



HISTORIC PLACES OF WORSHIP SUPPORT OFFICERS

Overall objectives

Any multi-site organisation will review its operations on a regular basis and any building owner wants to use their building as effectively as they can. English Heritage is concerned that listed places of worship are thought by some to be too expensive to look after and too difficult to adapt and therefore unsuitable for the needs of today's congregations. They are indeed a challenge for the often small numbers of regular supporters to shoulder alone, but where can outside help come from? Denominations (or their constituent parts) will continue to conduct strategic reviews to help plan the future, but we believe that the opportunities that many historic buildings can offer are not always taken into account. This is partly through a lack of understanding of the qualities for which they have been listed.

The Heritage Protection Review is aimed at making heritage sites much better understood through simpler designations and better written assessments of their importance. We are currently piloting with the Church of England schemes that test the ability of the new designation system to assist in the creation of management agreements within statutory control systems. However, these new systems will take some time to come into effect and a start needs to be made now on integrating listed places of worship into operational reviews.

We are therefore proposing to half-fund Historic Places of Worship Support Officers to establish the role and value of historic buildings in denominational priorities and to support individual congregations to understand, and so value, their buildings better and adapt them for today's purposes. Their role is, in modern jargon, to 'build capacity' by helping people to help themselves. Their precise role (and title) will depend on a denomination (or part of a denomination) discussing their needs with English Heritage, based on the tasks listed below. We are not looking to fund posts that help to carry out existing organisational core functions, like running normal statutory control systems. We want to promote new ways of understanding and managing historic places of worship that will secure the future of as many of them as possible.

Generic job description

The role of an Historic Places of Worship Support Officer could include:

Establishing the existence and qualities of the historic places of worship in the area with the assistance of English Heritage, local authorities and amenity groups. (see also English Heritage advice on Historical, Architectural and Archaeological Assessments of Historic Places of Worship)

Identifying priority places of worship in an area

Establishing what is meant by 'priority' will depend on whether there are existing denominational strategies in place or being developed into which buildings should be integrated. There will also be other local or regional development plans to consider. The priority for the denomination is likely to be the furtherance of its mission and that for English Heritage, the repair and sustainable use of the building to secure its future without damaging its essential heritage value.

Developing and pursuing an area strategy to secure the future of priority buildings

There may already be a strategy in place into which individual buildings can be integrated, but if not, then the aims of the strategy need to be established between English Heritage and the denomination and pursued by the Support Officer.

Supporting the congregations of priority buildings

This could mean concentrating on a few identified projects or giving more general advice and support on good practice or creating a network of consultants and contacts to help congregations to help themselves.

Promoting the value and use of historic places of worship in the community

There may well be wider regional strategies – for rural community regeneration for instance – that could help to make greater use of some historic places of worship, if only they knew the possibilities. The Support Officer can act as a conduit between such initiatives and the denomination.

Identifying sources of funding for conservation and development schemes

Fund raisers may already be in place, at both area and individual building level, but if not, the post-holder can investigate and advise. The new grant schemes English Heritage is proposing will both be targeted at the neediest congregations and there may be a role for this officer to help establish where those places are in their own area.

The exact role of each post we fund may well vary. For instance, while English Heritage will clearly be concerned with the future of *listed* places of worship the denomination may want the post to also cover unlisted historic places of worship. Some posts may cover an ecumenical area or combine a number of districts of one denomination. The post may be part of a project involving other funding agencies. Regional Development Agencies for

instance have a responsibility for community development and regeneration and have already helped fund a number of projects in places of worship. Similarly, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has an active interest in promoting the sort of community development work previously done by the Countryside Agency.

To discuss possible funding for an Historic Places of Worship Support Officer please contact either your English Heritage regional office and speak to the Regional Director or contact the Places of Worship policy team through the e-mail address churches@english-heritage.org.uk.