

<p>Grants Determination (Cabinet) Sub-Committee</p> <p>6 June 2018</p>	 <p>TOWER HAMLETS</p>
<p>Report of: Ann Sutcliffe, Interim Corporate Director of Place</p>	<p>Classification: Unrestricted</p>
<p>Formal offer of Historic Buildings Grant to Oxford House in Bethnal Green</p>	

Lead Member	Councillor Rachel Blake, Deputy Mayor for Regeneration and Air Quality
Originating Officer(s)	Sripriya Sudhakar – Place Shaping Team Leader
Wards affected	St. Peter's
Key Decision?	Yes
Forward Plan Notice Published	04 th May 2018
Reason for Key Decision	Impact on Wards
Community Plan Theme	A Great Place to Live

Executive Summary

This report relates to the awarding of a London Borough of Tower Hamlets Historic Buildings Grant of £95,901.20 to Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, Bethnal Green E2 6HG, for vital repair works to the roof and high level windows. The Grade II Listed Building is currently on Historic England's Heritage at Risk register. The works form part of an overall Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) financed scheme called *'From Victorian 'Gap Year' to Community Hub; heritage and community at Oxford House'*.

Oxford House have been informally offered Historic Building Grant funds to contribute to repair work on two previous occasions, and money has been held by the council pending receipt of additional information to satisfy the conditions of the Historic Building Grant scheme. The necessary information has now been received and the council is now able to make a formal offer of grant to Oxford House.

Works are due to start on site in June 2018. The LBTH grant contributes to match funding for a larger HLF grant; without the LBTH grant, the charity will have a shortfall in funds which could threaten the project.

Recommendations:

Grants Determination Sub-Committee is recommended to:

1. Authorise the Corporate Director Place to issue a formal offer of grant to The Oxford House in Bethnal Green to a maximum value of £95,902.00 for repair works to the roof and high level windows.
2. Authorise the Corporate Director Place to enter into the grant agreement and any such other agreements required to affect the grant and the use of the grant as detailed in paragraph 1.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 Oxford House in Bethnal Green is a prominent Grade II Listed Building located to the north of Weaver's Fields and south of Bethnal Green Road. The building, which is owned and operated by a registered charity, is an arts and community centre, providing community classes, activities and events, as well as affordable office and meeting space. Volunteering plays a large part in the centre.
- 1.2 The condition of the building has been deteriorating for some time with water ingress from leaking roof causing internal damage, resulting in it being placed on Heritage at Risk register in 2015. The award of a Historic Building Grant of £95,901.20 will make an important contribution toward the overall cost of roof repairs and high level window repairs. The restoration project meets the council's Historic Buildings Grant criteria, and all of the necessary information has been supplied. The project offers significant benefits for the borough as a whole when complete.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The Historic Building Grant forms an essential contribution towards the cost of the roof repair works and sympathetic repair to the windows. It allows for the release of grants from other funders, such as the Heritage Lottery Fund. Without the grant Oxford House would have a shortfall in funding for the project which would therefore be at risk of not going ahead. Without repair works the external appearance of the Grade II Listed Building would continue to deteriorate and internal areas remain unusable by the local community. Historic England would also continue to retain the listed building on its Heritage at Risk register.

3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 The council operates a Historic Buildings Grant scheme to assist owners and occupiers of listed buildings and buildings in conservation areas, in meeting their responsibilities for the care and maintenance of the irreplaceable cultural asset, which these buildings represent. The provision of this type of grant is in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and section 57 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
- 3.2 With over 50 conservation areas and approximately 2000 listed buildings (with 30 buildings on the Heritage at Risk register), demand in the Borough for grant-aided assistance in meeting the costs of buildings repair is high.
- 3.3 Oxford House in Bethnal Green is a prominent Grade II Listed Building located to the north of Weaver's Fields and south of Bethnal Green Road (Figure 1). It was constructed in 1892, to the designs of Arthur Blomfield, and further extended in 2001 to its northern elevation, to create an accessible entrance. Externally, it is a handsome three storey (plus basement and attic) building in the collegiate style typical of such institutions. Internally, it has been subject to change, but the original plan form largely survives along with important original features, most notably the top floor chapel; one of Tower Hamlets' finest historic interiors.



