

Ken Skates AM
Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

26 June 2017

Dear Deputy Minister,

Re Support for the historic places of worship in Wales

We write as the Wales Heritage Group (WHG) in connection with the Heritage Lottery Fund's (HLF) recent decision to close the Grants for Places of Worship (GPOW) scheme.

As you will see from the enclosed Terms of Reference, the WHG is an alliance of statutory consultees and voluntary national organisations active in the conservation of the built environment in Wales. You will recall our exhibition at the Senedd last autumn, which you kindly attended. You will know that there are over 4,200 churches and chapels in Wales, cared for by dedicated volunteers, most of which have no experience in fundraising or managing complex building projects. The importance of churches and chapels to the heritage of Wales and the sense of place for many local communities cannot be under-estimated. Churches and chapels represent 45% of all Grade I listed buildings in England and Wales. The Church in Wales alone owns 977 listed buildings, including 29 per cent of the Grade I listed buildings in the country. Other denominations also manage highly significant buildings.

The HLF's GPOW programme has played a very important role in supporting the conservation of historic places of worship in Wales. More than 60 churches have benefited from urgent repairs funded through the scheme, including the Grade II* St. Catherine's Church in Pontypridd, and the historic Capel Cildwrn, Llangefni. In December 2016, the HLF awarded a GPOW grant of £94,000 for urgent roof repairs to St Michael and All Angel's Church in Lower Machen. We believe that this type of project is at risk in Wales due to the demise of the GPOW scheme.

Members of the WHG are appreciative of the role that the HLF has played in supporting historic places of worship through GPOW. Although the HLF has stated that places of worship will continue to be funded under its open programmes, the members of the WHG have significant concerns about how the demise of the ring-fenced GPOW funding for places of worship will impact on churches and chapels in Wales.

Recent research on the support needs of places of worship in Wales, conducted by the National Churches Trust on behalf of the Wales Places of Worship Forum, has found that 67% of churches and chapels have a project that they are seeking funding for. Of this total, 65% are seeking funding for fabric repairs. Just over 59% of projects have a total cost of under £100,000, suggesting that many

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projects now funded under the GPOW scheme would likely need to apply under the HLF's Our Heritage programme in the future. However, the annual budget for the Our Heritage programme in Wales is small, with a monthly allocation of under £90,000 for all heritage projects. Indeed the average size of an Our Heritage grant in Wales in 2016-17 was approximately £35,000. The members of the WHG would appreciate the support of the Wales Assembly in pressing the HLF for clarification on its budgets for the Our Heritage and Heritage Grants programmes in Wales in 2017-18, and how it will ensure that church fabric repair projects under £100,000 are not disadvantaged by the small Our Heritage budget.

We would also like to raise an issue about how the HLF will ensure that the quality of fabric repairs remains high, now that it will no longer be a requirement for churches to engage a conservation architect or surveyor. This will be dramatically at odds with Cadw's decision to introduce the requirement, from early 2018, to employ such a professional when it is being asked for grant aid. Will Cadw continue with this policy directive, or defer to the HLF's less favourable policy on conservation professionals?

In Wales, it is alarming that these changes are being proposed at a time when Cadw has suspended its Historic Buildings Grants programme. The latter was widely used as significant match funding for urgent historic fabric repairs being funded through the Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Fund. This is a real concern at a time when the HLF are placing greater emphasis on the importance of partnership funding. Even more worrying, however, is that the Cadw grants facilitated the involvement of its Historic Buildings Inspectors; ensuring the quality of grant-funded conservation works to historic churches was closely monitored. The WHG are extremely anxious that the less stringent conservation requirements under the Our Heritage programme, coupled with a lack of monitoring by impartial conservation professionals (where Cadw are no longer stakeholders), will put historic church fabric at risk. Inappropriate and damaging interventions in the name of repair to historic churches, and an overall lowering of standards, are the likely result from inadequate scrutiny and oversight.

Members of the WHG are concerned that the GPOW programme is now being closed without consultation, and without an equality and impact statement on how the changes will affect places of worship in Wales. The HLF chose to make its changes unilaterally, without consultation with the WHG or the Wales Places of Worship Forum. Members of the WHG would value constructive engagement with the Welsh Government, Cadw, and the Wales HLF team to consider this strategic issue in more detail. Indeed, the HLF changes suggest a wider review of the funding and support needs for historic places of worship in Wales should be undertaken. We would not want any of Wales' historic places of worship to be lost as a result of the HLF's changes.

Yours sincerely,

Wales Heritage Group

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