



Colchester & North East Essex
Building Preservation Trust



**Church of St Peter's and St Paul's, Birch
Colchester
Essex**

Project Viability Study

October 2013

**Church of St Peter and St Paul's, Birch
Colchester
Essex**

Project Viability Study

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Photograph courtesy of the Morton Partnership



1.0 Background

1.1 Name of Organisation

Colchester and NE Essex Building Preservation Trust

Charity No. 1044514

1.2 About our organisation

The Colchester and North East Essex Building Preservation Trust was set up in 1995 for the purpose of acquiring historic buildings 'at risk', restoring and selling them and using the proceeds to acquire more buildings. However, the trust also has a much wider brief and can also fund relevant research, publish pamphlets and books and raise funding for major projects.

Since formation, the Trust has been involved in many projects that meet our Charitable objectives and we continue to work closely with Colchester Borough Council on making the Borough better.

1.3 Name of building

Church of St Peter's & St Paul's, Birch

1.4 Building address

School Hill, Birch, Essex

1.6 Postcode

n/a

1.7 Heritage significance

A Designated Heritage Asset. Included within the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, Grade II and within the Birch Conservation Area (1993).

A great deal has been written about the work of the Architect of the Church, SS Teulon and the value of the building within its historic and landscape context. Some of the material is replicated within the appendices but the purpose of this study is not to justify the reasons why the Church should be saved but instead, to assess the viability of doing so.



Fig. 1

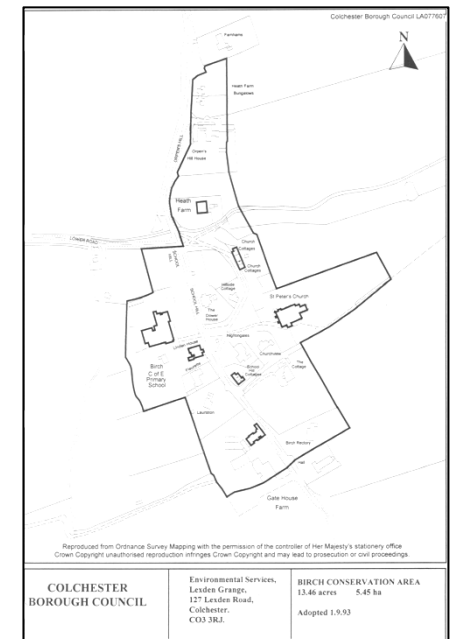


Fig. 2

English Heritage

BIRCH SCHOOL HILL 1. 5214 Church of St Peter and St Paul TL 91 NW 16/16 II 2. Built in 1850 by Teulon, in flint with limestone dressings. Red plain tile roof, with crested ridges. Nave, chancel, north and south aisles, south porch and west tower. West front has 2 gables, with traceried windows in the decorated style. West tower is surmounted by a shingled broach spire, 110 feet high. Windows have 2 centred arches throughout and tracery to match west front. Gabled south porch has simple 5 cant roof. All other roofs are framed side purlin with arch bracing and ridge pole, principal rafters with collars, braced to corbels. Listing NGR: TL9437119947

Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England – Essex* (1954)

St Mary 1850 by Teulon but with none of the offensive features so favoured by this Architect. Quite a normal, aisled interior, and an exterior, ambitious but not showy. The W front has a tall NW steeple with spire, 110 ft high. Dec tracery.

Council for the Care of Churches (1988)

This church is a salutary reminder that all of Teulon's churches were roughish. It follows a strictly ecclesiastical plan with aisles under their own gables and a long chancel (quite surprising for the Low Church reputation of it's designer), and could in fact quite credibly be assigned to an Architect such as Ferry or Bury.....

Matthew Saunders, *Memorandum*, author of "the Churches of SS Teulon" (1982)

St Peter and St Paul is constructed in flint with dressings in Caen stone.¹ It has two aisles, a tower and an octagonal broached spire of stone rising to 110 feet. The builders were Messrs. Baldiston and Son of Ipswich and the cost a modest £4,000. The church it replaced was taken down in 1849³. The whole cost was met by Charles Gray Round (died 1867) who five years previously had commissioned Thomas Hopper to design his own residence, the now demolished Birch Hall. His generosity also extended to the construction of the school and rectory. The latter, also by Teulon, dates from 1859.

Birch stands as clear testimony to his ability to work with confidence and imagination within the mainstream of the Gothic Revival, a welcome relief perhaps from the contortions and slight tinge of morbidity which he displayed elsewhere.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

1.8 BPT involvement in the project

The BPT first became involved in the project when notified of the Draft Pastoral measure by Colchester Borough Council in January 2013. However, previously, the Chairman of the BPT, Mr Anthony Bartleet had been instrumental in establishing the Birch Spire Arts Trust in 1999. This organisation planned to re-use the building as an arts workshop and training centre.

Ultimately, the project ceased when a stage 2 bid to the HLF was rejected.

1.9 Significant, previous activities involving the building

1990	Church was closed for worship
1995	Feasibility Study found no viable use could be found
1996	Church Commissioners submitted demolition proposal to Secretary of State. Decision deferred to allow further marketing of site.
1997 - 2002	Scheme for conversion promoted by the Birch Spire Arts Trust Heritage Lottery application eventually rejected.
2002 - 2009	Courtland Properties scheme for conversion and enabling development
2011	Draft Pastoral (Church Buildings Disposal) Scheme drafted to demolish the church
2013 (January)	Draft Pastoral Scheme published
January	Colchester & North East Essex Building Preservation Trust notified by Colchester Borough Council Trust wrote to Church Commissioners suggesting the need to review the situation via a study and objecting to total demolition. Other objections



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

received by the Commissioners.

March

Draft Pastoral Scheme deferred by Church Commissioners to allow for a further period of 'specialist marketing'.

Church Commissioners change their mind and reactivate the Draft Pastoral Scheme to demolish the church.

April

Church Commissioners' (Uses and Disposal) Committee decide to seek approval of Secretary of State to demolish the church but to **allow the Trust 6 months to undertake a viability study** to see if there was a way to avoid total demolition.

April - September Colchester and NE Essex Building Preservation Trust undertake the viability study

1.10 Reason for the building being at risk

The building was declared redundant in 1988 and vacated by the Parish. Worship and pastoral activities were transferred to Birch Green at that time.

Various attempts have been made over the ensuing years to find a sustainable, development solution that saved the church building but none have progressed beyond a draft, outline stage. Meanwhile, little work has been done to the structure to maintain its weather tightness and today, it suffers from localised decay to its fabric mainly as a result of water penetration.

A security hoarding surrounds the building that has been reasonably effective although there is recent evidence of vandalism occurring behind the corrugated sheeting. In 2012, Purcell Miller Triton Architects inspected the building and costed repairs at £1.24m of which the roofs and rainwater system were by far the highest cost at £830,000, the tower and spire were £200,000 and the rest of the costs were for walls, windows and internal repairs. This report is attached as Appendix i).

In 1988 the church Commissioner's statutory advisors, then the Advisory Board for Redundant Churches (ABRC), advised that the building was worthy of preservation and that a new use ought to be found. However, in 1993 the ABRC reluctantly agreed



Fig. 8 John Whitworth(www.essexchurches.info)



Fig. 9 John Whitworth(www.essexchurches.info)



Fig. 10

to demolition and subsequently, in 1998 advised against vesting the spire in the Churches Conservation Trust on the grounds that, as an entity, it was not worthy of vesting although it did have value as a feature of the landscape.

The Church Commissioners have recently reactivated progress on the Draft Pastoral (Church Buildings Disposal) Scheme to demolish the building. Consultations have been made and representations received. The findings of the Church Commissioners are contained within their letter to the Trust dated 21 May 2013 that is attached within appendix iii) to this study.

The risk status of Birch Church can therefore at best be described as perilous.

1.11 Ownership

Diocese of Chelmsford

1.12 Prospects of purchase

The Church Commissioners gave the BPT a 6 month option to purchase during which time we would carry out a viability study whilst the Church maintained progress on the Draft Pastoral (Church Buildings Disposal) Scheme (see letter from Church Commissioners (21 May 2013).

The relevant extract of this letter citing the decision of the Church Buildings (Uses and Disposals) Committee of the 24 April 2013 is:

'The Commissioners welcomed the offer from the Colchester and North East Essex Building Preservation Trust to undertake a feasibility study, the outcome of which will be known within a relatively short period of time and would enable there to be an agreement as to whether the tower and spire could be saved. However, the Commissioners believed that a decision to allow the current (Pastoral Measure) Scheme to proceed need not impair work on such a feasibility study. Were a proposal that secured the future of the tower and spire shown to be feasible and viable, a new draft Scheme would need to be prepared and published for consultation under the Mission and Pastoral Measure in any event. The Commissioners, therefore, considered that it would be sufficient to guarantee that work would not begin on the demolition of the building for a period of time, so as to allow the feasibility study to be undertaken.



