More than £2.4million for south east historic

17/02/2011

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and English Heritage are today announcing more than £2.4million to Grade I and II* listed places of worship across the South East - including just over £66,000 to the **Church of St Mary the Virgin, Sunbury on Thames, Surrey**. The grants were awarded under the organisations' joint Repair Grants for Places of Worship scheme.*

Nationally, since 2002, almost £140million of grants have been awarded for more than 1,500 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 £9million to maintain the £25million 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 South East.

Stuart McLeod, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the South East, 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."

Places of worship getting grants for urgent repairs this year include the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Sunbury on Thames, Surrey.

The domed tower of St Mary's forms a prominent local landmark, surrounded by trees, standing alongside the River Thames. The present building stands on the site of the medieval church, although nothing remains of this apart from some monuments and furnishings. The church was built in 1752 and is well used and cared for. However, some of the joints in the building are corroded and leaking and areas of the windows are in need of redecoration.

A grant of £66,000 will help pay for project development work and the creation of a maintenance plan. It will also provide for a survey which will ensure this significant building remains structurally sound.

Dr Andy Brown, South East Regional Director of English Heritage, 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."

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Issued on behalf of English Heritage by COI News and PR.

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Note 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 Scheme
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
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. For further information about our work, please visit www.english-heritage.org.uk