

ADVISORY BOARD FOR  
REDUNDANT CHURCHES

Fielden House, L  
Westminster, Lo  
Telephone: 01-

ANNEX III

Miss A. Dickens,  
Redundant Churches Department,  
Church Commissioners.

Your Ref: RC8/40c/JDB

4th October, 1988.

Dear Miss Dickens,

14/10  
JDB/410

St. Peter, Birch  
Diocese of Chelmsford

At its meeting on 4th October, 1988 the Board considered your application for approval of plans with regard to this church and it was

AGREED: That the Church Commissioners be informed that the Advisory Board regards the church of St. Peter, Birch, Diocese of Chelmsford, as a building of architectural, historic and archaeological interest and recommends that a suitable alternative use be sought for it.

The church is listed grade II and was designed by S.S. Teulon. Whilst the building lacks the idiosyncracies of style that give his buildings their special character, it is nevertheless a good example of the gothic style of the period and any adaptation must be carried out with care.

Both the surviving furnishings from the previous church, the modern furnishings, the stained glass and the organ, should all be found appropriate new homes. Any disturbance of the site would need to be done under archaeological supervision.

Yours sincerely,

Imelda Taggart  
Secretary to the Board.

# ADVISORY BOARD FOR REDUNDANT CHURCHES

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Michael Gillingham, M.A., F.S.A.

Secretary:  
Jeffrey West, Ph.D., F.S.A.

John Bevan, Esq.,  
Redundant Churches Department  
Church Commissioners

30 July 1993

Ref. RC8/40C/JB

Dear John 2/8

BIRCH, ST. PETER (CHELMSFORD)

Your request for the Board's final advice on the Church of St. Peter, Birch, was considered by the Board at its meeting on the 28th July 1993.

In considering its advice, the Board noted that the Board of Governors had accepted the Redundant Churches Committee's recommendation that a Draft Pastoral Scheme providing for the demolition of the building should be issued. The Board also noted that the diocese had received an informal response from both the County and Borough Councils to the effect that neither Council is in a position to take responsibility for the care and future maintenance of this building. A formal confirmation of these views is expected in the near future. In the light of these reports, the Board agreed with some reluctance that it would raise no objection to demolition, and advised that where possible new homes should be found for the more distinctive furnishings. The Board wished to draw particular attention to the stalls of 1919, the cast iron Royal Arms of 1816-37, the Royal Arms of 1792, the Benefactions board, the turret clock by Gillett and Johnstone of 1897, and the watercolour drawing of the church dated c.1920.

Yours sincerely,



Jeffrey West  
Secretary to the Board

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The Board advises the Church Commissioners on the historic and archaeological interest and architectural quality of Anglican churches proposed for redundancy under the provisions of the Pastoral Measure, 1983.

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John Bevan Esq.,  
Redundant Churches Division,  
Church Commissioners.

7th October, 1994.

Your Ref: RC8/40C  
Our Ref: SB/Chelmsford

Dear John,

10/10

## Birch St. Peter

Thank you for letting me have a copy of your note of the site meeting on 23rd September.

At the Board meeting on 5th October I reported that English Heritage and the County and Borough Councils had agreed to investigate and assess possible uses and grant aid for St. Peter's. If it proved feasible to produce a planning brief the church would be marketed nationally and locally for a further three month period. Although in July, 1994, the Board agreed that it would raise no objection to demolition, this decision was taken with with "some reluctance". The Board was therefore pleased to hear that further efforts are to be made to find a suitable alternative use.

Yours sincerely,



Saba Bannatyne

**ADVISORY BOARD FOR  
REDUNDANT CHURCHES**

Fielden House, Little College  
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Mrs. Dawn Christmas  
Redundant Churches Division  
Church Commissioners

5 June 1998

Your ref: RC8/40C

Dear Dawn,

**BIRCH, ST. PETER (CHELMSFORD)**

Your request for the Board's advice on a proposal to vest the tower of St. Peter, Birch, in the Churches Conservation Trust, was considered by the Board at its meeting on the 3rd June.

Having reviewed the case the Board advised against vesting the tower in the CCT on the grounds that it was not considered to be of vesting standard in its own right.

While recognising the value of the church as a feature in the landscape, the Board remains of the view that the church as an entity is not of the standard worthy of vesting in the Churches Conservation Trust. As regards vesting the tower alone, I am directed to say that the Board does not consider it acceptable to use the CCT as an expedient to alleviate the financial problems of potential end users, particularly when neither the church nor the part proposed for vesting is considered to be of vesting standard.

