

MEETING: 25/07/2019

Ref: 15189

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY: Bridging Divides - Connecting the Capital

The French Protestant Church of London

**Adv: Claran Rafferty
Base: Westminster
Benefit: London-wide**

Amount requested: £98,500

Amount recommended: £98,500

The Applicant

The French Protestant Church of London (FPCoL) is in Soho Square and has an interesting history, being the last descendent of the first Huguenot church in England. On 24th July 1550, Edward VI signed the charter granting freedom of worship to Protestant foreigners from France, Wallonia, the Netherlands and to small Italian-speaking and Spanish-speaking communities, making John a Lasco (a Polish baron and preacher) their leader and giving them the use of the Chapel of the Augustinians in the City of London. Through the subsequent centuries, different church buildings were established, mostly in the City, until 1893 when the present building was established from a design by Sir Aston Webb, known for the Victoria & Albert Museum and the façade of Buckingham Palace. Soho was then London's major French neighbourhood. FPCoL is a registered charity.

The Application

Whilst the principal activity of the Church is the advancement of the Christian religion it also delivers a programme of community activity and support (especially for the French community in London), both in the main nave area and in the crypts below. The charity wishes to repair and modernise some of its structures and facilities and provide improved access where possible but especially to the crypts. Due to its listing modifications need to be in keeping with the history and fabric of the building. Access works have been informed by an independent audit (as you require) and a programme of works to meet the key elements now costed. The cost of all the works amounts to c.£1m of which the access elements are estimated to be c.£118,000.

The Recommendation

The Church is open to the public for open days, conferences, concerts or historical visits and is a venue available for hire. The building has unique assets, not least its central location; is well served by public transport; and with excellent acoustics in the main space which makes it an ideal setting for concerts, plays or lectures. The charity has a genuine aim to maximise community use of the facilities. The key elements for improvement as identified by the access audit will be provided, should you support this request and have been costed reasonably. Some funds will be provided by a sister charity (French Huguenot Church of London Charitable Trust) with the bulk being sought from your Committee. A grant is advised:

£98,500 towards the capital costs of providing disabled access facilities.

Funding History

None

Background and detail of proposal

A great many of your capital grants for access are made to churches. For these to be recommended the applicant must provide evidence that the main beneficiaries of the

upgraded facilities will be the wider community and engaged in non-religious activity. FPCoL has made a clear case for their refurbished facilities being for wider community benefit and, following your officer's visit to the premises, it became clear that the charity has a genuine commitment to improving access for disabled people. Future community use will incorporate activities for children; better public access to archives and the library; access to meeting space for local community groups (including those working with homeless people); events and open days. The bulk of the works will be to the lower ground floor/basement areas – including the installation of a lift – with some improvements to a small area off the nave on the ground floor where the archives are located and which are open to the general public. All key recommendations of the Independent access audit will be delivered, a commendable feat given the nature of the building and the need to respect its Grade II listing.

Financial Information

The charity receives an annual donation of c.£100k - £130k for its day-to-day running costs from a sister charity – The French Protestant Church of London Charitable Trust – which historically raised and distributed funds for all of the Huguenot-related churches and activities. For expenditure above and beyond this – including the recent renovations - it must raise its own funds. The organisation does not present expenditure on the cost of raising funds as they deem this to be negligible as fundraising is chiefly by volunteers.

The table below shows income at levels above the core operating costs and these reflect fundraising for the non-access, general, renovations which have been undertaken over the past year. The charity's reserves policy is very generous in that it sets a target of 1 – 3 years' operating costs and although the unrestricted reserves shown below are in excess of that, any excess is used for the renovations and are eventually capitalised.

Year end as at 31 December	Examined Accounts 2017	Examined Accounts 2018	2019 Budget
Income & expenditure:			
Income	455,693	369,684	360,584
- % of Income confirmed as at 11/4/2019	n/a	n/a	27%
Expenditure	(126,830)	(104,704)	(119,480)
Gains/Losses on investments	13,139	(22,629)	not known
Total surplus/(deficit)	342,002	242,351	241,104
Split between:			
- Restricted surplus/(deficit)	276,578	153,731	214,206
- Unrestricted surplus/(deficit)	65,424	88,620	26,898
	342,002	242,351	241,104
Cost of Raising Funds	0	0	0
- % of Income	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Operating expenditure (unrestricted funds)	126,830	104,704	105,700
Free unrestricted reserves:			
Free unrestricted reserves held at year end	419,105	507,725	534,623
No of months of operating expenditure	39.7	58.2	60.7
Reserves policy target	126,830	104,704	105,700
No of months of operating expenditure	12.0	12.0	12.0
Free reserves over/(under) target	292,275	403,021	428,923