

BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Spring 2016 Meeting

DEPARTMENT FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE AND WORSHIP

Additional Paper: Update on Funding Repairs for Cathedrals and Churches

Background

This time last year I reported on the success Catholic cathedrals in England had had in obtaining grants from the Chancellor's First World War Centenary Cathedral Repairs Fund, on the outcome of the first tranche of Roof Repair Fund grants and on the need for dioceses to be aware of the new opportunities for grants, and the need for dioceses to ensure that sound professional historic buildings conservation advice is sought when considering making grant applications. This latter point remains critically important in order to achieve success.

Roof Repair Fund Grants

As reported this time last year, 12 Catholic churches in England and Wales were successful and were awarded grants under this new scheme. The grant scheme was heavily oversubscribed with over 2,000 applications for a grant budget of £15m. This grant scheme covered England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Recognising that demand greatly exceeded the sum of money available and recognising the significant needs of many churches, the Chancellor increased the original budget for this scheme and announced that a further £25m of grants would be available in 2016. The deadline for applications for this second tranche of Roof Repair Fund grants was the end of February and an announcement of the successful applications will be made at the end of June.

Towards the end of 2015 the Patrimony Committee received very helpful feedback from the Heritage Lottery Fund about those applications to the first round which had failed and the reasons why. It turned out that some 50 Catholic churches in England and Wales had applied for Roof Repair Fund grants, but only 12 of these had succeeded in being awarded a grant. In terms of numbers of listed churches, this represented a somewhat less successful "hit" rate than any other denomination or faith.

In analysing the reasons for rejection it became clear why this was so. The majority of grant applications failed for the following reasons:

- Applications did not meet the grant criteria (ie works proposed were not urgent roof works; sums applied for exceeded the RRF grant limit of £100k etc.)
- Applications failed to demonstrate urgency of work
- Applications were incomplete (ie not all the material required with the application was submitted)
- Applications failed to demonstrate financial need (ie accounts implied churches had sufficient funds available to them)
- Repair proposals insufficiently detailed/or not appropriate in historic buildings conservation terms
- Inadequate risk assessment

The above information was circulated to all Financial Secretaries, diocesan property managers, HCC Chairmen and Secretaries by the Patrimony Committee on December 3rd last year, immediately the new round of RRF grants was announced. The Patrimony Committee offered dioceses and individual parishes feedback on failed applications and help and support with new submissions. Some, but by no means all, took up this offer.

We are aware that some 22 churches which were unsuccessful last time around have re-applied, and we know of at least 14 new applications. Letters of support from the Patrimony Committee were offered to all those known to be applying. Some 18 letters were sent. Thus some 18 churches did not request letters of support from the Patrimony Committee. Some did not respond to communications offering support, whereas others proactively sought and acted upon the advice given. It is likely that quite a number of new applications were submitted of which we are unaware. It is quite likely that the number of applications will be above the 36 of which the Patrimony Committee is aware and that it will probably be around the 50 mark again.

In quite a number of instances churches appointed well qualified conservation architects to help with their applications. However, in some instances it was clear that churches had not entirely understood what was needed in order to ensure their applications were complete and convincing. There is thus still some way to go to get the message across within dioceses that a successful grant application needs careful planning and considerable attention to detail if it is going to succeed. Leaving applying to the very last minute is unlikely to ensure success.

When the new round of grants is announced in the summer it is very much hoped that Catholic churches will get a fair share of the funds available.

First World War Centenary Cathedral Repairs Fund

A surprise, and very welcome, announcement was made by the Chancellor in his recent Budget. In addition to the £20m made available in 2014 for repairs to Anglican and Catholic cathedrals, a further £20m is being made available as part of the First World War Centenary Cathedrals Repairs Fund.

Although no details have been made available yet, it is likely that the criteria for this second tranche will be similar, if not the same, as those established for the first tranche in 2014/15 and the mechanism for awarding the grants (via an Expert Panel administered by the Church of England's Cathedrals and Church Buildings Division) will likewise remain the same.

The lessons from the first round of grants are that cathedrals need to engage suitably qualified conservation architects who are well regarded in their field to prepare detailed and convincing schemes which are realistically costed and which meet the criteria of the grant scheme. Poorly put together applications or applications for unrealistic sums of money are unlikely to find favour. It is likely that the first awards may be made as soon as June so that cathedrals are encouraged to ensure they are well ahead with preparations if they wish to apply. Last time, Southwark Cathedral was awarded a grant to replace the failed heating system as well as getting a grant for stonework repairs to the roof. The aim of this grant scheme is to keep cathedrals open and welcoming and heating and wiring systems in cathedrals were eligible last time. It is very much hoped that this will be the cost this time too.

Heritage Lottery Fund Grants

A number of Catholic churches have been successful over the past year in obtaining grants from the HLF under their Grants for Places of Worship (GPOW) scheme which awards up to £250k. In addition, last July, St Augustine's, Ramsgate, was awarded £600k by the HLF under its main heritage grants programme, the first Catholic Church in England and Wales to have received a mainstream HLF grant. A new visitor centre is being created as part of the repair work.

The HLF are beginning consultations on their next five year Strategic Framework. Their present Strategic Framework runs from 2013-2018. It is not yet clear what view will be taken about the GPOW programme which sits somewhat outside the HLF's main grants programmes. From the point of view of churches, this programme is of vital importance and needs to be sustained.

Funding for churches

There seems to be increasing interest by government in the question of funding for historic churches. The Church of England has recently issued a report outlining the very real challenges it faces in maintaining some 13,000 listed churches. It has shown that some 2,000 rural but highly graded listed churches have congregations of less

than 10 people. In response to this report, the Chancellor announced in the Budget the setting up of a Review panel under the chairmanship of businessman, Bernard Taylor. It is to be called the English Churches and Cathedrals Sustainability Review and its aim is to assess maintenance and repair pressures and to examine how Church of England churches and cathedrals can become more financially sustainable. The Chancellor wrote recently to Cardinal Vincent Nichols to advise him of this review and to express the hope that the Catholic Church will support the review where this is relevant and appropriate.

This is the first time that the Treasury has commissioned a report on the funding of historic churches and whilst there are many that feel that such a report should look at the funding of all historic places of worship both of Christian denominations and of other faiths, the Church of England does have some specific issues, namely the sheer number of highly graded listed buildings and the sheer number of these in rural locations. The Patrimony Committee will engage with the work of the Review panel as appropriate but the fact that the Treasury and the DCMS are together thinking about this important issue can only be helpful in the longer term. We will, however, need to make it clear (as the Patrimony Committee continually does) that the panacea being proposed for Anglican churches to be used as community spaces where secular and commercial activities go hand in hand with use for worship is not a funding model appropriate to Catholic churches.

Summary

In the event of a further tranche of Roof Repair Fund grants being announced (and there is no certainty about this) the Patrimony Committee would welcome more communication with those churches seeking funding so as to be able to help them avoid the kinds of pitfalls that many of the first round applicants encountered. In addition, the Patrimony Committee is very keen to support churches embarking on making applications to the HLF for a GPOW grant, and also cathedrals contemplating applying for a grant under the second tranche of the First World War Centenary Cathedral Repairs Fund. There is grant funding available for repairs for listed churches but achieving success takes time, care and appropriate expertise.

Archbishop George Stack
Chairman, Patrimony Committee
April 2016