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From : Sara.Crofts@hlf.org.uk

Date : 04/05/2017 - 09:29 (GMTDT)

To : REDACTED

Cc : REDACTED

Subject : Funding for Places of Worship (HLF)

FAO REDACTED

Dear REDACTED

Funding for Places of Worship (HLF)

We have received letters from a small number of MPs in the South West enclosing a copy of your briefing letter sent to them on 5 April. Our chair, Sir Peter Luff, has responded to the letters that we received but has asked me to reply directly to you to address the points laid out in your briefing.

Firstly, it is worth noting that HLF has invested over £850 million raised by the National Lottery in places of worship since 1994. We are immensely proud of what this has achieved in terms of ensuring that the building fabric is in better condition but also because it has helped to ensure that people have greater access to and involvement with these superb buildings, helping to secure them for future generations. This would not have been possible without the National Lottery players on whom our funding depends; they deserve recognition and our sincere gratitude.

Secondly, we are not removing access to grants for places of worship; we are in fact merging the Grants for Places of Worship programme (GPOW) into our existing open programmes. As we do this we remain committed to ensuring that places of worship receive at least the same level of funding in proportional terms as they did previously. In the current financial year (2017-18) we have earmarked £20m specifically for such projects across the UK; if congregations continue to apply for National Lottery funding at similar levels to previous years we fully expect to spend equivalent amounts in subsequent years, if not more.

However, we realise that some applicants find a change in our grant programmes unsettling and therefore our development teams and grants officers will be working hard to provide additional support and guidance to potential applicants during the transition period. We intend to provide local briefing and training events and will also be creating new web-based resources, as well as making better use of our online community to signpost applicants to potential sources of additional advice and support. We have already published a blog, a FAQ page and a dedicated webpage for places of worship on our website to help clarify what the changes will mean and demonstrate the benefits of our new approach. Further resources, including new case studies and help notes, will be added to our website as the year progresses. We also hope that umbrella bodies and national networks will work with us to support congregations over the coming months.

It is also important to acknowledge that the change in our approach to funding places of worship was made with the benefit of detailed knowledge of the needs and challenges of this important part of the historic built environment sector. I, personally, have been working alongside congregations and denominational organisations to support the repair of church buildings for many years and, as an organisation, HLF can draw upon the findings of past evaluation and research projects as well as our ongoing GPOW evaluation project. HLF is also part of the Open University's Empowering Design Practices research programme and

was previously a member of Historic England's Major Parish Churches project steering group.

In addition, regular liaison with faith groups and umbrella bodies is maintained through our participation in the HRBA forum, our attendance at the Historic England convened Places of Worship Forum and through regular meetings with specific denominational groups. It is also worth noting that as part of the mid-point review of our current strategic framework we discussed HLF's funding for places of worship at a meeting of the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance (HRBA) and also at a roundtable event that we convened in May 2016.

Taken as a whole, our recent engagement with the sector has confirmed much of what we already knew about the needs and challenges of the sector; similar themes and concerns have also become apparent through the work of the English Churches and Cathedrals Sustainability Review where HLF is playing an active role. In particular, it has become extremely clear that whilst applicants welcome HLF's continued support for the repair of places of worship they find the GPOW programme complicated and difficult. We therefore believe that there are significant benefits in making the application process much less onerous for grants up to £100,000.

Another key benefit of our new approach to providing funding for places of worship is the inherent flexibility of the Our Heritage and Heritage Grants programmes i.e. applicants can ask for whatever they need to deliver an effective and engaging project that will achieve their aims. We recognise that for many applicants the focus of their project will still be addressing significant fabric repair needs, but there are many other elements that can be included to help ensure that the building, and the volunteers, are better prepared for a sustainable future. Potential applicants might wish to consider installing new facilities (WCs and tea-points), planning engagement activities, identifying capacity building measures, and commissioning professional support in addition to their capital works. So, applicants can still apply for projects that are similar to those that we currently fund through GPOW or they can take advantage of the less restrictive nature of our open programmes and develop projects more closely matched to their specific and individual requirements and context.

Although we recognise that the lack of capacity within the cohort of volunteers caring for historic places of worship is considerable, the Our Heritage and Heritage Grants programmes are no less suitable for volunteer-led organisations than GPOW. Indeed, it could be argued that Our Heritage is actually easier for less experienced applicants, as it is more 'light touch' than GPOW. However, it is also worth bearing in mind that the majority of our funded projects are devised and delivered by volunteer-run organisations – places of worship are not an exception or even unusual in this respect – and that all applicants to all programmes can include the costs of professional support (e.g. employing a project manager) in their applications.

Lastly, we should be clear that a key strength of the HLF's strategic approach is that we do not define heritage; in recognition that our funding comes from National Lottery players we believe that it is important to fund what people tell us is important to them. The focus on designated assets is peculiar to the GPOW programme and arose from the eligibility criteria developed by English Heritage/Historic England when they were joint funders and administrators under previous targeted programmes for places of worship. We believe that removing this restriction is actually a benefit for the heritage of the UK as it makes a clearer statement that we are an inclusive funder and flags up an opportunity that was often overlooked previously. So, in addition to being able to fund architecturally important listed churches, cathedrals, mosques and synagogues, we now expect to receive more applications from the people who care for important but – as yet – undesignated buildings, such as the modest chapels of the Welsh valleys or relatively modern C20 churches, which were often excluded from GPOW.

We do accept that there are substantial challenges facing those who care for places of worship at local and at a national level, but National Lottery funding for the capital repair of the physical heritage of these buildings is only a small part of the solution to their long term sustainability. Various groups have already considered, or are currently considering, this issue – including the Church of England’s own Church Buildings Review Group and the English Churches and Cathedrals Sustainability Review – but perhaps the time has come for a broader debate about how to deal with these challenges in the light of the known decline in congregational attendance and the current financial realities that we face. Forty years of state funding and then joint state and lottery funding for the repair of places of worship may have contributed to averting church closures in some cases, but it has not prevented large numbers of places of worship appearing on ‘at risk’ registers in recent years. Fresh thinking is urgently required and we very much hope that we can work with denominational groups and others to see whether it is possible to develop a strategy that will properly address these issues in the future. We therefore look forward to receiving suggestions that we can consider for future HLF policy as part of the consultation exercise for our next strategic framework, which will begin later this year.

In the meantime we will continue to support projects that are intended to improve the condition of the fabric of places of worship whilst delivering benefits for people and communities. Please do not doubt our undimmed commitment to the heritage of places of worship as we implement this carefully considered and simplified way of working.

Yours sincerely

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