

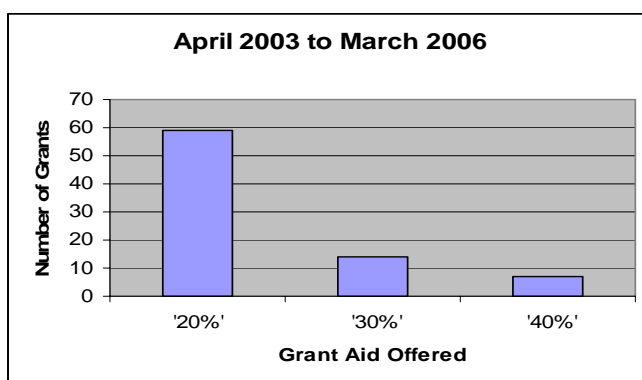
## REVIEW OF THE HISTORIC BUILDING GRANTS SCHEME (Report by Planning Policy Manager)

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report comments on the money that has been spent, reviews changes to the system to make it more effective and to target the most needy buildings and recommends adoption of these changes.

### 2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.2 Under section 57 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Local Authorities have the power to contribute to the preservation of listed buildings or buildings which appear to of special architectural or historic interest within their area.
- 2.3 In accordance with this legislation Huntingdonshire District Council has successfully managed a variety of different grant programmes to assist owners of historic buildings to repair their properties for over 10 years.
- 2.4 The current grant regime is focused to ensure that historic buildings most in need of grant aid are given priority funding. Buildings on the Councils Buildings at Risk register which identifies the most vulnerable buildings in the District rate highly against a scoring mechanism which allocates funding levels (see appendix 1).
- 2.5 This mechanism allows priority to be given to the most needy buildings but does not exclude buildings less in need from receiving lower levels of support.



- 2.6 As can be seen in the above table, the majority of the grants offered are 20% of the total costs of the works up to £2,000. To be eligible for the higher percentages, the property has to be a high category Building at Risk (see Points Scoring System appendix 1).

- 2.7 Over the last 3 years 80 grants have been offered (totalling £147,000) of these 40 were for buildings on the At Risk register. Only 6 of these grants were eligible for a grant of up to £6,000 which under the current regime is the maximum amount of funding that can be offered. The average spend is in the region of £1800.
- 2.8 Under the existing system, any owner of a Listed Building can apply for grant therefore the other 40 grants were for works to these buildings. Many of the grants were for window repairs or re-thatching to properties that are generally in good order.
- 2.9 In 2006-7 the section 57 grant budget amounted to £59,500 (this included a £30k carry forward from previous years). In addition to this £27,500 was available to fund specialist reports such as structural and condition reports into buildings at risk. Acknowledging the underspend of previous years, these budgets were combined and reduced so that the budget for 2007- 8 will now be around £60,000.
- 2.10 Under the current arrangements, offers of grant aid for more than £1,000 are reported to the Portfolio Holder for Planning Strategy for prior authorisation. Offers under £1,000 are delegated to the Head of Planning Services. Reports are produced at two monthly intervals.
- 2.11 It is important that the criteria for offering grant aid and supporting buildings on the at risk register are re assessed from time to time so that proper levels of funding are available to encourage owners to repair their historic buildings.

### **3. THE HISTORIC BUILDINGS GRANT FUND 2007**

- 3.1 Grants offered under this programme are making a difference to the Council's long term strategy to reduce the number of historic buildings on the buildings at risk register. Over the past 3 years we have done well, but we wish to reduce the number even more which is why we propose to introduce some changes.
- 3.2 The reasons for this drop are not obvious, but it may be that the amount of money being offered is not a sufficient incentive to encourage owners to repair particularly the long term at risk buildings. The buildings at risk strategy has been effective and another reason may be that the buildings remaining on the register are now the hard core of long term derelict properties, ones where there are significant ownership problems preventing repair not the lack of funding.
- 3.3 As a way of refocusing the grant regime it is suggested that the following measures are undertaken:
- The profile of the scheme is raised through promotion and wider marketing to encourage greater take up.
  - The amount of grants awarded to the most serious at risk buildings is raised in accordance with the following framework.

