

Application for Financial Assistance (Historic Buildings Grants) from the Conservation and Heritage Fund – St Thomas’s Church, Butterton Road, (Ref: 13/14013/HBG) and proposed alteration to the terms of grants awarded from the Conservation and Heritage Fund

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. That the Planning Committee agrees with immediate effect to bring in a £5,000 upper limit on future grants from the Conservation and Heritage Fund**
- 2. That the Planning Committee approves a grant of £5,000 for the stone repair, replacements, and re-roofing of part of St. Thomas’s Church, Butterton, subject to the appropriate standard conditions.**

Purpose of report

To consider an application for financial assistance towards the cost of the repair of this church which is a Grade II* Listed Building, and to address the immediate consequences for the Conservation and Heritage Fund of the approved 2014/15 Revenue Budget

Introduction

An application has been received from St Thomas’s Butterton Parochial Church Council for a grant for works to the church of repair to high level stone work with some replacement, re-roofing of the south transept, chancel and north transept, lime mortar repair and French drain installation to solve water penetration problems. The specification has been drawn up by conservation architects. The method of construction of this church has inherent problems.

In 2005 the church were awarded £8,000 towards the cost of restoration work, (costing £233,000) for mainly high level work to the spire, parapet wall and gutters replacing timbers affected by dry rot. At the time, in 2005, due to constraints in the Conservation and Heritage Fund and competing requests for support the Council did not award the maximum possible grant of £10,000. Once on site at the church costs increased to £600,000 and the church applied for a further £2,000 in 2007 to help meet their shortfall and this was awarded.

The church is again in need of repairs, this time for high level repairs to stone work and re-roofing of the north and south transept, chancel and stone window repairs with selective repointing. The total cost of eligible work including fees and VAT is £171,000. English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund are both supporting the continuing repair of this church.

This church is an important Grade II* church and therefore one of the Borough’s most important heritage assets. Only 18 buildings are Grade II*, just 5% of the total number of Listed Buildings in the Borough.

As a Listed Building, works eligible for grant funding would normally be the subject of a 20% grant offer or £10,000 whichever is the lower figure.

Financial Implications

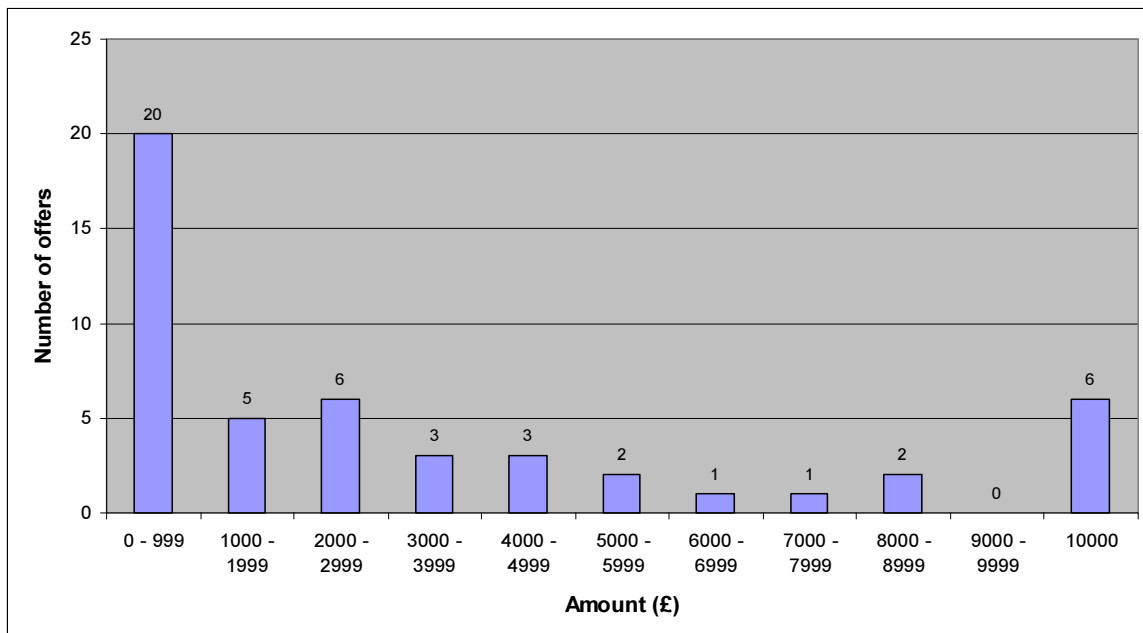
The Historic Building Grant Fund has approved 10 grants this financial year of which 6 have been claimed and work satisfactorily completed. Three others are part implemented and on site. The 2014/15 Revenue budget agreed by Council at its meeting on the 26th February 2014 does not include any provision for any payments into, or topping up of, the Fund in 2014/15 and it is recommended the Committee consider the practical implications of this, having regard to the fact that there is now, allowing for commitments, only approximately £22,000 within the Fund.

Members might wish to continue the current practice of considering grant applications when and if they are received, or alternatively that officers should hold up applications and present them in batches for consideration by the Committee, either on an annual basis or at some greater frequency – say every 6 months – to facilitate comparison between applications. There are important implications from any approach that holds up the consideration of grant applications, bearing in mind that they are required to be accompanied by 2 current competitive quotes for the eligible works. It is not uncommon for quotations or estimates to be only open for acceptance within a relatively short period of time. Whilst it is normally possible to refresh quotations and estimates your officers' view is that the holding up of applications would be likely to have a significantly deterrent effect on the take up of the Fund, particularly if the works are of an urgent nature. One of the conditions of the grant is that it is not available for works which have already been undertaken.

An alternative approach would be to reduce the maximum grant that is available from the Fund – with a view to ensuring that the number of projects that can be assisted by the Fund from now on is maximised (within the scope of the remaining size of the Fund), without significantly reducing its effectiveness in encouraging schemes that would otherwise not come forward. The upper limit is at present £10,000.

Table 1 shows Conservation and Heritage Fund Offers since 01 August 2005

Table 1



Of the 6 which were at the maximum level of £10,000, 4 of these were to churches.

Conclusions

A reduction in the maximum grant figure to £5,000 is recommended.

Whilst there is sufficient funding to meet this particular grant application with approximately £22,000 in the Fund, which allows for commitments, and notwithstanding that this Church has already benefitted within the last 10 years from an award of £10,000, **your officer's recommendation, having regard to the importance of this Grade 2* Listed building, is that a grant of £5,000 be agreed in this case.**

The views of the Conservation Advisory Working Party on both the proposal to lower the maximum figure and that to award a grant of £5000 in this case will be reported to the Committee.