



ENGLISH HERITAGE

## Places of Worship Forum

**Open Minutes of the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting held at 10.30am on Tuesday 9 October 2007 at The Law Society, 113 Chancery Lane, London, WC2**

**Members present:** Dr Christopher Wakeling (Chairman)  
Ms Sophie Andreae (Catholic Church Patrimony Committee)  
Mr Trevor Cooper (Ecclesiological Society) – also presenting item 6  
Dr Ian Dungavell (Joint Committee National Amenity Societies)  
Ms Paula Griffiths (Church of England, Archbishops' Council)  
Ms Linda Holder (Baptist Union of Great Britain)  
Mr Ian Serjeant (The Methodist Church)  
Mr Crispin Truman (Churches Conservation Trust)  
Mr Peter West (representing Hartley Oldham, United Reformed Church)

**Staff present:** Ms Sarah Brown (Head of Research, Places of Worship)  
Mr Nick Chapple (Places of Worship Policy Adviser)  
Mr Francis Kelly (Historic Buildings Inspector, P & D West) – item 5  
Mr Jeremy Lake (Inspector, Characterisation Team) – item 5  
Mr Richard Morrice (Inspector of Historic Buildings, Kent & East Sussex)  
Ms Joy Russell (Senior Architect, Research & Standards: Conservation)  
Ms Charlotte Tamvakis (Corporate Communications Manager)  
Mr Russell Walters (Head of Operations, Planning and Development)  
Ms Tania Weston (Grant Programmes Manager)  
Dr Reider Payne (Forum Secretary)

**Observers:** Ms Linda Alley (Commission Secretariat Asssitant)  
Mr Robert Green (Policy & Parliamentary Officer, Churches Conservation Trust)  
Ms Lizzie West (Head of Heritage Protection Research Policy)

## **Item 1 – Apologies, Announcements and Declarations of Interest**

### Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mr Frank Cranmer, Ms Judy Cligman, Mr Andrew Edwards, Mr Hartley Oldham, Mr Peter Beacham and Mr Peter Just.

### Announcements

- 1.2 The Forum welcomed Mr Peter West, who is representing the United Reformed Church at the meeting, and to Ms Linda Alley, Mr Robert Green and Ms Lizzie West, who were all observing the meeting.

### Declarations of Interest

- 1.3 There were no declarations of interest.

## **Item 2 – Open Minutes of the 7th Meeting held on 3 July 2007 (POWF 2007/9)**

- 2.1 The open minutes of the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting held on 3 July 2007, were to be signed by the Chairman, subject to four minor amendments.

## **Item 3 – Exempt Minutes of the 7th Meeting held on 3 July 2007 (POWF 2007/10/E)**

- 3.1 The exempt minutes of the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting held on 3 July 2007 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

## **Item 4 – Matters Arising and Members' Updates**

### A Glimpse of Heaven (paragraph 2.6)

- 4.1 Members were advised that publication of the paperback edition of *A Glimpse of Heaven* was expected to be in February 2008.

### The Churches Tourism Association (paragraph 2.7)

- 4.2 The Forum was informed that a member of staff from DCMS had been seconded to the Churches Tourism Association – this was a welcome sign of government assistance.

### Discussion of paper on proposed research and publication on conversion of places of worship no longer in religious use (paragraph 2.8)

- 4.3 Nick Chapple had hoped to present a full item paper to the Forum on this item, as it is likely to be an on-going contentious item. However, a members' update was instead to be presented later in the meeting.

Bats in Churches (paragraphs 3.7 – 3.10)

- 4.4.1 Richard Halsey and Paula Griffiths attended a meeting between the Bishop of Sodor and Man, Chairman of the Council for the Care of Churches (CCC) and the Minister of State at DEFRA, Joan Ruddock, on 24 July to discuss the on-going issue of bats in churches. The Minister had not been able to move on current legislation, but a further meeting is planned with English Nature on 19 October, to discuss improving the guidance available to congregations.
- 4.4.2 English Heritage will join with Natural England and the CCC to issue new, simple guidance to church congregations about managing the problems caused by bats. Congregations were often not aware that licences could be granted to move bats under certain exceptional circumstances, although the number granted annually was usually very small.

Friends Groups (paragraph 4.4)

- 4.5 The prevalence of Friends groups and their role has not yet been investigated. Reporting back on this will be held over until a later meeting of the Forum.

Heritage Protection Review (paragraph 6.5)

- 4.6 The HPA for Rochester Cathedral and precinct was substantially complete, while the Forum was advised that work in the diocese of Bath and Wells was proceeding well.

Grade II Statutory Work (paragraph 7.2)

- 4.7 The Forum was informed that the revised advice on grade II places of worship was nearly ready to be released to the four denominations that will be affected, pending agreement internally on a date for implementation of the changes in procedure. Implementation is currently intended for January 2008.