Number of Points	Percentage	Existing Amount	Proposed Amount
11-13	20	£2,000	£2,000
14-15	30	£2,500	£2,500
16	40	£3,000	£4,000
17-18	40	£6,000	£10,000

- Funding should only be available for buildings included on the Council's Buildings at Risk register 2007. This will ensure that grant aid is effectively targeted and only directed to the most needy listed buildings.
- Funding to be available to commission reports into specific aspects of listed building repair such as structural and condition reports. This will enable the Council to address some of the more hard core buildings at risk to be addressed and to inform the use of statutory notices such as urgent works notices. As reports often need to be commissioned urgently and outside the normal reporting mechanism, funding should be available up to £5k without the need for prior member authorisation. Any decision to fund a report will be included in the bi-monthly grant report to the Portfolio Holder of Planning Strategy.
- Amend the ownership criteria for applicants. Currently applicants are not eligible for assistance if they have owned the building for less than 2 years and if they subsequently sell the property within 3 years of the grant then funding can be reclaimed. Often the only way to secure the repair of long term at risk buildings is to secure new owners for the buildings. This criteria would therefore prevent the offer of grant aid being made. It is suggested that these criteria are no longer applied to encourage the effective use of the grant programme.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 Only buildings on the At Risk register should be offered grant money.
- 4.2 To assist the Conservation Officers' with their prioritising of those buildings on the Buildings At Risk register in the higher categories, the money available from the Section 57 budget that the Council allocates should be focused on their repair.
- 4.2 The maximum grants now available are not attracting enough interest from the owners of the high category buildings and the raising of the maximum grant for these building may encourage more applications from these owners.
- 4.3 The ownership criteria should be amended so that grants can be awarded to new owners from the time of purchase.
- 4.4 100% funding of specialised reports on listed buildings should still be available to with the ability to commission them out side of the normal reporting mechanism to the value of £5,000.

## **5. RECOMMENDATION**

- 5.1 That the section 57 grants are refocused to target them at owners of properties on the Council's Buildings at Risk register, in accordance with the Buildings at Risk strategy, and with funding available to commission reports in accordance with paragraph 3.3 above.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Buildings at Risk register

## **CONTACT OFFICER**

Enquiries about this report should be made to Susan Smith Assistant Conservation Officer Tel: 01480 388416.

**GRANTS POINTS SCORING SYSTEM****A. Principal listed buildings at risk, by urgency of repairs:**

Risk Category:	
Category 1	6
Category 2	5
Category 3	4
Category 4	3
Category 5 or 6	2

**Listed Buildings not at Risk & Curtilage Listed Buildings**

Building not considered at risk but re-instatement or repair of traditional materials / features involved: discretionary 0-2

Curtilage building of historic interest in need of urgent repair to prevent structural failure: discretionary dependent on importance of building 3-4

IF 0 SCORED ABOVE, DO NOT PROCEED.

**B. Use of building**

Building currently in viable use	1
Building currently not in viable use	3
Building with no economic use eg boundary feature, monument	3

**C. Other sources of grants available**

No other sources of grants for same project	3
Other sources of grants available for same building	1

Grants offered from other sources for the same work: e.g. works subject to English

Heritage grant or housing grant 0

PROJECT NOT ELIGIBLE, DO NOT PROCEED

**D. Previous Grants**

No listed building grants offered on the property in last two years	3
Previous grant offered within the last two years	1

Two grants already offered in the last five years 0

PROJECT NOT ELIGIBLE, DO NOT PROCEED.

**E. Ownership**

Private owner responsible, long-term lease, or in trust	3
Property in non-commercial ownership, eg church	3
Structure is divided between separate owners, eg boundary wall to more than one property	1
Commercial use including rented out to tenants	1

**Score Percentage eligibility**

< =10	No eligibility
11-13	20% up to £2000
14-15	30% up to £2500
16	40% up to £3000
17-18	Maximum eligibility 40% up to £6000