

**Church Commissioners**

**Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee**

**Closed Church of Prickwillow St Peter (Diocese of Ely)**

**Representation against a  
Pastoral (Church Buildings Disposal) Scheme**

**Note by Harvey Howlett**

**Summary**

- (i) The Committee is invited to consider three representations, one against and two in favour, concerning a draft Pastoral (Church Buildings Disposal) Scheme providing for the sale of the closed church of Prickwillow St Peter and the land annexed or belonging thereto in the Diocese of Ely for use as an arts studio and/or for residential use and/or for cultural and community uses and for purposes ancillary thereto
- (ii) The representors against raise concerns about potential disturbance, particularly affecting their own neighbouring property, from use of the proposed community space, and parking issues, and also concerns around loss of privacy and overlooking arising from the residential element of the proposals.
- (iii) The representations in favour support the proposals for use for two flats and also arts studio/community space as more appropriate than an earlier proposal for use as a large single dwelling. The prospective purchasers also set out their intentions to operate the proposed studio/community space for the benefit of the neighbourhood and wider community and the mitigations they have considered to minimise any disruption arising from the new uses.
- (iv) The Bishop of Ely had reiterated his support for the proposed use and sets out both the background to the proposal and also some of the mitigations proposed in relation to privacy and the impact on neighbouring properties.
- (v) The case has been examined by the Committee's Case Sifting representatives who have determined that the case should be considered on the papers alone.
- (vi) In considering the representations, the Committee will need to have regard to the legislative requirement which is to seek a suitable alternative use for the building. If the Committee considers the proposed use to be suitable in principle, it is still possible that it might be unsuitable in the particular

circumstances of this building because of its location or other factors relating to the impact of the proposed uses.

(vii) The main issues to be considered are:

- is the proposed use of the building as an arts studio and/or for residential use and/or for cultural and community uses and for purposes ancillary thereto a "suitable" use within the meaning of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011?
- are the concerns expressed in the representation against the draft Scheme of such substance and weight that the proposed use is to be considered unsuitable for the building in this location?
- will the proposals, taken as a whole, support the furtherance of the mission of the Church of England?

### **Recommendation**

The Committee is invited to consider the representations and the issues set out in this report and, in the light of these, whether or not the draft Scheme should proceed.

## **Introduction**

1. The Committee is invited to consider three representations, one against and two in favour, concerning a draft Pastoral (Church Buildings Disposal) Scheme providing for the sale of the closed church of Prickwillow St Peter, and the land annexed or belonging thereto, in the Diocese of Ely, for use as an arts studio and/or for residential use and/or for cultural and community uses and for purposes ancillary thereto.
2. Built in 1866-68, St Peter's is an unlisted Victorian Gothic closed church located in Prickwillow, a small fenland village of some 350 residents, about 5 miles north-east of Ely. It occupies a corner site on Main Street, with the former school building (now a private residence) to the west. There is also some modern housing development either side of the church and a new village hall to the west. There are no burials in the adjoining land.
3. The church closed in September 2011 after the congregation had dwindled to one or two regular attendees and both the PCC and Diocese concluded that keeping the building open for regular worship was unsustainable. The condition of the building was considered reasonable at the time of closure but has deteriorated over time.
4. An early proposal for use as a community hub did not proceed. The Diocese of Ely successfully applied for planning permission for the conversion of the building to full residential use as a five-bedroom single dwelling and following the grant of planning permission in December 2018 the building was marketed. Four confirmed offers were received for the building of which the current proposal was the highest offer.
5. The prospective purchasers intend to submit their own planning application to provide for an arts studio and cultural and community uses of the building with two two-bedroom flats, which requires a less intensive subdivision of the main interior space of the building than the plans already given planning permission. They propose an arts/studio use in the main body of the church with a self-contained flat in each transept.
6. The Statutory Advisory Committee of the Church Buildings Council regard the building as of low to moderate significance and consider the proposed mixed-use conversion as of a suitable nature and intensity for the building.
7. Attached are:
  - Annex A Background to the case including some site photographs;
  - Annex B The advice of the Statutory Advisory Committee of the Church Buildings Council;
  - Annex C A copy of sketch plans submitted by the prospective purchasers;

Annex D	A copy of the draft Scheme and accompanying note including a site plan;
Annex E	A copy of the letter referring the representations to the Bishop together with a copy of his reply;
Annex R	A copy of the representations; and
Annex S	Supplementary Comments (if any).

### **Summary of the representations received**

8. Following publication of the draft scheme providing for the sale of this closed church for use as an arts studio and/or for residential use and/or for cultural and community uses and for purposes ancillary thereto, we received three representations (one against and two in favour). The representations against came from Martin and Maddie Cox and the representations in favour from Sonia and John Lewis and from Ricki and Cary Outis, the prospective purchasers.

