

St Denis Church, East Hatley – note of points covered in briefing of St Denis Local Management Group on 5 April, 2012

David Bevan, 11 May 2012

I have been asked by the Cllr Nick Wright (Portfolio Holder, Planning & Economic Development, South Cambridgeshire District Council) to investigate future options for St Denis Church, East Hatley. The first stage of this investigation is to find out more about the constraints and to see whether any trusts would be interested in having a role.

Since the Local Management Group meeting on 5 April I have briefed Nick Wright and Jo Mills (Corporate Manager, Planning and New Communities, SCDC) and have been asked to produce a report on progress with St Denis, and other Council heritage sites, for the next Portfolio Holder meeting (date to be arranged).

The rest of the note summarises the results of the investigation to date.

CONSTRAINTS

Permitted uses and covenants

Advice from the Church Commissioners:

The current permitted use is as a nature reserve and for educational purposes. In principle the Commissioners would be willing to agree a Deed of Variation to permit certain alterations and other uses including: worship use by another Christian denomination, chapel, civic, cultural, community purposes, monument, residential, storage, light industrial, office, retail, educational, museum sports use. This suggests considerable flexibility. These uses would of course be subject to planning permission and listed building consent where applicable with the Secretary of State having a decision-making role.

Responsibility for and potentially closing the churchyard

Information sent by the Diocesan Registrars:

- 1) The churchyard is in the care of the PCC of Gamlingay with East Hatley and Hatley St George.
- 2) The Ministry of Justice might consider an application to close the churchyard but that is unlikely if there are still spaces available. Before that stage the incumbent and PCC would need to be very clear that the churchyard was not going to be required for the burials of parishioners i.e. that other provision and rights of burial were available and that there would not be people who would lose rights of burial who could claim compensation.

Rights of Way/Access

Advice from County Council Rights of Way and Access Manager:

Widening the path to accommodate private vehicular rights should not present significant issues for the footpath users but agreement would have to be obtained from the owners. If the site were to be sold for development then the footpath would be an issue and should probably be diverted. Agreeing the diversion could be complex and problematic.

Potential to support work to the church and/or provide an improved access through development on a neighbouring site

The area around the church is outside the Village Framework and a special justification would be needed to justify making an exception to Planning Policy. Decisions made on applications/appeals for neighbouring sites would be taken into consideration.

Development could provide funding and/or help provide an improved access and justify making an exception. However, development near to the church is likely to harm its setting.

Affordable Housing would provide another possible justification. SCDC officers say that there is a low need for affordable housing for people with a local connection, but the site could usefully provide affordable housing to meet wider needs. No grant aid is available and therefore the scheme would require rather than supply funding.

POTENTIAL TRUSTS

Anglia Church Trust

The Anglia Church Trust exists for the purpose of restoring ancient redundant churches to ecumenical Christian use and maintaining them in the historic tradition on behalf of the local and wider community. It has restored one church in Suffolk.

The Trust has produced a proposal for the restoration of the church, new services, a new west gallery with kitchen/cloakroom, and use for visitors, public worship and some baptisms and funerals. Preconditions include being offered the building for a nominal sum, funding for the restoration and other works, improved access, local support and necessary consents.

It should be noted that the Trust has undertaken one project to date and has a specific, ecumenical use in mind that may not get Church of England and local support.

East of England Buildings Preservation Trust

The East of England Buildings Preservation Trust developed out of the Cambridgeshire Historic Buildings Preservation Trust in 2007, but it has not undertaken a project since then. St Denis will be considered at its 19 April meeting. (I have asked what the conclusions were.)

The Friends of Friendless Churches

The Friends of Friendless Churches preserves redundant historic churches as spaces for visitors and local communities to enjoy. It owns over 40 churches in England and Wales including Papworth St. Agnes in the District.

The Director and adviser visited St Denis on 23 March and have subsequently asked for more information. The Director has highlighted the value of the church and said that they will seriously consider the case. The next Trustees meeting is on 11 June but this will

need to be followed by a thorough investigation of the implications of taking on the church including potentially making a site visit with the Trustees, holding a meeting with local people and making a grant application to English Heritage. No timetable has been given but the Director has said that they will need a number of months to investigate and reach a decision.

Cambridge Past, Present and Future

The initial response from CPPF was not positive on the basis that St Denis is outside its Cambridge Greenbelt scope.

Wildlife Trust

No response received as yet. Not considered a likely option.