


<p>Grants Determination (Cabinet) Sub-Committee report</p> <p>3 July 2019</p>	
<p>Report of: Ann Sutcliffe, Interim Corporate Director of Place</p>	<p>Classification: Unrestricted</p>
<p>Payment of Historic Buildings Grant to Oxford House in Bethnal Green</p>	

Lead Member	Councillor Rachel Blake, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Air Quality
Originating Officer(s)	Anna Zucchelli – Heritage at Risk Projects Officer
Wards affected	St. Peter's
Key Decision?	Yes
Community Plan Theme	A Great Place to Live

Executive Summary

This report relates to the payment of a London Borough of Tower Hamlets Historic Buildings Grant of £95,902.00 to Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, Bethnal Green, E2 6HG, for vital repair works to the roof and high level windows. The works form part of an overall National Lottery Heritage Fund financed scheme called '*From Victorian 'Gap Year' to Community Hub; heritage and community at Oxford House*'. On completion of the work, the building can be removed from Historic England's Heritage at Risk register.

The aforementioned works were completed on 10 May 2019. The work has since been inspected by the Heritage at Risk Projects Officer and found to be of a satisfactorily high conservation standard, so now a request is being made to the Grants Determination Sub-Committee on 3 July 2019 to authorise payment.

Recommendations

The Grants Determination Sub-Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the payment of grant of £95,902 to Oxford House in Bethnal Green as a contribution towards vital repair works to the roof and high level windows.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 Oxford House in Bethnal Green is a prominent Grade II Listed Building located to the north of Weavers 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. As a result 50% of the third floor was not accessible to the general public, including the chapel, one of the most significant elements of the building. The Council's Historic Building Grant of £95,902.00 makes 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 offers significant benefits for the borough as a whole when complete.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The Council and Oxford House have a signed contractual agreement (see Appendix 3). Once the applicant meets all conditions for grant payment, the Council will have an obligation to make payment.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

Background to the grant

- 3.1 The Council has in operation 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).
- 3.2 With over 50 conservation areas and approximately 2000 listed buildings, demand in the borough for grant-aided assistance in meeting the costs of buildings repair is high.
- 3.3 At present, the Historic Buildings Grant scheme has a yearly budget of £26,250. The reason for the large grant to Oxford House is because its grant

was rolled over from previous years. The current funds in the Historic Buildings Grant, including roll-over from previous years is £148,405. If £95,905 of funds are paid to Oxford House, the remaining funds will be £53,500. £30,000 of this is allocated to St. Mary's Bow (phase II). This leaves £22,500 of funds. An expression of interest letter has been received from the New Testament Church of Good (former Holy Trinity) on Morgan Street, Bow. An application for grant from the church is anticipated in the near future.

Oxford House context

- 3.4 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 the borough's finest historic interiors.



Figure 1: Location of Oxford House in Bethnal Green

- 3.5 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.’

3.6 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’.

3.7 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.

Purpose of the report

3.8 This report to the Grants Determination Sub-Committee has been prepared in order to obtain permission to make payment of a Historic Buildings Grant to Oxford House on completion of the work applied for in its application and approved by Committee on 6 June 2018.

3.9 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

3.10 The works will ensure that the building is permanently wind and water tight and will enable the removal of the building from the national Heritage at Risk

register. It will also improve the external appearance of the building and allow for greater community access.

