More than £220,000 for North East's historic places of worship

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Nationally, since 2002, almost £140 million 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 £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 East.

Places of worship getting grants for urgent repairs this year include:

• **St Cuthberts, Norham,** Northumberland, receiving £83,000 towards reroofing the south aisle and porch roofs, replacing defective timbers and carrying out a bat survey.

• **St Andrew's Church**, Haughton-le-Skerne, receiving £146,000 towards repairs to tower, chancel masonry, nave and chancel roofs and carrying out a bat survey.

Carol Pyrah, North East Planning and Development Regional Director at 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."

Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the North East, Ivor Crowther, said; "Historic places of worship are one of our most treasured cultural assets. They occupy a unique position at the heart of the North East, 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."

Reverend Dr David Bryan, Rector of St Andrews in Haughton-le-Skerne, said: "The grant is fantastic news for us and we are absolutely thrilled. St Andrew's is a real treasure trove. It is a special place and has special people involved and has been at the heart of the Haughton community since the 12th Century. To have the roof repaired is absolutely vital and necessary. We have historic furnishings and pews inside which go back to the 1630s and although we sometimes

complain they are uncomfortable, they do enhance the spiritual experience of being in the church. If the roof was to go so too would all that heritage.

“We still need to find £50,000-£70,000 to fund the repairs but what a start this grant is and what an encouragement from English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund!”

The Vicar of St Cuthbert’s in Norham, Rob Kelsey, said: “We’re very grateful for this grant offer, which gives a massive boost to our fund-raising efforts. The congregation at St Cuthbert’s takes good care of the church building on behalf of the whole community and we’re determined to ensure that the fabric is well maintained for the benefit of future generations.

Church warden and treasurer, Canon Terry Harris, added: “St Cuthbert’s is a glorious and historically important Grade I Listed building. Its wonderful ambience has been somewhat marred during recent rainy spells by the strategically-placed plastic buckets and the congregation is looking forward with eagerness to their removal! This generous grant will go a long way towards making this possible.”

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 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 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. www.english-heritage.org.uk

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