

4.2 ECCLESIASTICAL

4.2.1 STATEMENT FROM THE FRIENDS OF FRIENDLESS CHURCHES

1) The principal news item is the most unsettling for years. This is the sudden move by the **Heritage Lottery Fund**, without any formal prior consultation, to close down its separate grant stream, known as the GPOW, for historic places of worship. The ring-fencing of a sizeable amount of money for the most precious buildings in the country (45% of buildings listed Grade I are places of worship) has been a staple of the system of public aid for historic buildings since 1977. For half of its life (1977-1996) it has been administered by the State Agencies, notably English Heritage (now Historic England) and it is only now in the exclusive hands of the HLF because of the swingeing cuts which EH suffered in 2009-2010, after the global banking collapse of 2008. From the first days of the establishment of the Lottery in 1995, the monies had been dispersed as the result of a joint programme financed by both

HLF and EH. Since 1994 some £850 million has been awarded to 5,600 places of worship. This is the greatest ever injection of public or semi public money into historic churches since Parliament voted a total of £1.5 million in 1818 and 1828 in a scheme which provided 300 "Commissioner Churches". Given that almost all the capital costs of building, rebuilding and repairing churches from the Middle Ages through to the 19th century was borne privately, mostly out of the social obligations of the aristocracy and gentry, it is possible to argue that the largesse from the Lottery has been the single greatest concentrated injection of money ever from outside the Church. And it has done unequivocal good. Thousands of historic places of worship, cowed under by the cost of repairs, are now in much better heart and we can name at least 40 that are now open where they would have been shut. (The latest announcements are reviewed on page 30)

The GPOW had its critics not least within HLF given the considerable hand-holding necessary for the less certain applicants and indeed some applications were virtually identical, indicating too great a professional involvement rather than that of the individual congregations. Even so, **GPOW had enormous strengths:**

- a) It ring-fenced a significant amount of money for Britain's greatest and most visited historic building type – on much the same lines as the other dedicated HLF streams like Urban Parks, Landscape Partnerships and the Townscape Heritage Initiative. The whole reason that it, and its predecessors, were set up is because the general grant regimes had been overwhelmed by the number of churches applying (although the £20 million presently allocated (in England only) is a mere fraction of the £430 million distributed in 2016/17 and the £300 million envisaged for the budget of 2017/18).
- b) It offers a 'smart' mixture of grants for repair combined with up to 15% for new facilities – for those essential aids to sustainability, the loo, the kitchen, the disabled ramp. In light of the vital concentration on meeting the cost of high level repairs, it is the case that on average a much higher proportion of money from GPOW was spent on repairs than is true in other HLF schemes – where there is an increased stress on 'people outcomes' and broader activities in terms of interpretation and outreach.
- c) It is comparatively light-touch, which is suitable for a building type run very largely by volunteers. Only clergy are paid – it is illegal for churchwardens or members of any governing body within a church, chapel or synagogue to receive payment other than expenses. People join a church because of belief, often flavoured by an element of social responsibility. Sometimes, looking after the building and its contents is an unwelcome extra and diversion. They can be conservation amateurs compared with those coming together to save a particular building or site, where the primary drive is the wish to conserve. Many applicants to HLF are volunteers and the employment of professionals to assist them is something on which HLF can help. Even so, many applications, as from local authorities and museums, will be professionally-led.
- d) It builds in denominational fairness by making it easier for a spread of grant offers between denominations.
- e) It directs grants to remote but glorious buildings which may yet be enjoyed by hundreds if not thousands of visitors but which could never compete with institutions which are based in urban areas and have much greater potential for quantifying footfall. In great swathes of rural England, Wales and Scotland, the only building, as opposed to the landscape, which offers the potential for a substantial HLF grant, towards a building rather than countryside, in thousands of villages and hamlets, is the church. HLF has taken great pride in using the extraordinary potential reach of the GPOW to penetrate many settlements which could not have otherwise attracted one of their grants.
- f) It deals with all grades of listed places of worship (although it excludes the unlisted, on which see below).
- g) It requires the repairs to be supervised by an architect or surveyor accredited in conservation (a provision, that will now be dropped, see below).
- h) And finally, a discrete scheme like the GPOW offers the potential for partnerships with other Lottery distributors. The Big Lottery Fund is already in partnership with the HLF over its Urban Parks programme, adding millions to the distribution pot. We gather that Big has shown no great wish to partner HLF on places of worship but at least the potential is there.

