

Outlook Xtra

News about the Blandford Forum Parish Church Rooms - July 2006

"What's Happening with the Hall, then?"



After the high profile and very successful public campaign concerning the plan to demolish and rebuild the Church Hall, it is not surprising that some people have been asking. So what's happening with it, then ?

The answer is "quite a lot" (!) although much of it has happened in meetings between representatives of the parish and the planning officers at North Dorset District Council. The officers at NDDC were extremely surprised by the level of public support for the petition and plan to demolish the hall but it became clear that the plan we had put forward contained a problem - namely that the Government are not in favour of demolishing listed buildings and then leaving the site empty: there is a requirement to have specific plans as to what replaces the demolished building. Our application was to demolish and only provided a rough idea as to what would take its place.

As a result, our application was deferred whilst discussions took place to try and find a way forward which would be acceptable to both NDDC and the PCC.

We have now reached an important point in these discussions where there is a difference of opinion as to how we should proceed from here. In simple terms, NDDC believe that restoring the existing hall is a viable option, but suggest that we amend the inside of the hall to fit our needs, with the addition of a new (large) meeting room at the back of the hall. The PCC are of the view that whilst this is theoretically possible, the result will not meet the needs of the parish and community in the way that a new building would and that the cost would be prohibitive.

This difference of opinion has led to the PCC taking an important decision as to how to proceed from here.

- They have requested that North Dorset reinstate the deferred application for demolition and discuss it at the earliest opportunity.
- They will place alongside the application a legally-binding declaration that should the application be granted no demolition of the hall will take place until such time as plans for a replacement hall are agreed.

By doing this, the PCC believe that they are attempting to fulfill the needs of the parish and community in the best manner. It should be noted that should this approach not succeed, the alternative approach (the plan put forward by the NDDC officers) would still be open to the parish.

It is hoped that a decision on this matter will be made in September and your continued prayerful support for this would be gratefully appreciated. Our verse for the year from 1 Peter 2 talks of us being built as "living stones". Psalm 127:1 says that **"Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain."** The way that God has led us over the past couple of years in this matter has demonstrated that he has plans for the new Church Rooms and the PCC are convinced that this way forward is the right one. Please pray for myself and the PCC in the coming weeks that God's way will prevail, whatever the outcome of this application.

Tim Storey

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What does the Architect think ?

Along with our letter to NDDC, asking them to reinstate the application, has gone a letter from our Parish Architect, John Turnbull, making the following points ...

- "1. A considerable amount of decay was found in the lower levels of the main timber frame of the building. If the building is to be retained the whole of the lower part of the timber frame, about 500 mm above ground level will have to be replaced.
2. The metal sheeting has decayed in a number of places and will require renewal. The profile of similar sheeting produced today is different and therefore all the sheeting to wall and roof will have to be replaced.
3. A timber treatment specialist has confirmed that there is an active outbreak of dry rot under the valley gutter, which has a large fruiting body and is spreading. Repair of this outbreak would mean that a substantial part of the original timber structure and cladding in the area of the outbreak will have to be cut out, the remaining timber treated and the infected timbers replaced with new treated timbers. Two truss ends are affected as well.
4. All the timber windows are beyond effective repair and will have to be replaced with new windows.

Whilst it is true to say anything can be repaired, the extent of repairs and alterations necessary to make the present building usable and to try and meet current Building Regulations means that very little of the original building would be left. Furthermore the cost of all this work is very difficult to quantify and justify in the long

term. Reuse of the original building, even when it has been repaired, will give the building owner an on going and unreasonable maintenance bill. There is every sympathy for the retention of quality or unique buildings, either listed or unlisted, but the present structure is neither of these and represents a burden, when it comes to fit for purpose, to the owner in its present form and would continue to do so even if it was retained and repaired. (The statement of Government Guidelines on the matters ...) is quite clear where it states "There may, very exceptionally, be cases where the proposed works would bring substantial benefits for the community which have to be weighed against arguments in favour of preservations." We would content that this is one such case."



What Can You Do ?

- ✓ Please continue to support the application to North Dorset District Council for the demolition of the Church Hall, along with the added declaration not to demolish until firm plans for a replacement building have been presented (please quote reference 2/2006/9049 in any communication).
- ✓ Please consider coming to the meeting of NDDC Planning Committee when the application will be discussed (the date of the meeting is not yet known but will be widely circulated as soon as it is decided).
- ✓ Please pray that the Rector and PCC will be guided by God in their deliberations in the matter and that "His Will be Done".

"Outlook" is a News Sheet from the Parish of Blandford Forum in Dorset.

Mission Statement: "To Discover and Nurture Relationships in Jesus Christ."

Vision Statement: "To see every road in Blandford Forum baptised in the love of God."

Parish Office: 01258 456260 Email: office@bfpc.org.uk Web Site: www.bfpc.org.uk