I am also directed to draw attention to the furnishings of the building and the recommendation made at the close of the CCC report [PM1445, p.7]. The Board remains of the view that good homes should be found for the furnishings noted in the CCC report.

Yours sincerely,

  
Jeffrey West  
Secretary to the Board

*c.c. Churches Conservation Trust*

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Martin Elengorn Esq.,  
Redundant Churches Division,  
Church Commissioners,  
1 Millbank, SW1P 3JZ

20 July 1998

Dear Martin,

**BIRCH, ST. PETER (DIOCESE OF CHELMSFORD)**

I refer to your letter of 16 July, in which you ask for some amplification of the Board's advice on St. Peter's, Birch. As comment is requested for your meeting on 22 July, I referred your request to the Board's Chairman on 17 July.

As the author *The Churches of S. S. Teulon* (1982), Matthew Saunders' views (letter of 22 March 1984) are of considerable interest, particularly as his letter gives a fuller account of the building than appears in his earlier handbook. Like *The Ecclesiologist*, which described the church as being of "average character", Saunders considered Birch to be a "tame work by a nationally celebrated maverick" which is of "scholarly interest only". This description applies to the church as a whole and, like Pevsner, almost the only remark passed by Saunders on the tower and spire is that it rises to 110' in height.

As an entity, the Board did not consider the tower and spire to be of notable historic interest; either in the context of mid nineteenth-century ecclesiastical architecture nationally, or in the context of Teulon's career and output as an architect. Likewise, while the church is of some archaeological interest to the nineteenth century development of Birch, but it was not considered to be of significant local or national importance.

The same assessment applies to the architectural quality of the tower and spire. Again, Saunders judges Birch (as a whole) to be a building of "completely conventional but handsome design", and the epithet which Saunders applies to Benilton could equally be applied to Birch: it is a "design to which no-one could take exception". It was the Board's view that the tower and spire were neither distinctive in terms of their interest and quality, nor of such national importance to merit preservation "in the interest of the Nation and the Church of England".

As to the value of the church as a feature in the landscape, the CCC rightly notes that the "church stands in an elevated position on the crest of a ridge from which it can be

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seen for some distance". There can be no question but that the tower and spire make a signal contribution to the landscape value of the church, and must be regarded as significant.

In summary, the overall importance of the tower and spire of Birch - as opposed to the church as a whole - rests almost entirely on its value as a feature in the landscape. As part of a larger structure, the Board did not consider the tower and spire to be distinctive, nor indeed distinguishable from the quality and interest of the church as a whole.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey West". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Jeffrey West  
Secretary to the Board

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REDUNDANT CHURCHES

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Secretary:  
Jeffrey West, Ph.D., F.S.A.

Ms Georgina Seward  
Redundant Churches Division  
Church Commissioners

Your ref: RC/40C

Dear Georgina,

**BIRCH, ST. PETER (CHELMSFORD)**


Your request for the Board's advice on two proposals submitted for the conversion of St. Peter, Birch, to use by the Birch Spire Arts Trust, was considered by the Board at its meeting on the 9th December.

Having considered both Option A and B, the Board recommended approval of Option A without further comment at this stage. As regards Option B, the Board recommended that the proposal be revised to provide for circulation spaces and staircases in the aisles. In making this recommendation, the Board was aware that a consequence of the suggested revision would be smaller rooms in the central spaces of the building.

The Board also advised that an indication should be given on the final, detailed plans of any excavations within the churchyard to provide main services, car parking, and so forth. The Board considered it possible that such excavations may have archaeological implications for sub-surface deposits.

During the course of the Board's discussion of these proposals, I was directed to ascertain what action has been taken with regard to the contents of the building. If the contents listed in the CCC report remain within the church, the Board may wish to offer further advice on the disposal of the particular furnishings or fittings, or the preservation of those which are to remain within the building.

Yours sincerely,

  
Jeffrey West  
Secretary to the Board

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**ADVISORY BOARD FOR  
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Direct line : 020 7898 1872

RC8/40

Joanne Benson  
Redundant Churches Division  
Church Commissioners,  
1 Millbank  
SW1P 3JZ

31 July 2000



Dear Joanne,

**BIRCH, ST PETER (Chelmsford)**

Your request for advice on proposals for the removal of glass and a monument from the church of St. Peter, Birch, was considered by the Board at its meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> July.