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

The Commissioners also considered the request of the Building Preservation Trust for preferred bidder status in order to support their application for funding for the feasibility exercise. Whilst the Commissioners could not, as a matter of law, bind themselves to a contractual position with the Building Preservation Trust, because any proposed use would be the subject of separate consultation under the Measure, they were happy to provide the Trust with an exclusivity agreement for a fixed period in which the Building Preservation Trust could develop their proposals.

The Commissioners recognised that any further delay in the resolution of the future of this building would be unwelcome to those in the village of Birch. However, they believed that it was reasonable to allow for this further work to be put in hand, especially if it allowed some consensus to be reached about the future of the building and site by both those in the village and those representing wider national heritage interests.'

2.0 Condition of Building

2.1 Summary of building condition

The building is in a very poor condition although it is structurally stable with the exception of one area of roof that could soon collapse. In places, facing flintwork is spalling off the inner, brick core and rainwater is penetrating the building interior in several places.

A condition survey was undertaken by Purcell Miller Tritton LLP in January 2012 on behalf of the Diocese. As a general report, it does not include a detailed inspection of the higher level fabric. Nor does it include for the opening up of areas for inspection. The inspection was purely visual.

The report recommends:

- It was not possible to closely inspect large areas of external fabric of the building due to the extensive growth of vegetation to the walls and roof areas. It is therefore recommended as a matter of priority that the vegetation is removed as soon as possible to allow the proper inspection to take place.*



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

- There are areas of deterioration that require further inspection by a qualified structural engineer who is familiar with historic buildings, in particular with respect to the flint face to the walls and the cracking that has occurred in the tower.
- Essential emergency repairs are required to the roof areas where rainwater is penetrating as it will not be long before a major failure or collapse takes place.
- Repairs are urgently required to the rainwater fittings and installations as detailed in the report.
- A drainage survey should be undertaken to all surface water drainage systems and a report provided with recommendations.'

These recommendations have apparently not been acted upon but as part of this viability study, the Colchester & NE Essex Building Preservation Trust commissioned the Morton Partnership (Conservation Engineers) to report on the general condition of the building and the Spire, tower and external flint and stone facing, in particular. The report by Ed Morton is attached as [Appendix...](#) The Morton report does not estimate the likely cost of repairs but has established some important opinion in regard to the structural integrity of the fabric.

The Purcell's report condition report established budget cost estimates for the repair of the whole building and these help explain why there has been so little expressed interest in purchasing the church over the 25 years of its redundancy:

2.2 Schedule of urgent repairs and cost estimate

Access for inspection of high level exterior £1000

Priority A works⁵

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------|
| • Renew roof coverings | £400,000 |
| • Renew valley gutters | £90,000 |
| • Roof repairs | £300,000 |
| • Repairs to Spire stonework | £200,000 |
| • Renew rainwater goods | £40,000 |

Total urgent works (whole building)	<u>£1,030,000</u>
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It should be noted:

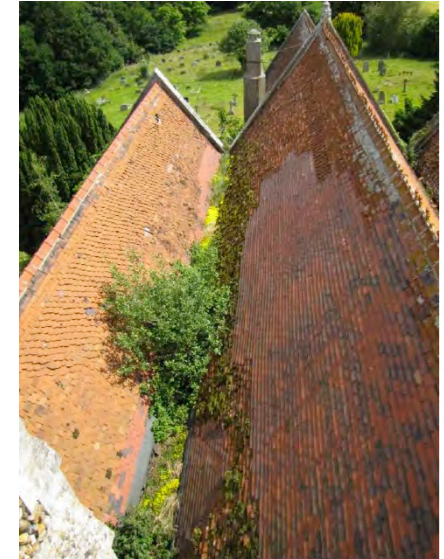


Fig. 15



Fig. 16

Extracts from the Conservation Engineer's report – see Appendix ii) for full report

'Overall the structural condition of the spire is not unreasonable, with there being no signs of any major instability. However, there are clear iron dog-leg cramps built into the structure, at various positions to help bind the spire, which is not unexpected. It is not clear from the survey how regular these are, but there are large areas where no damage has occurred which may suggest that the cramps were only used at strategic positions in the height of the spire. Certainly the cramps seem to be concentrated around the windows in particular, a logical position to have these.

The cramps have corroded, with the associated corrosion jacking in the worst cases having forced sections of stone to pop off, fractures to develop and indeed some lifting of the structure, identified through open horizontal joints. (see Figures 20 & 24)

There are clearly other fractures as well in the structure in local areas, which I suggest are linked with this damage, and probably associated with local higher stresses. These can develop through the tight joints and maybe odd aggregate particles in the mortar, as well as wind action etc. on the spire.

The tower faces below are formed of stone quoins, stone window dressings, and then flints set in mortar built onto a masonry core. Whilst I was anticipating that this core was predominantly of brick, on inspection inside the tower it seems quite clear that they reused the masonry from the previously existing Church on the site, along with elements and banding with brick.

In all areas inspected I checked the integrity of the flint facing, as it is not uncommon for flints to fall away, or bulges to form where the facing comes away from the core of the wall. Whilst

there were very occasional missing flints, overall I found that they were well adhered, being set in a relatively deep mortar. The pointing is somewhat eroded, and it would benefit from some repointing to prevent further flints dropping out.

To the west elevation at the base of lower window cills, a more significant bulge of the face work was found and when tapped, was clearly found to be hollow behind. This area will need to be carefully removed and re-built.

From the crane cradle it was possible to over view the roofs. The valleys are clearly blocked and this is allowing water ingress and significant decay to the roof structures. (see Figure 15)

No particular signs of structural distress were noted, although the inspection was rather limited at this level, but some areas where pointing had been lost were obvious with light shining through, and some water staining was noted. At the base of the spire, at the junction with the square tower, there are the normal squint brick arches across the corners. No particular structural defects were noted in the tower structure on descending.

The valley gutter between the north aisle and nave is clearly in very poor condition with much water ingress evident, and in some places vegetation can be seen internally. (see Figure 10) There will be a significant amount of repair needed to these elements with the following likely to be necessary: repair of trusses including wall post, principal rafter foot and arched braces; repair of common rafters say up to first purlin level, and then replacement of entire rafter wall plate; replacement of arched wind braces on underside of common rafters.'

Ed Morton
The Morton Partnership(2013)



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Fig. 25

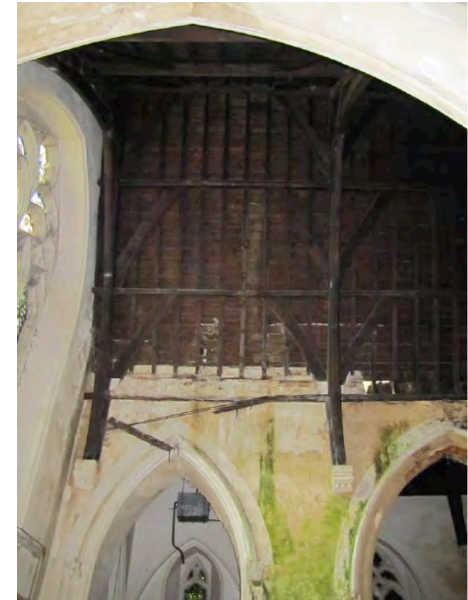


Fig. 26



Fig. 27

Previous attempts to find a development solution have failed due to the high cost of repair and conversion. In the absence of enabling development (previously discounted by the local community) and substantial grant assistance (rejected by the Heritage Lottery Fund in 1999) the BPT have concluded that partial demolition is possibly the only option.

3.0 Situation and Planning context

3.1 Description of the building and its setting

Birch church lies 5 miles outside of Colchester in a rural setting. Nestled near the church is a popular, primary school and a small cluster of houses including the former rectory and Almshouses. Birch Green is a larger village less than 1 mile to the south that retains its public house, village shop, post office and doctor's surgery.

Birch lies on the path of the Roman River Valley – a natural defence to the south of the Legionary fortress that became Colchester. It is possible that the mound known as Birch Castle was in fact a Roman defensive enclosure.

