



Belfast City Council

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| Report to: | Development Committee |
| Subject: | Council Response to Proposals to Amend the Historic Buildings Grant-aid Scheme and New Proposals for Funding Non-government Organisations |
| Date: | 14 May 2008 |
| Reporting Officer: | Marie-Thérèse McGivern Director of Development ext 3470 |
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Relevant Background Information

The Environment and Heritage Service is the government agency with responsibility for advising on and implementing environmental policy and strategy in Northern Ireland. Its aim is "To protect, conserve and promote our natural environment and built heritage for the benefit of present and future generations."

The Environment and Heritage Service currently offers financial assistance to owners of eligible buildings, through a Historic Buildings Grant Programme which provides financial aid for works of repair and maintenance to the historic fabric of a building. The scheme is designed to off set the additional costs related to historic buildings and to ensure that they are carried out to appropriate conservation standards which preserve the historic integrity of the buildings concerned.

Key Issues

A consultation document has been issued to seek views on proposed changes to the existing policy for funding to non-governmental organisations. The principle change is to extend the assistance to cover the majority of listed building (of all levels) as currently only the limited number of building listed as grade A and B1 are included. There are also new proposals for funding to Building Preservation Trusts. The Proposals are included in **Appendix 1** with a completed draft response form in **Appendix 2**.

The key changes to existing policy are:

- To extend provision of grant aid to B2 grade listed buildings
- Implement a single rate of 35% grant-aid on eligible costs
- Ensure that professional agents are suitably qualified
- That works resulting in removal of any original character will not be grant aided
- To extend aid to preventative maintenance works
- Maintain grant aid for thatch work at 75% of costs
- Extend grant aid to other areas including setting elements and elements within the curtilage of a listed building (see proposal for a full list)
- To provide access as a condition of funding
- To retain the enhanced level of grant aid (90%) for owners in receipt of benefits
- To retain the existing policy in relation to ecclesiastical building (due to exemption from listed building consent)

Outline of recommended response to the changes

It is recommended that the Council welcomes the above changes, however, that concerns are expressed regarding the resources available to support the recommended measures including the funding and the skills resources available. In relation to the inclusion of additional element to be funded it is suggested that the certain elements may be disproportionately expensive in terms of the benefit to historic fabric and that consideration should be given to specifying in the listing a wider range of elements that might be included. The justification for exemption regarding ecclesiastical buildings is also questioned.

Key changes to the proposed funding for Building Preservation Trusts

- To provide funding for Building Preservations Trusts
- To provide up to £500,000 from the existing budget for this purpose
- To provide funding through the same organisation relating to different projects
- To manage funding through a third party; the Architectural Heritage Fund
- To proposed specific conditions for funding

Outline of recommended response in relation to proposed funding for Building Preservation Trusts

It is recommended that the proposals are broadly welcomed as enhancing the role of Building Preservation Trusts which are a particularly effective way to bring back into use many threatened historic buildings. Some comment is also included on the specific conditions relating to the support such as distinction between recurrent funding and capital loans, however, there was felt to be a lack of detail included in the proposals to enable detailed comment.

Resource Implications

Financial

There are no financial implications

Human Resources

There are no human resource implications

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members endorse the proposed response.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 Consultation document on “Proposals to amend the Historic Buildings Grant-aid scheme and new proposals for funding non-government organisations”

Appendix 2 Draft completed Respondent Information Form

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