Taking Stock Project (paragraph 2.4)

- 4.8 The Forum was advised on progress made with a number of schemes. That at Portsmouth had been successfully completed, while work was well under way at Liverpool. Further, project work was also now in hand at Leeds and Middlesbrough, where church closures (especially in Leeds) were causing concern. Sarah Brown was happy to provide further details on request to Forum members.

Head of Places of Worship Policy

- 4.9 The Forum was informed that a total of 121 applications had been received for this vacancy, eight had been interviewed and one person offered the post. Staff were still awaiting a formal acceptance – and it was hoped the head of places of worship policy will be able to start on 2 January 2008.

New uses for historic places of worship (see above)

- 4.10.1 Nick Chapple informed the Forum of progress made since the last POWF meeting. This included a shortlist of examples to be used as case studies throughout the country. The next steps identified are to complete research on these case studies and to undertake consultation on the specific advice to be contained in the publication.
- 4.10.2 Forum members suggested that a difference should be made between conversion for public/community uses and conversion for private or commercial uses. Indeed, the Forum stressed that conversion to such public/community use was usually far more important and a far more desirable outcome than conversion to a private residence. In connection with this, members of the Forum made further enquiry as to the attitude of the Charity Commissioners to such disposals – an issue discussed by POWF in July. Staff advised that the issues raised then were still ongoing.
- 4.10.3 Omissions were also identified in terms of archaeology. Further, a Forum member commented on the dominance of Anglican places of worship – a fact explained by the preponderance of listed Anglican churches nationwide. Pressed further on the inclusion of Roman Catholic Churches on the list of case studies, staff drew the Panel's attention to the presence of St Wilfrid's Roman Catholic Church in Hulme, Manchester.

#### Heritage Protection Legislation

- 4.11 Richard Morrice, currently on secondment to the Heritage Protection Bill Team at DCMS, summarised the proposals for the future of the ecclesiastical exemption. The forthcoming draft Heritage Protection Bill will set out the main lines of the exemption which will then be narrowed down by secondary legislation, as is the case with current legislation. As the Heritage Protection White Paper pointed out, the exemption will be extended to registered assets which have a primary function as ancillary to a church building, such as attached churchyards and separately registered tombs. DCMS has recognised that it will be open for denominations to seek the exemption if they were able/ready to set up appropriate systems of control. Thus the exemption will be available to denominations, including those not currently exempt, on the basis of appropriate procedures for the protection of historic church buildings, including systems which provide similar levels of consultation and engagement to secular systems of control. Guidance is also being prepared to accompany the draft bill.

#### Item 5 – Historic Chapels: Informing Change and Future Strategies (POWF 2007/11)

- 5.1 The Forum was advised of the development of this project that will be jointly carried out between English Heritage and the Methodist Church in late 2007/early 2008. Staff wished to gauge opinion among the Forum regarding the project's objectives and the implications for multi-disciplinary and inter-denominational approaches to change. The Forum was asked to:
- Agree to the objectives for achieving the short-term priorities
  - Consider and provide comment on the project's objectives and implications

- 5.2 There is a pressing need to work with the local community and deal with the issues which are driving forward change within Cornwall. This is only a very small project, (in the region of £4-5k) and will look at the issues of chapel contraction, and the need for chapels to continue to play a role within their local communities. The work should be completed by spring 2008 and it is envisaged that staff will report its findings to POWF in the new year.
- 5.3 Forum members repeated their concern over the role of the Charity Commissioners in demanding that best price should be achieved for the disposal of redundant places of worship. Those groups disposing of places of worship were often concerned to ensure that the redundant buildings should continue in public use. However, such buildings were often converted into residential use for the simple reason that developers were able to make the highest bid to secure ownership. This is an issue which the Forum will have to return to again, and as members have discussed previously and in point 4.9.2 above, it is not an issue unique to Cornwall.
- 5.4 One Forum member was keen to stress that the picture was not always one of closure and decline but could be one of growth and change. There were cases where a very active congregation had decided that it needed to move to a different location, in order to better carry on its mission. The uses of monies made from such sales will form part of the study.
- 5.5 **The Forum warmly welcomed this work and saw that lessons learned will be applicable for other case studies.**

#### **Item 6 – Churches and Chapels in Salisbury (POWF 2007/12)**

- 6.1 Trevor Cooper gave a presentation on *Salisbury Churches and Chapels: patterns & reflections* a study of places of worship and Sunday attendance in Salisbury from 1851 to 2006. The presentation charted the patterns of growth, consolidation and retraction/refocusing in churches in Salisbury centre and suburbs. The key questions raised by the report were:
- Which church buildings to keep?
  - Why?
  - Who decides?
  - Who pays?
  - How does it happen?
- 6.2 The Forum was shown several interiors that had changed radically – one being the Grade II listed St Paul's, a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Anglican church – which now has a thriving Evangelical congregation. The pews had been removed to allow for a more flexible space - this might not have been allowed had it been listed Grade I. This raised questions as to the consequences of listing on congregations:
- Does listing stop change?
  - Are congregations self-censoring?

