

Capital Project

Response from DAC and Church Centre Feasibility Study

On September 22nd, representatives from the Diocesan Advisory Council (DAC) came to West Malling to look at the church and to discuss our options for the future of the church and a hoped-for extension to provide toilet facilities and other vital amenities. Tom Foxall, a representative from English Heritage and, Liz Guthrie, the Tree Officer from Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council were also in attendance.

In October, we received the English Heritage's written feedback (provided once again with this paper). While there was considerable delay, we have now received the DAC's written response for our consideration and it is also included with this paper.

There has also been a significant new development because of what has been taking place at Kings Hill. TMBC's decision to grant Liberty Property Trust planning consent for the Phase III development of Kings Hill included the gifting of 0.3ha of land to the Diocese of Rochester for a new parish church for the people of Kings Hill. That gift is now being worked out and agreed to make the land ownership a reality so that plans can begin to move ahead to design, seek consent, fundraise and build a new church for Kings Hill.

If built, it is my expectation that it will become the 'Cluster Hub'. Within the geography of the five communities, it would be central and, being built from scratch, it would make sense to create space there for the photocopier and booklet maker, office space for the administrator and filing, as well as space for the three clergy to collaborate and meet parishioners. As a result, I think that shifts the scope of what we require at St Mary's and reduces some (but not all) of our requirements. I no longer feel we need office space in an extension at St Mary's. The DAC's response which I might paraphrase as 'thus far and no further' also means we need to curtail our scope; cutting cloth to fit the available space.

Last week, I met with Alan Vousden, Colin Bays and Isobel Macdonald as a quasi-working party to consider the DAC response and possible next steps. Colin had also put some work into potential designs for an extension on the basis of the DAC's feedback.

In addition, Clare Innes has been very kindly working on the PCC's requested 'Option Appraisal' for the Church Centre. It is a working document and one that may need further shaping as we go along, but its current draft is also included with this paper.

I look forward to the PCC discussion on these matters but Alan, Isobel, Colin and I feel we are now in a place to put certain questions before the PCC.

Those questions are as follows:

1. Given the DAC and English Heritage responses and our knowledge of the developing situation at Kings Hill, does the PCC feel that Colin Bays' new sketches (as attached) are the right sort of direction? If so, we can respond to the DAC and seek their further feedback on our revised plans.
2. Further consider if, alongside any extension, we wish to pursue a Phase 1/Phase 2 plan in which Phase 1 may provide a disabled toilet, and possibly a kitchenette and meeting room within the church building (either at the base of the tower or in the westernmost bays on the north aisle).
3. If we do like the general thrust of the ideas, it is important that the PCC ratifies the use of some of our Capital Project funds already raised to engage an Ultrasound Survey Geophysical firm like BATEC to check what may lie beneath the monuments on the south side of the church that may need to be moved if this plan was to go ahead. We need to know if our plans are feasible.
4. Given the positive response from the DAC, and the Option Appraisal from Clare Innes about the Church Centre, do we feel we know enough to commission a full feasibility study on the potential value of the present Church Centre by obtaining planning consent from TMBC for residential or commercial usage? This would also conform with Charity Commission guidelines requiring the Trustees to ensure we receive best value for our assets when sold.
5. Finally, we would like the PCC to delegate the day-to-day work on the project to a small group – which it would then be trusted as a PCC sub-committee to progress the scheme. The group (of no more than six persons) will be appointed by the PCC and will report at each PCC meeting. It would be able to make decisions, liaise with Diocesan & Local Authorities, Architects & planners, Safety & Conservation Officers, English Heritage & other heritage groups and apply to Grant awarding bodies for additional funding. A separate fund raising group would also need to be set up. This group would form what we consider to be a missing link between the PCC and the current Sub-Group in which a wide variety of stakeholders, including residents, are consulted but which is too large to be useful for actually progressing matters.

The PCC is invited to discuss the DAC response, comment on the matters at hand and decide on these five questions.

David Green
18 January 2015

21 November 2014

The Rev D R J Green
The Vicarage
High Street
WEST MALLING
ME19 6NE

Dear David

St Mary's Church, West Malling: Grade II*: D – Possible extension or internal reordering – Site meeting held on 22 September 2014, and DAC meeting held on 9 October 2014

Thank you for your warm welcome to the church on 22 September 2014, to consider at the feasibility of an extension, or internal reordering. The site meeting was reported to and discussed by the full DAC at its meeting on 9 October 2014, and I am now writing to pass on the Committee's comments. I am very sorry for the delay in writing to you.

