

Parish:	Brancaster	
Proposal:	Installation of glazed access screen & removal of draft lobby	
Location:	Church of St Mary Main Road Brancaster Norfolk	
Applicant:	The PCC of St Mary's Church	
Case No:	19/01989/F (Full Application)	
Case Officer:	Connor Smalls	Date for Determination: 13 January 2020 Extension of Time Expiry Date: 7 February 2020

Reason for Referral to Planning Committee – View of Historic England are contrary to the Officer Recommendation

Neighbourhood Plan: Yes

Case Summary

The application proposes to install a glazed access screen and remove a draft lobby at the Church of St Mary, Brancaster. The Church is a Grade 1 listed building and of significant importance both historically and as a community asset.

There is no accompanying listed building consent application as the works fall under 'ecclesiastical exemption'.

Key Issues

Principle of development
Impact on Grade 1 listed church
Impact on conservation area

Recommendation

APPROVE

THE APPLICATION

The application concerns the Grade 1 listed St Marys Church in Brancaster.

The proposal is for a glazed access screen forming new doors on the porch of the church as well as the removal of an internal draft lobby.

The Church is a Grade 1 listed building, the highest a graded building can be. The church also sits with the Brancaster conservation area.

SUPPORTING CASE

Introduction

Brancaster Church is a Grade I Listed Church and the proposal to infill the South Porch Arch with entrance doors will clearly affect the appearance of the Church.

Undoubtedly as Historic England Representative David Eve has indicated these structures were put up as shelters rather than enclosures in Medieval/Historic times and would normally take precedence as an open community area. However a Church building has modern needs and as such where an alteration can be introduced without compromising the physical fabric of the building but serving an actual modern need then this should be considered as a strong argument for provision of amended arrangements which allow the Church to evolve and to serve current appropriate needs. The modern expectation of the shelter is more demanding now and enclosure is a more accommodating arrangement.

Many other Churches have had enclosures introduced with timber framed doors and the PCC has considered both the all glass option and timber framed doors.

This has been accepted as an arrangement elsewhere and on a number of prominent Grade I churches which is often appropriate and for lesser reasons than for the Church at Brancaster.

An example of the glass door infill is Weybourne Church where this has been extremely successfully integrated into the Porch whereas many other doors infilling the Arches have been introduced with timber framing and half glazed or fully glazed doors – Old Catton, Grimston and Little Snoring are examples. This is not to say that Brancaster should necessarily follow their example but it is clear that this is found acceptable elsewhere and in Churches which have a similar category of Listing and prominence and similar arrangement.

Provision of disability access descending 800mm into the Church (currently with a step) is hindered substantially by the unsightly and impractical internal lobby. Studies were undertaken to try and retain this initially in a different format and showed that the provision is visually and physically devastating to the Church and the removal of the internal lobby has major benefits which outweigh a reversible provision for external porch doors.

Summary

The reasons for the PCC pursuing the arrangement even in the light of issues of enclosure and affecting the historic status of the Church are set out in the Statement of Need but since there are essentially very good reasons for the proposal to enable removal of the poor Heath Robinson ugly and damaging internal lobby and that it is deliberately designed in order to be reversible without physically effecting the fabric of the building to its detriment. It is hoped that the Authorities would feel able to support the PCC in their endeavours to keep up with modern expectations, modern legislation and the demands of a congregation in order to encourage the Church mission with a solution which does not cause significant or permanent harm.

PLANNING HISTORY

14/01176/F: Application Permitted: 10/10/14 - Erection of flagpole in churchyard

12/00132/TREECA: Tree Application - No objection: 08/01/13 - 1 x Sycamore and 2 x Cherry Trees to be felled as too close to church yard wall and causing overcrowding to other trees

11/00107/TREECA: Tree Application - No objection: 10/11/11 - Fell 1 x Sycamore Tree, 2 x Flowering Cherry Trees and 1 x Elm Tree in a conservation area

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION

Parish Council: NO OBJECTION:

Brancaster Parish Council totally supports this application which will be a great asset to the church.