It must be made crystal clear that whilst HLF is abolishing the separate GPOW scheme (and doing so early, with final applications to be submitted in August), it is absolutely not shutting the door to applications from POWs. Indeed it is claiming that there might even be more money, proportionately, for the "sector". Rather it is saying that churches and chapels and other places of worship must now compete, not with their peers, as they have done within the GPOW, but with all manner of applicants – local authorities with all their resources, museums who may have access to full time development staff, and charitable trusts who can bid for start-up grants from bodies like the Architectural Heritage Fund (which can help places of worship but has hitherto, only helped those which are closed and need a new use).

Henceforward churches and other PoWs will be required to bid for assistance under HLF's 'Our Heritage' and 'Heritage' Grants streams, which covers everything from capital works to new means of interpretation. The first is a single stage process with grants of up to £100,000 and the second a two stage process with grants from £100,000 to £5 million (as opposed to the current GPOW limit of £250,000). Both these streams require applicants to go beyond repair and meet further access and educational goals. The larger and better resourced buildings might fare well but hundreds if not thousands will now find the more competitive environment very daunting. And all this is taking place in the context of substantial cuts. The reduction in the overall HLF budget from the, unprecedented, £430 million in the year just finished to £300 million in 2017-18 must dictate that the number of unsuccessful applications across the board will be substantially higher.

Churches will now not only compete with secular rivals but will do so within a system that may not find it easier to think in terms of a single project. It has seemed to us that one of the strengths of the GPOW culture has been that it is better able to absorb a phased programme of works, sometimes lasting decades. 80% of grants from GPOW were above the £100,000 threshold of the relatively simple "Our Heritage" scheme. It follows from that, that 80% of existing GPOW applicants would have had to apply to the much more rigorous and competitive Heritage Grant scheme. This cannot bode well for the hundreds of splendid but isolated rural churches and the big boned churches of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries in underprivileged multi-cultural inner cities. And this at a time when the demand for "Heritage" or "Heritage Enterprise" grants will rise steeply as a result of the escalating tide of asset disposal by local authorities – and indeed the anticipated rise in church and chapel redundancies. The Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) with its 55 staff and its thorough going professionalism is an expert, serial and successful applicant to HLF, much better at it than the average PCC which tends to have just one major building campaign per generation. It will now become a competitor with the church and chapel still in pastoral use.

One important example of the HLF being a patient friend as the congregation struggles to raise the money and manage a substantial programme of works is the story of SS Peter & Paul and St

Philomena in New Brighton in the Wirral, shown here. The HLF has just offered a third phase of funding in 6 years to the courageous local people who, under the aegis of the Institute of Christ the King, reopened this church in March 2012, after it had been forcibly closed by the Diocese. This



huge building of 1935, designed by E Bower Norris, landmark from both land and sea, is cited as a navigational reference point on the marine chart for Liverpool Bay. In 2008 the Diocese denied access on the grounds of structural failure, but after a spirited campaign in the local papers and the national Catholic press, the church was re-opened following a change of heart by the Bishop, who in 2011 secured a lease in favour of the Institute. Only the HLF could have the resources and indeed the patience to walk with the congregation over their complicated and occasionally frustrating journey of the last six years, a pilgrimage which is not yet over. The new regime, if it is to be the equal of its predecessor, will need to be as accommodating.

Now it does need to be borne in mind that places of worship are already major beneficiaries from the "Our Heritage" and "Heritage" Grant programmes – the £10 million apiece for Bath Abbey and York Minster came from the latter. And the Church Buildings Council calculates that as well as the £25 million from the GPOW (soon to be £16.6 million) £4 million comes to Anglican parish churches from the two non-GPOW programmes, for everything from the all-singing, all-dancing regeneration scheme to a couple of thousand for the new guidebook. That is still modest compared with the GPOW budget and comes without the discipline of the latter which requires congregations to concentrate on repairs before they embark on regeneration and change. It is only by such a concentration on repairs that the present total of 833 Church of England churches on the Historic England Heritage At Risk Register

(seven fewer than last year) will be reduced. Of that 833, 203 'have a solution agreed but not implemented', nearly all of which involves an HLF-funded programme.

