

Historic Religious Buildings Alliance

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

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The Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
DCMS, 100 Parliament St
SW1A 2BQ

2 August 2017

This letter was convened by Trevor Cooper, Chair of the HRBA, to whom any reply should be sent e: tc@trevorcooper.net

Dear Mrs Bradley

Historic Places of Worship

Between them the organisations represented by the first five signatories to this letter have ultimate responsibility for the great majority of the 17,500 listed churches and other places of worship in England and Wales. Others of the thirty-six signatories represent bodies closely involved in the care, funding and sustainability of these buildings and their contents, in some cases with a formal or statutory role in the preservation of the nation's heritage.

We are writing to draw your attention to a strategic issue which we believe in the medium term will adversely affect the future of historic places of worship, and to offer constructive engagement with DCMS on the matter.

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Before doing so, we would first like to congratulate you on your re-appointment as Secretary of State, and wish you every success in a post which plays such an important part in enriching everyone's lives.

We would also like to thank the DCMS for its continued support since it was started in 2001 of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, operated by DCMS and now jointly financed by HMT, which provides congregations looking after listed places of worship with grants equivalent to most of the VAT spent on repairs and alterations. This scheme was introduced to mitigate an unintended consequence of a change to the VAT regime, and we are grateful for the cross-party support it has received since it was set up. The scheme means that each pound that a congregation raises can go towards repairing the building, in which, of course, congregations normally have no

financial interest. We very much hope that the new Government will continue to support this important grant scheme and would welcome your assurance on this.

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Our present concern lies with the funding of major repairs to places of worship.

APPROACH SINCE 1977

As you will appreciate, all historic buildings, however well-maintained, occasionally require significant investment in fabric repair (for example, roof renewal). To the best of our knowledge, more or less every Western European country deals with this issue by using public money to pay for repairs to its historic church buildings, and in this way keeps its heritage in good condition and available for everyone's enjoyment.

The UK has taken a very different approach: congregations worshipping in a historic building are expected to pay for their own repairs. However, forty years ago, following increasing concern about the loss of ecclesiastical heritage, a degree of state aid was introduced to give reliable financial support just for very major repairs. For any individual building, such repairs are a relatively unusual occurrence.

FUNDING MAJOR REPAIRS SINCE 1977

For some decades from 1977 the dedicated grant schemes for major repairs were funded either directly by government or indirectly through government-sponsored bodies such as English Heritage and Cadw, From the late 1990s a scheme to provide major repair grants to places of worship was funded jointly by English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

As a consequence of the 2010 Spending Review, English Heritage withdrew its funding and the Heritage Lottery Fund took on responsibility for the scheme. HLF established its Grants for Places of Worship Scheme (GPOW) in 2012, which continued providing protected funding for major repairs and also allowed places of worship to secure a modest level of support for improvements to assist sustainability, such as the installation of toilets, catering facilities or disabled access. It will be appreciated that during this latter period those faith groups, both Christian and non-Christian, which for ethical or religious reasons could not apply for lottery funding were not able to make use of these HLF grants.

In our view this unbroken forty-year period of supporting major repairs has been a resounding success. In England for example fewer than 4% of listed places of worship are on the Heritage at Risk Register with no solution agreed for dealing with the problem (data from Historic England). Given the generally poor condition of these buildings in the 1970s this is a major improvement at relatively little cost to taxpayers money or lottery funds, because local congregations and communities are still responsible for the bulk of repairs and all routine maintenance costs.

THE END OF A PROTECTED FUND FOR MAJOR REPAIRS

However, in April HLF announced that it was closing the GPOW scheme later this year. In future, applications to HLF for repairs to places of worship will have to be made to their general grant schemes, and each application whose major purpose is repairs will be in direct competition with grant applications for a variety of other purposes from many other bodies; this at a time when HLF grant funding has reduced by about one third.

Thus after forty years this decision (which was not subject to prior consultation) brought an end to protected funding for major repairs to historic places of worship. There is now widespread concern, shared by the signatories to this letter, that over the medium term the removal of protected funding could lead to the loss of a significant number of fine and much-loved buildings.

