

from **The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance**
a group within The Heritage Alliance

We bring together those working for a secure future
for historic religious buildings

The Heritage Alliance

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Sir Peter Luff
Chair
Heritage Lottery Fund
7 Holbein Place
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Copy: DCMS

24 March 2017

Dear Sir Peter

CANCELLATION OF GPOW SCHEME

I am writing as Chair of the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance (HRBA), an independently-funded group within The Heritage Alliance. The members of the HRBA include faith groups and charitable trusts who between them maintain almost all listed religious buildings in the United Kingdom.

To put this in context, there are about 20,000 listed religious buildings in the UK, of which some 60% are owned by the Church of England, with most of the remainder being churches owned by other Christian denominations and charitable trusts. A small number are owned by other faith groups, and our membership includes Jewish and Muslim representatives

Since we heard of the proposed closure of the Grants for Places of Worship Scheme (GPOW) a few days ago we have raised the matter with some of our members, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Church in Wales and the Church of Scotland. We plan to talk to other key players over the coming days, including the Methodist Church, the Baptist Church and the United Reformed church, all of whom have significant numbers of listed buildings, together with members of HRBA representing non-Christian faiths, who will also be affected.

RESPONSE

Attached you will find our initial response to the closure of GPOW, entitled '**The proposed closure of the grants for places of worship scheme: points for consideration**'.

As we are having to respond to this major proposal on the basis of a one and a half page HLF briefing note

Our members are non-government, voluntary and private organisations that promote, conserve, study and involve the public in **our heritage**.

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(‘New Approach to Funding for Places of Worship’) we have limited ourselves to a number of reactive points, rather than – as we would have preferred – responding in a holistic way to help shape the overall thinking behind the proposal. Nevertheless we have developed some of our points in detail, in the hope they may be useful.

LACK OF CONSULTATION

We were taken by surprise by the decision to close GPOW. Despite its more or less monopoly position, HLF has a reputation for transparency and engagement with its stakeholders, and it is therefore alarming to us that HLF has decided to close the GPOW scheme with no prior consultation (that we are aware of). There was certainly no mention of this possibility in the discussions on developing GPOW held between members of HRBA and HLF last summer (unfortunately the remarks in HLF’s briefing document could be taken to suggest the opposite).

We are disconcerted, too, that HLF should attempt to link this change with ‘insights’ gained from the Government’s Sustainability Review. We are not, in fact, aware of the closure of GPOW being called for by members the Review Panel (though we are open to correction on this); and we have certainly not been asked to respond to the suggestion in any call for evidence by the Review. It will be a matter of some interest to see whether the closure of GPOW is recommended by the Review in its final report, and, if so, the evidence on which this recommendation is made.

We note also that the closure of GPOW is not raised as a possibility in the HLF 2016-2017 Business Plan. We do not know what has led to such a significant change of mind since the business plan was drawn up. We do think it most unfortunate that such a major change of policy for the places of worship sector should be introduced suddenly a few months before HLF launches a major review of its own strategic framework, including systematic public consultation. We fear a precedent may be set.

Given the above, and without a full impact assessment being available to us, it is hard to be sure that HLF has properly carried out its obligations to take into account its assessment of the needs of the national heritage and their priorities for addressing them, and to involve the public and local communities in making policies, setting priorities, and distributing money.

It is disappointing, too, that HLF should have planned (as we understand it) to announce this change shortly *after* the current DCMS public consultation closed, thus removing any opportunity for public comment on the proposal. As you know, six thousand people took the trouble to respond to the DCMS Sustainability Review online survey, and the closure of GPOW without prior consultation and its lack of mention in the current DCMS consultation may well cause considerable public unease.

Overall the proposed closure of the Grants for Places of Worship scheme raises deep concerns, and we would be very grateful if you and your Board would consider whether there are other approaches to achieving your objectives.

It may be that through a process of exploration and consultation an alternative way forward can be found. We would, of course, be happy to help with this in any way we can. On 28 February HRBA sent to HLF a submission discussing options for the longer term development of GPOW (also attached for your convenience), and although this February submission was written in ignorance of the decision made by the HLF Trustees a few days earlier to close GPOW, there are many resonances between the points we made and your subsequent briefing note about the closure. I do wonder if our submission might provide the basis for discussion and wider consultation on a longer-term future for GPOW.

Yours sincerely

Trevor Cooper
Chair, the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance
an independently-funded group within the Heritage Alliance

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Attachments:

- 1 'The proposed closure of the grants for places of worship scheme: points for consideration', HRBA, 24 March 2017
2. For convenience, a copy of an earlier document originally submitted February 2017: 'Discussion note: longer term development of GPOW', HRBA, 28 February 2017