



Colchester

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Environmental & Protective Services

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Your ref:

Our ref: 122155

Date: 24 January 2013

Dear Madam

Proposal: Notification of the Demolition of the listed building of St Peters Church, Church Road, Birch.

Location: St Peters Church, Church Road, Birch, Colchester, Colchester

Thank you for your letter dated 26 January seeking this Council's comments on the proposal to demolish the church of St Peter under the redundant pastoral measures scheme.

It is understood that Birch Church was closed some 22 years ago. A proposal to use the church for a community art centre was proposed by the Birch Spires Arts Trust; the Trust was however unsuccessful in its bid to secure heritage lottery funding. A scheme for the conversion of the church to residential use with supporting enabling development was put forward by Courthold Properties in about 2006; the size of the enabling development was strongly opposed by the local community however.

The Church of St Peter has suffered from a lack of regular maintenance of a number of years. A condition survey of the church (prepared by PMT) was recently submitted to this Council by the Church Commissioners. This report shows that the church has deteriorated significantly in recent years (certainly when compared to condition survey undertaken by Courthold Properties). It is understood that the schedule of repairs and associated costs are based on an ideal restoration rather than a scheme that would perhaps come forward as a part of a conversion proposal. It is also important to note that the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states where there is evidence of deliberate neglect of or damage to a heritage asset the deteriorated state of the heritage asset should not be taken into account in any decision (paragraph 130).

The Church of St Peter is a nationally important building by important architect and is listed grade II for its special architectural or historic interest. The church forms both a significant local landmark and the centre piece of the Birch Conservation Area.

The proposal to demolish the Church of St Peter constitutes substantial harm. The Framework states (paragraph 133) that:

Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and
- no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and
- conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
- the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.

Whilst it is understood that the Church of St Peter has been on sale for since its closure, the church does not appear to have actively marketed for sale – for example via local / national press, a property auction houses or through specialist websites (such as Save Britain's Heritage). This Council would urge that a final concerted marketing initiative is undertaken before any decision is taken in respect of Church of St Peter.

If the decision is taken to demolition the Church of St Peter, this Council would ask that the possibility to retaining the church spire (which is a prominent local landmark) is fully explored; should this not prove to be feasible, it is recommended that the footprint of the building is retained (600mm) with the nave / aisles are a memorial garden. A full recording survey of the church should also be carried out prior to any demolition works being undertaken.

This Council has received an objection letter to the proposed demolition of the Church of St Peter and I attach a copy of this letter for your records / consideration.

Finally, I would be grateful if you could keep this Council informed of any decision that is made in respect of Church of St Peter.

Yours sincerely

Alistair Day

Alistair Day
Planning Officer

Application Number: 122155

Name: Tim Bugg

Address:

Tel:

Email:

Date and time of comment left: 13-01-2013 17:13

Comment Type: Object to Proposal

Comment:

What an awful decision it would be to demolish this beautiful landmark!

Both my sister & myself were Christened in St Peters and both our Grandparents are laid to rest in the Churchyard.

Please keep St Peters Church!