- Does listing restrict their future?
- 6.3 Forum members also discussed the conversions of places of worship in Salisbury, and were informed that new congregations had taken over some of redundant buildings. However, attention was also drawn to the conversion of an 1869 Primitive Methodist chapel to a nightclub. Although the central pews had been removed and the floor level changed, a substantial amount of the chapel's furniture and interior had been left intact. Forum members noted that this was a better fate than being subdivided into residential accommodation. Concern though was raised as to the long-term prospects of such an establishment and over the chapel's fabric.
- 6.4 The Forum also returned to the issue of fixed pews, as highlighted in the case of St Paul's Church. One Forum member expressed misgivings that pews were proving a hindrance to congregations, and voiced his concern that some conservation groups were being over-protective in defending the idea of fixed pews.
- 6.5 **The Forum gave a warm welcome to Trevor Cooper's presentation. One Forum member thought it would be worthwhile to conduct a similar survey in an industrial town, such as Preston, rather than a cathedral city. He also cited other examples where significant numbers of redundant places of worship had been taken over by congregations from Eastern Europe.**

#### **Item 7 – Equality Impact and the RGPOW (POWF 2007/13)**

- 7.1 New equality legislation is now either in place or just about to come into force. While staff have had to be aware of issues relating to equality, the RGPOW presents a challenge in being explicitly faith based. Staff have considered how to ensure the RGPOW scheme is transparent to all faith groups, and have raised two main concerns:
- Designation lists will not be up to date in ownership use and hence it will not be easy to assess the scheme's success in being open to all
  - Non-Christian groups and non-traditional Christian groups may use buildings not designated as places of worship, such as former cinemas. Provided they are in use as places of worship and appropriately listed they will become eligible under RGPOW. At this stage, staff do not know how many potential applicants exist until they apply.
- The Forum was invited to:
- Offer advice and guidance to the project team to get a better understanding of how RGPOW might engage with a wider variety of faiths and denominations .
- 7.2 One Forum member suggested that the very name of the scheme could be a hindrance to Islamic groups who often prefer to build afresh rather than convert an existing building. Certainly in 20, 30 or 50 years, the numbers of mosques being listed is bound to increase and then such buildings will certainly be eligible under the RGPOW. Additionally, the Forum's attention was drawn to the upgrading of

non-Christian places of worship, notably the New West End Synagogue in St Petersburg Place, Bayswater to Grade I. The synagogue, completed in 1879, is only the second to achieve this status. Another Forum member also expressed their hope that Neasden Temple would achieve listed building status in the future.

- 7.3 Forum members expressed their concern over the RGPOW's ability to reach out to non-Christian denominations – and the lack of a non-Christian representative on POWF was noted in this respect. Staff noted that one problem can be the lack of an umbrella group to contact. One Forum member went further and suggested that previously there had been a perception of EH being primarily concerned with preserving places of worship belonging to the Church of England. Staff pointed out that this perception had undoubtedly been engendered through the overwhelming number of listed Anglican places of worship.
- 7.4 Staff recognised that it was important to remove any such perceptions as they were a barrier to best practice of equality in terms of the RGPOW. Staff asked that any denominations which felt that such perceptions existed should come forward. Only by working together could equality issues be improved.

#### **Item 8 – RGPOW and EU Procurement (POWF 2007/14)**

- 8.1 EU procurement legislation has recently changed, which will have an impact on all public funded activities. Previously EU procurement regulations have only been applicable to large projects, where works were over c.£3m or professional fees were c.£100k, and public funding made up at least 50% of the total package. RGPOW grants were rarely affected. However, new rules now require that these regulations be applied to all procurement where public funding is 50%. The Forum was invited to:
- Note the impact of the regulations on the RGPOW
  - Disseminate the implications to relevant people within their denomination
- 8.2 Forum members raised concerns that this implied an obligation to accept the lowest tender – with obvious concerns as to the quality of work undertaken and the materials used. Staff advised that this was theoretically the case. However, staff also stressed that open tendering should not adversely affect the quality of works. This was because detailed tenders called for under the RGPOW already asked bidders to clearly demonstrate an ability to complete the work to a satisfactorily high standard. Thus, a position where the lowest tender has been rejected as unsuitable would still be in place.
- 8.3 This paper is intended as a short statement to the Forum. Staff invited Forum members to meet individually afterwards in order to note their concerns.

#### **Item 9 – POWF meeting dates for 2008 (POWF 2007/15)**

- 9.1 The Forum was asked to note the meeting dates for 2008, which had already been emailed to members.

**Item 10 – Any other business**

10.1 The Chairman congratulated the Forum Secretary on the recent award of his PhD.

**Item 11 – Future topics**

11.1 The following topics were suggested for discussion at future meetings:

- Climate change and places of worship
- Conversion of places of worship

11.2 Next meeting

The next POWF meeting will be held at 10.30am on Wednesday 16 January 2008, venue tbc.

11.3 The meeting closed at 12.55pm.

**Reider Payne  
Forum Secretary  
October 2007**