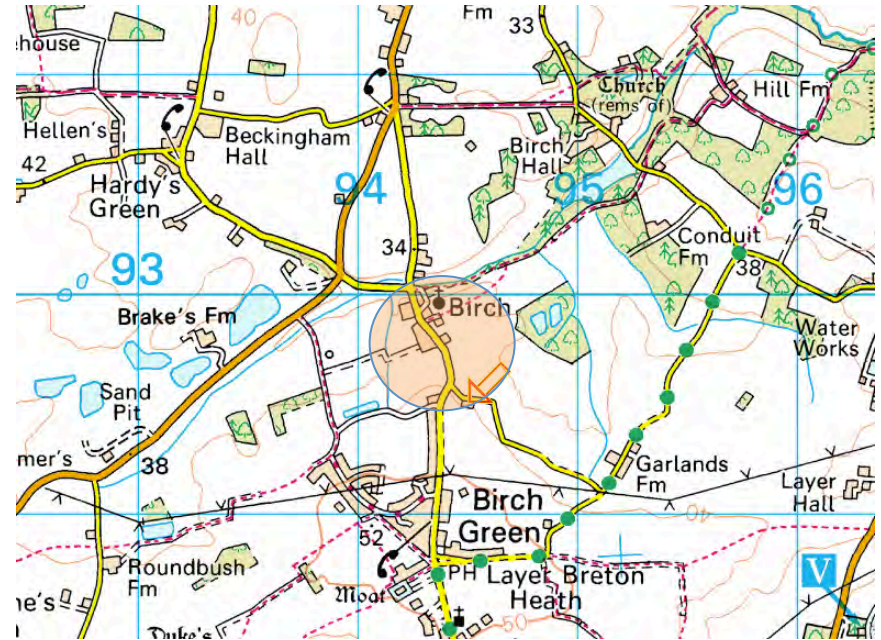


Fig. 28

From the 18th century members of the Round family of Birch Hall, who had social contacts in Essex, London, and Oxford, took an active part in public life and had great influence on the social and economic life of Birch. The Evangelical and paternalistic, Charles Gray Round (1797-1867) and his wife Emma (1819-92) promoted religion and education in the parish, were diligent in charitable works, and provided some housing for estate workers.

The Round family greatly influenced the appearance of the parish by rebuilding Birch Hall, the school, St. Peter's church, a new rectory house, and by adding some distinctive new houses..... The red-brick late 19th or early 20th century villa on part of the site of Birch castle may also have been built by the Rounds.

The church has an internal floor area of 400m². It is surrounded by a long, narrow



Fig. 29

churchyard with a number of mature trees, marked graves and cremated remains and is situated within the Birch Conservation Area (designated in 1993). The churchyard is surrounded by residential properties to the south-west, west and north-west and by fields on all other sides.

Vehicular access to the churchyard is via School Hill across a short, narrow drive from the public highway owned by the Birch Estate.

3.2 Relevant planning policies and planning guidance

Colchester LDF Adopted Development Policies

Policy DP1: Design and Amenity

All development must be designed to a high standard, avoid unacceptable impacts on amenity, and demonstrate social, economic and environmental sustainability. Development proposals must demonstrate that they, and any ancillary activities associated with them, will:

- (i) respect and enhance the character of the site, its context and surroundings in terms of its architectural approach, height, size, scale, form, massing, density, proportions, materials, townscape and/or landscape setting, and detailed design features. Wherever possible development should remove existing unsightly features as part of the overall development proposal;*
- (ii) provide a design and layout that takes into account the potential users of the site including giving priority to pedestrian, cycling and public transport access, and the provision of satisfactory access provision for disabled people and those with restricted mobility;*
- (iii) protect existing public and residential amenity, particularly with regard to privacy, overlooking, security, noise and disturbance, pollution (including light and odour pollution), daylight and sunlight;*
- (iv) create a safe and secure environment;*
- (v) respect or enhance the landscape and other assets that contribute positively to the site and the surrounding area; and*
- (vi) incorporate any necessary infrastructure and services including recycling and waste facilities and, where appropriate, Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), and*



Fig. 30



Fig. 31

undertake appropriate remediation of contaminated land.

For the purpose of this policy ancillary activities associated with development will be considered to include vehicle movement.

Policy DP14: Historic Environment Assets

Development will not be permitted that will adversely affect a listed building, a conservation area, historic park or garden or important archaeological remains. Development affecting the historic environment should seek to preserve or enhance the heritage asset and any features of specific historic, archaeological, architectural or artistic interest.....

Conservation of the historic environment will also be ensured by:

- (i) Identifying, characterising, protecting and enhancing Conservation Areas;
- (ii) Protection and enhancement of existing buildings and built areas which do not have Listed Building or Conservation Area status but have a particular local importance or character which it is desirable to keep. Such buildings or groups of buildings will be identified through a Local List which will be adopted by the Council;
- (iii) Preserving or enhancing Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, Historic Parks and Gardens, including their respective settings, and other features which contribute to the heritage of the Borough; and
- (iv) Known sites of archaeological importance will be clearly identified and protected, and sites that become known, whether through formal evaluation as part of a Planning Application or otherwise, will similarly be protected according to their importance.

Heritage Statements and/or Archaeological Evaluations will be required for proposals related to or impacting on the setting of heritage assets and/or known or possible archaeological sites, so that sufficient information is provided to assess the impacts of development on historic environment assets together with any proposed mitigation measures.'

Policy DP19: Parking Standards

The Council will refer developers to the Essex Planning Officers Association (EPOA)



Fig. 32



Fig. 33



Fig. 34

Vehicle Parking Standards which was adopted by Colchester Borough Council as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in November 2009

For residential uses, specifically, a minimum of 1 car parking space should be provided for each 1-bedroom dwelling or 2 car parking spaces for each dwelling of 2 or more bedrooms, in addition to 0.25 spaces per dwelling for visitors. Cycle parking will be required for all developments. Provision must also be made for disabled and motorcycle parking.'

Policy DP16: Private Amenity Space and Open Space Provision for New Residential Development

All private amenity spaces shall be designed so as to avoid significant overlooking.

For houses:

One or two bedroom houses – a minimum of 50m² 3 bedroom houses – a minimum of 60m² 4 bedroom houses – a minimum of 100m²

Items of note:

1. a high standard of design and conservation will be required
2. a Heritage Statement will be required
3. 2.25 minimum car parking spaces required per dwelling
4. 100m² minimum private garden area required per dwelling

3.3 Preliminary views of the LPA, English Heritage, the Victorian Society and the Ancient Monuments Society.

Letters of objection to the Draft Pastoral Measure were submitted by Colchester Borough Council, English Heritage, the Victorian Society and the Ancient Monuments Society. These representations are attached as Appendix iii) and are relevant for this report in that these organisations benefited from preliminary discussions with the BPT where a broad outline of the ambitions of the BPT were described.



Fig. 35



Fig. 36

4.0 Development options

4.1 Previous options considered

Demolition

Demolition 1998

Demolish church	£27,000
Fees @ 12%	£ 3,240
	£30,240
VAT @ 17.5%	<u>£ 5,292</u>
	<u>£35,532</u>

Demolition 2013

The above costs have been revised and take account of the rate of VAT, CDM regulations and market conditions that bear upon the value of recovered materials. Today, the cost of demolition is:

Demolish church	£36,800
Fees @ 12%	£ n/a
VAT @ 20%	<u>£7,360</u>
	<u>£44,160</u>

Cost excludes:

- removal of asbestos
- welfare facilities
- temporary fencing and hoarding
- isolation of services
- scaffolding
- temporary access road from School Hill for the duration of the works⁸



Fig. 37



Fig. 38

Conversion

Conversion to arts centre 1999

The project promoted by the Birch Spire Arts Trust. The intention was to restore the entire fabric of the church and undertake internal alterations to provide an outreach facility to make various forms of art experience available to the community whilst maintain public access into the building.

Various art related courses were to be available along with a variety of art studios for rent.

This project carried a variety of risks that included a dependency upon attracting sufficient, paying students. Ultimately, the Stage 2 Heritage Lottery Fund application was rejected on the grounds of increasing costs and value for money.

	£450,315
prelims @ 7% excl scaffolding	<u>£ 28,372</u>
	£478,687
contingency @ 5%	<u>£ 23,934</u>
	£502,621
fees @ 20%	<u>£ 95,737</u>
	£598,358
VAT @ 17.5%	<u>£104,713</u>
	£703,071
other fees	<u>£ 44,500</u>
	<u>£747,571</u>

This project was the final attempt to develop a scheme that enabled public access into the building.

Conversion to residential 2002 & 2010

A scheme in 2002 from Courtland Properties Ltd for enabling development of 16 detached houses within the village together with the conversion of the church into 5 apartments. There were strong objections within the community against this proposal which was subsequently abandoned.



