

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

Second Delegated Legislation Committee

DRAFT GRANTS TO THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST ORDER 2016

Monday 29 February 2016

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Friday 4 March 2016

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT WILL GREATLY
FACILITATE THE PROMPT PUBLICATION OF
THE BOUND VOLUMES OF PROCEEDINGS
IN GENERAL COMMITTEES

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chair: SIR ROGER GALE

- | | |
|---|---|
| † Beckett, Margaret (<i>Derby South</i>) (Lab) | † Murray, Mrs Sheryll (<i>South East Cornwall</i>) (Con) |
| Blackwood, Nicola (<i>Oxford West and Abingdon</i>)
(Con) | † Siddiq, Tulip (<i>Hampstead and Kilburn</i>) (Lab) |
| Cartledge, James (<i>South Suffolk</i>) (Con) | † Smith, Jeff (<i>Manchester, Withington</i>) (Lab) |
| † Cruddas, Jon (<i>Dagenham and Rainham</i>) (Lab) | † Spelman, Mrs Caroline (<i>Meriden</i>) (Con) |
| † Efford, Clive (<i>Eltham</i>) (Lab) | Thomas, Mr Gareth (<i>Harrow West</i>) (Lab/Co-op) |
| † Evennett, Mr David (<i>Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State for Culture, Media and Sport</i>) | † Tomlinson, Michael (<i>Mid Dorset and North Poole</i>)
(Con) |
| † Fabricant, Michael (<i>Lichfield</i>) (Con) | † Tugendhat, Tom (<i>Tonbridge and Malling</i>) (Con) |
| † Green, Chris (<i>Bolton West</i>) (Con) | Jonathan Whiffing, <i>Committee Clerk</i> |
| † Kirby, Simon (<i>Brighton, Kemptown</i>) (Con) | |
| Mullin, Roger (<i>Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath</i>) (SNP) | † attended the Committee |

Second Delegated Legislation Committee

Monday 29 February 2016

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

Draft Grants to the Churches Conservation Trust Order 2016

4.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr David Evennett): I beg to move,

That the Committee has considered the draft Grants to the Churches Conservation Trust Order 2016.

It is a great pleasure and privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, in my first Committee as the acting Minister for heritage. I am delighted to be here.

The order is required so that the Government can continue to provide funding for the Churches Conservation Trust. The trust takes care of some of our finest churches—mostly they are grade I and grade II* listed—that are no longer required for regular worship. The CCT cares for almost 350 churches, encompassing 1,000 years of English history, architecture and archaeology. They include churches large and small that range from isolated gems to urban Victorian buildings in rural and urban areas across England.

The CCT is a charity. It was established by ecclesiastical legislation in 1969 as the Redundant Churches Fund. It is a successful partnership between the Church, the Government and the community sector, aimed at protecting an important part of this country's heritage. The Government provide 66% of the trust's statutory funding, and the Church Commissioners match that with a 34% contribution.

The CCT has increasingly made use of its statutory grant to raise new income from donations, legacies and grant-giving foundations. That independent income now makes up 50% of its expenditure, and it has shown great initiative in developing activities and bringing its buildings back to life at a time of pressure on public funding.

There are many interesting examples of that work, such as “champing”. Champing is an entirely new word for a “back to the local” experience of spending a night in beautiful historical churches in amazing rural locations. In the inaugural champing season last year, which ran from May to September, almost 300 people champed overnight in four CCT churches in the south-east. Guests came from all over the world, generating additional revenue of £15,000 for the charity. There are now 10 champing churches across south-east England available for bookings between May and September this year.

The Discover Churches project is supported by a special Department for Culture, Media and Sport capital grant. The CCT is significantly upgrading facilities and the visitor experience at nine of its town centre churches to attract new audiences, to set a new standard in church heritage visiting and to raise new income for its wider work from hire, small shops and cafés. There are also new membership schemes for those wanting to play a greater part in and to learn more about the CCT's

work, which includes the highly successful historic church tours. That programme has been expanded every year for the past four years.

Historical places of worship are a valuable and vital part of our nation's heritage. Some 45% of all grade I listed buildings are Church of England churches or cathedrals. They represent some of the finest historic buildings and are showpieces of the most accomplished design and workmanship. As iconic buildings, they help to define our cities, towns and villages. They can be magnets for tourists, but they are also vital and highly valued in their communities as they may be the only community space left in a locality.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend pay tribute to Staffordshire County Council, which plans to relocate the public library to the decommissioned church of St Mary's in the centre of Lichfield? That will bring greater footfall into the area and into St Mary's church, which also hosts an exhibition of the history of the great city of Lichfield.

Mr Evennett: My hon. Friend is a great exponent for his community and area. We welcome the usage proposed if it brings a valuable historical building back to life for community use.

