

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 1st February 2006

AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/2289/05/F - Oakington
Erection of Meeting Rooms Building at Church of St. Andrew, High Street
for Rev. James Alexander

Recommendation: Refusal
Date for Determination: 24th January 2006

Listed Building & Conservation Area

Site and Proposal

1. St. Andrews Church is Grade II* Listed. The church dates from the 13th, 15th and 19th centuries. The exterior walls are covered with a mix of pebblestone, pudding stone, limestone rubble and limestone dressings. It has a clay tiled roof. The building is set within a churchyard measuring 0.4ha. To the east of the churchyard is the Vicarage and associated gardens. Directly to the south of the churchyard is a treed area, beyond which are paddocks. Clear views are provided from Water Lane across these open areas of land to the church itself. The churchyard is adjacent to several residential properties. In particular, the northern wall of no. 68 High Street forms the boundary with the churchyard, having several windows facing the church and a rear first floor window facing south-east.
2. This application proposes the erection of a building in the south-eastern corner of the churchyard. This building will be built on an L-plan, with gabled roofs. The north-western gable is to have glazing to its full height. The building proposed has a floor area of 130.9 square metres and measures 14.7m x 7.0m with a 5.0m x 5.6m projection on the south-eastern side, alongside the Vicarage garden. The overall height of the building is 6.3m. Rooflights are proposed in the south west and north east roofslopes. The building will be accessed by a new footpath across the graveyard. The siting of the building has been chosen to be as unobtrusive from the road frontage and west tower entrance, to be recessive in nature and secondary to the church. It will require two gravestones to be moved and the removal of a sycamore which is growing out of the brick wall that separates the churchyard from the Vicarage's garden.

Planning History

3. **S/0208/00/A** gave advertisement consent to display a Notice Board at the church.

Planning Policy

4. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan (adopted October 2003) policies:
 - **P1/2** Protection of sites of archaeological, historical or architectural value.
 - **P1/3** Requires a high standard of design and sustainability for all new development.

- **P6/3** Requires new development to minimise the risk of flooding by including flood defence measures and design features.
 - **P7/6** Local authorities will protect and enhance the distinctiveness of the historic built environment.
5. South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (adopted February 2004) policies:
- **CS5** Restricts development in areas liable to flooding unless it has been demonstrated that the effects of development can be overcome.
 - **EN5** Retention of trees and hedges in new developments.
 - **EN28** Requirement to submit illustrative and technical material to allow the impact of proposals affecting a Listed Building, its curtilage and wider setting.
 - **EN30** Requirement for applications for planning permission in Conservation Areas to be accompanied by sufficient details to allow their impact to be assessed.
 - **EN31** High quality of design, planting and materials connected with landscaping of developments in Conservation Areas.
6. South Cambridgeshire District Council Supplementary Planning Guidance:
- The **Policy for Church Extensions in South Cambridgeshire** sets out the approach to be taken when the Council receives applications for extensions to churches. Extensions will not be permitted where there is an alternative site within the churchyard.

Consultations

7. **Oakington Parish Council** has no objection to the proposals, but the footpath leading to the new building and the adjoining footpath needs to be lit in the interests of safety. It recommends approval.
8. The **Conservation Manager** comments:
9. "The proposals follow many years of discussion with SCDC and English Heritage (EH)
10. The SCDC Policy for Church Extensions proposes a sequential approach to such works. The proposal to reorder within the church has been explored together with a 'porch' style extension on the main building. Neither of these options was felt to be appropriate – both resulting in the harming the character or appearance of the building and not offering the required floor space. The preferred option has therefore been for a site within the church yard.

Proposed location

11. The graveyard is on rising land and to High Street has an open frontage. The position on the site is one which is generally screened from the High Street by the church itself. The corner location is considered to have the least impact on the setting of the church and its relationship to the vicarage to the east.

Trees

12. The potential impact on the trees, boundary wall and graves have all been considered. This location enables the main graveyard trees to be retained. It will result in the loss of a large sycamore – the Trees and Landscape Officer in pre application discussions indicated agreement to this. This will still have an impact on the long views to the site from Water Lane. New planting is offered to mitigate this.

