

## The Maintenance Cooperatives Project

The Maintenance Co-operatives Project is a ground-breaking initiative to connect, encourage and support the army of volunteers across the country who are largely responsible for the up-keep of some of our most beautiful and significant local landmarks. The SPAB's (Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings) Maintenance Co-operatives Project will create and support a network of local groups to connect people who care for historic places of worship. The aim is to help volunteers at the sharp end of maintenance to help each other. Places of worship are integral to the landscape, representing centuries of belief, craftsmanship and design. Yet many of our most precious faith-related buildings are in desperate need of repair and rely on the help of local supporters. The Maintenance Co-operative Project aims to connect, inform and empower the people who look after these buildings. Along with protecting significant historic structures, the project will also encourage more people to become actively involved in their local community's heritage while broadening and strengthening their own skills base.

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has awarded a grant of £907,400 towards a total project cost of £1,202,050 enabling the Maintenance Co-operatives Project to start in the winter of 2013 and run for three years.

The local maintenance co-operatives set up as part of the project will form a national network allowing people to share ideas, resources and good practice as well as benefiting from peer-to-peer support. Groups will also benefit from a tailored training programme designed to meet local needs and interests. Training will be freely available to volunteers interested in learning heritage-related skills and may include topics such as:

- building maintenance
- project planning
- understanding traditional building materials
- working with professionals
- welcoming visitors

The project is intended to build capacity at community level and will target five key areas of the country – Lincolnshire, Cumbria, Northumberland/County Durham, Worcestershire/Herefordshire and Dorset/Somerset. In each of these areas the aim is to set up a minimum of 5 local maintenance cooperative groups. The initiative will also provide web-based and printed educational resources for a range of audiences. These resources will help to promote the timely and effectively maintenance and repair of building fabric following SPAB founder, William Morris's advice that we should aim to "stave off decay by daily care".

The scheme is a successor to the SPAB's highly successful HLF-backed Faith in Maintenance project which ran for 5 years between 2007 and 2012 and delivered 150 training courses to around 5,000 volunteers with a responsibility for the care of historic places of worship. At a national level the new scheme will build on the success of the SPAB's annual National Maintenance Week campaign, using the dedicated week as the focus for an annual conference and networking event allowing people from across the country to meet and share best practice.

The Maintenance Co-operatives Project will be delivered with the support and assistance of a number of national partners including: English Heritage, the Arthur Rank Centre, the Churches Conservation Trust, the National Churches Trust and the War Memorials Trust. At a local level the project will be supported by the Places of Worship Support Officers in the participating Church of England dioceses and by a number of other local organisations including the Churches Trust for Cumbria, Inspired North East, the Avon & Somerset Probation Trust and the Heritage Trust for Lincolnshire.



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### **Benefits for people:**

The project will respond to local need and demand and will allow participants to direct their own learning. The growth and future direction of the local maintenance co-operatives will be shaped by those participating in them.

The project will build the confidence of volunteers and allow them to carry out their roles more effectively. Based on the FiM project we know that many volunteers gain significant personal satisfaction from their role and see taking part in relevant training as a way of enhancing their personal development as well as their enjoyment of their volunteering role.

The project will help to counter the fact that many volunteers currently work on their own or in small groups. This sometimes means that they feel isolated and unsupported. The local maintenance co-operatives will tackle this problem by allowing people to be part of a larger network where they can benefit from peer support and encouragement. Our research has shown that this is something that people would value very much.

The project will provide opportunities for people to learn about other historic places of worship in their local area as well as their own. It will also encourage people to connect with volunteers from faith groups other than their own and to learn about their heritage too.

The project will encourage participants to actively seek to engage others in the care of historic places of worship by giving them skills related to the recruitment and retention of volunteers.

Volunteer co-ordinators will benefit from training and skills development. This might be particularly relevant for recent graduates and others wishing to gain experience in the heritage sector by volunteering as local co-ordinators in the project.

### **Benefits for heritage:**

The project will raise awareness about the need for timely maintenance and sensitive repair. It will also promote the importance of using traditional building materials and repairing rather than replacing fabric in line with the SPAB's philosophy and good conservation practice.

The creation of local maintenance co-operatives will ensure that knowledge, skills and understanding are retained locally and will allow the sharing of resources including skills, knowledge and equipment.

The project will encourage the sharing of good practice with other volunteers, professionals and organisations at a local and a national level.

Historic places of worship will benefit from being able to make use of economies of scale, as local maintenance co-operatives will provide a mechanism to set up joint contracts for services such as gutter cleaning.

The project will have an impact on the SPAB as a heritage organisation. Through this project the SPAB will start to engage with new audiences that it has previously had little contact with such as young people, offenders, job seekers etc. It will also result in considerable organisational change as our staff numbers will grow by about a third. Furthermore the new project will help to enrich the SPAB's relatively broad national outlook with the addition of a much more local and people-centred initiative.

The developing partnerships between the SPAB, the National Churches Trust and the Churches Conservation Trust will bring considerable benefits at both a strategic and a practical level. Through developing the project we have already benefited from greater information sharing between the organisations and during the delivery phase there will be much greater practical sharing of resources at a local level as well as many opportunities for joint working.



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