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): Early in his remarks my right hon. Friend the Minister mentioned the fact that a few of the churches are isolated, with no natural community around them. Does he agree that the Churches Conservation Trust provides a wider benefit to the local rural community by creating jobs that bring people in to repair and maintain these precious buildings?

Mr Evennett: I thank my right hon. Friend for her question. Before I answer it, I congratulate her on her superb work as a Church Commissioner. She is always hard at work on such matters. I totally agree with her: we want to bring new life into our rural communities, and if we can use churches to do that, we should. I mentioned earlier the innovative champing initiative. In a rural area that might be just what is needed. I welcome my right hon. Friend's comments. We would warmly welcome and encourage any developments that bring tourism, jobs and opportunities to rural areas.

In the past year the trust has saved for the nation three additional churches of exceptional merit, all of which are grade I listed. It will cost an average of £300,000 each to bring recent or upcoming acquisitions into a suitable condition so that they can be safely opened to the public and equipped for community use.

The trust's primary objective, and the greatest call on its funds, is the conservation of its churches, particularly upon vesting, when buildings might have been out of use for a number of years. The trust has an excellent reputation for the quality of its conservation work. In 2015, it won the European Union prize for cultural heritage, the Europa Nostra award, in recognition of its role in promoting the architectural significance of historical places of worship and their essential function as centres of community life. The work and expense do not end there. With an estate of 347 buildings that could and should be serving communities, there is a rolling programme of repair needs, and new facilities are needed where consents can be granted.

In autumn 2014, the trust opened a new flagship urban project that saw the rescue and adaptation of All Souls church in Bolton for modern community use. With the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, the £4 million project has conserved the grade II* listed church in a disadvantaged area of the north-west in which the majority of the residents are from an ethnic minority background and put it back into the hands of the community. Hi-tech internal pods provide space and amenities for the whole local community, small business and arts use, while the historical fabric has been beautifully restored. The building is now being run by a newly constituted community group, its facilities are fully booked and it will be self-sustaining in the long term.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): As the Minister mentioned the Heritage Lottery Fund, it would be remiss of me not to commend the work it does alongside the CCT. The fund has done some impressive work in Tonbridge and Malling and I am very much looking forward to announcing a new project it will be doing for us shortly.

Mr Evennett: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments, which I endorse.

This year, the CCT will complete the £6 million regeneration of the grade I St Mary-at-the-Quay in Ipswich. With HLF support and a partnership with Suffolk Mind, the church has been fully conserved and, once new facilities are complete, will open as a wellbeing centre in the autumn. The church will be available for a wide range of community uses and will provide a range of therapeutic services, as well as a new model for accessible mental health provision.

In the year to April 2015, 1.9 million people visited CCT churches—an increase of 5% on the previous year. The trust's churches are run by a growing army of regular volunteers, to whom I offer my praise and thanks. Without them, events as diverse as fashion shows, concerts, flower festivals, and farmers' markets would not be able to take place. The CCT is busy increasing the number of volunteer helpers, of whom there are currently around 1,800 throughout the country, that it relies on to open churches to the public and make them welcome. The CCT offers its volunteers support and new skills through networking and training. It has shown that it is excellent at partnership working and is at the forefront of saving buildings by looking beyond the traditional heritage solutions.

The CCT has also been applying its expertise in community solutions for churches that are still in use, when they would otherwise, if closed, be significant enough to come to the trust. Benington All Saints in Lincolnshire is one example of where a non-CCT, grade I church, which was in a sad state of repair, has been rescued by the community, with significant CCT help, and was this year endorsed by the award of a major Heritage Lottery Fund grant.

Church buildings can again be the centre for community activities, which is good news. I hope that the Committee shares my enthusiasm for the work of the trust and will approve the draft order.

4.40 pm

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I welcome the right hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr Evennett),

the acting Minister with responsibility for heritage, sport, gambling and tourism. I congratulate his colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), on the birth of her child Freddie. We wish her, Freddie and the whole family well.

The Minister clearly received the same briefing as me, because I was sat here crossing things off in my notes as he was going through his speech, which was more or less the same as mine.

Mr Evennett: Bipartisan.

Clive Efford: Exactly. In that spirit, I will cut my speech short. Farmers' markets, fashions shows—tick, tick—I have all the same points here.

The Churches Conservation Trust carries out some important work. Churches are an important part of our heritage and contain many examples of fine architecture dating back to the middle ages. Some of the finest examples of architecture are protected in our churches. Many of us who are interested in history will find that researching our ancestry or a particular period in history will invariably take us to a church. It is not a CCT church, but I was recently at Sherborne abbey, which is a fascinating building that dates back to the eighth century. I do not know whether many people will know this, but two Saxon kings, older brothers of Alfred the Great, are buried there. When looking to find out about history, where does someone turn? They go to a church to find out some facts.