Fig. 39

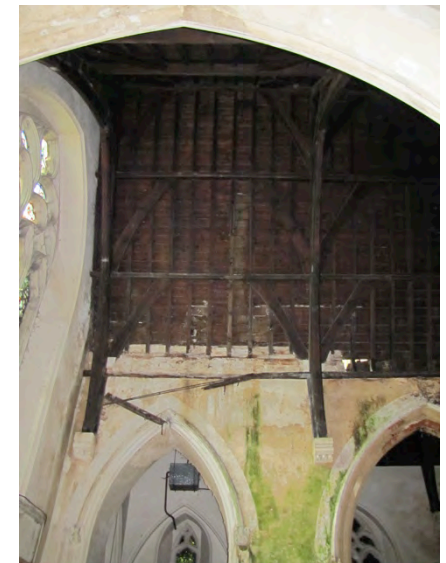


Fig. 40

A scheme in 2010 for the conversion of the church by the Rural Community Council for Essex into social housing failed to reach the cost yardstick together with a reluctance to take on the responsibility of maintaining the spire and so too was abandoned.

In addition to the above, the marketing of the site produced enquiries from around 40 individuals or organisations none of which were sustained.

4.2 Current development options

It was considered important to investigate a limited number of development scenarios within this viability study and the choice of these was guided by:

- a recognition that it was highly unlikely that a scheme to save 100% of the external fabric of the church would be viable, bearing in mind the previous work undertaken by the Birch Spire Arts Trust and the more recent building condition report by Purcell's (2012).
- the necessity that options include the retention of the Spire.
- an understanding of the local market that placed the highest value on residential use in this location at this time.
- a prediction of the likely amenity problems for the adjacent community that may result in uses other than residential.
- a desire to retain as much historic fabric as might be possible whilst suspecting that a scenario with the greatest retention of fabric would also be the least financially viable. Another development option would therefore need to consider retention of the minimum amount of fabric that was compatible with a good end value.
- a recognition that there are several ways of assessing viability and the report would need to take look at the traditional, cost report method via a Quantity Surveyor, the approach taken by a self-builder where there is a lower expectation of resolving costs with end value on completion of works and also, the cost analysis method used by specialist developers who rarely employ QS consultants and use instead, their

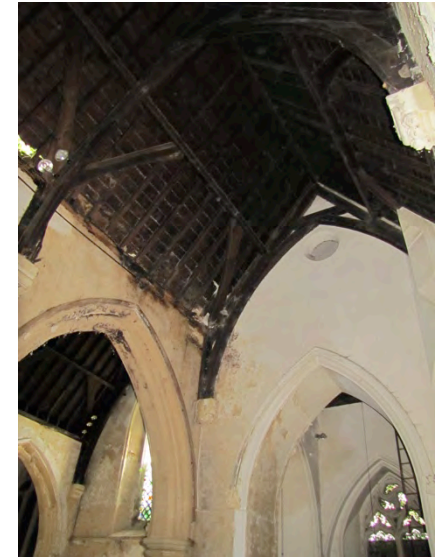


Fig. 41

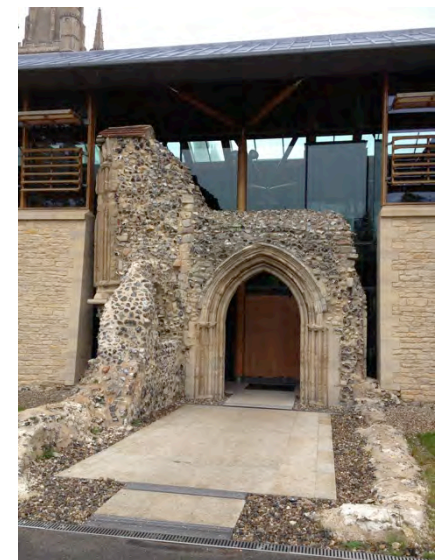


Fig. 42

experience of undertaking similar schemes. One can say a little more 'emotion' is factored into the last two viability analyses than occurs with the first, QS method but this does not render them any less valid. They do, however, involve greater risk.

This study initially considered three options for development and has applied a traditional, cost appraisal method to each. It also considers an alternative, development appraisal methodology – using the skills and experience of a developer-partner in assessing viability to produce a fourth development option.

4.2.1 Common aspects of the new development options (see following pages)

All of the options retain only part of the existing fabric of the Church, to a lesser or greater extent. Where external walls are shown to be demolished, we have assumed that the outline of the church will be retained on the ground by demolishing to within approximately 400mm of ground level to a level coincidental to the existing, stone plinth course that runs around the entire building. The wall base would be 'soft capped' as illustrated within Appendix vij).

The North Aisle exterior wall is retained under all options to maintain a dignified and appropriate backdrop to the graves and cremated remains that lie adjacent to it within the active burial ground. The wall would be retained at full height under development **option 1**. In development **option 2A** the wall is retained as enclosing fabric to the two dwellings although two bays of the wall between the dwellings could be reduced in height to window cill level (approximately 2m) to allow more light into the internal courtyards. In **option 3** it is possible that the North Aisle wall would be reduced in height to window cill level along most of its length as to retain it at full height without a supporting structure behind it, may allow the wall to be unstable.

The South Aisle is demolished in all development options.

The Spire and Chancel West window are retained in all options.

Where part of the Nave or North Aisle is retained (all options), the existing, structural grid has been used as a template – marked out by the arcading, arches and supporting columns. New, enclosing, external walls for the dwellings would sit outside of this grid so that the new fabric protected the historic fabric from the weather and



Fig. 43



Fig. 44

allowed the glory of the original architecture to be seen from within the new internal spaces.

We have assumed that the new, external fabric will be designed to be visually, lightweight and of a contemporary appearance. Our agreed approach with Colchester Borough Council (Conservation) will be to achieve a visual foil between old and new (Figure 42) utilising materials such as glass, insulated, copper sheets or corten steel with stained timber and solar shading(see Figures 43-47).

Graves within the disposal area that will become private garden will be identified within the Pastoral Measure. Their markers will be relocated within the active burial ground at locations yet to be decided. Buried remains will not be disturbed. A detailed burial plan will be produced as part of the topographical survey that would be undertaken at the next stage of project design and this will be used within subsequent, land registry documentation as part of a covenant imposed upon future site owners that would not allow later, ground disturbance within locations specified on the plan.

Future access for the dwellings (options 1-4) will occur along the private drive that leads up to the West front of the Church. This land is owned by the Birch Estate and preliminary enquiries have confirmed that permission to use the drive for the purposes described in this report will be allowed without charge.

The drive would be extended into the disposal area to the West and South of the retained fabric to a parking facility that may include vehicular garaging. A turning area will be included to comply with the Essex Parking Standard. The minimum number of car parking spaces to be provided will be 3 + 1 visitor parking space per dwelling.

Public access to the active burial ground will be maintained through the existing entrance to the churchyard. A signed path will lead pedestrians around to the North side of the building.

New burials

Following the completion of restoration and conversion of the Church to its new use



