

The Old Church of St. Mary's, Barnstaple

Update to the Parish

November 2021

Update on developments

Parishioners will recall that in January 2021 the Bishop of Plymouth appointed a Project Group to take forward the repair and refurbishment of the former Church building. This Note updates the Parish on the progress made over the last months.

There have been extensive and detailed discussions with Historic England and the local Planning Authority to agree the nature and extent of the first phase of the work. Once agreement was reached the building work was put out to tender. The successful contractors in the tendering process were Westcountry Stonemasons, a highly experienced building company who have undertaken many ecclesiastical renovations.

The cost of works has been carefully reviewed by Historic England and the Diocese; a grant has been offered by Historic England and accepted by the Diocese which will go some way towards paying for the vital work of repair. The balance will be met by the Diocese with, it is hoped, a contribution from the Parish.

As reported in January the project has been split into 2 parts. Phase I concentrates on the external envelope, and repairs and maintenance internally. Phase II aims to seek new uses commensurate with the needs of the Parish and community. The Project Group must stress that the present phase is only concerned with repairs: this is a long-term project which is likely to extend over a number of years before completion.

What will happen now?

Contractors will start on site erecting scaffolding internally in December. In January external scaffolding will be erected and work will progress with repairs to the rainwater goods, lead, slating, coping stones, pointing and windows. Internal work will consist of stitching, tying and repair work to the walls and roof structure. It is hoped that this phase will be completed by the Summer of 2022.

Once Phase I is complete the building will be wind and weathertight and structurally secure. However, before any further internal work can be carried out the building, which has stood neglected and deteriorating for over 30 years, must be allowed to dry out fully. This pause will give the Parish and the local community time to assess local needs and opportunities for the ongoing use of this important listed historic building. There will be time to develop plans for the identified use, obtain the necessary statutory approvals and hopefully secure further funding.

Practical considerations

The contractors fully understand that they will be working on a building which immediately abuts an active functioning Church. They are acutely aware that there will be occasions when it would not be appropriate for noisy work to continue, for example at times of Mass. Canon Peter has established a good rapport with the contractors and is confident that they will cooperate with him in ensuring that disturbance is kept to a minimum.

All site parking by the contractors is to be within the designated building site and is not to impinge upon the Parish parking for either Church or Presbytery. The contractors are aware of the need for full access to the Church for 10.00 a.m. Mass on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Conclusion

It has been a long and difficult journey to get to this point. The Project Group is very grateful to the Parish and to Canon Peter for the understanding which has been shown and is delighted that the process of restoration is beginning.

Sir Neil Butterfield KSG
Chairman of the Project Group and Diocesan Trustee
November 2021