

ABC Development Project - Update 16th May 2011

Since being commissioned by the Church Meeting of March 2010 the ABC Development Group have, with JBKS Architects, been working on an agreed plan for the development of the whole of the ABC site. This required various site assessments including a Tree Survey, Asbestos Survey and an Archaeological Survey. The first two have been completed and the latter is in the process of being arranged.

We were required to produce a Statement of Significance and Statement of Need for use in our conversations with interested parties including English Heritage, the Listed Buildings Advisory Committee (LBAC) of the Baptist Union and the Conservation and Planning sections of the Vale of the White Horse District Council. We have had two on site meetings with English Heritage and two with the LBAC. We had one informal on site meeting with representatives of the Vale of the White Horse DC. We were planning to have a second meeting with the VOWHDC but as this would be charged for we waited for the key responses from the other two groups.

English Heritage

- Found the removal of one of the stairs to the gallery to be regrettable
- Were concerned about the large proposed openings in the external walls linking through to the proposed additions
- Wish the entrance in the main facade to remain the principal entrance
- Considered that the wrap around would lead to the loss of the existing hall and impact on the setting of the building,
- Think it likely that the hall forms part of the original church building and is therefore of some significance as evidence of the way that this has always been a building that was not simply used for worship but accommodated community facilities
- Remain deeply concerned about the impact of the wrap around obscuring the side elevations and the way the proposed foyer steps forward, competing with the grand frontage of the listed building.
- Accepted that, while there is an argument for an extension to house some extra facilities, think that this could be provided by land to the West without compromising the historic fabric or setting of the building.
- Noted that the Statement of Need concentrates on the need to provide a flexible space for Worship and other activities. This could primarily be addressed through reordering the main body of the church and removing the pews. English Heritage is content for this to take place, and for the internal screen at the entrance to be removed

LBAC (notes from verbal comments)

- Can the existing hall be retained, extending the hall into the garden?
 - Height and extent forward of the proposed new foyer needs further justification. Couldn't it be alongside the church or, preferably set back.
 - The removal of the staircase hasn't been sufficiently justified in term of loss of symmetry
 - Principle of removing pews and retaining some upstairs doesn't seem to be a problem
 - Re-ordering the Sanctuary would help us to maximise the use of our current space In the light of the very strong feedback concerning the retention of the outline of our current buildings the Development Group felt that the financial implications of challenging these views were not a sensible course to take. Although disappointing we firmly believe that God's hand is in the process and we look forward, confidently, to His continuing guidance.
- Recommendation Our recommendation is that we take the core of the plans produced by JBKS, covering just the Sanctuary and Gallery, which would provide us with the modernising and updating urgently needed in that area, but ensuring that any work done is in line with the planned overall development of the site.

This will deliver, as a first stage, a modernised and flexible Sanctuary, and greatly enhance our premises. This also gives us the time to look afresh at the issue of the surrounding rooms and to find a scheme that accommodates the fact that we are a listed building, but also one which meets the needs of our congregation in the 21st Century

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