

HLF GRANTS UPDATE

THE LARGEST source of funding for the UK's historic places of worship is closing. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) currently distributes £30 million to listed places of worship in the UK each year through its Grants for Places of Worship (GPOW) scheme. Those grant offers already made under the scheme will not be affected, and there will be a final round of applications for places of worship in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in August 2017. The scheme is likely to be continued in Scotland where it is administered jointly with Historic Environment Scotland.

The GPOW scheme offers grants of £10,000–£250,000 for urgent structural repairs and for improvements such as the provision of toilets and access ramps. While it is the only HLF scheme dedicated to the needs of places of worship, two other HLF grant schemes are available for general heritage projects: Our Heritage (for grants of £10,000–£100,000) and Heritage Grants (up to £5 million). Both can be used for the conservation and repair of a wide range of heritage assets, including places of worship whether or not they are listed. The HLF believes that congregations will find these schemes useful for a wider range of purposes, allowing them to carry out projects which make places of worship more sustainable.

A proportion of the money available under the two general heritage schemes will be ring-fenced this year for projects which would have been funded under the GPOW. However, there is no guarantee that funding will be ring-fenced beyond this, and it is likely that places of worship will have to compete for grant aid with all other aspects of our heritage in the future. Competition for HLF grants is already intense, and recently there has been a decline in lottery ticket sales, reducing the funding



The windows, nave and transept of St Andrew's, Roker, Sunderland (1907) were restored with the aid of a grant of £140,000 under the GPOW scheme. Grade I listed, it is often referred to as the Cathedral of the Arts and Crafts Movement, attracting visitors from across the country. The support of a dedicated grant source is essential for small parishes to keep treasures like this open and in good repair.

available next year by about a third.

The closure of the GPOW has drawn criticism from across the sector, and highlights the need for an alternative mechanism for supporting the conservation of historic places of worship in the long term. Almost half of all Grade I listed buildings in England are places of worship, and many of them are managed by small congregations. It makes sense to ring-fence funds for such

an important sector and to target grants in a manner which best suits the unique requirements and limited resources of the recipients. The dominant concern for congregations is funding for occasional major repairs, and the GPOW is generally considered to satisfy this need more effectively than the two general heritage schemes will. In particular, the GPOW provides a two-stage process with expert assistance, which means that congregations are supported in the upfront costs of developing their project. In contrast, the Our Heritage scheme is relatively simple but it does not currently provide such assistance, while the requirements of the Heritage Grant scheme have a reputation for being particularly onerous and needing specialist expertise, which can be expensive.

The Church of England's ChurchCare website points out that the poorer and less well-resourced churches will be disproportionately affected by the loss of the GPOW as they are already struggling to access the funding required to develop proposals. Parishes in rural areas and inner cities may be worst affected as they often have both the smallest congregations and the most complex requirements. Given the competition for heritage funding and without public funds ring-fenced to support congregations in carrying out major repairs, the concern is that many necessary but expensive repairs will simply not be carried out.

Further Information

The Heritage Lottery Fund website – in particular, see 'A new approach to supporting places of worship', www.hlf.org.uk/about-us/news-features/new-approach-supporting-places-worship The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance website – for the latest information and links to other sources of information, see www.hrballiance.org.uk/consultations-2/hlf-closure-of-gpow