

NORWICH DIOCESAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR THE CARE OF CHURCHES

*Minutes of the Sub-Committee held on Wednesday 9th January 2013
at 10.30 am at The Church Rooms, Church Street, Wymondham*

Present:

Mr Alan Kefford (Chairman), Mr Hugh Richmond (Vice-Chairman), The Archdeacon of Norfolk, Mrs Clare Agnew, Mr Neil Birdsall, Mr Nigel Bumphrey, Mr Charles Carus, Mr David Eve (also representing English Heritage, and present for the first part of the meeting only), The Revd Nicholas Garrard, Mr Stephen Heywood, Dr Andrew Rogerson, Mr Nigel Sunter, Mr Iain Walker, Mr Nicholas Warns, Mrs Kate Weaver, Mrs Jean Gosling (DAC Secretary) and Miss Caroline Rawlings (Assistant Secretary).

Also present for the first part of the meeting were representatives from the following organisations:

South Norfolk District Council: David Edleston

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings: Miss Catherine Cullis

Church Buildings Council: Christina Emerson and Tony Redman

Parish – The Revd Christopher Davis, Mrs Hilary Hunter (Churchwarden), Mr Richard Hawes (Churchwarden), Mr Michael Halls (Fabric Officer), and Mr Barry Johnson (PCC)

Freeland Rees Roberts, Project Architects: Mr Henry Freeland and Ms Tania Gomez-Duran.

Alan Kefford explained that this is a DAC sub-committee to consider the detailed plans for the future development of Wymondham Abbey. The first part of the meeting will consist of a presentation from the project architects, to which everyone has been invited and can ask questions. The second part of the meeting is a closed session of the DAC sub-committee to discuss the proposals in detail.

Henry Freeland outlined the key points of the project as follows:

St Margaret's chapel on the north side of the church has the boiler room located underneath it. The boilers have been renewed recently and are now gas fired, which has allowed the oil tank to be removed. As a result the new sedum roof will have to be designed to accommodate the four boiler flues. Entrance to the chapel will be via a door through the east wall of north aisle on the north side of the present Lady Chapel. The ground levels externally are slightly higher and levels will have to be adjusted within the Lady Chapel to accommodate this. This has alleviated the need to move the triptych forward. Henry Freeland asked if the DAC could give guidance on the treatment of this wall. The work also involves re-opening of the archway in east wall and glazing it to relate to the ruins outside. The room will be used as a choir vestry.

South-east extension. There will be difficulty gaining access for builders etc to the site and it is proposed that a contractor's roadway will be built around the monastic tower, constructed so that the archaeology is protected. Drainage for the new building will be close to the south aisle. The extension will house toilets, kitchen servery, educational and interpretation space, clergy vestry/reading room. Due to the change in levels and to avoid archaeology, the floor in these rooms will have a gentle slope. Access to the toilets, clergy vestry and further interpretation space is through this outer room. The doors either side of the sanctuary will be opened and a new walkway built across the monastic tower. The double outer doors will act as a fire escape, although they may be opened in fine weather. The profile of the extension has now altered and will extend further south. The roof will be supported by T section steel blades on cruciform posts. The roof will be tern coated steel, although lead would be preferred, but the PCC felt that the risk of theft was too great. To allow for extra natural light, roof lights are proposed which may incorporate PV cells. The connecting wall between the two main rooms will have a half height glazed screen.

West tower. It is proposed that the west doors will be opened, with storage built either side to accommodate east of the screen an old organ on the south side and clock mechanism on the north side. The storage on the south side will be used for chairs, whilst the other side will be used as a general storage area. In height the screen will have to be adjusted to allow for the free movement of bats in and out of the bat loft. The Coat of Arms will be relocated on the west wall of the south aisle. The shop is also being relocated to the west end of the south aisle, and two table tombs, which have already been moved once, will be moved again.

East tower. The two doors either side of the tower will be opened up to allow visitors to enter the east monastic tower. Railings are proposed across the tower opening as it is felt that the two re-opened doors will be vulnerable and that the area could become a 'lurking space'. The railings will be behind the responds. The ground level will be lowered and a path constructed. Because of the problems with pigeons the path will have to be constructed so that it can be kept clean.

The meeting adjourned to allow members an opportunity to look around the Abbey, and to allow them to see the areas affected by the developments.