Conservation Officer: SUPPORTS:

The Church of St Mary is listed Grade I but the application for a faculty over rides the need to apply for Listed Building Consent.

With regard to the current planning application - I know that the matter of adding doors to the porch has been considered in the past but that Historic England have had serious concerns about such a proposal, primarily because medieval church porches were originally used as open community spaces and to enclose the porch would potentially change its historic use by bringing it into the sacred body of the church. The use of glass would also be alien in this environment.

Whilst understanding their concern, I take a slightly different view.

Many historic structures, including churches, have to adapt in order to remain in use and, whilst the NPPF sets out the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets it also notes that they should be put to viable use. The test of the acceptability of change is whether the proposal will harm the significance of the designated heritage asset and, if the harm is less than substantial, is there good justification and/or public benefit.(NPPF paras.193, 194, 196)

Enclosing the porch will clearly cause some harm in terms of changing its traditional use and it will also represent a change in the appearance of the Church so there will be some harm to significance. However, the proposed doors are quite elegant but unobtrusive, they can be fixed with little or no impact on historic fabric and they could also be removed very easily at a later date should the need arise. Furthermore they would remove the need for a visually unattractive and rather cumbersome internal storm porch. I would therefore consider the potential harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset to be less than substantial. In terms of public benefit, enclosing the porch will make the building as a whole a more user friendly space and, at a time when churches around the country are being used for more secular activities alongside regular worship in order to maintain viability, bringing the original use of the medieval porch into the body of the church seems to be perfectly reasonable.

I therefore consider that the proposal accords with NPPF and I fully support this application.

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For information – I believe that the Grade II*listed Churches in Old Catton and Weybourne have already gone this route but I am not personally familiar with either.

Although St Marys is listed Grade I there is no corresponding application for LBC and I made comment on the planning application some time ago. However, we have now received a consultation response from Historic England stating that they are not able to support the granting of planning permission as the application currently stands which has prompted me to make further comment.

Work to listed churches often needs planning permission but does not need listed building consent because they benefit from what is termed as the 'ecclesiastical exemption', so instead they are subject to the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2015. This means that work to be carried out to consecrated buildings and land, which will usually include the church and churchyard and fixtures, fittings and furnishings requires a faculty – ie the Churches own form of LBC.

In most cases the faculty jurisdiction is exercised by the Chancellor of the Diocese. In determining an application for a faculty the Chancellor will have regard to advice from the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches, the DAC. The DAC reviews all faculty applications, and consists of a number of experienced advisors with wide ranging expertise on church buildings and furnishings. Members include the Archdeacons, several other clergy, architects and other specialists and a representative from Historic England.. The committee can call upon additional expert advice where necessary. Norwich DAC meets regularly, usually monthly, to consider faculty applications and the functions of the DAC are set out formally in the Care of Churches and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1991.

This proposal was considered by Norwich DAC on 28th October 2019 and granted a faculty on 18th November 2019. As you can see, the faculty authorises work in accordance with “the designs, plans and other documents accompanying the petition” and the work is described on page 2 as “position partially glazed door inside the porch as proposed by our Architects drawings”.

Historic England would have had input into the DAC meeting and the decision to grant faculty and that is why I am surprised that they are unable to support the planning application which, so far as I can tell, is for the same scheme.

Notwithstanding the comment from HE, I would still support a recommendation to approve this application for the reasons already given. However, I believe that should we chose to go against Historic Englands advice the decision may need ratification from Govt. Office.

Arboricultural Officer: NO OBJECTION:

Historic Environment Service: NO COMMENTS:

Historic England: OBJECTS TO CURRENT PROPOSAL:

Historic England Advice

The earliest building in the grade I listed parish church of St Mary the Virgin, Brancaster dates from the 12th century with the aisles added in the 14th and a grade tower with decorative flushwork and battlements in the 15th century. The south porch dates from the 14th century and features a elegant arched doorway with carved capitals and shafts and small attractive quatrefoil windows on the side walls.

In the medieval period church porches were usually built as open structures, not secured by heavy doors like the main doors to the church nave and tower. The porch was not a sacred,

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liturgical space but was used by the community as a functional, civic and ceremonial venue (for instance, in the earlier medieval period marriages were often officiated here). The porch at St Mary's is therefore an important element of the building not just because of its architecture but has a particular character and meaning.

