

**ST MARY THE VIRGIN – WEST MALLING**  
**Minutes of the meeting of the PCC held in the Church Centre**  
**on Tuesday 21st July 2015 at 8.00 p.m.**

**PRESENT:** Revd David Green (Chairman), John Musker (Churchwarden), Lesley Bays (Treasurer), Deb Sutch (Secretary), Becky Clifford, Margaret Moore, Canon Alan Vousden, Colin Bays, Gail Crutchfield, David Day, Bruce Dickson, Isobel Macdonald, Christie Ransom, Leo Sharp & Anna Tunnicliff.

2. **Apologies** were received from Ralph Alliston and Andrew Mills.

**8. Fabric**

**8.4. Residents concerns about the Church Centre**

8.4.1. Mr Matthew Christmas, a Churchfields resident, addressed the meeting to explain the anxious, and generally negative, reaction to the proposals for sale or refurbishment from neighbours in Churchfields, St Mary's Court, and further afield, as detailed in his letter. The discussion covered possible retention as a community centre, but the main issue was concerns about increased traffic movements which could generate noise and light pollution. He handed over a set of letters which residents had signed and while identical in general content, did have a number of handwritten comments. The Chairman received the letters and promised that the comments would be captured in a suitable format and then made available so that the residents' comments could be properly heard. The PCC asked a number of questions of Mr Christmas in regard to the proposals and residents' concerns. Mr Christmas did note, in answer to a question, that the residents didn't have an alternative plan for the Church Centre's future.

**8.5. Capital Project and Church Centre**

8.5.1. The Chairman reported that he had held consultations (with the Church) which had gone well, and that all the church members who had contacted him, either in person or in writing, were in favour of selling the Church Centre. The Residents' Meeting had been lively and opinion there was far more mixed with a number of concerns, as we had heard earlier from Mr Christmas. The Chairman noted that many very reasonable residents accepted that there was a need to take action of some sort since the building was not in good repair and beyond our financial means, but they were understandably concerned to protect their own interests.

8.5.2. Clare Innes explained that the residents' concerns were not unexpected, and that in some cases were due to disappointment that there were not more parking spaces in the plans. David Green noted that the Residents had asked whether the PCC would consider only applying for permission to convert the existing building to three units and not look to build two new units, using the additional space for parking. It was noted that if more spaces were provided, the potential sale value would decrease. The PCC discussed the matter but felt that it was not a workable option. Their duties under Charity Law require them to make best use of their assets and while 'Best Value' can include non-financial elements, it would be very hard to argue that they had fulfilled their duties if they did not at least ask the Borough Council for permission for five units.

8.5.3. David Green explained that the residents had made two other suggestions, firstly that all or part of the building should be used for a community facility, and secondly that the planned ramp should be resited so that car lights do not disturb the occupants of 4 Churchfields. David also said that he had received a letter saying that Historic England were considering an application for listing.

- 8.5.4. The ensuing discussion included the following points; that increased car use by the new residential units will generate less traffic than a community facility and that despite repeated open offers to local groups to come up with a community-based plan, no-one had done so. The costs involved and the possible recoup of the costs for community use don't seem to stack up for anyone who has looked at it, that the air raid shelters and additional outbuildings could be removed to advantage, that the building would be sold with a restrictive covenant to prevent further development, and that the drainage would be likely to improve if the old playground were replaced by gardens. In regard to the planned ramp, PCC acknowledge that there was a perception of a problem with car lights and that the Architect would be asked to look at the issue. They did, however, acknowledge that coming down a ramp should keep lights down rather than pointing up (if the ramp had needed to be angled the opposite way) and that we don't own the corner of the land that might allow a resiting of the ramp. Nevertheless, the Chairman resolved to ask the Architect about it, and Clare will collate the residents' objections.
- 8.5.5. The Chairman summed up the discussion, saying that the parking space proposal would be considered, but that the Church's duty as a charity meant that 'best value' should be sought, that the community facility proposal needed community facility proposal needed a suitable organising group from the community to come up with a fully worked out business plan and funding if it was to be seriously considered, and that the effect of the extra lights on the surrounding houses would be investigated.
- 8.5.6. It was confirmed that the project would move forward, taking account of the consultations, and that Clare would liaise with Derek Hudson.