

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**REPORT TO:** Conservation Advisory Group.  
Conservation, Sustainability &  
Community Planning Portfolio Holder

**AUTHOR/S:** Conservation Manager

15<sup>th</sup> September 2004

### English Heritage Support to arrest deterioration for the redundant Church of St. Denis, East Hatley.

#### Purpose

1. To present the results of the recent grant submission to English Heritage for consideration and recommendation of subsequent action to Cabinet.

#### Effect on Corporate Objectives

2.	Quality, Accessible Services	The proposed project will secure the future of a 'building at risk', such action is an adopted performance indicator (SP903)
	Village Life	The project will : enable the churchyard and County Wildlife Site to be restored to full accessibility; make possible the development of a community facility; make a safe a semi-derelict building; lay the grounds to restore an important part of local heritage; thereby enhancing village life.
	Sustainability	The restoration and re-use of historic buildings is a key sustainability measure.
	Partnership	The scheme will be developed as a partnership project with the Parish Council , SCDC and English Heritage and will facilitate further partnership working with other national heritage bodies.

#### Background

3. The redundant church of St. Denis, East Hatley is owned by SCDC having being acquired from the Church Commissioners on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1985.
4. The building was last used for worship in 1959 and was declared redundant soon after by the Church Commissioners. There were covenants placed on the transfer of ownership to restrict demolition or the making of structural changes to the buildings without the consent of the Church Commissioners, nor to disturb monuments, tombstones or memorials without such consent, nor to disturb human remains. *The main covenant is to use the property only as a nature reserve and/or for the study of natural history.*
5. Scdc does not own any of the churchyard land, only the building.. However, it does have rights of way on foot across the churchyard and also rights of access for workmen and appliances on the church commissioners' adjoining land transferred, to maintain and repair the building. The churchyard is in active use, with the latest burial having been in august 2004.
6. Planning Law relating to listed building controls primarily relate to protecting buildings and areas from unnecessary demolition and unsuitable alterations. However, the local planning authority does a duty to seek to preserve historic buildings. This may be by intervening to encourage or enforce private owners to

undertake those basic repair works which would keep their listed buildings wind, and weather-tight and safe from deterioration. The expectation of the legislation is that the management of publicly owned listed buildings would result in examples of best practice by maintaining such stock to at least this basic standard to ensure their safe stewardship.

The unusual nature of both the condition and transfer of the former church of St. Denis and its originally intended use (as a nature reserve) have meant that maintenance of the fabric of the building has been difficult. Conservation is, however, a priority of SCDC and therefore finding a viable use for St. Denis which would preserve it in the long-term has been the main objective of the authority. Over time it became evident that the original use as a Local Nature Reserve was incompatible with its long-term survival, as this use has restricted access for maintenance and resulted in deterioration of the building's fabric. Consequently, a new use needs to be found which would incorporate an appropriate maintenance regime. This might include the *study* of nature.

7. As the site surrounding the church is in use as a churchyard, the Council has obligations and prospective liabilities as owner of a building which adjoins an area to which the public have limited access. It is incumbent on SCDC to take steps to ensure that bits of the building do not fall off and take steps to protect people and place warning notices. In order to fulfill this obligation security fencing and structural scaffolding has been erected.
8. Consequently, in dealing with St. Denis' church, since its fabric has become unstable the objective has been to find a use for the building that will secure the long-term future and maintenance of the building. In order to move towards finding a solution the following tasks have been undertaken.
9. ***March 2003. Purcell Miller Tritton (PMT) architect's commissioned to report on the condition of the building.***  
PMT conclusions :
  - the building has suffered severe damage to part of the external walls. Some of the walls are unstable and are in danger of collapse. The roof tiles are also insecure and are liable to fall to the ground during windy weather.
  - The removal of the ivy has left voids in the fabric and has affected the integrity of both the roof and the walls leaving many of the tiles loose and much of the flint stone facing in a decayed condition.

The PMT report illustrated the structural problems and emphasised the need to carry out safety measures (which were implemented).

The report presented a series of repair options with estimated costs.

- 10.. ***March 2004. Outline proposal submitted to Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for possible grant support for low key use.***  
The outline proposal was to restore the building for use as a community building with an emphasis on nature/environmental study based on the following assumptions :
  - As a Grade II\* listed building, covered by a covenant, it cannot be demolished and should be preserved.
  - Use as a local nature reserve contributes to the destruction of the building, and is not a viable long-term option.
  - It is necessary to establish a viable mechanism to secure the building's future by objectively examining options.
  - HLF support requires the project to demonstrate that the building will have an, "*active, purposeful role*" which will secure the future of the 'heritage asset'

and the need to have the potential for “*robust useage*” with clear public support.

