

Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches

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The Diocese of
Canterbury



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

The Reverend Colin Preece
The College
Church Yard
Ashford
Kent TN23 1QC

31 March 2009

Ashford, St Mary – Project

As you already know from my telephone conversation with Nick Lee-Evans we had a very good discussion about the project at the last meeting of the DAC and reached what I hope you will feel to be a very positive outcome.

I am enclosing a copy of a Minute of our discussion of this item from which you will see there is continuing support for the project as a whole, although there are ongoing problems with identifying an acceptable design solution for any proposed new west porch. You will see that the Minute is worded in such a way that it leaves the local project team with the flexibility to decide whether to stick with a single scheme, which would include the west entrance, or whether this latter item could form a second phase in the project. If the porch is omitted, I am sure that we could proceed fairly quickly to the issue of a certificate whereas the inclusion of the porch could slow things down considerably. The DAC has not taken a view on whether the scheme should be phased since we feel that this is properly a decision for the project team.

I think this brings us up-to-date but please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about the position reached on this case.

LEE EVANS PARTNERSHIP
Att..... <i>NALE</i> Job No.. <i>6.7.9.2</i>
3 - APR 2009
Action
Copies to
.....

cc Nick Lee-Evans ✓

Canterbury Diocesan Board of Finance (Custodian Trustee to Canterbury Diocesan Board of Education)

Diocesan House, Lady Wootton's Green, Canterbury, CT1 1NQ

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13th century origins although mainly of the 15th century. Aisles widened and have lengthened in the 19th century. Listed Grade A. Inspecting architect David Martin.

Proposals – A reordering of the building in conjunction with Ashford Borough Council to include the provision of performance and exhibition space.

Current Status of Case – Following extensive discussions between the PCC and Ashford Borough Council a project architect was soon to be appointed. An initial round of consultations was held with our secular partners in 2007. At its meeting on 12 September 2008 it was agreed that a site visit be arranged to enable the proposals to be considered at first hand. The site visit was subsequently held and a full discussion took place at the meeting on 10 October 2008.

The Secretary reported that this project was the result of an innovative partnership between the PCC and Ashford Borough Council to develop the west end of the building for use both as a place of worship and also as an arts venue within the wider community. The project would be centered on the nave, aisles, galleries and the series of rooms by the west door. The rest of the building would be unaffected in terms of structure and furnishings but, hopefully, would become better used as more people came to know and appreciate the building.

The role of the DAC was to focus on the impact of the proposals on the building itself and the Committee would not be commenting on the management structure both for the project itself and the subsequent day-to-day running of the venue.

The principle change which would be required was the removal of all of the pews in the nave and aisles, the provision of replacement seating, the possible modification of the galleries and refurbishment of the west end suite of rooms. Without the removal of pews the project would not be viable. The Secretary reminded the Committee that the pews had been an issue with our secular partners, which had resulted in the production of a professional Statement of Significance which had been circulated to members and to our secular partners. The latest views of our secular partners were still awaited.

Following full discussion, the Committee agreed to support in principle the removal of the pews subject to consideration being given to the retention of some around the walls of the building and the possible reuse of the distinctive and original pew ends. The Committee was concerned to improve the levels of natural light in the building and encouraged the PCC to consider reducing the size of the galleries and replacing the aisle windows with clear glazing. Although not presently part of the project, the PCC was also encouraged to look at ways in which the rest of the building could be enhanced without losing its distinctive character.

Some preliminary sketches had been prepared and these had been submitted to the DAC for the Committee's comments and observations. It was agreed that a further site visit would be helpful.

Information available at the DAC:-

- A Statement of Significance of the building.
- Background information on the proposals.
- A plan of the church.
- Sketch drawings.
- A report on the site visit.

Discussion – The members of the Committee who had been present at the site visit indicated their continuing support of the project, but highlighted the problems in reaching an acceptable solution for the proposed new entrance. The project team was keen to provide a structure of high visual impact and sketch drawings had been produced showing solutions which made use of a high proportion of glazing. Concerns had been expressed on site about these particular design solutions and more generally about the need to provide any structure on the west façade of the building.

Subsequent to the meeting, both English Heritage and Ashford Borough Council had written to confirm that they would be unable to support a planning application for the proposed external structure based on the solutions which had been proposed.

In view of these comments, the Committee did not discuss the proposed new external structure since it seemed unlikely that planning permission would be forthcoming. A number of members did, however, feel that a bold and imaginative solution should still be pursued but this may need to form part of a second phase of the project. This would, however, be a matter for the local project team to consider.

Decision – To reaffirm the Committee's support of the proposals and to invite the project team to submit a detailed specification and working drawings for full consideration. Whilst these could include proposals for the porch, this would inevitably lead to delays in the process.