STRATEGIC ISSUE

This has highlighted what to us is the core issue: that there is now no arm of central government or quasi-government which is taking a strategic approach to the financial support of listed places of worship needing major repair. (In Wales the Welsh Government has published a *Strategic Action Plan for Historic Places of Worship in Wales*, but this, whilst a positive acknowledgement of the challenges for the sector, contains no strategic financial plan or funding for major repairs.)

We appreciate that the forthcoming report of The English Churches and Cathedrals Sustainability Review, although limited to Church of England churches in England, may point to a strategic way forward for financing major repairs to places of worship of all faith groups across the country. Nevertheless, the signatories to this letter are greatly concerned about this present lack of strategic responsibility, and would very much value the opportunity for constructive engagement with you and your Department on this matter.

Convened by, and please reply to, Trevor Cooper, Chair, The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance, at the above address, or by email: tc@trevorcooper.net

SIGNATORIES

The following have asked to be signatories to this letter

1. Representatives of faith groups

Alphabetical by signatory

The Right Revd John D E Davies

Bishop of Swansea and Brecon (Church in Wales; senior bishop in absence of archbishop)

Ingrid Greenhow

Clerk (Chair) of Trustees, Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

The Right Revd John Inge
Bishop of Worcester (Church of England), lead bishop for cathedrals and churches

Revd Gareth Powell
Secretary of the Methodist Conference

The Most Revd George Stack
Archbishop of Cardiff (Catholic Church)

2. Other groups directly responsible for historic places of worship

Matthew McDade
Executive Officer for the Diocese of Norwich Churches Trust

Matthew Saunders
Director, Friends of Friendless Churches

Roland Jeffery
Director, Historic Chapels Trust

Mrs Scilla Latham
Company Secretary, the Norfolk Churches Trust

David Lloyd
Chairman, the Welsh Religious Buildings Trust

3. Groups providing advice, funding or other support

* = *National Amenity Society with statutory role*

Matthew Saunders (also a signatory above)
*Director, *Ancient Monuments Society*

Alan Thurlow
Chairman, the British Institute of Organ Studies (advice on historic organs)

Dr Christopher O'Mahony
President, Central Council of Church Bell Ringers (advice on historic bells etc)

Jean Lesley Wilson
President, the Church Monuments Society (advice on church monuments)

John Mills
Chair, Churches Trust Forum

Canon John Brown
Chair, Churches Visitor and Tourism Association

Becky Payne
Hon. Secretary, the Ecclesiological Society (forum for information and debate)

Trevor Cooper
Chair, the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance (HRBA); convenor of this letter

Sharman Kadish
Founder and former Director, Jewish Heritage UK

George Allan

Chairman, Maintain our Heritage

Luke March

Chairman, National Churches Trust

Jane Kennedy and Sophie Andrae

Co-Chairs of the Places of Worship Forum (advice to Historic England)

Matthew Slocombe

*Director, *Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB)*

Peter Ruback

*Chairman, *Twentieth Century Society*

Christopher Costelloe

*Director, the *Victorian Society*

4. Local Trusts providing funding and/or other support

Peter Durrant

Chairman of Trustees, Berkshire Churches Trust

Adam Naylor

Chairman, Churches Trust for Cumbria

Lady (Mary) Burnell-Nugent

Chairman, Devon Historic Churches Trust

Joan Appleyard

Chairman, Hampshire and the Islands Historic Churches Trust

David Furnival

Chairman, Herefordshire Historic Churches Trust

Janet Arthur

Mrs J C Arthur, Chair, Leicestershire Historic Churches Trust

John White,

Chairman, Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust

Basil Eastwood, CMG

Chair, The Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust

Stephen Winwood

Chair, Shropshire Historic Churches Trust

Hamish Donaldson

Chairman, Surrey Churches Preservation Trust

Tim Bridges

Chair, Worcestershire & Dudley Historic Churches Trust