The contribution made by open porches to the architectural and historic character of churches is reflected in our guidance, "New Work in Historic Places of Worship".

There we suggest that "Where the outer entrance of a porch has always been open this arrangement is best retained as part of the historic character of the building, reflecting its traditional pattern of use". It is likely that the porch at St Mary the Virgin has been open since its construction in the 14th century. The proposed glass doors would not only enclose the porch, changing the historic character of the building, but would do so with large areas of glazing. Glass is only found in historic churches in windows where small panes are set in patterns of lead work. The ability to use glass as the main material in doors is very recent as it follows developments in glass technology in the later 20th century. As well as being at odds with the character of the porch the proposed doors would be visually distracting because of this use of glass on an extensive scale.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that the purpose of the planning system is to achieve sustainable development and that protection and enhancement of the historic environment is an overarching objective in this (paragraphs 7 and 8). The significance of listed buildings can be harmed or lost by alteration to them or development in their setting. The NPPF states that clear and convincing justification should be made for any such harm and that 'great weight' should be given to the conservation of listed buildings irrespective of the level of harm caused (paragraphs 193 and 194). This weight and the justification for harm should be especially convincing where harm to buildings of a high grade of listing is concerned.

We have considered this application in terms of this policy and conclude that the addition of a door to the porch of the grade I listed church would result in harm to its historic significance in terms of the NPPF, paragraphs 193 and 196. As such it would not achieve the NPPF's overarching aim of promoting sustainable development. In previous advice to the applicant we have recommended that either an internal 'draft lobby' is constructed inside the church door or at very least the design of new porch doors is amended so the inappropriate large sheets of glazing are broken up by more timber elements. This would make it more in sympathy with traditional church doors and at least reduce, if not remove, the harm. We would not support the application as it stands but if it were withdrawn would be keen to advise the Council on amended designs which could reduce the harmful impact and better achieve the NPPF's overarching aim of promoting sustainable development.

Recommendation

Historic England has concerns regarding the application on heritage grounds. We would not support the granting of permission as the current application stands, although significant amendment could reduce the level of harmful impact on the significance of the listed building. We consider that the issues and safeguards outlined in our advice need to be addressed in order for the application to meet the requirements of paragraphs 7, 8, 193 and 194 of the NPPF. In determining this application you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 66(1) of the

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess. Your authority should take these representations into account and seek amendments, safeguards or further information as set out in our advice.

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Norfolk Coast Partnership: NO OBJECTION:

National Amenity Societies: NO COMMENTS RECEIVED:

REPRESENTATIONS

ONE letter of **SUPPORT**

Churchwarden: No objection to this application. The glazed doors and internal work will add greatly to the welcome our church gives to all, local and visitors alike.

LDF CORE STRATEGY POLICIES

CS01 - Spatial Strategy

CS02 - The Settlement Hierarchy

CS06 - Development in Rural Areas

CS08 - Sustainable Development

CS12 - Environmental Assets

CS13 - Community and Culture

SITE ALLOCATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICIES PLAN 2016

DM1 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

DM9 - Community Facilities

DM15 – Environment, Design and Amenity

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN POLICIES

Policy 2 - Design, Style and Materials

Policy 8 - Protection of Heritage Assets and Views

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

National Planning Policy Framework – sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.

National Planning Practice Guidance - Provides National Planning Practice Guidance, in support of and in addition to the NPPF

National Design Guide 2019

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PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

1. Principle of development
2. Impact on Grade 1 listed church
3. Impact on conservation area

Principle of development

Through policies in the Development Plan, the Borough Council will seek to maintain and enhance facilities to support rural communities. Brancaster church is a grade 1 listed building and development plan policies require protection of historic assets such as this. The principle of development is therefore fully supported subject to a consideration of the impact on heritage assets, which is the key issue in this case.

