

New Approach to Funding for Places of Worship

Briefing Note

What is the change?

In February the NHMF Board of Trustees agreed that in future funding for repair to places of worship will be delivered through the Our Heritage and Heritage Grants programmes. This will bring our funding for places of worship more closely into line with our strategic aim to achieve positive and lasting benefits for both heritage and people. The new approach also responds to the insights coming out of the work of the ongoing English Churches and Cathedrals Sustainability Review and the sector discussions about the Grants for Places of Worship (GPOW) programme that were carried out as part of the mid-point review of the current Strategic Framework (SF4).

In summary the proposed changes are intended to:

- simplify the approach for applicants in order to assist those with low capacity to apply for HLF funding;
- provide more flexible access to funding to enable places of worship to become more sustainable in the longer term;
- rationalise and streamline the portfolio of HLF programmes.

When will this happen?

In order to manage the transition from GPOW to Our Heritage/Heritage Grants there will be three batches of GPOW decision-making in 2017/18. The last GPOW deadline will be in August/September 2017; this information will be clearly displayed on the HLF website and portal from early April. We are aware that there is likely to be a spike in demand for GPOW funding in the run up to the last deadline in September and are thinking about how we will manage this additional demand both in terms of staff resource and budget.

What are the opportunities for applicants?

1. Flexibility and sustainability

The aim of the new approach will be to continue supporting the repair of building fabric; the introduction of new facilities to encourage greater community use; activities to bring more people into the building; opportunities for revenue generation; and capacity building within the congregation. Rather than defining the scope of fabric repair projects, as we currently do through GPOW, the existing restrictions will be removed, allowing applicants to apply for whatever they feel they most need to enable their place of worship to become (or move towards becoming) sustainable. The following elements might be included:

- Capital repair works – conservation, planned repairs, urgent repairs
- New facilities – WCs, serveries and repairs / upgrades to services (heating, lighting and electrics)
- Activities to increase engagement
- Capacity building – increasing the skills within the congregation e.g. leadership, governance, community engagement, marketing & tourism, managing ongoing maintenance etc.
- Professional support – business & financial management, project management, fundraising, engagement & education etc.

The new approach will also allow HLF to reach out to a broader range of places of worship. GPOW was restricted to listed places of worship but Our Heritage and Heritage Grants are available to any group caring for an historic place of worship, not just listed buildings. This might mean that we are able to increase the interest in our support from the smaller non-Conformist and non-Christian groups.

2. Outcomes

The Our Heritage programme requires one outcome for heritage and one for people ('learnt about heritage' is weighted). It is possible that potential applicants will find the Our Heritage outcomes

easier to meet than the current GPOW outcomes where we require one outcome for heritage ('better condition' – weighted) and one for communities ('more people and a wider range of people will have engaged with heritage'). During the mid-point review we received a lot of feedback that suggested that applicants were struggling with 'more and wider' despite our relatively modest expectations and the – much appreciated – support offered by development teams. This was perceived to be a particularly challenging issue in small, isolated rural communities. Applicants may therefore find it easier to develop good quality Our Heritage projects that allow people to learn about heritage instead.

3. Demand

This single-stage Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Fund programme was very well received by the sector and the fact that the Roof Repair Fund was heavily oversubscribed suggests that there is considerable appetite for an approach that provides grants for relatively modest schemes of fabric repairs (<£100k). It is also worth noting that the analysis of grant awards under SF4 shows that in the first three years of SF4 congregations have been very successful in securing funding for a variety of projects through both Our Heritage and Heritage Grants, with success rates as high as, and sometimes higher than, the averages for these programmes. Excluding cathedrals, in the three years from 2013 places of worship applicants have received grants totalling £149m across all HLF programmes – only £83.6m (56%) of this was awarded through GPOW. £33.7m (23%) was awarded through Heritage Grants.

4. Support

As sector feedback suggests that congregations find the current GPOW guidance challenging, we will take the opportunity to rethink how we present our advice and will seek input from external sector experts. We intend to produce a new suite of 'good practice' resources for congregations, to include case studies, links to existing successful projects and detailed application 'help notes'. We also intend to make greater use of the online community as a vehicle for providing support, though we are aware that all resources will need to be printable and accessible for applicants who are less comfortable with IT. We will therefore work with denominational bodies and national groups, such as ChurchCare and the National Churches Trust, to make sure that all applicants can access the information they need. The Historic Environment Team will also support development teams in giving advice to applicants; collating and preparing development resources; preparing case studies; and developing and delivering training and organising sector briefings etc.

There is also potential for Our Heritage applicants to make use of a mentor paid for through their grant and we would hope that Places of Worship Support Officers will be able to assist with the transition where such posts exist.

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