

Great Chishill DCC wins Heritage Lottery Fund support for urgent repairs to the church tower



Great Chishill DCC (responsible for the care of St Swithun's church) is delighted to announce the award of £29,700 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). This development funding will allow us to begin urgent work to repair the tower. We will start with preparatory work to investigate structural defects in the church tower, with expert advice from a specialist in "damp tower syndrome", carry out archaeological and environmental surveys, and then prepare tenders for the repair work. This support from National Lottery players will help progress our plans to apply for a full grant later this year. The initial work will start in a month or so, and the actual repairs probably in a year from now.

St Swithun's is the focal point of Great Chishill and an important example of an intact medieval parish church, whose history is strongly linked to that of the village. The church is grade II* listed, reflecting the significance of its architecture and heritage. The tower has suffered various mishaps over the years; it caught fire (affecting the roof and floor under the bells) in the disastrous fire of 1798, when eighty per cent of the village was destroyed. The tower began to crumble badly in 1884 and the top fell off in 1891. It was rebuilt in 1896-7 at a cost of £865, but without the original spire. Now it is suffering serious damage as a result of water penetration through the upper flint walls, especially the East face. This urgently needs repairing as the historic fabric is being damaged internally – you can see how the stone of the tower arch and nearby plaster are crumbling - as well as externally.

The project aims to make the tower watertight and repair the damage. We will also install basic facilities in the church, water, toilet, kitchenette, and open up the space at the back of the church. This wonderful and much loved building can then be used by the wider community for meetings and events.

This first-round pass means that HLF has endorsed our outline proposals and earmarked funding, as well as contributing towards the costs of the initial work. Once we know what restoration work is needed we will submit detailed proposals to HLF in a second-round application later this year. As long as our plans have progressed satisfactorily and according to the original proposal, an award for the full project is confirmed. In our case the full project costs are estimated at £352,000 with £249,100 coming from HLF. The rest will come from VAT recovery, our own fundraising efforts and by applying to other grant giving agencies.

I'd like to take the opportunity to say a huge "Thank you" to everyone who has given so generously of their time and money towards our restoration appeal. We still need to raise more money to meet our share of the total project costs, but with your help we are now about to take the first steps towards "saving our village icon for future generations".

About the Heritage Lottery Fund

Thanks to National Lottery players, we invest money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. www.hlf.org.uk

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