



Colchester & North East Essex Building Preservation Trust

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18 January 2013

Ms Anne Griffiths
Pastoral and Closed Churches
Church Commissioners
Church House
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3AZ

Dear Madam

**Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011
Closed church building of St Peter, Birch
Diocese of Chelmsford**

Colchester Borough Council has forwarded the draft Pastoral Scheme seeking the demolition of this closed church for consideration by our trust.

The Colchester and North East Essex Building Preservation Trust is a charity concerned with the conservation of the built heritage of this locality. In pursuing this objective we work closely with local authorities, community groups and other organisations and have in the past, rescued 'buildings at risk' through application of local expertise and grant assistance.

The value of St Peter's Church as a historical monument is not in question. It is the centrepiece of the Birch Conservation Area and is listed Grade II as a designated heritage asset. The spire also dominates the surrounding landscape.

You may be aware that, in an attempt to secure an alternative use for the church, our trustees led in the establishment of the Birch Spire Arts Trust and developed a project that received widespread support. The project would have preserved the building in its entirety.

The feasibility study examined the cost and future viability of this proposal in considerable detail and the Birch Spire Arts Trust were encouraged by a stage 1 approval from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Unfortunately, a grant from the HLF did not materialise and the project was reluctantly abandoned.

The Colchester and North East Essex Building Preservation Trust do not wish to resurrect this project as a consequence of this draft pastoral scheme. However, we believe a solution is long overdue and would very much like to take part in the future discussion that should include options other than total demolition.

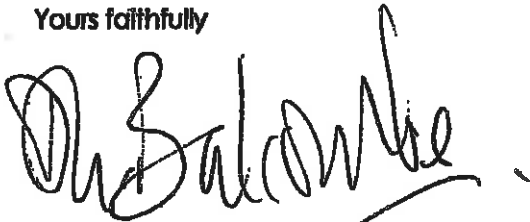
At present, these options may be:

1. Demolish the Nave, Aisles and Chancel and put efforts into the preservation of the Spire only. Establish local group to take over responsibility for site.
2. As above, but convert the Spire to a holiday let. Consider its care in the Landmark Trust portfolio.
3. As above, but sell site with a planning brief and indicative scheme for conversion to a single house, combined with a ground floor extension. Use former floor area of Nave etc as a walled, private garden perhaps retaining parts of the perimeter walls as a boundary.

I reiterate – the trust would be very willing to take part in a discussion of these and possibly other options that we believe is a prerequisite to finding a definitive solution for this building. We therefore urge the Bishop to commission a simple and expeditious study to examine the alternatives to total demolition. This study may understandably, exclude an option for the preservation of the church in its entirety.

Please copy subsequent correspondence to me at the above address.

Yours faithfully



David Balcombe
Director

cc C&NEE BPT trustees
Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Alistair Day, Colchester Borough Council
Libby Kirby-Taylor, Essex County Council