#### *Representation against the Draft Scheme*

9. Following a drop-in session in the village, *Martin and Maddie Cox* wrote to represent against the plans. They argued that there would be no guarantees of the use and opening times of the community space and were concerned about the possibility of noise disturbance, particularly if there were to be events with music. They also raised a concern that the proposed parking if being used for 12 cars would cause a significant amount of noise.
10. They raised a further concern that the plans for developing the church in to flats and community space would affect their privacy, in particular the proposed main window of the upstairs bedroom would look directly over their garden and in to windows.
11. They cite a report prepared by the Diocese of Ely during the process to secure the approved planning permission to convert the building to residential use which had stated that Prickwillow already had a generous amount of space available for community use, demonstrating the lack of community need for the former church building and arguing that residential conversion ensured its financial sustainability into the future without jeopardising the several other community facilities in the village through overprovision.

#### *Representations in favour of the Draft Scheme*

12. *Sonia and John Lewis* wrote in support of the proposals. They regarded the provision of two two-bedroom flats as appropriate to the needs of the village, rather than yet another single large and expensive property, while also offering life to the village in the form of studio/art space for the community.
13. *Ricki and Cary Outis*, the prospective purchasers, wrote a detailed letter in support of their proposals responding to issues raised with them during the 'drop in' session held in the village. They set out their proposed use of the

studio/community parts of the building primarily as a space for teaching and learning for textile and art classes and workshops and occasional exhibitions and offering Tai Chi sessions. They explain that they are both artists and intend to use the space for exhibitions and teaching and learning including occasional weekend or week-long courses.

14. They summarise comments they have received to their plans from local residents and also respond to some of the concerns, particularly setting out the limitations they envisage on any community activity at the building and proposed arrangements and restrictions for when events might take place.

#### **Diocesan response to the representations**

15. Following normal practice, a copy of the representations were sent to the Bishop of Ely to seek his comments. The correspondence with the Bishop is attached at **Annex E**.
16. In his reply the Bishop makes clear that having obtained planning consent for residential conversion the building was then marketed by the Diocese and five sealed bids were received. The Uses Committee (CUC) recommended the bid which enabled best use in terms of the impact on the building and which proposed leaving the nave and chancel completely open as a single space. The CUC also considers that this would be the preference of the Conservation and Planning Department at East Cambridgeshire, now that a use has been identified which would enable this and one which would enable continued access by members of the public.
17. While the CUC stood by the view that Prickwillow had adequate community facilities without the former church, the Bishop writes that the intended use of the building is not replicating anything that is currently provided in Prickwillow, but rather supplementing it, as neither of the other existing community venues would be suitable for mixed studio/exhibition use.
18. In response to the concerns about privacy, the Diocese had been advised that the large rose window in the North transept was at a height where it would not be possible for someone standing on the floor to look through it and that the window in the stairwell could be fitted with obscured glazing to prevent views out to the north-east.
19. The Bishop also explained that the prospective purchasers would work up a planting scheme/boundary treatment to provide screening and a noise buffer between the parking area and the neighbouring properties. The Bishop suggests that the use proposed, in terms of traffic and noise, would be similar to what would be expected with any rural church building. In addition, with the inclusion of two flats in the property, the prospective purchasers would be mindful that any events held in the main body of the building should not disturb their tenants and should finish at a reasonable time.
20. The Bishop stated that a closed church building can be perceived as a permanent symbol that the Church has left a community and wrote that for the

building to continue to be an occasional gathering space for the local community was a much preferable outcome, missionally.

21. The Bishop concludes by reiterating his support for the proposed use.

#### **The further views of the representors**

22. The Bishop's response has been shared with the representors and any further comments received will be circulated in due course.

#### **The sifting group's decision**

23. The case has been examined by the Committee's case sifting representatives who considered that the issues raised were clear and limited in scope. They concluded that they had sufficient information in the written papers to fully understand the objector's concerns but asked that some additional photographs be provided to better show the relationship of the Church building to the surrounding residential properties. These have been included in **Annex A**.

#### **The issues for the Committee**

24. In considering the representations, the Committee will need to have regard to the legislative requirement to seek a suitable alternative use for the building. The Mission and Pastoral Measure Code of Recommended Practice provides examples of alternative uses which have been found to be acceptable which include both residential conversion and a range of community and educational uses. Section 17.4 of the Recommended Code states:

##### **17.4 The most common alternative uses include:**

- Worship by other Christian bodies
- Civic, cultural or community purposes (includes community centre; lecture or concert hall; conference hall and exhibition centre; art gallery or heritage or tourist centre; county record office; urban study and architectural interpretation centre; youth work and night shelter; library; Scout and Guide headquarters; children's nursery)
- Monument (for preservation)
- Residential
- Storage (includes university book store; scenery and props; warehouse; diocesan furnishings store)
- Arts and crafts, music or drama centre (includes arts centre; theatre and restaurant; orchestral or operatic rehearsal hall; Fine Art auctions; craft workshop)
- Light industrial / office / retail (includes: pottery manufacture; studios and offices; antiques market; retail shops)
- Private and school chapels
- Educational purposes

