£1,909,000 for North West historic places of worship

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The grants were awarded under the organisations' joint Repair Grants for Places of Worship scheme.*

Places of worship getting grants for urgent repairs this year include St Chad's Church in Chester, an important Grade II church with an extensive history. St Chad's has been built in several stages with the oldest part being the base of the tower dating back to the 1340s.

St Chad's houses the white stone effigy of 14th-century knight Sir Patrick Barton. During the Civil War in the 17th-century soldiers were billeted inside and fighting reached the churchyard causing such extensive damage that in 1658 the church had to be completely rebuilt except for the tower.

Now the church has been awarded grand funding to repair the tower roof and the famous painted Civil War window, which was commissioned just after the war. The window depicts the royalists and pikemen from the time and attracts visitors from all over the world to the church. The grant of £35,000 will significantly help St Chad's with the repairs.

Nationally, since 2002, almost £140million of grants have been awarded for more than 1500 projects at Grade I and II historic places of worship through the joint scheme, which is the largest single source of funds to help congregations to care for historic churches, chapels, synagogues and other historic places of worship.

Despite the challenging economic climate, HLF and English Heritage have been able to maintain the planned level of funding and support for places of worship in the current financial year. The Heritage Lottery Fund has provided an extra £9 million to maintain the £25 million value of the total grants budget for 2010 – 11 (further funds will be offered to Grade II places of worship in March). HLF has also confirmed that it will continue its increased level of support in future years. This means that despite English Heritage having to withdraw most of its contribution for new awards from now on, the scheme can continue in its current form. There will be no reduction in expert advice English Heritage staff and local support officers give to congregations all over the North West.

Reverend Captain David Scurr, the Vicar of St Chad's, says: "We are delighted with the grant funding – we have been fundraising for some time, but without this help our job to raise the money for repairs would have been incredibly daunting. Thanks to this help from the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage, we now feel we are well on the way towards achieving our goal."

Sara Hilton, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund, said: "Historic places of worship are one of our most treasured cultural assets. They occupy a unique position at the heart of communities up and down the country, and are a focus for so many civil and social activities in addition to their central purpose as a place for prayer and contemplation. Places of worship are one of the most instantly recognisable features of our cultural landscape, and they continue to inspire people to get involved with and learn about their shared history. This is at the very core of what the Heritage Lottery Fund wants to achieve and the reason we have substantially increased our investment to the programme."

Henry Owen-John, Regional Director of English Heritage North West, said: "Thanks to the generosity of the Heritage Lottery Fund, and ultimately therefore of Lottery players, our historic places of worship in direct need still have the vital

safety net of the Repair Grants scheme. Without it, many brave but struggling congregations would be faced with watching their beloved churches and chapels falling into ruin. Instead, the combination of Heritage Lottery Fund money and English Heritage advice is seeing these wonderful buildings revived and restored and becoming ever more central to their communities as places of prayer and celebration and as a hub for local services."

Notes to editors

***The Repair Grants for Places of Worship in England Scheme** is funded mostly by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and administered by English Heritage (EH) on behalf of both organisations.

The scheme, in a slightly different form, began in 1996. Before then it was difficult to secure funding on the scale required to help a place of worship facing closure or demolition because of high repair costs.

Listed places of worship in England of all denominations and faiths are eligible for grants which support urgent repairs to the fabric of the building with a focus on projects costing less than £250,000. There is a two-stage application process with development funding available at Stage One to help work up proposals.

The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme makes payments equivalent to the VAT incurred in making repairs to listed buildings primarily in use for public worship. In the 2009-10 financial year, 3,745 claims were paid UK-wide, with a total value of £14,963,412.67, giving an average grant of £3,996. Since last year's Spending Review, works on clocks, pews, bells, organs and professional services such as architects' fees are no longer eligible.

English Heritage is the Government's statutory advisor on the historic environment. We provide advice on how best to conserve England's heritage for the benefit of everyone. While most of England's heritage is in private hands, we work with all who come into contact with it - landowners, businesses, planners and developers, national, regional and local government, the third sector, local communities and the general public - to help them understand, value, care for and enjoy England's historic environment.

We are also entrusted with the custodianship of over 400 sites and monuments which together form the national collection of built and archaeological heritage. These include some of the most important monuments of human history such as Stonehenge and Hadrian's Wall.
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