

**VICTORIA ROAD CHAPEL, FARNBOROUGH**

**SUMMARY**

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Cabinet to approve a variation to the Capital programme of £44,000 to fund the roof restoration;
- That if the Farnborough Society indicate they wish to take forward option 2 set out in section 6 of the report then subject to Farnborough Society raising the capital funding to convert the Chapel to a columbarium within 2 years and establishing a legal entity to take a lease, the Solicitor to the Council be delegated authority to agree the terms and conditions of a lease to transfer a leasehold interest in the Chapel
- In the event that the Farnborough Society indicates they are not in a position to support option 2 then the Solicitor to the Council be delegated authority to apply for de-consecration of the Chapel and to make a bid in the capital programme, subject to viability, to convert the chapel to a residential use for letting.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this report is to:

- a) Request funding of £44,000 for the construction of a new structural roof and minor masonry repairs at Victoria Road Chapel, Farnborough to restore the building to its pre fire condition; and
- b) To agree the approach for the future of the chapel

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In July 2016, a fire caused by two sea scouts practising their fire lighting skills at the Chapel caused extensive damage to the roof structure, resulting in the roof being demolished.
- 2.2 The Council's Insurers would not cover the cost of repairs due to the council's failure to provide evidence of carrying out weekly property inspections on the chapel. Subsequently a nominal goodwill payment of £10,000 has been received from the insurers.
- 2.3 Scaffold to protect the chapel from further deterioration was erected in December 2016 and this has an ongoing financial implication as detailed in the financial implications section of this report.

### **3. HISTORY OF THE CHAPEL**

- 3.1 The cemetery was acquired by a predecessor council in 1859 for use as a burial ground. The chapel was built in 1859 and became consecrated when the sentence of consecration was made. Thus, the whole of the cemetery and chapel are consecrated land.
- 3.2 The Chapel has not been used for religious purposes since the early 1980's, though it had been used as a furniture store by the Council until shortly before the fire.
- 3.3 In 2002, Cabinet made a decision to demolish the Chapel, which required the land to be deconsecrated – a memorial was to be left on site. This approach appears to have floundered when bats were discovered in the Chapel and, despite obtaining a licence from Natural England to remove the bats, it would appear the demolition decision was put on hold in 2006 following some media interest. At that time, there were various alternative uses suggested including a music studio but none proved to be realistic and it would appear that no application for an Order to remove the effects of consecration was made.
- 3.4 There has been no correspondence with the Bishops of Guildford's registry since October 2009.
- 3.5 A potential project to create a columbarium originating from the Communities Service was discussed with the Farnborough Society, who then mounted a fund raising campaign on the basis that there would be a grant application and the grant funder would be likely to require matched funding. There is evidence that the Heritage Lottery Funding of £40,000 needed for immediate repairs was to be sought and the Garfield Weston Foundation was to be approached for the £65,000 thought to be needed for the conversion of the building to a columbarium. The Farnborough Society aimed to raise £5000 towards the additional cost of a card entry system, from fundraising events and from donations.
- 3.6 In May, the Farnborough Society submitted a report for the current cost of refurbishment and installation of a columbarium compiled by the Worthy Group. This was included a budget sheet detailing the works in the sum of £262,725.00.
- 3.7 The Council's current financial position coupled with its stated priorities mean that it is not recommended that we allocate these resources.

### **4. DETAILS OF ACTION SINCE THE FIRE**

- 4.1 After the fire, the Council has said it would restore the Chapel to its pre-fire condition. Initial protective supports to the building were put in place whilst decisions were made about the building's future. On 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2017, a Structural Engineer was employed to carry out an inspection of the Chapel. The conclusion of the report is the existing scaffold is not providing structural support to the remaining walls. It is however providing some protection from

the wind and, even if the gable peaks were to collapse, they would probably fall inwards due to the external restraint the scaffold affords.

4.2 If the scaffold were to be removed, it would be necessary to either:

- a) Restrain the gable walls against wind load but this would require a proper shoring system. This would be more expensive as such designs typically have to resist a lateral force applied at the head, equivalent to at least 10% of the weight of wall that they restrain; or
- b) Reduce the gable peaks height to 3m to match the sidewalls.

4.3 The alternative is to rebuild the structural roof. This rebuild has been designed by architects and tendered under the Council's building framework.

## **5. SHORT TERM PROPOSAL**

5.1 To follow through on our commitment it is proposed to adapt the existing scaffold and rebuild the structural roof as it appeared originally. This will consist of rafters complete with Collars, Ashlar pieces, Sarking board, battens and slate. The addition of roofing felt and insulation will put the building in its pre fire state and provide a warm roof, which could enable any future conversion works.

