The Heritage Alliance

Sir Laurie Magnus
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Copy: DCMS

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Dear Sir Laurie

CANCELLATION OF GPOW

As you know, HLF are shortly to announce the closure of the Grants for Places of Worship Scheme (GPOW).

Sustainability Review
One reason that HLF gave for this major change is 'insights coming out of the work of the ongoing English Churches and Cathedrals Sustainability Review'.

As the Review has not yet reported, this justification for the closure of GPOW has rather surprised us.

I am therefore writing to you as a member of the Sustainability Review Panel, to ask what views were expressed on behalf of Historic England (HE) about the pros and cons of closing GPOW when this was discussed by the Sustainability Review Panel before the decision was taken by HLF.

And similarly what views were expressed by HE in discussions that HE had with HLF outside the ambit of the Sustainability Review (before the decision was taken)?

Four impacts of the move to existing grant schemes
One impact of the closure of GPOW and pushing applicants towards Our Heritage and Heritage Grants is that these schemes do not have 'building condition' as their only applicable heritage outcome. This move away from the primacy of repairs seems to us to be a major policy shift – indeed HLF have talked about the closure of GPOW in strategic terms, and this does not seem to us to be an exaggeration.

A second change is that money will no longer be dedicated to *listed* places of worship. For several decades GPOW and its predecessor schemes, run by English Heritage initially and then jointly with HLF, have only given grants to listed buildings, so this too is a major

shift of emphasis. At a time when listed buildings are queuing up for GPOW grants, and the HLF grants budget has dropped by about a third, it seems to us a surprising shift in priorities that less important buildings should compete for repair grants on identical terms to listed buildings.

A third impact is that a qualified conservation architect will no longer be required for Our Heritage grants. It was an explicit policy objective achieved by English Heritage some years ago (not without effort) that conservation professionals be engaged for work on listed places of worship being grant-aided by public money. We would assume that the reasons for this policy objective still stand.

A fourth impact, as we understand it, is that HE's guidance on technical matters and helping applicants shape an appropriate package of work will no longer form part of the application and grant-awarding process for Our Heritage grants. The implication is that large sums of public money will begin to be spent on work to listed places of worship without the involvement of any government agency in ensuring the suitability of such work.

In its role as expert advisor to DCMS, what is HE's view on these four policy changes?

As you will see, I am copying this to DCMS as it involves both the Sustainability Review and the ongoing DCMS Review of HLF. I hope, too, you will allow me to share your reply with others.

Yours sincerely

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

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