

The Future of All Saints' Church, Lonan

This is a proposal to secure the future of the Church and Burial Ground, following the closure of the church to worship in 2014

1. The Church:

All Saints' Lonan was built in 1834 to replace a previous building on the same site. It served the parish for 180 years and was closed suddenly when the electrical supply and part of the nave floor were deemed to be unsafe. Both defects could have been rectified using the parish funds, but with dwindling support from an increasingly elderly congregation, the decision was made to make the building redundant, transferring to Christ Church, Laxey. In fact, the building is in a surprisingly sound state, as many people discovered when it was re-opened on 13th November 2016 for a Remembrance Service.

2. The Burial Ground:

The burial ground is the only one that serves the Parish of Lonan and the Village of Laxey. In common with most of the cemeteries on the Island, it is administered by a Burial Authority consisting of the Vicar and Wardens who levy a precept on the annual commissioners' rates. In return, any rate-paying household of any denomination or none in the Parish and Village has the right to opt for burial in All Saints' graveyard. Three-quarters of the population of Garff are thus served by this facility. It remains in regular use and has capacity for at least another 50 years. Investigations are currently taking place into the possibility of the Commissioners becoming the Burial Authority in Lonan. It is anticipated that the rate will be identified separately on rate demands, as at present, should a transfer of this function to the Commissioners prove to be a viable option that would benefit Lonan

residents. If responsible for the Burial Authorities functions, the Commission intend to set the burial rate a level commensurate with operational and administration costs; it is anticipated that there would be minimal impact on the level of burial rate set.

3. The Present Situation:

Apart from the 2016 Remembrance Service, the church has been disused for more three years. It is technically a redundant church, and there is little or no prospect of it being used again as a Parish Church. The funds, which are substantial, are currently held by the Diocesan Board of Finance, but the Chairman, Archdeacon Andrew Brown, has indicated that they will be released in full to pay for essential repairs and routine maintenance if a sustainable use can be found where the public will still have access to war memorials. The Diocese remains open to suggestions for alternative uses, and there has been one tentative enquiry about conversion to a dwelling, but this has not come to anything so far. The location of the Church, in the middle of a burial ground and some distance from other settlements, makes a viable conversion and change of use unlikely. If no future is found, the Church, which is the most prominent iconic building in Lonan and a symbol of the parish, will deteriorate to the point of collapse. There is at this point still time to save it.

4. The Proposals:

Archdeacon Brown, Commissioner Stewart Clague and Architect Tony Pass have worked together to produce workable proposals to retain the building for occasional worship and for a funeral chapel to serve the burial ground. The Archdeacon has suggested the idea of a 'Festival Church' which means it would be open for occasional rather than regular weekly services, ie Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Harvest,

Remembrance, etc. It could also be used for Weddings and Funerals but not for Baptisms. At present there are no facilities for Funeral Services on the site, so it is difficult to predict the likely frequency of use if the Church were to be available again for services, but there could be one or two every month. In addition, the building lends itself to community uses such as public meetings, indoor sports training and events, so it could eventually become a valuable facility for the Garff community. The Diocese would also wish to be assured that any new use was not inappropriate or unseemly for a former church building.

5. How to Make this Happen:

Several things will be needed. A scheme for the long-term use of the Church will have to be approved by the Diocese who will then also release the necessary funds for restoration and repair from the Parish funds held by the DBF. It has been suggested that since the Commissioners already levy a rate on behalf of the Burial Authority, they (the Commissioners) should take over the role of the Burial Authority, which will be self-financing from rates, as well as responsibility for the Church which would then become a Funeral Chapel and Festival Church. To achieve this, it would be necessary for minor changes to the existing legislation. Our MHK's, Mrs Caine and Mr Perkins, support the changes and have expressed their willingness to take the process through Tynwald. The Onchan team ministry, led by the Rev Clive Burgess, and the local Vicar, the Rev Jo Dudley have indicated to Stewart Clague that they support the rescue proposals for community use. In common with other parishes on the Island, the role of Burial Authority is an unwelcome burden which falls on a small and often dwindling number of regular church supporters. At Lonan, the existing Burial Authority could continue in that role if they wished, or alternatively they could assign it to Garff. If the Commissioners took over this role, they could secure the future

of the building and Burial Ground at little or no cost. The building could be restored using the existing funds held by the Diocese and the ensuing maintenance commitment would therefore be minimal.

6. Community Facilities in Lonan:

All Saints Church is situated beside a large area of development that has taken place relatively recently in Lonan. There is no demarcation between this area of new development and the Ballacannell/Croit-e-Quill residential areas. There has recently been an approval for eight further dwellings at All Saints Park and it is likely that several fields in the surrounding area will be identified as areas that can be developed in the emerging 'Area Plan for the East'. When viewed together these areas constitute a large community that is remote from areas such as Laxey and has virtually no community facilities of its own. Despite the level of established, recent and forthcoming development there are no community halls or facilities in the vicinity. The Commissioners believe that there is currently a demand and a need for community facilities, and, due to the likelihood of further development, they anticipate that this demand for facilities will only increase in the coming years.