Fig. 45

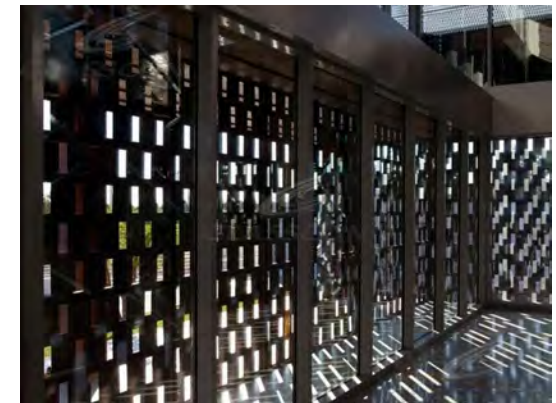


Fig. 46

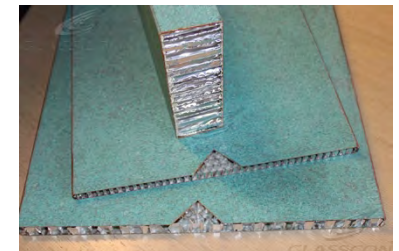
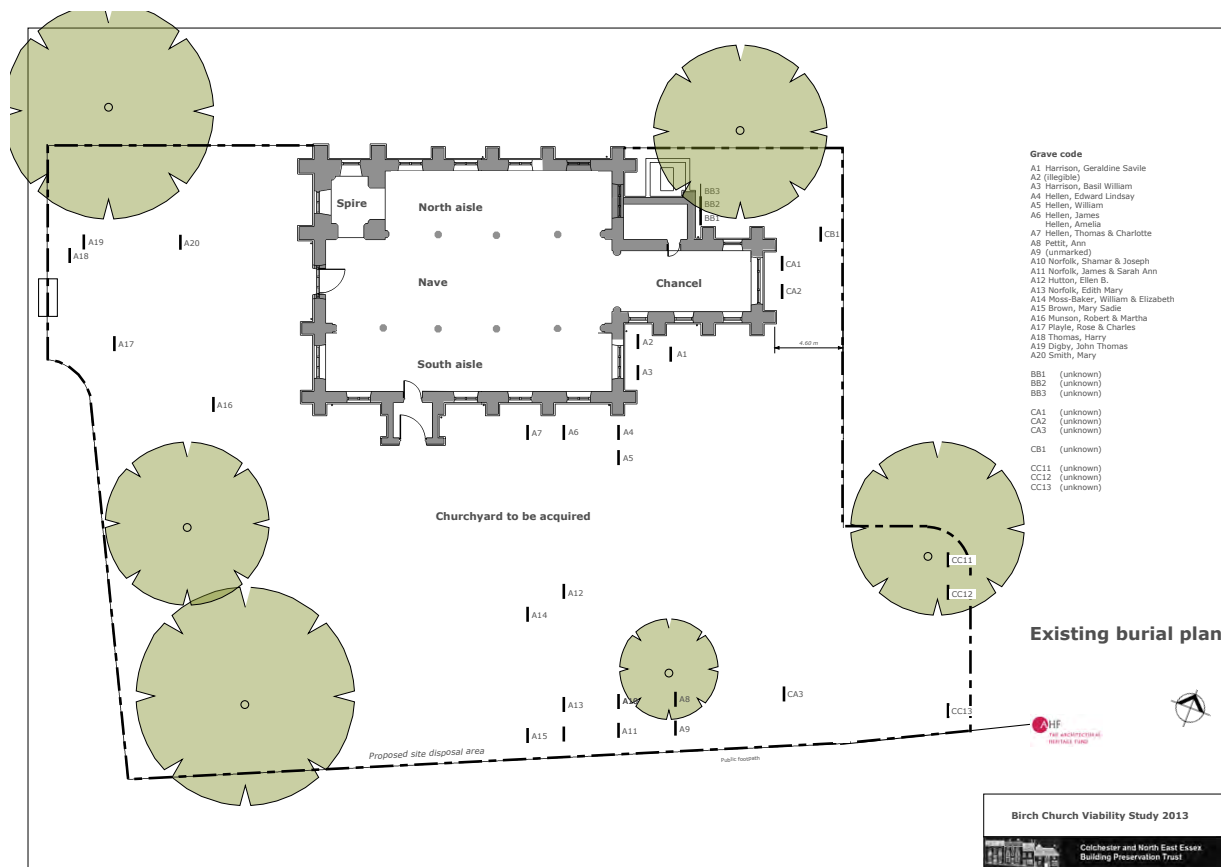


Fig. 47

the existing access arrangements for new burials is envisaged to remain. Funeral hearses and limousines will continue to wait on the drive to the burial ground (temporarily blocking vehicular access to the new dwelling/s) and vehicles belonging to mourners will park on available spaces nearby. To put this arrangement in context, there appears to have been approximately 20 burials over the past 20 years.

New boundary enclosure will be by metal 'estate' fencing that is under-planted with indigenous hedge species. Maintained in a neat, clipped appearance at around 1.5m height would be appropriate.



Site disposal area

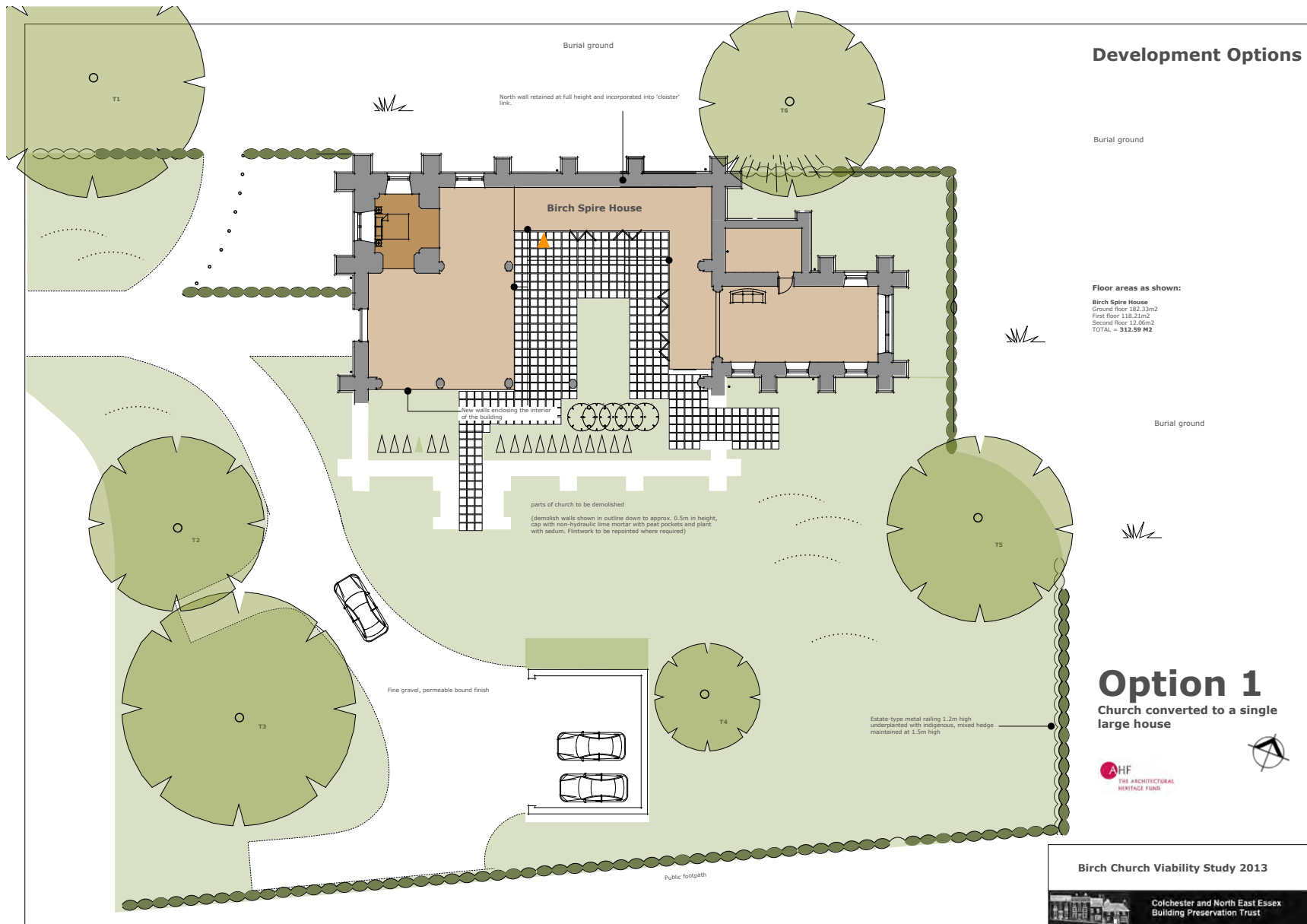
If the church were sold, part of the burial ground would become a private garden. This plan indicates where known burials are located although it has been based upon data that may not be complete.

Although this boundary has been agreed with the Chelmsford Diocese the precise alignment is subject to survey.

Development Option 1

Large single house with Chancel retained

1



4.2.2 Option 1

Partial demolition and development as single house and annexe

Description

This option retains the Spire, the Chancel and the Vestry and the exterior wall of the North aisle up to top plate level. Common to all options, the plans show the retention of 2 bays of the Nave and 1 bay of the North aisle.

An enclosed lean-to would run the length of the North wall and attach the chancel accommodation with the rest of the house. The main part of the accommodation would be adjacent to the spire where new, possibly largely glazed walls would enclose the floorspace over 2 floors. A staircase would also give access to an additional floor within the lower part of the spire. Above, a ladder and safety harness would be used to access the upper levels of the clock and bell rooms.

The Chancel would have a floor inserted above the lancet windows that run along each flank side that would be lit from the east and west ends.

It is expected that the accommodation would comprise of 4-5 bedrooms, 3 ensuite bathrooms, an open plan living space and an office/studio space for the owner. This non-residential space would not be for sub-letting and no provision would be made for separating this space from the rest of the house.

The total floor areas would be:

Spire part – 232m² over 3 floors

Link – 55 m² over 1 floor

Chancel – 110m² over 2 floors

Extent of fabric retention

This option retains the most fabric as, whilst similar to Option Two, the North wall of the North aisle would be retained at full height, buttressed by the new lean-to link structure.

