

Committee:	Conservation Area Advisory Group
Date:	Tuesday 8 July 2003
Subject:	Draft Planning Brief: St Elisabeth's Church, Victoria Drive
Report of:	Head of Planning
Ward(s):	Old Town
Purpose:	To seek Members views on the Draft Planning Brief.
Recommendations:	That the Members support the Draft Planning Brief for St Elisabeth's Church.
Contact:	Jeff Collard, Development Planning Officer 68 Grove Road, Tel. 415252.

1. Background

1.1 St Elisabeth's church in Victoria Drive has been declared redundant by the Church Commissioners. However, it is a Grade II Listed Building and as such, it is part of the nation's architectural and historical heritage and every effort must be made to retain the building and its architectural values.

1.2 A Draft Planning Brief has therefore been prepared in conjunction with Council officers and the various heritage and church agencies that have an interest in the building. These agencies include the Church Commissioners, the Diocese of Chichester, English Heritage and the Courtauld Institute of Art.

2.0 Comment

2.1 The assets of the building that are of particular value are as follows:

- It forms part of an intact and cohesive 1930's architectural group with adjoining vicarage and church hall.
- The murals by Hans Feibusch and their setting in the crypt are of great historical and artistic importance.

- The building is an intact period example of 1930's architecture that contains many contemporary features such as the Lady Chapel, wall hangings, altar rail and windows.

- The scale and prominence of the building is unique in Eastbourne and is integral to its status as a Listed Building.

2.2 Despite these assets, there are serious structural and operational difficulties, which suggest that it will be difficult to find a viable and productive future use for the site. Several building reports have been commissioned by the church over the last 20 years, and the latest report estimates that it would cost more than 3m to carry out repairs to the building. In addition, there is very limited car parking available on the site.

2.3 Nevertheless as a Listed Building, the Council must make all endeavours to identify a viable use for the building in partnership with the Church Commissioners and other agencies. There are many redundant churches across the country and many of these are listed buildings. Some of these have been converted for productive uses such as housing schemes, arts production and theatre uses, as well as commercial uses such as workspaces and offices. The Council must test these possibilities in accordance with Borough Plan policies.

2.4 If marketing were not successful, then the Church Commissioners would review future options for the building, including demolition. A new Planning Brief for the site would be prepared at that time.

3.0 Consultation

3.1 The Council's head member and members of the Planning and licensing Committee have given approval for the Draft planning Brief to go out to public consultation.

3.2 Because St Elisabeth's is such a prominent and important building, it is considered that the wider community should be invited to have their say on future plans for the site.

3.3 Residents within the vicinity of St Elisabeth's church have therefore been notified about the Brief and informed that a copy is available for public inspection at the Council Offices, 68 Grove Road.

3.4 In addition, copies of the Draft brief have been sent in to the central library and former old town library. A copy has also been sent to the Priest at St Elisabeth's to enable Parishioners to view its contents.

3.5 Finally, the church and heritage agencies have also been asked for their formal comments on the Brief. English Heritage, the Church Commissioners, the Twentieth Century Society, the Diocese of Chichester, the Courtauld Institute of Art and the Eastbourne Society have therefore been formally invited to comment.

3.6 Consultees have been informed that the date for final receipt of representations is 8 August 2003

4.0 Environmental Implications

4.1 There are important environmental implications with this proposal. The Draft Brief may be the last opportunity to retain a Grade II Listed Building that has been identified as part of the nation's heritage. By preparing a Draft Brief, which identifies and highlights the buildings assets and potential uses for the site, it may be possible to retain the former church as working building.

4.2 If a sustainable use can be identified, then there would be further environmental benefits in terms of recycling old buildings, reuse of materials, and so on.

5.0 Other Implications

5.1 No human resource, Financial, Youth, Human Rights or Anti-Poverty implications have been identified for this report.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 In view of the difficulties in finding a viable future use for the building, the Draft brief encourages a flexible approach from both the relevant agencies and from potential investors.

6.2 St Elisabeth's is a landmark building in Eastbourne and the wider community will no doubt have an interest in its future. Even though future-planning applications will be subject to the normal consultation and notification procedures, it is recommended that Members support the Draft Brief.

Lisa Rawlinson

SENIOR PLANNING OFFICER

Background papers:

The background paper used in compiling this report were as follows:-

1. St Elisabeth's Church – Draft Planning Brief, April 2003
2. Eastbourne Borough Plan 2001-2011, Revised Deposit Draft
3. Head of Planning's Report to the Planning and Licensing Committee on 17 June 2003.