The Committee heard that a site meeting took place on 22 September 2014 to consider options for either internal reordering or an extension. Those attending included the Archdeacon of Tonbridge, Derek Shilling, Roger Joyce and Neil Thompson from the DAC; the Rev David Green, Isobel MacDonald, Becky Clifford, Colin Bays, Rev Alan Vousden from the parish; Martin Dadd from DC Hudson and Partner; Tom Foxall (English Heritage) and Liz Guthrie (Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council's Tree Officer).

Members noted that currently, the parish uses an old school as a church centre, but this was now described as "beyond economic repair", and alternative ways of providing meeting room facilities, as well as lavatory and tea making facilities were being investigated.

While the Committee supported the need for a meeting room and other facilities, members noted at the meeting that there appeared to be some uncertainty about exactly what the PCC was seeking to achieve, apart from the obvious WC and kitchen facilities. The Committee considered that the brief for the hall could be better defined.

Two options were considered for meeting the need: either to provide the accommodation within the existing building; or to create a stand-alone hall in the churchyard. Drawings numbered 1922-02A, -/03A, -/04A, -/05A, -/06A, -/07A, -/08 and -/09 had been circulated before the meeting, including construction of a meeting room at the west end of the nave; a two storey construction in the north aisle; a smaller phase I option in the north aisle just providing a lavatory; and an detached church hall with a ramp linking to a new entrance in the south aisle.



The drawings prepared by DC Hudson identified the constraints that would affect any outcome. Whilst some good suggestions were made at the meeting as to how the internal spaces might be used (including Tom Foxall's compromise solution of extending the organ gallery one more bay into the Nave), it was generally agreed by all parties that a new building in the Churchyard was a more acceptable solution although some of the required facilities could possibly be located in the church.

The drawing 1922-03A showed a detached church hall on a north-west, south east axis, possibly to avoid marked graves. Those attending the site meeting agreed that would not be appropriate, and that any construction should be aligned on an east west orientation. To ensure level access to the church, it may be possible to excavate the churchyard, either with direct access to the church, or attached by a lighter, possibly glazed link.

Consideration of tombs (some listed) and the potential re-siting of others will affect the final layout. It is acknowledged that there will also be unknown as yet undiscovered burials. Tom Foxall from English Heritage commented that it would be acceptable to relocate some of the memorials (but not those with vaults) to create an area for the new hall.

Members at the site meeting agreed that the preferred option to access the hall from church was by the creation of a doorway through the South wall, between the bottom of the gallery staircase and the repositioned font. Access through the base of the Tower was not considered acceptable.

Members looked at the space at the base of the Tower, which, although occupied by bell ringers, seemed to offer potential for WC facilities, and although access might not be easy, this would not be insurmountable, and may be possible for an interim phase 1 solution. The area to the left of the north entrance might also provide space for some permanent or temporary facilities.

Liz Guthrie, Tree Officer for Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, advised on potential routes for drainage with regard to the trees, and advised against the main path, as this was flanked by some particularly good Limes. She commented that if necessary, the yew on the south west side of the Tower might be expendable.

Other points discussed included independent access to the new facility, so that it could be used when the Church is locked, disposal of the Church Centre, financing of the new project, and possibly 'partnering' with a sympathetic developer who could provide part or all of the new facility, as part of the disposal of the Church Centre site, so as to avoid an ungainly 'Phase 1' option in the North Aisle, that might be regretted in the long term.

Members advised the parish to consider the cost of a new build and be realistic about what they can afford.

The Committee noted that in its letter dated 8 October 2014, English Heritage had encouraged the parish to consider including some of the required functions within the church, for example in the base of the tower, in the westernmost bays of the north aisle or below the western gallery. However, English Heritage stressed that it would not be possible to incorporate a new hall within the existing building without doing considerable harm to its significance.

The Committee encouraged the parish to develop your Statement of Need, analysing what space is absolutely essential, and what is desirable. The Committee acknowledged that you have the use of ample space in the current Church Centre, and advised the parish to assess whether it is really necessary to provide the same degree of space.

The Committee agreed that any extension or detached hall should be on an east-west orientation.

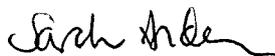
The Committee advised the parish to consult with the Planning officer to see whether an extension was feasible. In due course, consultation with the SPAB and CBC would be needed.

Once again, I am sorry for the delay in writing to you to pass on these comments.

I suggest that further SKETCH drawings are submitted for comment, taking these comments and those of English Heritage into account, and also a revised Statement of Need. Once the DAC has considered these, it may be helpful to arrange a further site meeting, including the SPAB, CBC and your local council's Planning Officer, and possibly English Heritage.

I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely



Sarah Anderson
DAC Secretary

cc
Archdeacon of Tonbridge
Roger Joyce (DAC Architect)
Derek Hudson (PCC Architect)
Tom Foxall (English Heritage)