- 11.. The outline proposal was considered by the Hatley Parish Council and the St. Denis Local Nature Reserve Committee and is understood to have received their support, with reservations about the management of traffic and the intensity of use.
- 12.. The initial response by the HLF was that a grant support to support the outline project with a low key use is “*not impossible*”, if :
  - it can be demonstrated that it will facilitate public access
  - that it has a carefully considered, active and purposeful role.

The process of applying for HLF grant support is, however, extremely lengthy and given the need to develop evidence of a viable, community use will require considerable consultation. In the meantime the deterioration of the fabric of the building needs to be arrested and the site made safe.

**13. May 04 - Grant application submitted to English Heritage to support structural repair works.**

The submission was for 60% funding support to make the building safe by completing long-term repairs (Option F – PMT report). Scheme costs were estimated at upto £100k.

- Works proposed were the structural repairs to the walls and re-tiling of the roof (i.e. making the building weatherproof with safe access).
- Works would not facilitate a use on their own, as the interior was not to be addressed but would re-open the churchyard and repair the exterior fabric.
- Implementation would resolve the main repairs, enabling removal of the structural scaffolding and security fencing and give time to explore the viability of uses for the building.

- 14.. English Heritage’s response received 24<sup>th</sup> August 2004 was as follows :
  - (a) Concerned at the poor state of the building which is why it appears on the national ‘Buildings at Risk Register’.
  - (b) Premature to consider grant for an extensive programme of works, without the building’s long-term use having been further developed and demonstrated as viable.
  - (c) However, it is a priority to undertake the works required to arrest further deterioration and give the time necessary to develop proposals for future uses.
  - (d) The above could be achieved by a less extensive programme of holding repairs described below

- 15.. English Heritage have indicated that they would be prepared to offer a grant of upto 50% towards a package of “holding repairs”, as described below with their architect’s *estimated* costs :

<b>Works</b>	<b>Costs (£)</b>
Structural & surface repair of walls & copings	25,000
Structural roof timber repairs	15,500
Temporary roof covering (Corrugated iron)	6,000
Security & protection, including storage of sound tiles	4,000
Site works & scaffold	9,000
Contingency	5,000
Fees (architect	13,024
<b>Total</b>	<b>77,524</b>

- 16.. English Heritage have emphasised that they, *“would only be prepared to consider grant for such a reduced package of work”* and have requested indication is made as to whether the Council, *“would be prepared to proceed on this basis”*.

### **Considerations**

18. It is considered that the potential generous offer of grant support provides an excellent opportunity to start to address the on-going issue with the maintenance of the church. If implemented then the structural fabric of the building would be both repaired and protected, removing any hazard to people using the churchyard, which would become again fully accessible.
19. It is evident from consultations with the potential funding bodies that there is both a concern to find some form of use for the building and a conviction that it could (and should) perform some community use. However, it appears to be accepted that the process of developing an appropriate use, which has the support of local people as well as all the other interested parties (Church Commissioners, Parish Council, English Heritage, Diocese, SCDC, etc) may take some time and that the immediate task should be to stabilise the building's fabric and remove the danger.
20. English Heritage's estimated costs of the works appear to roughly accord with previous estimates undertaken by consultant architects PMT for SCDC. The costs of re-instatement of the tiled roof is the most uncertain element as it will depend on the extent of recycling of tiles and necessary timber repairs. Clearly the costs need to be tested via the Tender Process.
21. Given the long-term aim to restore the historic fabric of the building, it is suggest that such tenders take the form of 2 options : one to repair the roof structure, clad in the Corrugated iron (as per E.Hs note); and another to seek prices to re-clad using the existing re-cycled tiles, supplemented by new/second hand tiles. This would enable a clear comparative cost picture to be established which would enable a contract to be let without further delay after the approval of the funding by Cabinet and English Heritage.

Therefore, Implementation of the schedule of works as suggested by English Heritage, would stabilise the building and enable the actual feasibility of options for a new use to be explored. This would include full consultation on the impact of any proposed uses (to enable a favoured use to be identified) and investigation of the necessary management and maintenance regime that would result. Crucially the favoured option must have the full support of the local community. Having established a viable use, an application could then be made to the Heritage Lottery Fund for financial support to realise the project.