Access, parking and garden space

The scheme would include a 3 car garage and additional parking for 3 cars.



Fig. 48

The property will benefit from a large, South facing garden.

Cost of development

Development option 1

Construction costs	1,263,200
Fees @ 18%	227,376
Ecology	55,000
Archaeology	10,000
VAT on works	63,160
VAT on fees	54,475
Total cost	<u>1,677,211</u>

End value and Valuation Surveyor's opinion

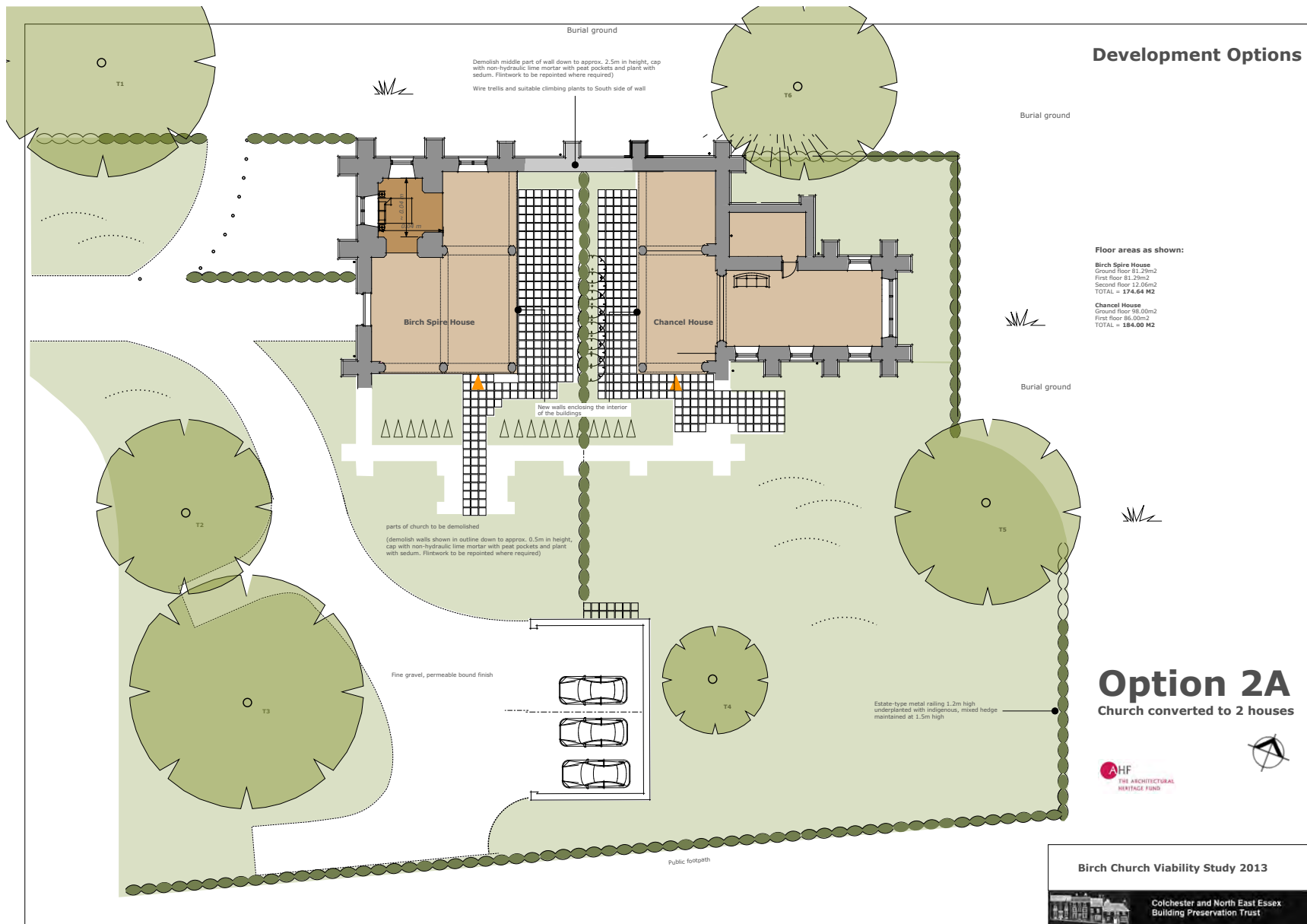
'In respect of Scheme No. 1 this is obvious particularly impressive but becomes quite a mammoth project for anybody to take on and are minded that the resale value would be a little under £1,000,000, i.e. in the region of £950,000.'

£950,000

Development Option 2A

Development as 2 houses, Spire House and Chancel House

2A



4.2.3 Option 2A

Partial demolition and development as 2 houses

Description

Like Option One, this option retains the Spire, the Chancel and the Vestry and the exterior wall of the North aisle but only up to the height of the existing string course at approximately 2m high to give privacy and to be a backdrop to the retained burials on the land immediately to the North side of the wall.

The Chancel is made into a separate dwelling and given additional floorspace over and above Option One with the insertion of a third floor mezzanine.

The Spire would be adapted as Option One with a first floor level that spanned the entire footprint and a second floor level within the Spire itself.

The total floor areas would be:

Birch Spire House – 232m² over 3 floors

Chancel House – 150m² over 2^{1/2} floors

Extent of fabric retention

As Option One except the north wall of the North Aisle is retained at a lower height to avoid structural instability.

The remaining walls of the church that are not utilised in the conversion will be demolished to approximately 1 metre above ground. They would be capped with lime mortar and sedum planted in soil pockets. The flint facing will be repaired and re-pointed as required.

Access, parking and garden space

The scheme would include a 4 car garage and additional parking for 3 cars.

The site would be divided into two garden areas although the entrance area off the shared, private drive would only be semi-private for Birch Spire House. Creating a suitable, entirely private garden space for this property is a design challenge yet to be

resolved. Chancel House has a substantial private garden and benefits from having space to the north side of the building.

The space between Birch Spire House and Chancel House would be divided but would be useful, sheltered, outdoor living areas for each property.

Cost of development

Development option 2A

Construction costs	1,403,200
Fees @ 18%	252,576
Ecology	55,000
Archaeology	10,000
VAT on works	70,160
VAT on fees	63,515
Total cost	<u>1,854,451</u>

End value and Valuation Surveyor's opinion

'Scheme No. 2A we favour in terms of saleability and is in a form where it would be easy to attract either developer interest or carry out preparatory works and then sell each section independently. I particularly like the Chancel House as I feel that this has privacy and is probably easier to live in but obviously the Spire House has particular appeal and we are minded that each unit would have a value of £600,000.'

£1,200,000

Development Option 3

Development as a smaller, single house, Spire House

3



4.2.4 Option 3

Partial demolition and development as single house

Description

The majority of the church would be demolished under this option leaving only the Spire and adjacent Nave and N. Aisle bays as the other options.

Extent of fabric retention

The Chancel and Vestry would be demolished under this option although the North wall of the North Aisle would be retained at a lower height as Option Two. Some of the remaining walls of the church would be demolished to approximately 1 metre above ground and 'soft capped'. Other wall sections would be demolished entirely and their alignment marked on the ground.

Access, parking and garden space

The scheme would include a 2 car garage and additional parking for 2 cars.

The property will benefit from a large, South facing garden.

Cost of development

Development option 3

Construction costs	998,800
Fees @ 18%	168,984
Ecology	55,000
Archaeology	10,000
VAT on works	46,940
VAT on fees	47,795
Total cost	<u>1,226,571</u>

End value and Valuation Surveyor's opinion

'Scheme No. 3 is also quite satisfactory from a saleability point of view and with total control of the site increases the value of this single unit to £700,000.'

Total end value **£700,000**

4.3 Financial summary of the options 1, 2A & 3

4.3.1 Projected costs

A summary of the project cost estimates (rounded) is given below. However, for the purposes of this work we have reduced the likely fee estimate from 18% to 12% to reflect the current market where these costs are invariably trimmed back. This subsequently alters the liability for VAT on fees.