Local war memorials are the focus of attention every year, but particularly at this time when we commemorate the centenary of the first world war, in which the CCT is playing an important role. The trust's "First World War: Memorials of Life and Death" programme is recognising the role that our churches have played in commemoration over the past century. In my constituency, Henry Hall, chaplain of one of the regiments that served in Gallipoli, came back to be a local parish vicar. He landed with the troops during the invasion, taking communion with the soldiers while under enemy fire, and decided, based on his experiences, to set up a chapel in the church for the commemoration of the Gallipoli campaign, so we have a permanent memorial that has played an important part in our commemorations in recent times. Churches continue to play an important part in commemorating significant parts of our history and allow us to continue to learn lessons from it.

The Minister spoke about the number of people who visit churches. He is the Tourism Minister at the moment and I am the shadow Minister for that industry, for which churches play an important part. The CCT's work to protect many older churches attracts a lot of people to rural communities where tourism can be vital for creating jobs and sustaining tourism. Similarly, the trust's work to restore churches is vital and supports many specialist craftsmen whose role is to restore and protect those churches. Again, that brings employment and important investment—more than £5 million of investment from the trust—to the communities in which those churches are located.

The trust's forerunner was set up by the Labour Government in 1969 so we welcome the work of the CCT, but I have a couple of questions about its ongoing work. The draft order covers a four-year period and provides £10.6 million, which roughly equates to £2.7 million

[Clive Efford]

each year. However, the order that was passed last year was for £3.2 million. Now, I understand that a specific grant was made within that £3.2 million, which is why it was significantly higher than the annual amount for this period. Is that correct? Was a specific grant included within the £3.2 million and is that why the figure is significantly higher than the annual figure cited in the draft order? Has that work been completed, or is money still earmarked for it? Is there some other specific grant money in the current allocation?

The Minister spoke about the requirement on the trust to raise money from independent sources. He mentioned champing, and I saw some confused expressions on the faces of his colleagues. Church camping, which the CCT has been encouraging in some locations, has become known as champing. People pitch up on the site of a former church, and that generates income and helps the work on that site to become more sustainable. It is described on the trust's website as a "slow tourism escape"—I suspect that nothing could be slower than staying on the site of a former church. The Government are making assumptions about the income the trust can make from such activities. Has that been taken into account in the Government's estimates of how much the trust needs to carry out work and how much can be generated from those activities?

The trust's core funding was cut by 20% over a four-year period from 2010-11. Has the Department been monitoring the impact of that cut on the trust's work? We welcome the fact that this is a four-year settlement, which offers the hope of some stability for the CCT. With that, we wish the trust every success and look forward to hearing the Minister's answers.

4.49 pm

Mr Evennett: I am grateful for the support of my south-east London neighbour, the hon. Member for Eltham—we stick together as much as we can—and, in particular, his support for the trust's work. It is vital that we have a bipartisan approach. A four-year settlement is obviously good because it allows any organisation to take the opportunity to plan. The CCT should be looking at innovative ideas. We talked about camping and champing or whatever and I am sure that my hon.

Friend the Member for Lichfield, who certainly is an innovative individual, will see what he can do to support that in Lichfield. It is important that churches try to maximise revenue, because we live in difficult times and savings have to be made and the trust has taken its share of that.

However, we have been able to find additional funding. We found £100,000 in 2014 following the extraordinary flooding and in 2015 there were two capital grant aids: £65,000 in support of the CCT's piloting of a new product brand, Discover Churches, an income-generating project; and £600,000 to upgrade eight churches to be Discover Churches. That included: café and retail fit-out; visitor information and welcome points; interpretation; exhibitions; upgrades to ambient lighting; and a suite of signage.

At the spending review in 2015 we were successful in maintaining the CCT's grant in aid at the current level for the next four years. As the hon. Member for Eltham will be aware, these are difficult economic and financial circumstances, but a four-year settlement at the current level will help the trust to plan and develop. At the same time, we are looking for innovative ideas on how churches can raise more money so that, with their usage, they can plough more money back into the project.

I think the CCT had a good settlement and, yes, a huge amount has been done and we can all be proud of what has been achieved, but the CCT must use the opportunity to consider more innovative measures to see what can be done. When I was down in Bristol I saw an innovative project that was being run in a church. That church, which is still consecrated, can be used for services, but it is also being used as a theatre and for training for circus activities and so forth, which brings in an awful lot of money. Other churches are doing that as well. The more that can be brought in to churches, the more that can be done and that provides more opportunities.

The trust has a good package. We would all like more money for whatever we like to do, but I am afraid that economic circumstances mean that we must be realistic.

Question put and agreed to.

4.52 pm

Committee rose.