- 3.11 The Place Shaping Team Leader presented a report to the Grants Determination Sub-Committee on 6 June 2018, which sought permission to make a formal offer of Historic Building Grant to Oxford House, subject to conditions, as a contribution towards the cost of repair works to the roof and high level windows. At the meeting the sub-committee agreed:
- That the Corporate Director Place be authorised to issue a formal offer of grant to Oxford House in Bethnal Green to a maximum value of £95,902.00 for repair works to the roof and high level windows.
 - That the Corporate Director Place be authorised to enter into the grant agreement and any other such agreements required to affect the grant and the use of the grant as details in paragraph 1 of the report.
- 3.12 A letter was sent to the CEO of Oxford House, dated 12 June 2018 (Appendix 2), stating the Council's offer of grant of £95,902.00 towards repair works to the roof and high level windows. The signed contract, dated 20 September 2018, can be found in Appendix 3.
- 3.13 The aforementioned work was completed on 10 May 2019. Further work continues on site, which includes access improvements, café upgrade, etc., elements which will make Oxford House more sustainable in the future. This is not funded by the Historic Buildings Grant. Project completion and the grand opening are planned for June 2019. The reason why request for payment is being made now and not at the end of the capital works is due to cash flow issues of the organisation. Oxford House had requested at application stage if the Historic Building Grant could be allocated to a particular area of work that would be completed early on in the project, so payment could be made earlier, thereby assisting with cash flow.
- 3.14 Payment of the grant is conditional on the inspection, by the Conservation Officer or Heritage at Risk Projects Officer, of the work contained within the application to ensure it has been carried out satisfactorily to a good conservation standard. An annotated photographic record of the visit is prepared and is presented as evidence, along with a written report, to the Grants Determination Sub-Committee to request authorisation for payment of the grant.
- 3.15 The Heritage at Risk Projects Officer visited site on 16 May 2019 and found the work to be of a satisfactory conservation standard. A record containing annotated photographic evidence of the works can be found in Appendix 4. In addition, an interim Certificate of Practical Completion (for the roof works and

high level window repairs) produced by the architect can be found in Appendix 5.

4. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

4.1 At its meeting on 6th June 2018, the Grants Determination Sub-Committee confirmed previous allocations of Historic Buildings Grant totalling £95,902 towards the financing of repair works to the roof and the restoration of windows at Oxford House in Bethnal Green. The report considered by that committee stated that once works were satisfactorily completed, further approval would be sought to authorise the release of the funding. This report requests that approval.

4.2 Funding has previously been earmarked within the Council's Historic Buildings Grant allocation to fully finance this grant to Oxford House in Bethnal Green.

5. LEGAL COMMENTS

5.1 The previous approval of this grant required further approval to be sought prior to payment.

5.2 The report suggests that the works have been successfully completed which may indicate that the Council is legally obliged to make payment subject to the terms of the grant.

5.3 There are no other legal considerations arising from this report.

6. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 The works contribute to the preservation of a grade II building, contributing to the setting and interaction with Weavers Fields. It is significant in telling the social history of the area of Bethnal Green.

6.2 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.

6.3 The project thus contributes to the theme 'A Great Place to Live' in the Community Plan to build One Tower Hamlets.

7. BEST VALUE (BV) IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The delivery of this project ensures the Council meets its commitment set out in the Council's Conservation Strategy.
- 7.2 The partial partnership funding contributed to securing a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant.
- 7.3 The restoration of this listed cultural asset part funded through the grant benefits the whole community and is considered to offer considered excellent value for money.

8. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

- 8.1 In line with other beneficiaries of grants from the Council, Oxford House has been 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.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Conditions of the Historic Buildings Grant, state that payment will only be made if the aforementioned works have been completed satisfactorily to a good conservation standard, as determined by the Council.
- 9.2 As there is a contract in place and once the work has been completed to a satisfactory standard, the Council will have an obligation to pay the allocated funds.
- 9.3 If the grant is not paid this could result in cash flow issues for Oxford House and may affect its ability to deliver the benefits described in this report.

10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

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.

11. SAFEGUARDING IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no safeguarding implications.
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Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

Grant sub-committee report 'Formal offer of Historic Buildings Grant to Oxford House in Bethnal Green', dated 6 June 2018

Appendices

Appendix 1: Decisions 6 June 2018 Grants Determination Cabinet Sub- Committee

Appendix 2: Signed offer letter

Appendix 3: Grant contract

Appendix 4: Annotated photographic record

Appendix 5: Interim Certificate of Practical Completion

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

None

Officer contact details for documents:

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