

HRBA email to Diana Evans, HE of 26 May 2017

*** = redaction

Dear Diana (copy ***)

HE has asked that the sector keep it in touch with concerns over the closure of GPOW, and this is in response to that request.

You will see that I am attaching a letter from Sir Peter Luff, Chair of HLF, to Sir Hugo Swire, MP. I am also attaching an email sent by HLF to John ***, Secretary of the *** (I have confirmed with HLF that this latter email is not confidential, but I have nevertheless redacted *** name and details).

Both these communications appear to have been drafted with care by HLF, and give useful further insight into some of HLF's thinking when closing the GPOW scheme.

However they raise a number of concerns, and on the final one we would like very much to understand Historic England's position.

First, as you may imagine we were concerned by the claim in the email that GPOW and its predecessor repair schemes have not prevented places of worship from appearing on risk registers in recent years, and the implication that these schemes have therefore failed. However I am pleased to say that HLF have now responded to our concerns by agreeing that 'churches are in reasonable condition now in terms of their fabric', and, as regards this particular email, have said that the natural reading of the text (that GPOW and its predecessors have failed to keep buildings in good condition) was not what was intended. We welcome this clarification.

Secondly you will see that Sir Peter uses the assumed forthcoming recommendations of the Sustainability Review to justify a change which he says is appropriate for *all* historic places of worship, not just those of the Church of England. It will not surprise you that this assumption that the Sustainability Review applies to *all* historic places of worship concerns us, particularly as HLF's decision did not have an Equalities Impact Assessment. One of our denominational members has particular concerns in this area. We are not looking for a response from you to this point.

Thirdly, HLF appear to justify their lack of consultation over the closure of GPOW by explaining that they have expertise in the topic. Expertise is, of course, always welcome in a public body, and HLF have a good reputation for carrying out research to improve their understanding of heritage issues. HRBA does not, however, think that believing one's organisation has expertise is a good reason for lack of consultation; we think that those affected had legitimate expectations that they would be consulted on such a major change. Again, we are not looking for a response from you on this matter.

Finally, the email sets out to explain why, as a matter of policy, HLF does not wish to focus on places of worship which are listed. HRBA's view is that that the switch away from designated places of worship will be bad for that class of heritage, simply because at a time of financial stringency it moves money away from the most important buildings. If you are free to do so, could you let me know what view HE has expressed, or is intending to express, to Government (or, indeed, anyone else) about HLF's attitude to designation, either in this particular case or more generally.

With all good wishes

Trevor

Trevor Cooper, Chair, the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance (HRBA)

Email from HE 26 May 2017

Dear Trevor

Thanks very much for this email and your sensitivity. Historic England is seriously considering the implications of the HLF's decision for places of worship, aware that some have limited capacity for local fundraising and need external help to undertake essential repairs to historic fabric.

The straightforward answer to your question about HE's view is that we have not reached a position we can share publicly. As you'd expect, we are thinking carefully about the concerns raised by the HLF's decision and are discussing the situation with DCMS but it is too early for us to be able to say anything more than that.

Mrs Diana Evans

Head of Places of Worship and Owners Advice, Government Advice Team, Historic England