



<b>DAC SITE VISIT NOTES</b>
<b>Church: St Mary Ely</b>
<b>Date: 19 July 2017</b>
<b>Subject: Re-ordering and extension</b>

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### **Building Details**

Large parish church; the only remaining parish church in Ely. Long nave of seven bays. Largely 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century construction, later clerestory and steeple, furnishings dating from 19<sup>th</sup> century restoration. Significant extensions to south for rooms and offices late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Listed Grade I.

**Present at meeting:** Mark Bonney (Chairing), Neil Birdsall, Mary Hancock (DAC), Chris Hill, Derek Tye, Chris Watson, Piers Coutts (St Mary's), Nigel Walter, Jack Boyns (Archangel), Guy Braithwaite, Jacinta Fisher, James Bettley (Church Buildings Council), Sue Dickinson and Geoffrey Hunter (DAC office).

#### **1. Background**

Statements of significance and needs had been submitted to the DAC, together with drawings suggesting how the church's needs might be met through re-ordering the church and reworking the existing extensions. A site visit was proposed. All relevant statutory consultees were invited to attend.

#### **2. Pastoral situation**

- a. St Marys is the principal church for the Ely Team which includes parish churches in surrounding villages and also missional churches in the fast-growing suburbs of Ely. The city's population is set to expand by 50%. The Bishop is talking of St Mary's being a 'Resource Church' for a wider area.
- b. St Mary's is also looking further afield for planting opportunities.
- c. The church site as a whole is very well used. The rooms are booked out and the office is overcrowded. The largest space on the site, church itself, is in use only 5-7 hours per week.
- d. On a Sunday currently some youth work has to be housed off-site because there isn't enough space.
- e. Further staff are set to be recruited, but there is no space to house them on the church site.
- f. The PCC wants more flexibility in how services are arranged, including being able to worship in the round and to improve the provision for baptisms, which take place outside the main service (to cope with numbers).
- g. This all ties in with, and is expanded on, in the statement of needs submitted.

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### **3. Proposals**

The project architect has developed proposals which seek to meet these needs, broadly:

- a. Improving the functionality of the existing extensions by re-arranging the spaces, providing an entrance and small further extension.
- b. Improving accessibility to church, hall and office for all users by bringing the west doors of the church back into use and fitting a level timber floor across the whole of the nave and aisles.
- c. Providing the freedom of space the PCC desires in the main body of the church through removal of most of the current fixed furnishings. A font, holy table and lectern would be provided, all “portable things”.
- d. Providing discrete meeting and storage space within the church by separating off the east end of the chancel for a vestry and cupboard (lowering the current sanctuary step), glazing off the south aisle chapel as a meeting/fellowship space with servery. It is also proposed to install a west gallery to provide a crèche space at the base of the tower, and to improve access for bell ringers.
- e. Lighting, heating and audio systems would be renewed as part of the project.

### **4. Discussion**

- a. The proposed wholesale removal of the 19<sup>th</sup> century interior would need to be very carefully justified. The views of the Victorian Society and Historic England should be sought as an early next step.
- b. The existing font dates from the 1876 Restoration. Its proposed location would mean it would almost certainly never be used. It might be better located at the east end of the south aisle.
- c. A note in the Statement of Significance referring to the Victoria County history has been conflated with the views of the Victorian Society – quite a different thing. Instead of depending on historic value judgements, the actual artistic and liturgical significance of the furnishings needs to be established as a first step.



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- d. Most of the surviving furnishings date from the 1876 Franey & Wood/Christian restoration. This in itself does not sufficiently explore their significance to justify their wholesale removal.
  - e. It should be considered whether adaptations to furnishings (eg retaining some of the pews mounted on wheels) could meet the PCC's practical requirements.
  - f. The proposed timber floor would create a very uniform appearance, and one largely alien to a stone medieval church. The bases of the nave arcades would be buried in the depth of the floor, at least as far as the first chamfer. It was understood that floor monuments would be retained in situ beneath the floor.
  - g. The sedilia and piscina in the chancel would become hidden in the vestry – it was noted that these had not been in use for some time; the visitors regretted the loss of these features from the main body of the church, which would need to be carefully justified.
  - h. The proposals for the southern extensions were of less concern given the nature of the buildings. Perhaps this area could bear greater development to reduce the pressure placed on the church itself by the current proposals.

## **5. Outcome**

- a. The DAC welcomes the desire to use the church building throughout the week, and wishes to help the PCC realise that ambition. The DAC understands the need to make St Mary's fit for its developing role as a resource church.
- b. However, among the enthusiasm to embark on a new chapter in the history of the church, it is important that due consideration be given to the historic and cultural significance of the church, and what opportunities exist to integrate significant aspects of the past and the present, into the future shape of the church.
- c. The degree of intervention and change proposed, while it may be a fair architectural expression of the ambition of the PCC as a church, may be difficult to justify during the faculty and consultation processes, and some compromise may make the process of getting consent easier; in particular an agreement to retain at least a sample of the current furnishings, integrated into the re-ordering, and re-consideration of the proposed timber floor.

**Geoffrey Hunter, Church Buildings Consultant**

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