The meeting reconvened. Alan Kefford invited Henry Freeland and Ms Tania Gomez-Duran to stay for a few minutes to answer some questions:

Alan Kefford indicated that members felt the panelling could be removed in the north east chapel to ease the construction of the entrance into St Margaret's Chapel. Henry Freeland thanked members for their directions as this will allow a more simple entrance to be constructed flush with the walls. Members said the plinth supporting the triptych would have to remain, but felt that the removal of the panelling would enable them to design the support afresh. Stephen Heywood said that originally, when the triptych was in St Peter's, Lowestoft, the altar had been placed against it, and was all of one piece. The altar then acted as part of the structural support for the triptych.

Members enquired about the materials proposed for the masonry of the new south extension. Henry Freeland said that South Norfolk District Council has asked for sample panels, but as yet the final details are still being worked out. He feels that the wall will be stone but it may require texture, and to keep the rhythm of the wall detailing such as buttresses may have to be introduced. Nothing has yet been formalised although they are aware that the detailing will be critical.

Nicholas Warns said that he was unsure of the rationale of circulation relating to the vestries, and questioned why they were not being located near to each other. Henry Freeland indicated that the parish is happy with the proposals. The Archdeacon of Norfolk pointed out that this was no different to what currently happens at Norwich Cathedral.

Charles Carus questioned the glazing of the eastern arch of St Margaret's chapel which, as single sheet of glass, was rendered slightly out of scale by the subdivision of the fenestration on the south side. Henry Freeland said that the intention was to make the screen as simple as possible. However, the unblocking may reveal clues to how this should be treated.

Iain Walker asked if sedum will grow on north facing roofs. Henry Freeland said as yet this had not been fully discussed but he would check to ensure there are no problems.

Nick Garrard queried the use of the railings across the opening into the monastic tower. Neil Birdsall indicated that from memory the previous railings were not overly intrusive and appeared to recede into the shadows. Their removal however, had been undertaken without faculty. Henry Freeland said that the railings would be set back behind the responds of the arch.

The representatives from Freeland Rees Roberts left the meeting.

Alan Kefford indicated that this is now a substantive application and, whilst some details have still to be resolved, the DAC is being asked for its recommendations. Stephen Heywood felt that no one would have a problem with the general principles of the application. Nick Warns however indicated that he was unhappy with the footprint which has changed from the original submission. He was no longer happy with the overall design and feels that what is proposed may not meet the needs of the parish. He felt that the building should be more compact and not intrude behind the southern building line. Echoing this, Hugh Richmond said that he had misgivings on the usefulness of the new extensions. Kate Weaver felt that more space might be needed as the church expands in the future.

The Chairman felt that the DAC had already indicated its support in principle and therefore could not back track at this late stage. However, he asked the office to fully check this point so that it could be discussed further at the next meeting on the 30th January.

Members were concerned that the sloping the floor in the display areas would render the room unusable. There is no clear indication in the proposals how the room would be used and, given its close proximity to the servery; the sloping floor would prevent the use of tables and chairs. Dr Andrew Rogerson said that, provided the archaeology is properly recorded, he could see no reason why the floor could not be level. In view of this, it was generally accepted that the floor should be levelled. This might then give the opportunity to reduce the overall size of the footprint of the extension. Members supported the idea of the wall having texture and detailing but felt that more information would be required including a sample of materials.

Members felt that the design for the half height screen should also be revisited as its current form compromises the use of the space. It was noted that details of the display/interpretation panels have not been submitted but were on display in the meeting room. Details of the boards will be requested.

Members supported the opening of the west doors, but queried whether the processional passageway will be too narrow. Details of the new storage areas were requested. The shop has already been relocated to the west end of the south aisle, although the new works involve building new units. As yet no details of these have been received. Two table tombs need to be relocated, and as yet no details have been given of their new locations.

Members agreed that the panelling in the Lady Chapel could be removed, allowing the redesign of the support for the triptych and the new entrance into St Margaret's Chapel. There was some concern about the use of sedum for the roof and this requires further clarification. Members felt that if the security issues could be resolved they would prefer the roof to be in lead. Stephen Heywood and Andrew Rogerson said that the unblocking of the doorway will need to be done under archaeological supervision, and a full record made. Members requested detailed designs of the window, which cannot be prepared until the apertures are revealed.

Members felt that the entire base of the monastic tower should be paved, which will make it easier to clean the entire area. They also felt that a gateway should be included in the railings allowing access to the tower when the doorways are locked, and to ease maintenance and cleaning.

Whilst noting the reservations of Mr Warns, others present were overall in favour of the proposals subject to the matter of detail and the issues referred to above. Hugh Richmond said that the design involved a series of compromises but it was clear that these had been made to integrate the new buildings with the form and archaeology of the existing fabric of the Abbey.

It was agreed that a report of the meeting would be circulated by email ahead of the main meeting. The case would then be listed on the agenda of the meeting on 30th January 2013 to allow the full committee to consider the application.