Impact on church

13. The structure will also have a direct relationship with the main porch entrance to the church – linked via a new pathway. The scale and form of the new hall is considered to be subservient to the church. The pre-application discussions suggested an L-shaped form to the structure and the layout has now been revised to have regard to the views of the Conservation section and English Heritage. The scale and layout of the building is therefore supported.

Materials

14. The main reservation in pre-application discussions put forward by English Heritage was that the structure was too domestic and needed to relate more to the church in the palette of materials selected. It was suggested that stone/flint could be used rather than brick. The submitted design retains the use of a gault brick. This choice of material will harmonise with the graveyard wall/vicarage but does not address EH concerns. It is considered that a justification for the use of brick rather than the suggested stone/flint needs to be sought from the applicant. The roof covering, windows and rainwater goods materials are considered to be appropriate and need to be conditioned to ensure this quality of detailing is secured.

Roof

15. The clay tiled roof includes a number of roof lights on the south and eastern sides – concerns have been raised at pre-application stage at the potential impact of these given the prominence of the site – the light from these opening will be very visible. It was suggested that these should be deleted or either high level windows proposed under the eaves or the roof lights moved to the graveyard roof faces. This issue remains unresolved.

Lighting

16. It was requested that the means of external lighting be an integral part of the design of the building to ensure this is both sensitively located and considered from the outset. This has been addressed and the uplighter format of lighting is considered to be appropriate.

Conclusion

17. The proposals have been subject of lengthy discussions to reach this stage and generally the principal is fully supported and the form, scale and location accords with past discussions. The only points of issue relate to the choice of external walling materials and use of roof lights on the most prominent roof elevations. It is suggested that amendments or a written justification for the scheme as submitted are secured given the concerns raised to these matters.
18. The **Trees and Landscape Officer** comments that the sycamore tree to be removed does contribute to the landscape character of the area, however it is growing out of the base of the church wall and if not causing severe structural damage at the moment, will in the near future. As a consequence, he has no objection to its removal.
19. The **Building Control Manager** notes that fire engine access is unsuitable. Additional roadways are required to gain access to within 45m of all points of the building or compensatory measures may be considered i.e. sprinkler system.
20. The **Environment Agency** has identified the site as falling within zone 1 (low to medium) flood risk area. The Council is required to respond on its behalf in respect

of flood risk and surface water drainage related issues.

21. **English Heritage** does not wish to comment in detail on these proposals, but offer the following general observations:

“We have accepted the principle of the development at a pre-application stage but have raised concerns over the detailing and particularly materials used. It is still the case that if the walling materials, particularly, made more of a direct visual link between the new build and the church the two would harmonise more. We are content for your Conservation Officers to conclude the debate on this or make it the subject of conditions placed upon any consent granted.

Recommendation

We would urge you to address the above issues, and recommend that the application should be determined in accordance with national and local policy guidance, and on the basis of your specialist conservation advice. It is not necessary for us to be consulted again.”

Representations

22. One letter in support has been received from the occupier of 95 Water Lane. It does not include any particular comments.
23. One letter of objection has been received from the occupier of 69 High Street. It raises parking and noise as particular issues:
- a) The only place that users of the proposed meeting rooms could park is along High Street, Oakington, which is a very narrow rural street with no pathways in the vicinity of the church.
 - b) Traffic has steadily increased over recent years and it is particularly hazardous when cars are parked solidly down one side of the street. St. Andrew's is a popular church and it is not unusual to have solid parking several times per week preventing the bus service from getting through.
 - c) On at least two occasions recently vehicles have driven into the low wall outside no. 69. This is not directly attributable to the parked cars but simply indicates the general and increasing traffic problem along the High Street.
 - d) Potential increase in noise; particularly later in the evening. High Street is very narrow and no. 69 effectively faces directly onto the road so that traffic and parked cars are within 5 to 10 metres of its study and bedroom.
 - e) The use of the proposed Meeting Rooms will give rise to a substantial increase in noise resulting from conversations outside its windows, car doors slamming and the very annoying habit that people have of *peeping* their car horns when they depart.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

24. The key issues in considering these proposals are the impact upon the Grade II* Listed church, Oakington Conservation Area, flood risk, highways, neighbouring amenities and access for fire vehicles.