## **6. FUTURE**

6.1 As explain above the Farnborough Society has a longstanding interest in the future of the Chapel and prior to the fire was keen to work alongside the Council to secure its future as a columbarium. However, the Council now has higher priorities and whilst it would be happy to support a community organisation to take such a proposal forward it would only be with a view to an organisation such as the Farnborough Society undertaking the necessary fundraising and grant applications and would ideally include transferring the asset.

## **7. OPTIONS**

### **Option 1- Council to fund restoration of the Chapel as a columbarium.**

7.1 The Farnborough Society's quote shows a cost of the order of £262,725.00. This would need to be funded by borrowing with ongoing revenue implications in maintaining the building. When the columbarium project was conceived, it was never intended to be a council funded project and any such capital expenditure would need to be considered in light of other council competing capital projects. This is not considered to be affordable.

### **Option 2 - Restore the roof and let the Chapel for a columbarium subject to external funding being raised**

7.2 The level of proposed roof restoration is detailed in paragraph 5.1. This returns the building to its pre-fire condition. The Farnborough Society could be invited to form a Community Interest Company to take a lease of the

building, allowing the community to bring forward the columbarium project. The lease could be granted upon confirmation that sufficient funds having been raised, to include any grant funding, and with the CIC taking on future repairing and insuring obligations. This would need to be time limited, as the Council remains responsible for the empty building and the onerous inspection regime required by our insurers. If this option were to be agreed, a period of 2 years is recommended. If the building is to remain then it is important to find a viable use to prevent further cost and deterioration after restoration of the roof. A view on this option is currently being sought from the Farnborough Society and this will be reported at the meeting

### **Option 3 - Restore the roof, de-consecration and convert to a dwelling**

- 7.3 The building could be converted to a one bedroom dwelling by inserting a mezzanine floor. There is sufficient space to create car parking with turning area and a small terraced sitting out area. Mains services are available in the highway. The building is locally listed and such a conversion could respect the integral features of the building. The Chapel would only be suitable for letting given its location within the cemetery and in this way, the Council could maintain control over the tenants. A Local agent has confirmed that it would generate interest and provide a rental income. This option is recommended should the Farnborough Society not be able to raise the funds within a two year period, as a fall back option, to give the building a future and to end on going revenue liability. The restoration of the building with a warm roof will enable this to happen without incurring substantial conversion costs. The estimated further conversion costs are likely to be between £60,000 and £70,000 if the roof is insulated.

### **Option 4 - Demolition**

- 7.4 This has been considered previously by the council and rejected and is unlikely to find favour with the community.

## **8. IMPLICATIONS**

### **8.1 Risks**

The risks of collapse are as stated above. The works need to be undertaken before the winter worsens the weather.

### **8.2 Legal Implications**

Section 22 of the Care of Churches and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1991 provides that a Bishop of a diocese may order the removal of the legal effects of consecration, provided that the building is not held by any ecclesiastical corporation and that no purpose will be served by its remaining subject to the legal effects of consecration. The bishop must consider the preservation human remains buried in or beneath the affected building and the maintenance of orderly behaviour in the affected building. The file shows that there are no remains and therefore it seems likely that any such application would be successful.

### 8.3 Financial and Resource Implications

#### ***For restoration of the roof only***

A Framework Contractor has provided a quotation of £33,755.00 plus a contingency of £10,000.00 for any unforeseen works for the re-construction of the roof. The quotation is based on a Structural Engineers design work. These particular works should not exceed £44,000.00. Cost of borrowing £198.00 p.a. (short-term interest rates) plus MRP of £880.00 p.a.

This Framework Contractor has also provided an additional quotation of £17,340.00 for some internal remedial works, which are not part of the recommendation.

#### ***For funding the columbarium project***

Cost of borrowing of £262,725.00 is £1,182.00 p.a. plus MRP of £5,255.00 p.a.

### 8.4 Equalities Impact Implications

None

### 8.5 Property Implications

If the roof is restored but no permanent use for this building is found, then it will continue to deteriorate and be a drain on the council's revenue resources both in terms of maintenance and in terms of the cost of empty property inspection and keeping the Chapel secure. As an empty property, it is liable to break-ins and vandalism such as that which caused the fire in 2016

## 9. CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 Restoration of the roof will resolve the existing stability problems with the damaged fabric of the property and end the ongoing scaffolding costs.
- 9.2 It was never envisaged that the Council would fund the columbarium project and there are other competing priorities for capital funding which would be a better use of council resources.
- 9.3 It is unclear whether there is a realistic prospect of grant funding and fund raising coming forward and therefore a period of a 2 years will allow this to be established, giving the possibility of transferring this asset to the community should the project be achievable. If the community does not wish to pursue Option 3 then Option 4 should be undertaken.
- 9.4 If the columbarium project cannot be funded then converting the property to a dwelling for letting will at least preserve the appearance of this locally listed building whilst removing the revenue costs of an empty building.

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