means for consultation and informed comment on matters concerning the work of Historic England relating to historic places of worship of all denominations and faith groups.
  
2. Specifically, members are appointed to:
  - 2.1 provide Historic England with access to a range of informed partner organisations and others involved in the care of historic places of worship as it develops and pursues its responsibilities;
  - 2.2 share experiences of owning and maintaining historic places of worship, on behalf of the organisations or sectors they represent, with particular regard to the impact of the exercise of statutory functions under heritage protection legislation;
  - 2.3 ensure that the organisations or bodies which members represent are kept informed of the progress of Historic England's work with historic places of worship;
  - 2.4 advise Historic England about the experience of closing and disposing of buildings no longer needed for public worship.

### **Chair**

3. The Chair of the Forum shall be appointed by the Forum Membership. The Chair does not have to be a Commissioner. In the absence of the Panel Chair, the Coordinator will invite another member to chair the meeting.

### **Attendance at meetings**

4. The following organisations or sectors dealing with historic places of worship shall be invited to send one named representative (or a proxy) to each meeting:
  - 4.1 The Baptist Union of Great Britain
  - 4.2 The Cathedral and Church Buildings Division, Archbishops' Council (Anglican)
  - 4.3 The Catholic Church Patrimony Committee (RC)
  - 4.4 The Churches Conservation Trust
  - 4.5 The Churches' Legislation Advisory Service

- 4.6 The Ecclesiological Society
  - 4.7 The Free Churches Group of Churches Together in England
  - 4.8 The Heritage Lottery Fund
  - 4.9 The Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies
  - 4.10 The Methodist Church
  - 4.11 The National Churches Trust
  - 4.12 The United Reformed Church
5. If representatives from these organisations are to change on a permanent basis this should be with the agreement of the Chair.
6. In addition, two members with expertise in non-Christian places of worship may be appointed. If they do not represent any formal organisation or constituency and are appointed in a personal capacity to bring particular expertise to the Forum then they will be appointed by the Chair of Historic England for a fixed term, in accordance with Historic England's Appointments Policy.
7. The Forum shall have not fewer than six and not more than sixteen members, excluding the Chair.

#### **Quorum**

8. The quorum of the meeting will be three full members, excluding Historic England staff.

#### **Frequency of Meetings**

9. The Forum will normally meet three times a year. Meetings will be serviced by Historic England's Commission Secretariat. Between meetings Historic England staff will inform members of any developments, issues of concern or papers requiring consultation via electronic communication.

**October 2016**