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Christina Emerson
Casework Officer
Church Buildings Council

24 January 2012

(by email: jeangosling@norwich.anglican.org)

Dear Jean,

Wymondham Abbey, Ss Mary & Thomas
Proposed extensions and reordering

Further to your referral of 14 December and my visit with the Rev. Tony Redman on 10 January, the Council considered this case at its recent meeting. I am now writing with its advice.

The Council noted that the proposal involves the following works:

- The creation of an extension within the ruinous St Margaret's chapel to the north-east of the church to provide a learning space and choir vestry.
- The creation of an extension to the south east of the church to provide a vestry, kitchen and WC facilities and a multi-purpose space.

The Council commended the parish's desire to provide the best possible facilities as part of its vision for the 'Abbey Experience' project and noted that the abbey played a significant role not only as a centre of worship but also as a visitor attraction, educational centre and archive.

The Council agreed that the parish had a need for additional space and better facilities and had no objection in principle to the proposal to house these in one or more extensions. The Council did however have some concerns as to the scale and massing proposed for the extension in the south east corner which it felt could be detrimental to the character of the historically and architecturally significant east end and the setting of the abbey. The plans show the south extension projecting beyond the line of the south aisle and extending upwards to conceal the first two stages of the tower and the Council felt that more thought needed to be given to the relationship between the proposed extension and the existing architectural features: the simpler approach adopted for the north extension might be more sympathetic.

The Council thought that it would be worthwhile for the parish to explore whether the space within the church could be used more effectively, thus reducing the space required within the extensions. The archives might possibly remain in the Muniment room if provision were

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made elsewhere for disabled researchers to consult them. While opening up the west door would provide an additional escape route and so permit increased attendance at cultural events, the large space under the west tower might be better used to provide a vestry or educational space.

The Council felt that the proposals might give rise to some practical issues, for instance the route between the two extensions would be by way of an exterior path through the base of the tower and open to the elements, the choir and clergy vestries would be on opposite sides of the building and the choir vestry is remote from the toilets. In addition, the Council had some concerns about detail, in particular, the use of large expanses of glazing proposed for the east walls, which would be at odds with the ruinous character of the east end and provide little or no privacy, and an exposed steel tree support structure in the south extension which did not resonate with the other structural elements.

The Council would therefore recommend that the parish be encouraged to continue to develop its proposals for the scheme and would be happy to advise further in due course. This is a wonderful building and we are all committed to doing our very best to ensure the 21st century interventions do credit to it.

Lastly, the Council regretted that despite assurances within the consultation document that the Council had been consulted and was happy to support the proposals; the DAC had not formally consulted the Council at an earlier stage.

With best wishes

Christina Emerson
Casework Officer
Church Buildings Council

c.c. Ms Catherine Cullis, SPAB (by email: catherine@spab.org.uk)
Mr David Eve, English Heritage (david.eve@english-heritage.org.uk)
The Revd. Christopher John Davies

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