	Development option 1	Development option 2A	Development option 3	notes
construction costs	1,260,000	1,400,000	939,000	5% contingency
fees @ 12%	147,000	164,000	108,000	reduced fee
Ecology	55,000	55,000	55,000	
Archaeology	10,000	10,000	10,000	estimate
VAT on works	63,000	70,000	47,000	reduction of liability possible?
VAT on fees	29,000	33,000	22,000	reduced VAT
total costs	<u>1,567,500</u>	<u>1,735,500</u>	<u>1,180,400</u>	

4.3.2 Projected income for Options 1, 2A and 3

We have derived total income for the project based upon 3 assumptions:

1. that the Diocese/Church Commissioners would contribute to the cost of the development of the site by an amount equal to the majority of the costs that would otherwise be borne by them were the site to be cleared and a memorial garden established¹². Whilst we have no details of what the memorial garden might look like, we have assumed that this will be a simple scheme that preserves the outline of the walls of the church in the same manner as we suggest under our development options, landscaping, the erection of an interpretation board and a selection of hardwood benches.
2. that the BPT would continue to champion the project and, as part of any disposal by the Diocese, would help secure Listed Building Consent and Planning Permission for the project and that the cost of this project development work might be funded in part by a grant from the Architectural Heritage Fund.
3. that the expected sales receipts for the dwelling(s) produced by Fenn Wright are realised. Most people agree that these figures are realistic but conservative valuations and that a true valuation could only occur upon completion of the dwelling(s).

The table overleaf summarises the subsequent, commercial viability of Options 1, 2A and 3. It demonstrates that none of these options are commercially-viable.



Fig. 49

Income projection (Options 1, 2A & 3)

	<u>Option 1</u>	<u>Option 2A</u>	<u>Option 3</u>	
Grant from Diocese	180,800	180,800	180,800	cost of total demolition, ecology, temporary access and Archaeology but excluding cost of Memorial Garden
AHF Project Dev Grant	10,000	10,000	10,000	speculative at this stage
receipt on sales	950,000	1,200,000	700,000	
total income	1,140,800	1,390,800	890,800	
viability				
costs cf	-1,567,000	-1,735,000	-1,180,000	
income cf	1,140,800	1,390,000	890,000	
outcome	-426,200	-345,000	-290,000	

4.4 Developer-partner interest

It was always the case that the BPT would not be in a position to finance the development of the church. Our strategy (see 5.0 and 6.0, below) is to use our skills and experience in reconciling the design and conservation challenges of the site, the legal hurdles of obtaining the consent of the local planning authority and English Heritage and securing the agreement of the Diocese and the Church Commissioners to a project that would be a partnership venture with a private business or individual.

The point at which the BPT steps away and the developer-partner takes over has not been agreed and is very much open to further discussion but on the basis of an understanding that this occurs at an appropriate milestone within the development programme that is satisfactory to the Commissioners.

The Trust approached four firms to ascertain their possible interest. They were selected either because of prior notification by them of their interest in working with the BPT on this project or by previous collaboration with individual Trustees in their professional, work capacities. Two parties were selected for further discussion:

Mr and Mrs G. Cottee

Mr GM & Mrs GT Cottee
Spring House
Ransom Road
Tiptree
Essex CO5 0TL

Mr J.Harding and Mr M.Harding

Harding Homes Ltd
111 Crouch Street
Colchester
Essex CO3 3HA

Mr and Mrs Cottee would intend to develop the building as a single, family home for their own use. We have called this **Option 4**.

Mr Cottee is a Chartered Quantity Surveyor and a Director of Abacus Build (UK) Ltd, a

contracting development company based in Nayland. The firm undertake design and build, traditional and project management projects and have an annual turnover of around £4m. They are both quality assured under ISO9001, and carry both CHAS, Safe Contractor and Construction line accreditations.

If selected by the trust, Mr Cottee intends to develop the project as his family home although the project will be delivered via Abacus Build (UK) Ltd.

Mr Cottee has produced a cost plan (see Appendix iv) and is confident that the development of the church can be achieved within these parameters. The cost plan and the associated, sketch drawings of the preferred scheme of development (also attached as Appendix v) indicate the retention of the majority of the church with demolition limited to the South aisle. The building would be enclosed by new glazed screen walls fitted between the exposed arches and a structural steel frame inside the building would be designed to be independent of the historic fabric and carry all the new loads for the inserted floors.

The chancel would be restored as a single volume space without sub-division.

Total project costs are estimated to be:

£1,209,000 inc. VAT and a 10% contingency sum

or

£2,200 per m² gross internal floor area

On examination, a few items of detail within the cost schedule will need to be amended to make the scheme acceptable for LBC purposes but these amendments are unlikely to increase the estimated cost of the project.

Mssrs. Harding would intend to develop our **Option 2A** as two dwellings but with the addition of possibly acquiring 2 acres of land adjacent to the church for use as paddocks for the dwellings. There is consensus that any sale would be conditional that no building take place on the paddocks.

Trustees were familiar with this Colchester-based firm as they developed Charlie Brown's, East Street following initial feasibility work by the trust. This successful, residential development was notable as it was both high-risk (in that it involved a listed building in very poor condition that was located in a part of town where values were quite low) and it required enabling development. Harding Homes have gone on to develop many sites for both commercial and residential uses.

Mr Mark Harding and Mr Jason Harding think it possible to develop Option 2A, with amendments that increase the floor areas in each house, into a viable scheme. They have written to the Trust setting out their proposal – attached. Essentially, they would wish to develop the design of option 2A to a state where they could have the project priced by one of their favoured contractors who would also apply value engineering to the scheme.

To this end, they are not yet able to state unequivocally that they could proceed with the development of Birch Church. Much would depend upon the outcome of further design and costing investigations but they have stated that should they be selected by Trustees as their preferred development partner, they would expedite this work over a 6-8 week period, appointing Architects immediately.

Each of these propositions was discussed at a meeting of Trustees held on 25 September 2013.

Development Option 4

Development as a large, single house by Mr & Mrs Coffee

4



4.5 Option 4

Partial demolition and development as single house

Description

The majority of the church would be retained under this option with only the South aisle demolished. It is possible that the gable end walls of the South aisle could also be retained, subject to structural assessment (see Figure 5).

Extent of fabric retention

Most of the church fabric is kept and restored, retaining the appearance of the church largely intact when viewed from the North, East and West.

Access, parking and garden space

The scheme might include a 2 or 3 car garage and additional parking for 2 cars.

The property will benefit from a large, South facing garden.

Cost of development

Development option 4

Construction costs	1,040,917
Fees @ 18%	40,000
Ecology	55,000
Archaeology	10,000
VAT on works & fees	54,245
Total cost	<u>1,209,164</u>

End value

Fenn Wright are of the opinion that Option 4 would have a market value of £950,000 - £1,000,000.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Preferred development option

The Birch Church Working Group advised trustees that the scheme put forward by Mr and Mrs Cottee was preferred for the following reasons:

- Mr & Mrs Cottee were able to commit to acquisition immediately as they have undertaken sufficient work in order to establish viability to their satisfaction.
- As the intention is that the church would become their family home, there is less weight to the need for immediate, financial viability. The 'return' would be the creation of a distinctive and unique residence.
- A greater amount of historic fabric would be saved under the scheme that Mr Cottee has priced. Only the south aisle would be demolished.
- It was felt that the Cottee's proposal would be less contentious within the local community. Commercial projects that have on previous occasions, raised local suspicions of possible over-development.
- The Working Group thought the energy and enthusiasm of a 'self-builder' should not be underestimated and that in this instance, Mr Cottee has the additional benefit of being a construction industry professional.

The resolution of this meeting of trustees was:

1. The outline proposal put forward by Mr & Mrs Cottee be accepted as the preferred scheme for Birch Church.
2. That the Birch Church Working Group continue discussions with Mr Cottee to help refine the project prior to presentation to the Church Commissioners and Chelmsford Diocese.
3. That the Birch Church Viability Study adopts these recommendations.
4. That detailed enquiries are made to establish the ability of Mr Cottee to finance the project.
5. That consideration be given for the setting aside of a financial bond of an appropriate

amount to be held in a place to be agreed that may be used by the BPT or Colchester Borough Council or Chelmsford Diocese to secure the weather-tightness and stability of the building should works on site cease for any reason prior to the completion of these works.

5.2 Funding plan

The study clearly demonstrates that the site has a negative value. In these circumstances, we are of the view that a premium to the Diocese on sale of the site cannot be justified. For practical purposes, our funding plan attributes the site value to be nil.

The gap between the cost of development of options 1, 2 and 3 estimated by our Quantity Surveyor and the end value of the developments projected by Fenn Wright is substantial (between £290k and £426k). Were we to propose to develop the site entirely as a BPT project this conclusion would be enough to abandon such a venture not least because the most obvious funding sources¹³ would consider the scheme unviable.

The BPT do not have the resources to fill this gap. However, our selected developer-partner has assessed the project in an alternative way and is satisfied that the required works of both restoration and conversion are manageable. Mr and Mrs Cottee have advised us that they have access to sufficient resources to undertake the development at the estimated, £1,209,164 cost and enquiries are in hand to confirm this. However, there are at this stage many abnormal risks in undertaking this project such as the uncertainty of gaining planning permission and LBC for a scheme that involves substantial demolition and alteration, the precise extent and cost of the structural repairs required to the Spire, the duration, complexity and cost of site acquisition and rights of access, the unknown issues surrounding any below-ground archaeology and burials, the possibility of having to manage the relocation of protected species and creation of suitable, alternative habitats and the abnormal cost of gaining a temporary access to the site in order to limit the disruption of site traffic and operations on neighbours and the local community.