Figure 1: Location of Oxford House in Bethnal Green

- 3.4 Historic England placed the building on the statutory list in 2011 (Grade II) due to:
- (i) its historic interest as a building ‘redolent of the moral fervour and paternalism that characterised Victorian ideas about the causes and remedies of poverty’;
 - (ii) its architectural interest; ‘the traditionally-styled Tudor Revival building, although austere, testifies to the settlement movement’s aspirations to the ‘squires of East London’; and
 - (iii) its art and craftsmanship; ‘the attic chapel contains a painting of the crucifixion by Alfred Snood, set into a brightly-painted Gothic tracery reredos, and a fine Neo-Jacobean oak screen.’
- 3.5 The building is on Historic England’s ‘Heritage at Risk’ register, and has been given a condition rating of ‘fair’ and a vulnerability rating of ‘medium’ (Appendix 1).
- 3.6 Oxford House, which is owned and operated by a registered charity, is a highly-valued community asset, providing community classes, activities and events, as well as affordable office and meeting space. Volunteering plays a large part in the centre. Oxford House has had a continuous use of supporting community life in the East End since it was established in 1884 as a university ‘settlement’, as a home for graduates, tutors and those intending to enter the church, so they could learn, at first hand, about the problems of disadvantaged areas and provide practical support to the local community.
- 3.7 This report to the Grants Sub-Committee has been prepared in order to obtain the permission to issue a formal offer of grant to Oxford House in Bethnal Green. The project meets the criteria laid down by the council for assistance, and offers significant benefits for the Borough as a whole when complete.
- 3.8 The grant allocated will contribute to the cost of various roofing and high level window repairs, which all impact on the integrity of the building, especially the chapel and are imperative to the future of the building. These works will also allow a new balustrade, following historic precedent, to be installed, there by reinstating a roof terrace, historically known as the ‘witches walk’. The works include:
- Repairs to structure, boarding and surfacing of flat roof area
 - Refurbishment of tiled pitched roofs, dormer windows and chimneys
 - Refurbishment of cupola tower
- 3.9 The works will ensure that the building permanently wind and water tight and enabling removal of the building from the Heritage at Risk register. It will also

improve the external appearance of the building and allow greater community access to the building.

- 3.10 The works funded through Historic Building Grant scheme will be part of a larger refurbishment project. The total cost of the refurbishment project will be £2.977m, which will be funded through:
- £95.9k Historic Building Grant (the subject of this report)
 - £1.394m HLF grant
 - £250k bank loan
 - £328k private donations
 - £210k fundraising and other opportunities
 - £450k loan from the local authority
 - £250k s106 grant from the local authority
- 3.11 The first informal Historic Buildings Grant was offered by LBTH in 2013 after officers from the council met John Ryan, Chief Executive Officer, at Oxford House and discussed ways to tackle water ingress and the general deterioration of the historic fabric. A letter (Appendix 3) was sent to John Ryan at Oxford House on 19 March 2013 stating the Council's agreement in principle to the making of an offer of a grant of £44,650 towards the cost of roof repairs and restoration of the windows.
- 3.12 The discussion indicated that there were wider issues, including improving access, potential café improvements, etc., which would be beneficial to the building and the wider community and would make Oxford House more sustainable in the future. As a result, officers recommended that Oxford House approach the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) with a view to funding a wider scheme, using the LBTH Historic Buildings Grant as partial match funding for the roof repair and window restoration aspect of the scheme.
- 3.13 The first application to the HLF in 2013 was unsuccessful. Due to the extent of the roof works and shortfall required to meet match funding obligations, LBTH increased their grant offer in 2014 (Appendix 3). A second application to the HLF was made in September 2014 which was successful, from which there was a two year development phase.
- 3.14 A Historic Buildings Grant application to fund restoration works Oxford House was made to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets on 22 June 2016.
- 3.15 Permission to start the delivery phase was granted in July 2017. The lengthy HLF application process has resulted in the rolling over of the LBTH Historic Building Grant offer to Oxford House each year until 2018/19. Following the development phase, council officers requested that Oxford House complete a

new grant application form so that it would reflect more accurately the roof repairs set out in the architect's specification. This was received on 22 March 2018 (Appendix 2).

