

MINUTES OF CONGREGATIONAL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 25th SEPTEMBER 2007 (7.30pm).

PURPOSE OF MEETING.

To enable members of the congregation of Elgin High Church to be consulted on possible ways to develop and better use the church buildings.

ATTENDANCE.

Fifty-one members of the congregation attended the meeting.

WELCOME.

The Session Clerk, David Russell, welcomed those attending the meeting and conveyed apologies on behalf of the Minister, Rev. Julie Woods, who was unable to attend due to ill health.

INTRODUCTION.

The Auxiliary Minister, Rev. Anne Attenburrow, was in the Chair and opened the meeting with a reading and a prayer. She then read a message from the Minister which provided a brief background to the events that had led to the meeting being called. This included the possibility of creating a purpose built, modern community church building away from the centre of town altogether. The Property Committee had explored all possible avenues and had recommended to the Board that the sensible way forward was the development of existing church buildings. This recommendation was approved by the Board at a meeting held on 19th June 2007. The Minister indicated that whatever we decide to do it will be done carefully and will reflect the future of our church and enable us to move forwards in faith and friendship together.

PROPERTY COMMITTEE PROPOSALS.

The Property Convener, Donald Urquhart, outlined the Property Committee's proposals. It was emphasised that the list of desirable developments provided was in no way exhaustive and it would be for any member of the congregation to propose changes or alterations which they think will be of benefit to the congregation, the church and the community at large.

THE PROPOSALS.

The following proposals were outlined by Mr Urquhart:

- toilet accommodation for the disabled,
- prayer sanctuary and area for wheelchair users,
- office accommodation and former pipe organ enclosure,
- meeting rooms and family space,
- development of the Cock Loft,
- development of all or part of the church balcony,
- development of all or part of the hall balcony,
- use of the pend on the east side of the church.

FUTURE ACTION.

Mr Urquhart outlined the possible future action as follows:

Assuming that the congregation approves these proposals in principle then the next step would be to advise and consult both Moray Presbytery and the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland about our intentions

Thereafter professional consultants, most likely an architectural practice, would be employed to carry out feasibility or option studies, together with probable costs, in respect of the Congregational proposals.

In due course the consultant would advise and steer any project to its conclusion, which would include, design sketches, estimated costs, detailed planning and statutory approvals, contractor's tenders and final supervision of the project to its completion.

Consultations would be held at every stage in the projects progress and at any of the preliminary stages the project could be abandoned. Such consultants will themselves require the congregation to furnish a brief as to its exact wishes and intentions. Such consultants would, themselves, normally be employed only after submitting competitive fee offers to carry out their services as was done in respect of recent repairs and maintenance works.

It is hoped that the cost of the preliminary options and feasibility studies, at least, will be met by the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland. They would have to be consulted at stages throughout the project and would insist upon the above procedures being followed.

It is a condition of the General Trustees that such a meeting as this is held to protect the congregation and to ensure that when undertaking such a project everyone is working to the same goal.

COSTS.

Mr Urquhart indicated that it is not possible, at this time, to deal with costs or the necessary fund raising but he thought it necessary to remind everyone that much concerted effort will be required. This may include any or all of the following; simple fund raising, obtaining grants, use of bequests, public subscription, lottery funding, local authority support.

TIMESCALE.

Mr Urquhart indicated that, as with costs, there is not a great deal that can be said about time scales. However, the Board had previously indicated that such proposals should not necessarily be time driven.

PLENARY SESSION.

A wide-ranging discussion took place both during and following Mr Urquhart’s presentation. A variety of questions were raised and a number of suggestions were also put forward. Topics and issues raised included; options for toilet facilities, the number of pews to be removed, disabled access including the possible need for a lift, the best location for wheelchair area, the cost of a feasibility study (around £3,000) and the likelihood of funding from the General Trustees, possible conversion of vestry/office/session room area, overall potential costs (around £250,000?) and likelihood of securing grants, lottery funding etc., (mention was made that we could apply for a reduction in Ministries and Mission Allocation payments if major works planned), need for realistic time scales, optimism regarding the increasing numbers at the mother and toddler group and the expressed wish of several young parents to attend worship with their children.

Costs of ongoing works already in the five year plan, need for more storage space, poor representation of members of the congregation at this meeting, churches in general suffering from reduced congregations and having to link/amalgamate or close, view this as an opportunity, to do nothing is not an option.

Mr Urquhart closed the plenary session by inviting all members of the congregation to submit ideas, views and suggestions to the Property Committee.

CONCLUSION AND VOTE.

Those present voted unanimously in favour of proceeding to the next phase, namely to advise and consult both Moray Presbytery and the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland regarding the intention to develop and better use the buildings of Elgin High Church.

The Rev. Anne Attenburrow thanked Mr Urquhart and the Property Committee for their considerable efforts in taking matters to this stage. This was fully endorsed by those attending the meeting.

She then closed the meeting with the Benediction.

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Auxiliary Minister

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Clerk to the Board

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Date