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Application to the William Hill Trust for Financial Assistance

Many thanks for your letter in regard to our application for funding.

In response to your request for further clarification: -

- (a) Having examined the chairs following the 2017 Festival, we concluded that they were no longer fit for purpose. They came to us second-hand over 15 years ago, when they were being disposed of by the Braw Lads' Executive. They are all in a state of disrepair and it takes a huge amount of time to straighten legs etc. to get them to fit into the frames which Historic Environment Scotland requires us to use. This further weakens the frames of the chairs and could potentially result in collapse.

The reason 200 extra chairs are required is also because of Historic Environment Scotland requirements. They are now preventing any access to areas where spectators have traditionally leaned against the stonework. The ceremonies in the Abbey last about an hour, which is a considerable length of time to stand unsupported, especially for those who are elderly or infirm.

- (b) We already use the Abbey wedding chairs, which are on site and easily accessible. We also bring forward all the benches which are normally placed around the grounds for visitors to the Abbey. There are no other organisations / businesses within the town, of which we are aware, who could help us with this kind of folding seating, which could be easily transported, could be used outdoors and would fit the frames we are required to use.

If we borrowed chairs from other festivals, we would have to spend time collecting and returning them and hire a van to transport them.

Each year, it becomes increasingly difficult to find volunteers willing to give their time and effort to support the Festival. A local business currently donates 3 or 4 hours of their working time free of charge on each of two consecutive days to collect / set out / remove / return the chairs and they also provide one of the two vans required. The time required increases as the chairs deteriorate and there will be double the number of chairs to put out next year. This is not sustainable. Replacement chairs and trolleys would satisfy three major requirements: safe seating for participants and spectators; much less time commitment required; and greater likelihood of volunteers continuing or new ones coming forward.

It takes 4 or 5 people to manhandle the chairs from storage to van to Abbey and back. The chairs are in high stacks to fit in our storage area and have to be manually dragged and lifted into / out of vans, up and down steps and carried across the Abbey grounds from the gate. To continue with this arrangement would leave Melrose Festival open to potential liability claims if an accident were to occur. This would be entirely avoidable if we were able to purchase furniture which is more suitable for purpose.

(c) If other organisations / groups in the community required the chairs and agreed to return them in the condition in which they were borrowed, we would be more than happy to help. Also, if we had chairs which could be moved easily and quickly, this would enhance the Festival's activities, as we could also use them at our annual Appointment Night, as well as the Children's Sports, Football Fives, Netball competition, Fancy Dress and Barbecue, for those who are elderly and infirm and would benefit from having a seat.

As you can see from our accounts, without the donations from the Melrose Festival Supporters' Group and the grant from Scottish Borders Council, Melrose Festival would cease to exist, hence the crucial nature of this application. Although the Festival's use of the chairs would focus on particular times in the year, they would be well looked after and would last for many, many years and, to reiterate, we would be glad to assist other organisations in the town should they require it.

We would also like to underline the fact that, if this application were to be successful, it would benefit the entire Melrose community, for many of whom the Melrose Festival Week is the highlight of their year.

Your letter does not mention our request for new bunting. As you will be aware, Melrose once experienced a fatality related to frayed bunting and we certainly do not wish to risk any further incident.

We feel, therefore, that the application is justified and hope that you, as trustees of the fund, will be able to support it.

I attach details of the chairs and trolleys we have priced. If you require any further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Evelyn Oliver
Honorary Secretary to the Executive