It is readily accepted that HLF is not the only player in town – the National Churches Trust was able to find £596,000 in grants for 36 churches across the UK at Christmas, 11 of them on the At Risk Register. (And until last year, NCT operated the monies available under the Landfill Communities Fund – in 2016 14 churches benefitted to the tune of £750,000 from the WREN FCC Heritage Fund.) But in NCT's own words, they are "a boutique funder", vital in providing the "partnership funding" which HLF, which never gives 100% grants, regards as vital. The Allchurches Trust Ltd, which presently has a consultation running on its own strategy for grants is equally important, as is the Garfield Weston Trust (which gives some £4m a year) and the County Churches Trusts but these bodies are undeveloped offspring compared with the Earth Mother which is the HLF. They are unlikely to be anything other than essential but secondary.

HLF is about to embark on its long planned consultations in the run up to its new Strategic Plan, which commences in 2019. There is yet time, particularly in concert with the ongoing Sustainability Review, instigated by George Osborne and chaired by Bernard Taylor, for HLF to re-examine its decision, listen to the sceptical but informed voice and instead resolve to reform and refocus the grants for places of worship, rather than abolish them. The timing could not be more critical for that other legacy of George Osborne as Chancellor of the Exchequer, the £55 million he allocated to cathedrals, and to parish churches under the Roof Repair Fund, have all now expired, with little or no expectation that there will be any successors. The HLF, and before that, State Aid, has achieved a quiet revolution in the future of churches in the last decades – hundreds are much safer from dilapidation or closure than they were before. We truly wonder whether HLF understands the adverse effects, particularly into the medium and long term, of the changes that they are unwittingly, and with the best of intentions, about to perpetrate.

And good intentions can reap further unintended consequences. This is on three principal fronts:

- 1 **Under GPOW only listed places of worship were eligible (whatever the grade) but in the other HLF grant streams, to which places of worship now have to apply, buildings do not have to be listed.** This can only mean that in the context of a reduced budget and a more competitive process, buildings of lesser architectural quality will be competing with those recognised as 'outstanding'. There is a very real risk as a comment piece in 'The Guardian' has highlighted that HLF, although still obliged to find a Heritage content to the project it grant aids, may find itself grant aiding 'belief not buildings'. It has always been axiomatic that the National Lottery does not support religion as such but rather the additional benefits that religion has brought to the culture of the country – the conservation of Christian art and architecture and the sense of community, outside the confines of the congregation, represented by the historic church and chapel.
- 2 **GPOW (uniquely in HLF programmes) required the use of conservation-accredited professionals to supervise the repairs.** The existence of such an obligation was one of the primary spurs towards the introduction of the accreditation system(s) in the first place, especially as its conception dates back to the preceding English Heritage scheme. Under HLF's Open Programmes that obligation goes, leaving only HLF's expectation that "the applicants will appoint an appropriately qualified and experienced professional team". It is a great comfort that HLF's own findings are that the standards of professional supervision have improved over recent years but this does seem a step backwards.
- 3 This is compounded by the apparent intention **not to seek the automatic involvement of the experts at Historic England** in assessing the applications submitted under the new regime (although it has to be said that HE involvement in general with HLF schemes is much less than it used to be, except of course in advising the planners when it comes to processing the associated applications for listed building consent).

The GPOW's triple lock on applicants, designed to guarantee quality – that concentration should

be on repairs, that those repairs should be supervised by an accredited professional and that repair programmes will be signed off by Historic England – will all go.

HLF did not intend this – but the real risk of these changes is that the number of applicants pursuing repairs, and obtaining HLF grants to that end, will go down. Moreover those grants will not necessarily be entrusted to those that are accredited. Removal of the limitation to listed only will increase the number of applicants at a time when the likelihood of refusal of grant will grow, as the budget is reduced and competition increased. This would well drive forward the rate of redundancies – bad news for The Friends of Friendless Churches.

Even now, there is time for a change of heart.

For a rolling update on the situation, do consult www.hrballiance.org.uk/consultations-2/hlf-closure-of-gpow/