- 3.16 All necessary additional information as required by the conditions of the grant, including three tender documents, was received from Oxford House by 26 April 2018. They were subsequently checked by the Heritage at Risk Project Officer and found to be in order.
- 3.17 Works are expected to commence in June 2018. Whilst the works are being carried out, a sign will be displayed on-site to indicate that the works are being funded by the council's Historic Building Grant scheme.
- 3.18 The roof repair work is expected to be complete before the end of the overall project; therefore it is likely that Oxford House will draw down the grant before then. Once works are complete and assessed to be carried out to a satisfactory standard, the Heritage at Risk Projects Officer will prepare a further report to the Grants Sub-Committee for permission to release the allocated funds.

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The proposed works would contribute to the conservation and enhancement of a highly-valued and well-used community asset, contributing to the setting of Weavers Fields.
- 4.2 The building is currently provides community classes, activities and events, as well as affordable office and meeting space. Through the project, the intention is to extend local community use and engagement and to use the building for community purposes. The work will see the building become a greater focal point for a larger number of local residents, as well as visitors to the Borough.
- 4.3 The project thus contributes to the theme 'A Great Place to Live' in the Community Plan to build One Tower Hamlets.

5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
 - Best Value Implications,
 - Consultations,

- Environmental (including air quality),
- Risk Management,
- Crime Reduction,
- Safeguarding.

5.2 **Best Value implications**

The delivery of this project ensures the Council meets its commitment set out in the Council's Conservation Strategy. The partial match funding would contribute to securing a Heritage Lottery Fund grant. The restoration of this listed cultural asset part funded through the grant will benefit the whole community and is considered to offer excellent value for money. The grant will be conditional on the building participating in London Open House for five years to ensure the best possible value for the council.

5.3 **Environmental**

In line with other beneficiaries of grants from the Council, Oxford House in Bethnal Green will be encouraged to consider taking appropriate steps to minimise negative impact on the environment when taking up the opportunities offered within the programme and on an ongoing basis.

5.4 **Risk management**

If a formal grant offer is made, it will be ensured that no funds will be released until the repair works have been completed and inspections have verified that they have been carried out to an appropriate standard. There is a risk that, if a formal offer of grant funding is not made, the repair work may not proceed and the benefits described in this report would not be delivered.

5.5 **Crime reduction**

Beyond the roof repair works, the overall scheme should help to promote positive neighbourhood engagement by encouraging visitors and users to Oxford House and its interface with Weavers Fields.

5.6 **Safeguarding**

There are no safeguarding implications.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

6.1 The Chief Executive of Oxford House in Bethnal Green has been in discussions with the Council over a number of years in relation to the funding of repair and restoration works to the building. The Council has previously

agreed in principle to the award of two Historic Buildings Grants totalling £95,900 towards the costs of repair works to the roof and the restoration of windows - £44,650 on 19th March 2013 and £51,250 on 19th June 2014.

- 6.2 These works now form part of a major refurbishment project costing £2.977 million. As set out in paragraph 3.10, in addition to the proposed Historic Buildings Grant, additional funding has been secured from the Heritage Lottery Fund and a Section 106 grant from the Council. Loan funding has been provided by the Council and a bank, with the residual element being financed from private donations and fundraising activities.
- 6.3 Resources have previously been set aside to fully finance the Historic Buildings Grant to Oxford House. In order to confirm the grant allocation, the formal approval of the Grants Determination Sub- Committee is required. No funding will be released until all necessary grant conditions have been met.

7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 The Council has the legal power to provide a grant for the purposes stated in the report.
- 7.2 The other main legal duty is for the Council to ensure that the grant represents Best Value under the Local Government Act 1999. Oxford House sought three tenders in order to find the most competitive price which considerably demonstrates that the grant is to be spent in a manner consistent with this legal duty. However, the Council must also have in place suitable monitoring arrangements to ensure that the grant is spent only on the items for which it is given and otherwise in line with the grant agreement.
- 7.3 The grant is borne out of the Council's generally available application procedure for these sorts of grants with predetermined and published eligibility criteria. Therefore, it may be expected that there will not be any significant issues for the Council under the Equality Act 2010. However, in any event the Council should undertake an appropriate assessment to ensure that the works as well as the grant comply with the Council's Equality Act duties.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- None

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Extract from the Heritage at Risk Register
- Appendix 2: Historic Buildings Grant application form
- Appendix 3: Informal grant offer letters (2)

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- None

Officer contact details for documents:

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