



Discussion Forum - The Council's Consultation Document.

Why the Society should not abandon the Grants Policy.

Over the years the Grants Policy has been carefully defined and approved by Members. It should not be summarily abandoned. Its rules ensure that it costs no more than we can afford, it promotes the Society, it encourages third party funding and it serves to demonstrate to the Commission that we as a charity operate for the Public's Benefit.

1. The Society has always freely offered its expertise and advice and for that matter it has worked hard to attend exhibitions and other events where there may be interest in dialling. To imply, as the Consultation Document does, that somehow provision of expertise will be something new is quite simply wrong.
2. The Grants Policy has actually been an excellent vehicle by which our free expertise becomes better known. Even an offer of only limited funding can be a great attraction whether or not in the end other granting bodies take over the finance. A BSS Grant is often a catalyst that embarrasses other richer sources to provide the balance and critically it ensures that the BSS influences the restoration quality.
3. It is a distortion of the facts to suggest that "Restoration applications have almost invariably been declined", or that "Restoration of historic sundials is not easy to agree." These statements show a worrying ignorance of the history of the Society's Restoration Policy.
4. When in 2010 we agreed with the Charity Commission our then 'new' approach to a Reserves Policy, the Grants Policy was the single vehicle available to convince the CC that we were not simply accumulating funds and that we did already have in place plans for the careful reduction of our excessive reserves. The present Council has abandoned that Reserves Policy and now plans to expose the Society even further by removing the Grants Policy which provides the major legitimate opportunity to reduce the excessive level of the unallocated BSS reserves by making more and bigger grants.
5. The Grants Policy forms a major element in our provision of Public Benefit. The Consultation Document astonishingly fails to mention this at all. We should not be proposing to abandon one of the few important tools in our armoury regarding Public Benefit especially at a time when Charity law in this area is subject to imminent change following the Commission's consultation in 2012.
6. Where any BSS grant - however small - is made we, as a Society, are entitled to the publicity of our involvement. Indeed we can in some cases get our name on any plaque referring to the restoration. Abandoning the policy will lose us all that benefit.
7. The Consultation Document confirms that the Grants Policy costs the Society very little, indeed the Grants are currently funded from a minimum equal to the Gift Aid recovery of Income tax, not Membership fees. It takes little time to administer so why, when there are so many benefits from it, is the Council proposing to abandon it? It should be left in place as a route to reduce the BSS reserves which are now well above the Charity Commission's acceptable level.
8. The Consultation Document proposes project management without any recognition of the legal perils faced by the Society with all the consequent risks of professional liability. The Society as a Charity could never obtain Public Liability Insurance for any free but detailed involvement that could result in liability claims and the Trustees would personally bear any consequent financial risk.
9. The document proposes reimbursement of reasonable 'costs and expenses'. This takes any UK Charity into fundamentally dangerous water. The existing restoration advice policy, which has operated for more than 17 years, aims freely to assist the enquirer but then to involve a restorer as soon as possible because the restorer is the only person who can propose the restoration detail and cost it. This has ensured that all site inspection 'costs and expenses' are born by the restorer NOT the Society. Professional fees or fees for the Society's provision of expertise cannot be charged by BSS members. Membership charities like us are not allowed to operate to benefit their members. Payment to Trustees is actually forbidden by the Constitution. Payment to other members of the Society would almost certainly bring us into conflict with the Charity Commission. These important issues have not been addressed in the document at all.
10. The Grants Policy isn't broken and doesn't need fixing. Rather it needs expansion and greater publicity.