Listed Building and Conservation Area

25. The key issue in relation to this application is the impact on the Listed Building and Conservation Area. The agent has indicated that the church would be willing to construct the hall using stone, fieldstone and flint to all three main elevations except the long rear wall, in order to keep costs down. This wall would be a good quality

buff brick with stone quoins at each end. The Conservation Manager has indicated that this is likely to be acceptable.

26. The issue remains of the Rooflights in the south west roofslope. The building will be visible from Water Lane and when lit it will become prominent within the wider area due to light spillage from the rooflights. The agent has stated informally that the church would accept relocation of rooflights but not the total abolition of them, as both toilet areas has natural light via the rooflight, they provide ventilation and free up the walls for all of the equipment needed to be fixed to the walls. In addition, they are also of the opinion that the main meeting room will not obtain sufficient daylight from the low windows and one partly glazed gable. Conservation has stated informally that moving the rooflights to the north east roof slope would not be significantly detrimental to the use of the building, as it is likely that the lights would be on inside when occupied anyway.

Flood Risk

27. The site falls within an area of low flood risk and is an area of less than 1ha. The Environment Agency's guidance requires a basic flood risk assessment (FRA) from the applicant. This should focus on the management of surface water run-off. Development that increases the amount of impermeable surfaces can result in an increase in surface water run-off, which in turn results in increased flood risk both on site and elsewhere within the catchment.

Highways

28. The proposals do not include any off-street car parking provision. The proposals are to provide accommodation for meetings and activities already held at the church or Vicarage and as such are unlikely to result in a significant increase in on-street car parking, although it may result in an overall increase at different times of the day and week. It is noted from the representations received that on-street car parking may contribute to problems on the highway, with some vehicles having difficulty passing the site. In the Officer's opinion on-street car parking is likely to slow vehicles down as they pass the site and decrease the likelihood of such traffic incidents.
29. One possible solution however, given the site's features, would be to provide a lay-by off the street. This would require part of the churchyard to be excavated to street level and would result in the loss of trees in this part of the churchyard. This would result in significant harm to the setting of the Listed Building and to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. On balance, the community gain from providing additional facilities at the church, and avoidance of works that would harm the historic fabric and character of the church in order to meet modern access standards, is such that the inconvenience of having cars parked on the street is outweighed.

Neighbouring Amenities

30. The impact of noise disturbance from people leaving the building could be reasonably controlled, given the close proximity to several residences, through the imposition of a condition restricting the hours of use.

Access for Fire Vehicles

31. The agent has been in contact with Building Control, who has advised informally, having liaised with the Fire Officer, that the lack of access for fire vehicles could be mitigated through the introduction of a suitable sprinkler system.

Recommendation

Refuse

32. While there is no objection in principle to the proposals, the issue of the building's impact upon the Conservation Area is unresolved and the application fails to adequately address flood risk. The application is recommended for refusal, for the following reasons:
1. The exterior walls of the Church of St. Andrew are covered with a mix of pebblestone, pudding stone, limestone rubble and limestone dressings. The proposed design includes the use of gault brick for the walls. While this choice of materials will harmonise with the graveyard wall and Vicarage, it is important that the building makes a direct visual link between the new build and the Grade II* Listed church building, therefore the proposed materials are inappropriate and will damage the setting of the Listed Building contrary to policies P7/6 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan (adopted October 2003), EN28 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (adopted February 2004), and Supplementary Planning Guidance 'Policy for Church extensions in South Cambridgeshire'.
 2. The proposed rooflights will by way of their siting and orientation, result in the building being unduly prominent within the wider area, which is designated as a Conservation Area, particularly when viewed from Water Lane. The proposals are therefore contrary to policies P7/6 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan (adopted October 2003) and EN30 and EN31 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (adopted February 2004) as they will result in harm to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
 3. The site is in an area identified as being at risk of flooding and the proposed development is likely to increase the risk of flooding. The application fails to fully address flood risk and does not detail measures that will be taken to manage of surface water run-off and as such are contrary to policies P6/3 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan (adopted October 2003) and CS5 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (adopted February 2004).

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003
- Planning file Ref. S/2289/05/F

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