

HLF STRATEGIC PLAN CONSULTATION 2013-19
POW@ALLIANCE SUBMISSION
26 APRIL 2011

Places of Worship @ The Heritage Alliance is a grouping of national bodies under the Alliance's auspices. It is an independent forum designed to strengthen the voice of historic places of worship by sharing information and good practice and by identifying consensus on policy issues across denominations and faiths. It has members who are concerned with the built heritage of all the major Christian denominations, as well as Judaism and Islam in Britain.

The wider forum of the Heritage Alliance membership, has responded separately on a range of strategic issues for the HLF to consider. This POWAlliance response goes into detail on Question 25 only, based on the discussion held by the POWAlliance Steering Group on 8th March.

Q25 Places of Worship

Places of worship remain one of the areas of greatest need for funding. We have invested £133.5m in 2,163 places of worship through the Repair Grants for Places of Worship programme since 2002. The Repair Grants programme has until now focused on addressing the most urgent high-level repairs of listed places of worship.

We propose to continue to support the urgent repair needs of places of worship and will also want to consider how our grants could help to make places of worship more sustainable in the future, by increasing community use and involvement. This would bring our funding for places of worship more closely into line with our overall strategic framework of providing positive and lasting benefits for heritage and people.

We welcome your views on the scope and criteria for a new initiative that will best meet the urgent repair needs of places of worship whilst making them more sustainable in future.

POWAlliance welcomes the enormous support the HLF has given to places of worship over the past 16 years. With HLF funding, through the open grants, through the targeted programmes and especially through the Repair Grants for Places of Worship programme since 2002, the fabric of many of our historic places of worship has been sustained for the future. The way that HLF funds have opened places of worship up to engage the wider community, in addition to those worshipping, has transformed the future of these buildings, sometimes in wonderfully innovative and inspiring solutions. However, there is much still to do.

The 2005-6 Fabric Needs Survey undertaken by English Heritage and the Church of England found that necessary repairs to all listed places of worship was valued at £925m over the next five years, or £185m a year. In fact, over the last five years, the Church of England has spent a maximum of £110m per year, 65% of which is raised by the congregations. There is still a considerable shortfall. In 2010, English Heritage published the result of their sample survey which suggested that 11% of places of worship in England could be at risk which means that up to 1,600 listed places of worship need urgent support.

1. Much as we appreciate this multi-million pound injection of aid, we note that some denominations and faiths are uncomfortable with using Lottery money, as Mobeen Butt from Islam in British Stone so ably pointed out to Secretary of State

Jeremy Hunt at our Heritage Day in December. For this reason, we reiterate that Heritage Lottery Fund can not and should not replace government support for places of worship. The current economic climate is not favorable, but the principle of additionality still needs upholding.

2. We hope that applications relating to places of worship will be accepted under the HLF's future targeted programmes, as well as the open funds. The Repair Grants programme, however, is a very welcome additional route that recognises the special challenges faced by our places of worship in the 21st century, their significance to the local community, and the positive action of thousands of congregations to maintain them. We support the continuation of a targeted programme for places of worship for 2013-19.

3. We very much welcome that HLF has taken on the entire financial commitment to this Repairs Grant programme following English Heritage's withdrawal of its funding earlier this year. Expertise in administering the scheme is also critical to its operation. While EH has committed to providing this up to 2013, we would suggest that after that point the HLF seek to draw in external skills and competencies from the other heritage bodies in developing its own administration of the way forward. We would hope that EH would be able to continue to provide expert advice post 2013.

In designing a new Repairs Grants programme, there is still a strong case for addressing the most urgent, high-level fabric repairs of listed places of worship. We would want this to continue as the major, although not necessarily the only, focus of the majority of projects. A simple Grants scheme could be aimed at providing funding towards basic new facilities such as toilets and kitchens –which will allow the opening up of a church for new uses and wider community use.

This way relatively small amounts of money could go a long way to achieving sustainability. Aspects concerning sustainability through new uses and community involvement (under this particular targeted programme) should recognise the differing nature of places of worship and the pressures upon them. One of the key facts from the recent NCT survey says that many church buildings have key facilities, but there is room for improvement. Buildings with adequate heating, toilets or tea/coffee-making facilities are more likely to offer additional community activities. Nearly a third of churches lack toilets. Listed buildings are generally less well equipped.

4. In considering how HLF grants can help make places of worship more sustainable - for example by increasing community use and involvement - we also suggest that the HLF should recognize the different approaches taken to the use of sacred space. For example, Catholics consider their churches to be sacred spaces which cannot be used for the kinds of alternative secular activities that now occur in the churches of other denominations. Secondly the interpretation of community use can vary – for example, Catholic churches are often the first point of contact for Catholic immigrants, and help them thrive and integrate into the existing community. Places of worship of all denominations and faiths are used as places of prayer, contemplation and reflection in this busy world. These functions are not currently recognised – or valued - as outreach. A November 2009 survey confirmed previous survey results from the last 8 years to reveal that about 85% of the population visit a place of worship in the course of a year, for reasons ranging from participating in worship to attending social events or simply wanting a quiet space. (ORB Surveys 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009)

It is important that the new programme, where possible, accommodates other faiths and denominations.

5. POWAlliance is especially concerned that the condition requiring a church to remain in full, formal parochial/denominational use for ten years after a repairs grant is given is deterring deserving applicants who cannot guarantee this point. We would like to see this condition reviewed in a new scheme and consider the appropriate requirement to be more around public access and a range of community uses which could include worship without being necessarily in the denominational system.
6. As always, we are concerned that HLF should employ a proportionate approach not just to the work involved in the application process but also that the requirement for public involvement should be proportionate to the size and location of the building. More modest access and educational requirements may be acceptable under the proposed single strategic aim 'making a positive and lasting difference for heritage and people'. This should be used for example to ensure that community use and involvement conditions for remote rural churches are realistic.
7. In conclusion, HLF support to places of worship is vital to their future. The design of a new dedicated Repairs Programme 2013-19 will determine the fate of numerous places of worship up and down the country. The member organisations of POWAlliance, have a huge range of practical experience in keeping these buildings in good repair and in appropriate use. We would be glad to share our expertise and knowledge with HLF in drawing up the details of this important programme.

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