It is proposed the project be funded in the following way:

Cost of development of option 4	£1,209,164
Capital raised by purchaser	£1,018,364

The second, organised public event was the exhibition of the results of the study held on 4 and 5 October. More than 80 people attended over the 2 periods of the exhibition where trustees were on hand to guide them through the outcomes of the study and to answer questions. Exhibition panels helped to summarise the findings. In addition, attendees were invited to fill out a response form and 26 people did so on the day. A single form was later, posted to the trust and 2 people emailed the trust with comments after the exhibition.

The majority of these comments were positive. 23 respondents wanted the church/ spire to be saved. 3 respondents wanted the church demolished and 2 responses raised questions that were not adequately addressed within the exhibition/ at the event.

6 Action Plan

6.1 Immediate actions required

6.1.1 BPT and Mr Cottee to present the viability study to the Church Commissioners and Chelmsford Diocese and seek agreement to the development and funding principles contained therein.

6.2.2 Draft partnership agreement between the BPT and Mr & Mrs Cottee.

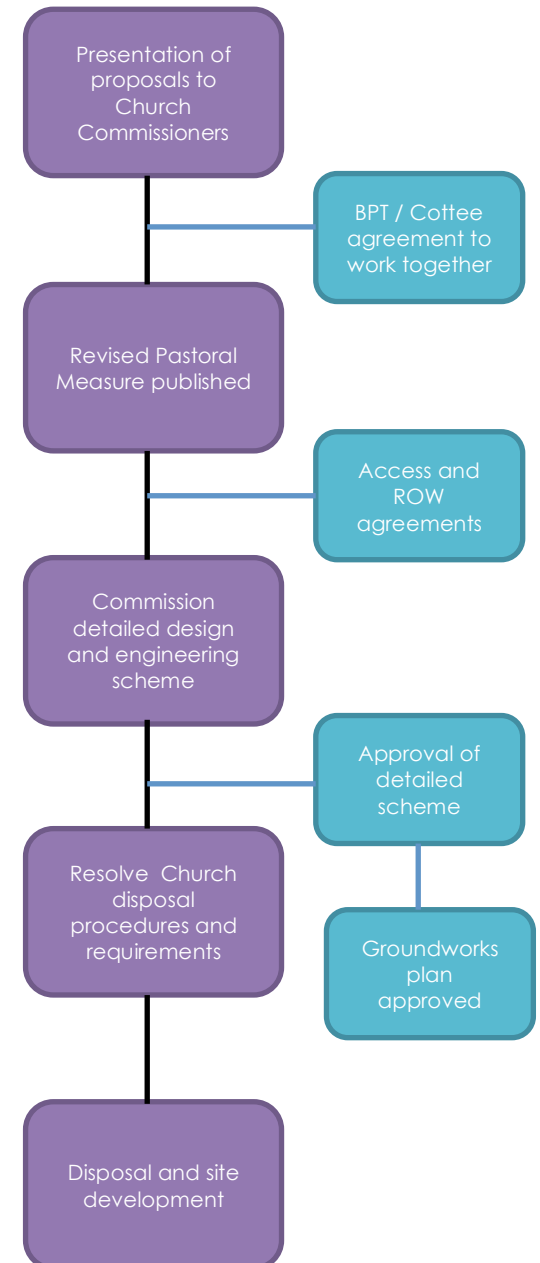
6.2.3 Draft agreement between Mr & Mrs Cottee and the Birch Farms Estate for temporary access

6.2.4 Draft agreement between Mr & Mrs Cottee and Birch Farms Estate for RoW across access driveway.

6.2.5 BPT to apply to AHF for a project development grant

6.2.6 Commission a detailed site survey of the building, topography, landscape and graves

6.2.7 Commission planning application drawings



6.2.8 Commission ecological surveys

6.2.9 Present planning proposals to Church Commissioners and Chelmsford Diocese

6.2.10 Draft Heads of Terms Agreement between the Church Commissioners/ Diocese and Mr & Mrs Cottee. This agreement will include approval of detailed plans, compliance with the procedures on dealing with human remains, approval of the relocation of existing grave markers to the active burial area, any covenants deemed necessary and receipt of planning permission and listed building consent.

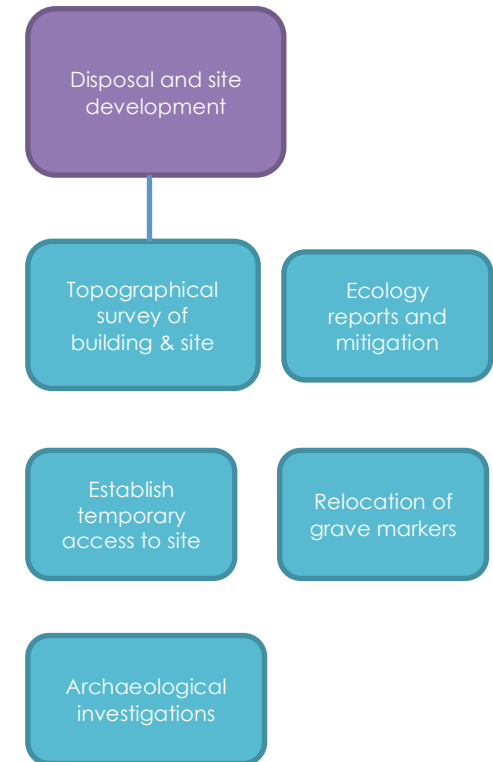
7.1 Development and disposal plan

As above.

Despite the findings of this viability study, the Church Commissioners and the Diocese could still seek approval of the Secretary of State to demolish Birch Church. We would urge them not to as this study has revealed an option that saves the majority of this heritage asset, preserves the special character and appearance of the Birch Conservation Area (Figure 1), maintains a distinctive local landmark and is a project that has overwhelming, local support.

However, the next 12 months are critical in both presenting adequate, additional evidence to the Church to assure them that sale and restoration is the most appropriate option for them and working through the many complex, conservation, design and legal issues that this project will involve.

Mr and Mrs Cottee have confirmed that they wish the Trust to assist them with this work and to this end, we will be drawing up a consultancy agreement over the coming weeks. The trust would expect to work closely with the Commissioners, the Chelmsford Diocese, Colchester Borough Council, neighbours and adjacent landowners during this period. We will use our local knowledge, contacts, technical expertise and experience to help guide the project to a successful outcome.



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Appendices

- i) Conservation Architect's building condition report, Purcell Miller Tritton (2012)
- ii) Conservation Engineer's building condition report, the Morton Partnership (2013)
- iii) Relevant correspondence
- iv) Cost estimates:
 - Option 1
 - Option 2A
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 - Option 4
- v) Option 4 draft floor layouts, Mr Cottee (2013)
- vi) Temporary access road and compound
- vii) Proposed 'soft capping' of demolished walls.
- viii) Ecology summary report, DF Clarke Bionomique Ltd (2013)
- ix) Valuation of development options 1, 2A & 3, Fenn Wright (2013)
- x) Public meeting notes (June 2013)
- xi) Photo catalogue sent to the Architectural Heritage Fund (2013)
- xii) Birch Conservation Area, Colchester Borough Council (1993)
- xiii) Survey drawings of church, Freeland Rees Roberts (1998)

People and organisations consulted

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Libby Kirkby-Taylor | Conservation Officer, Colchester Borough Council |
| 2. Simon Cairns | Projects Manager, Colchester Borough Council |
| 3. Tom Ashley | The Victorian Society |
| 4. John Neale | English Heritage |
| 5. Matthew Saunders | The Ancient Monuments Society |
| 6. Claire Griffiths | The Church Commissioners |
| 7. Kevin Quinlan | Surveyor, The Diocese of Chelmsford |
| 8. Birch Parish Council | |
| 9. Elaine Bowtle | Chair, Birch Parish Council |
| 10. Cllr Kevin Bentley | ECC and CBC |
| 11. Cllr Andrew Ellis | CBC |
| 12. Cllr Jo Hayes | Heritage Champion, CBC |
| 13. approx. 110 people
from the Birch community | via a public meeting held on 7 June 2013 and a Public Exhibition held
on 4 th and 5 th October 2013 |

David Balcombe
Director
Colchester & NE Essex Building Preservation Trust

October 2013

colchesterbpt.co.uk