

Church Commissioners' proposals for the demolition and landscaping of the former church of St Peter and St Paul, Birch, in the Diocese of Chelmsford.

1. The Church Commissioners have published a draft Scheme under the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 (a Measure is statute law) providing for the demolition of the Grade II listed church building of St Peter and St Paul, Birch, which is to be the subject of a Non-Statutory Public Inquiry.
2. At the Pre-Inquiry Meeting held on Wednesday 21 February 2018 the Inspector asked the Church Commissioners for 'up-to-date proposals' for the demolition and landscaping of the site to be submitted by Monday 12 March 2018. This paper outlines those proposals.
3. Should demolition proceed the draft Scheme provides for the site of the former church building to be vested in the Parochial Church Council (PCC) and become part of the open churchyard.
4. The PCC and Diocese will, therefore, need to agree how this land is used (for 'future' burials and/or as a garden area) as the PCC will be responsible for its care and maintenance along with the existing open churchyard. They have limited resources.
5. The Church Commissioners have obtained demolition costs from a specialist contractor, (who has experience working on historic structures and working alongside archaeologists), for (a) demolishing and removing the existing building in total, and (b) for demolishing the existing building but retaining the perimeter walls up to the lowest plinth level. The costs include for the protection of nearby headstones and graves and for demolition 'by hand' at strategic locations. Both options will take up to 4 weeks excluding landscaping. The contractor provided their costs with the benefit of drawings and having visited the site to fully appreciate its context and constraints.
6. The Commissioners have also commissioned a Landscape Architect to produce an illustrative concept design for how the site of the former church may be landscaped should demolition proceed.
7. Ultimately, should demolition proceed, the cost of demolition and landscaping will be subject to competitive tender.

The Proposals

8. **Option 1:** Total demolition and 'repairing' the landscape (sub-soil, topsoil and grass) so the site of the former church building is incorporated 'seamlessly' into the surrounding churchyard.

The cost for demolition and landscaping (assuming all existing burials remain in their current location), including an allowance for removing memorial stones and 2 stained glass windows by Mary Lowndes and Henry Holiday (accepted by the London Stained Glass Depository), archaeology and ecology provisions, dealing with services and a 10% contingency is estimated at: £224,280.00 ex. VAT.

9. The following options represent a landscape strategy which will be subject to detailed design development and discussion/agreement with the PCC and Diocese.

Option 2: Demolition but retaining some parts of the perimeter wall up to the lower plinth level and incorporating a 'grassed' garden area as illustrated on Landscape Perspective Drawing No.1473 L90 201.

This proposal retains parts of the of the perimeter walls of the main features (tower, chancel and corners) up to the lower plinth level and allows the ground levels to be graded and grassed to seamlessly integrate with the surrounding graveyard; respect those graves located near the perimeter wall; provide for the Round family graves (surrounding Estate owners who largely financed the construction of the current church building) to remain in their current location and, if appropriate, allow for memorial stones to be relocated from the church building and incorporated into the paving at the chancel end.

Both the current church building and the smaller medieval church which was demolished to make way for the existing church were set-out along the same east-west axis which is represented by a central path linking the former main entrance with the former chancel, tower and side entrance. An interpretation board outlining the main historical facts about the site is also included.

The cost for this option including all the provisions allowed for in Option 1 is estimated at: £234,586.00 ex. VAT.

Option 3: Demolition but retaining all the perimeter walls up to the lower plinth level and incorporating a 'grassed' garden as illustrated on Landscape Perspective Drawing No.1473 L90 202. This option is proposed as the total removal of the perimeter walls and footings may be considered an unacceptable risk to existing burials and/or archaeology.

The cost of this option including all the provisions allowed for in options 1 and 2 is estimated at £228,312.00 ex. VAT

Both Option 2 and 3 provide a flexible approach as it allows the grassed area to be easily maintained and used for occasional 'summer' outdoor functions; and for the PCC to incorporate their own garden ideas over time.

Option 4: Options 2 or 3 can be developed in a variety of ways over time by the PCC. A suggestion is illustrated on Landscape Perspective Drawing No.1473 L90 203.

Here, there is a central grassed area which replicates the footprint of the original medieval church (over which the current church was built) surrounded by a wild-flower garden. This represents a relatively low maintenance approach that introduces colour/ fauna and provides a visual reference to both church buildings.

The cost of this option including all the provisions allowed for in Options 1, 2 and 3 including an allowance for 2 benches is estimated at £230,000.00 ex. VAT

10. These options are illustrative of the Church Commissioners' approach to the restoration of the site following demolition and will be for subsequent discussion and agreement with the PCC and Diocese. As a starting point the Commissioners believe option 3 has much to commend it but the other approaches are equally possible.

Church Commissioners for England

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