In considering its advice, the Board regretted that the proposed meeting with the Diocesan Furnishings Officer had not taken place, and considered that clarification of the long-term plans for the contents remained in the general interest.

As the Board regards the Arts & Crafts glass of the east window and the plaster monument by Ellen Mary Rope to be objects of interest and aesthetic quality, it advised that their removal be approved if they are considered to be genuinely at risk.

In the event of removal from the church, the Board advised that they should be safeguarded pending a decision on the future of the building, or the return of these objects to their original positions in the church (see Furnishing Officer's Report, 23 May 2000, para 2).

Yours sincerely,



Jeffrey West  
Secretary

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REDUNDANT CHURCHES**

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Your ref: RC8/40

Marie Papworth,  
Redundant Churches Division  
Church Commissioners,  
Elizabeth House,  
39 York Road  
SE1 7NQ

5 October 2001

Dear Marie,

**BIRCH, ST PETER (Chelmsford)**

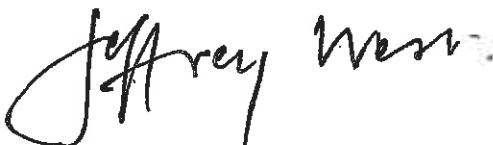
Your request for the Board's advice on revised plans for the conversion of St. Peter's, Birch, to use by the Birch Spire Arts Trust, was considered at the board meeting on 3 October.

Having considered the plans, the Board agreed that the proposals would preserve both the exterior and interior with the minimum of alteration. It was therefore agreed to recommend approval of the scheme as submitted.

As regards matters of detail, concern was expressed at the number of roof-lights – although it was appreciated that the positioning of them would reduce their impact on the appearance of the building. It was suggested that the need for so many roof-lights might be reduced by considering the replacement of any 'cathedral' glass by clear glass.

Concern was also expressed about the Mary Lownes glass and the memorial by Ellen Mary Rope (raised in my letters of 30 May & 31 July 2000). I am directed to ask about the provisions made to safeguard these objects.

Yours sincerely,



Jeffrey West  
Secretary

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Statutory Advisory Committee

Jeffrey West Ph D, FSA  
Senior Advisor

Anne Griffiths  
Closed Churches Division  
Church House  
Great Smith Street  
London SW1P 3AZ

Your Ref: RC8/40C

5 February 2013

Dear Anne,

**BIRCH, ST PETER (Chelmsford)**

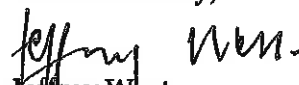
I refer to the Draft Pastoral (Church Buildings Disposal) Scheme issued for the closed church of St. Peter, Birch (Chelmsford), which was referred to the Statutory Advisory Committee at a meeting held on 23 January 2013.

In noting the provisions of the scheme and the Advisory Board's final advice of 1993, the Committee received an oral report on a recent member level site visit to consider the implications of retaining the NW tower and W front as features of value in the landscape and village scene. While it was understood that such a proposal had been suggested as a compromise position on the part of the Victorian Society and Ancient Monuments Society, the following comments are non-statutory and do not constitute a representation for or against the Scheme.

Setting aside the matter of cost, though the NW tower and W front form a single composition, whereas the NW tower is in principle a self-supporting structure, the W walls of the nave and S aisle are part of the nave which, if demolished, would leave the façade without any substantive means of support other than the tower. While it is not for the SAC to suggest how the façade walls might be supported, it was observed that not only could buttressing the W façade adversely affect its architectural quality, but it also had potential for high impacts on the archaeology of the site – notably the remains of the medieval church, its burials and churchyard. It was also observed that even if the façade could be preserved without unacceptable damage to the archaeology of the site, provision would be required for its future preservation, maintenance and repair.

As regards the impact of demolition on the contents of the church, attention was drawn to the reredos, the stained glass of the E window by Mary Loundes (the tracery glass is C19 and not of national interest), the aisle windows by Henry Holiday, and the bell by Thomas Gardiner of 1737, all of which were regarded as being of national interest and were worthy of preservation by relocation [the relocation of the Royal Arms and monument to Margaret Lewis and Lucy Higginbottom (by Mary Ellen Rope) to the church at Layer Breton, was noted]. In the case of the stained glass, the Committee advised that it be referred to the Repository and that the Loundes window is removed and relocated by an accredited conservator.

Yours sincerely,

  
Jeffrey West  
Senior Advisor

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