7. The Project has been Approved in Principle by the Garff Commissioners:

At their meeting on the 6th of July 2017 the Board of Garff Commissioners approved in principle the proposal to purchase All Saints' Church, Lonan for a fee of £5.00 together with the Burial Ground, and Resolved to take the matter forward through the Local Authority Petition Process which involves public consultation and scrutiny by Government. Subsequently, at a meeting on the 22nd of July 2017 following a generally favourable public response (*see para*

8 below) the Garff Board gave its approval to the project to take over and restore the building principally as a centre for community activities, but also as a ‘festival church’ providing for occasional services, weddings and for funerals associated with the surrounding Burial Ground. The resolution was passed by a majority of seven, there being only one commissioner who continued to have reservations.

8. Consultations with the community of Garff:

The proposals were widely publicised in social media, in the Commissioners’ Newsletter (delivered to every household in Garff), and the local papers including the Courier (which is delivered to all properties) and the local circular, ‘Laxey Views’. Following this, the community was invited to attend a Public Meeting on Saturday 22nd July. About 70 people attended. The meeting was chaired by Mr Nigel Dobson, Chairman of the Garff Commissioners, all of whom were in attendance. The Venerable Andrew Brown, Archdeacon of Man, Architect Tony Pass and Commissioner Stewart Clague also spoke and there followed a lengthy examination of the proposals. Views expressed were diverse, but there was no doubt that the overwhelming opinion of the meeting was in favour of the proposed take-over and conversion to community use by Garff Commissioners.

Subsequently, the Board of the Laxey Working Mens’ Institute requested a separate meeting which took place at the church on the 1st August 2017. The substance of their concerns is expressed in their letter (undated and unsigned) in which they are at pains to say that they do not fear competition for community activities, but they feel that the Commissioners should ‘treat all similar community schemes equitably and make underwriting available to all’. While the promoters of the church project agree that there is unlikely to be any significant competition for bookings between the two facilities, they

would point out that every project arises in different circumstances, and that nearly ten years separates the two initiatives. LWMI did receive some financial support from public funds, although at the time Garff Commissioners had not then been constituted. They also point out that the Board of LWMI are alone among the community groups in expressing any significant concerns, which in fact do not amount to opposition.

9. How will the building be used?

The exact degree of the following uses is impossible to predict in advance of the completion, but the Commissioners and the Diocese are strongly of the opinion that the local community in Lonan, where there are literally no other comparable facilities, would justify the proposals and serve a growing need.

The Nave of the Church is a plain unobstructed space approx. 70ftx40ft with a high flat ceiling at a height of approx. 25ft which offers a wide variety of potential uses. Subject to the minor modifications (protection of windows and monuments, better lighting and flooring) proposed, the building will be uniquely suitable for the following activities. (*None of these are presently available to the community of Garff, or the surrounding areas*):

- Rehearsal and Recording space (no neighbours!)
- Indoor sports (bowls,etc)
- 5-aside football
- Badminton
- Basketball
- Keep Fit
- Yoga
- Martial Arts
- Table Tennis

- Performance Space for audiences of up to 200
- Voluntary Groups – scouts, guides
- Mums and Tots
- Sketch Club
- (Longer Term) Bunk House Dormitory for TT and MGP

10. Continuing Use as a Church:

Although weekly Sunday services will not be restored, it is envisaged that the building will be available for use as a ‘Festival Church’ ie for about six special services each year (Christmas, Easter, Harvest etc.) To serve the Burial Ground, the church would re-open for funeral services (for any denomination or none) of which there may be 6-10 each year. The church requires no additional licence to conduct Weddings; it will provide a traditional location in a scenic location. 4-5 weddings can be anticipated each year. For all these services, catering facilities will be available within the building to serve large groups. All these activities are income-generating.

11. Condition Survey and Reports:

The condition of the building has been surveyed three times since closure. The Diocesan Surveyor prepared the last Quinquennial Report for the Diocese: all the items listed as outstanding this report will be addressed in full as part of the proposals. Tony Pass MA RIBA MRTPI FSA, a member of the project sub-committee and an expert on historic buildings, has undertaken an appraisal for the Commissioners. Most recently John Gray CEng, structural engineer, completed a comprehensive survey. All the essential items listed for immediate attention will be attended to. This is a simple structure with few if any inherent weaknesses: the only item for long-term attention would be to strip off render and hard cement pointing in places and replace with lime mortar.

12. The 'Do Nothing' Option: What if the Commissioners took no action?

- The ring-fenced money offered by the Diocese would remain with the Diocesan Board of Finance and would be unavailable for community purposes. The money would actually leave the Island.
- The building would be offered for other uses: significantly, there has been no other viable proposal since closure in 2014 with no access to Archibald Knox's war memorials.
- If no other purchaser came forward, the building would rot. So far, there has been little deterioration, but experience shows that once decay sets in, the process would accelerate and become virtually irreversible.
- Demolition would deprive the Lonan community of its most - important and prominent iconic building. It would be a conspicuous failure of the church and local authorities. It would also cost £50k-£90k to demolish.

13. A Concise Summary of the Proposal:

The building and surrounding area will be transferred to the Commissioners at virtually no cost (a nominal sum of £50.00).

Diocesan funds and donations will finance all the necessary repairs and adaptations.

The Commissioners propose to set aside an annual sum of £9,500 for three years to cover any initial losses while demand for the facility builds up.

14. If the Project is unsuccessful or Fails:

In the unlikely event that after five years the project has not met expectations, the Commissioners are free to seek another user, subject to any profit being returned to the Diocese.

It can be seen that the risks involved have been carefully assessed and are negligible.

Tony Pass MA B Arch RIBA MRTPI FSA

Architect

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