- Museums (includes: natural history; archaeological; regimental)
  - Adjuncts to adjoining estates
  - Sports use (includes: squash courts; gymnasium; indoor climbing centre)
25. If the Committee considers the proposed use to be suitable in principle, it is still possible that the use might be unsuitable in the particular circumstances of this building because of its location or other factors relating to the impact of the use. These could include, the potential for disruption and disturbance to the neighbouring properties.
26. Finally, the Committee must be satisfied under the general duty of the Mission and Pastoral Measure that the proposals support the furtherance of the mission of the Church of England.
27. The main issues to be considered are, therefore, as follows:
- is the proposed use of the building as an arts studio and/or for residential use and/or for cultural and community uses and for purposes ancillary thereto a "suitable" use within the meaning of the Mission and Pastoral Measure?
  - are the concerns expressed in the representation against the draft Scheme of such substance and weight that the proposed use is to be considered unsuitable for the building in this location?
  - will the proposals, taken as a whole, support the furtherance of the mission of the Church of England?

### **Recommendation**

The Committee is invited to consider the representations and the issues set out in this report and, in the light of these, whether or not the draft Scheme should proceed.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'H' followed by a long, horizontal flourish that ends in a smaller, more complex mark.

Signed: Harvey Howlett

Church House  
Great Smith Street  
London SW1P 3AZ

11 December 2019





**Closed Church of Prickwillow St Peter (Diocese of Ely)**

**Representation against a  
Pastoral (Church Buildings Disposal) Scheme**

**Background**

**The Building**

Built in 1866-68, St Peter's is an unlisted Victorian Gothic church built of flint, accredited to the designs of John Bacon and possibly built by R Reynold Rave. It is situated in Prickwillow, a fenland village of some 350 residents, about 5 miles north-east of Ely. The building occupies a corner site on Main Street with the former school building (now a private residence) to the West and is built on land reclaimed from the drained fens. The ground conditions prevented burials on the site.

The building has some landscape value due to its tall bell-cote and location at the eastern edge of the village, although vegetation and mature trees along the south side screens the building from the road. A road bridge over the River Lark is just beyond the church to the east. Some low density modern housing developments are on either side and a new village hall are just west of the church. The only listed building in Prickwillow is the former pumping station, now a museum.

The cruciform plan of the building is of a three-bay nave, south porch, chancel with north and south transepts, an apsidal east end and a central bell-turret.

A copy of the Statutory Advisory Committee's (SAC) Critical Information Summary and advice is attached at **Annex B**. The building is considered to be of low to moderate national significance with scope for some change without undue impact on its immediate setting.

**Background**

Prior to closure St Peter's had been affected by low attendance for some years with only one or two regularly attendees and no-one coming forward to act as churchwarden or sit on the PCC. The church was formally closed for regular public worship on 28 September 2011 on the union of parishes with that of Ely, Holy Trinity with St Mary, which was in the same benefice. The condition of the building was considered reasonable at the time of closure but has deteriorated over time.

Following early proposals for use as a community hub which did not proceed, the Diocese of Ely applied for planning permission for the conversion of the building to full residential use as a five-bedroom single dwelling and following the grant of planning permission in December 2018 the building was marketed. Four offers were received for the building of which the current proposal for a mixed arts/studio use in the main body of the church with a self-contained flat in each transept was the highest offer.

## **The Views of the Statutory Advisory Committee**

The SAC advised that the building is of low to moderate national significance as a heritage asset but has some scope for change without undue impact on its immediate setting. Though sub-division would have impact upon the value of the roof structure, the impacts have the potential to be partly mitigated.

The SAC was consulted on the prospective purchasers' plans and commented that the proposed mixed-use conversion is of a suitable nature and intensity for the building and churchyard and the design sensitive to the building. A copy of the initial advice, Informed Change Assessment and subsequent advice on plans is also attached at **Annex B**.

## **Planning and Access**

The Diocese of Ely applied for planning permission for the conversion of the building to full residential use as a five-bedroom single dwelling and this was granted by East Cambridgeshire District Council on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

However, the prospective purchasers wish to submit their own plans to provide for an arts studio and cultural and community uses of the building with two two-bedroom flats, which requires a less intensive subdivision of the main interior space of the building than the plans already given planning permission. A copy of the prospective sketch plans are attached at **Annex C**.

Access is directly off Main Street, which is public highway, and parking will be provided on the churchyard land.

## **The Churchyard**

The unburied curtilage is laid to grass with trees and bushes and bounded by hedges with the main access on the south side. There is an existing small car parking area to the west.



**Arial view of the church showing properties to North and East**



**View of the Church from Padnal Bank at the North East**



**View of the North Transept looking East towards the neighbouring housing**



**View of the North Transept with back to the neighbouring property boundary**