22. It is perhaps worth emphasising that potential funding agencies (and indeed the Council) are only likely to contribute to a project that has strong local support. It is consequently suggested that any grant funding application to the HLF should be jointly submitted by the SCDC and Hatley Parish Council, as a means to demonstrate local commitment and support.
23. Finally, implementation of these repair works would remove the on-going need to pay for structural scaffolding, security fencing and site maintenance.

### **Options**

24. The Conservation Advisory Group are requested to consider the following :

- (a) That members welcome the offer of grant support from English Heritage and request that the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder authorises officers to seek Tender prices to undertake the programme of works suggested by English Heritage on the basis of comparative submissions for both (i) corrugated iron roof cover and (ii) retiled using recycled and new tiles.
- (b) That, subject to the receipt of satisfactory tenders that, members request that the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder seeks Cabinet approval to let a contract of works based on the results of a schedule of work as outlined by English Heritage. The works to be funded from the Portfolio Holder's existing budget (*Historic Buildings Preservation Fund*) and to be subject to confirmation of grant support of upto 50% of the works cost from English Heritage.
- (c) That members decline the offer of grant support from English Heritage and request that the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder seeks Cabinet approval for an alternative means to restore the long-term future of this building.

### **Financial Implications**

- 25. The on-going need to maintain scaffolding and security fencing at the former church of St. Denis is slowly drawing on valuable resources. These costs (totalling approximately £5,000 per annum will be removed by implementing the repair works and create a potential asset rather than a drain on resources.
- 26. Cabinet has approved an existing budget for this purpose of intervening to protect serious deterioration of listed buildings (the *Historic Building Preservation Fund*) which could accommodate the necessary 50% SCDC contribution to these repair works. It is evident that the English Heritage offer of 50% towards these basic structural works is both generous and probably the only immediate source of external finance available to the Council to assist in the restoration of the building. English Heritage support and the implementation of these works does, however, indicate the importance of this medieval building as an item of the national heritage and could help secure subsequent funding from other bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- 27. Resolution of the immediate structural problems and removal of the danger presented to the public will also open the prospect of creating interest amongst other heritage bodies (such as the National Trust or Landmark Trust) who might be approached to assist with the long-term management of the building. The expenditure of the initial sum would then not only buy time to consider a community use it would also help re-establish the building as a possible asset.

### **Legal Implications**

- 28. SCDC is the owner of the building and has a duty to try to secure its future as a national heritage component. It also has duty of care to users of the adjoining churchyard.

### **Staffing Implications**

- 29. None specific.

### **Risk Management Implications**

30. None specific. The danger of unknown costs arising will be addressed by the inclusion of a generous contingency fund in the contract.

### **Consultations**

31. The issue of the restoration and re-use of this church has been widely debated both within the Council and wider in the local press. The consensus appears to be that something has to be done to arrest the building's deterioration in a manner that minimises the cost to the Council. The comments of Hatley parish Council on the above will be sought on this report and at their meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2004. They will be reported to members at the Conservation Advisory group meeting.

### **Conclusions/Summary**

32. The offer of English Heritage support to support the structural stabilisation of the former church of St. Denis would appear to offer the potential to finally start to address the issue of securing the life of this medieval church. The broad areas of use for the future of the church have been debated at length only to conclude that demolition is not an option. The only option appears to be to attempt to secure sufficient external funding to make the building habitable for a community based use. The works suggested by English Heritage could facilitate this restoration proposal and Members are, therefore, requested to support this option to enable the building to become an asset to the community once again.

### **Recommendations**

19. It is recommended that :
- i. That members welcome the offer of grant support from English Heritage and request that the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder authorises officers to seek Tender prices to undertake the programme of works suggested by English Heritage on the basis of comparative submissions for both (i) corrugated iron roof cover and (ii) retiled using recycled and new tiles.
  - ii. That, subject to the receipt of satisfactory tenders that, members request that the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder seeks Cabinet approval to let a contract of works, based on the results of a schedule of work as outlined by English Heritage. The works to be funded from the Portfolio Holder's existing budget (*Historic Buildings Preservation Fund*) and to be subject to confirmation of grant support of upto 50% of the works cost from English Heritage.

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

1. Report by Purcell Miller Tritton Architects on the condition of the building – April 2003.
2. Letters from English Heritage dated 23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> August 2004.

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