Members may also wish to note that the Diocese of Norwich has already granted faculty permission for these proposed works. This mitigates the need for listed building consent. Historic England are specialist advisers to the Diocesan Advisory Committee which resulted in the approval of this faculty application (please see further clarification in the Conservation Officers comments).

In terms of national policy on heritage assets, the NPPF places great weight in regards to the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets. It also places an emphasis that such assets should be put to a viable use. The test to determine if change is acceptable is whether the proposal will harm the significance of the heritage asset and, if the harm is less than substantial, if there is good justification and/or public benefit (NPPF paragraphs 193,194,196).

Impact on Grade 1 listed church

This proposal aims to add a new glazed set of doors to the church porch. They will be slightly set back from the main arch and will be fixed in place with a method that avoids having to drill into the stonework.

This door will provide a new space for the church whilst ensuring the removal of an unoriginal draft lobby that is negatively affecting accessibility. The proposed doors can easily be removed should the need arise and will have little impact on historic fabric of the church porch.

The NPPF states that the significance of that harm needs to be weighed against the public benefit. The NPPF also states that the protection and enhancement of the historic environment is a key aim whilst also stating that 'great weight' should be given to the conservation of listed buildings no matter the level of harm caused, the justification of this harm should be especially convincing with higher grade buildings such as this church.

The design is considered to be of a complimentary nature to the character of the church and is of high quality. To echo comments made by the conservation officer this improvement will help to maintain viability by providing a modern solution to the needs for more space and incorporating this part of the church into the functioning whole of the overall building.

However, Historic England make a clear point that Medieval church porches, such as the one present on the application site, were open spaces separate from the main body of the inner church. They state the following advice;

“Where the outer entrance of a porch has always been open this arrangement is best retained as part of the historic character of the building, reflecting its traditional pattern of use”.

Historic England also raises an issue with the use of large expanses of glass. They emphasise that it is not in keeping with the character of the church and would be visually distracting. They also argue that it would enclose the porch. However, the use of glass in a modern design shows a clear modern addition instead of poorly replicating traditional style. Other churches, as referenced by the conservation officer, have successfully implemented similar schemes.

Historic England has recommended a reduction in glass with more wood incorporated in the design. However this would further reduce openness when compared with a large area of glass. Glass allows light to pass in and maintain an air of openness whilst ensuring the inside of the porch is protected from the elements and can be used as a functioning space in conjunction to the main church.

Another part of this application involves the removal of an interior lobby. This is an addition of no historical importance that will no longer be required should these exterior doors be granted. As such the lobby can be removed. This will further open the church up exposing a traditional doorway on the interior. It would also help to improve accessibility issues, a key consideration for an important community asset. A small amount of harm caused by the new doors would, on planning balance, be mitigated by the gains of the removal of this lobby and the improved viability of the community function.

A further point Historic England make is that the proposal is not NPPF policy compliant, specifically paragraphs 193 and 194. They quote

‘The significance of listed buildings can be harmed or lost by alteration to them or development in their setting. The NPPF states that clear and convincing justification should be made for any such harm and that ‘great weight’ should be given to the conservation of listed buildings irrespective of the level of harm caused.’

Whilst these are all considerations relevant to his application, paragraph 196 also states;

‘Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.’

The Borough Council’s conservation officer supports this application, also referencing paragraphs 193, 194 and 196.

The conservation officer concedes that there will be some harm caused by this proposal and the change in appearance will have a small effect on the church’s significance. However, it is argued that the harm is less than substantial and the public benefits, as outlined, far outweigh the harm caused. The conservation officer argues that the proposal is NPPF compliant and reiterates that other churches have successfully implemented this style of door. She also mentions the benefit of removing the internal draft lobby in terms of visual and character gain.

This proposal is considered to maintain openness whilst enhancing the area of the church for a more modern and practical use. Thus ensuring its viability as an environmental, community and cultural asset and therefore compliant with policy CS12, CS13 and the NPPF. This proposal is also deemed to comply with Brancaster neighbourhood plan poly 2

as the design is considered to compliment the church and be of high quality design. It is also considered to comply with policy 8 as the proposal is deemed to have respect and regard for the heritage asset and helps to maintain and enhance the building's character and features.

Impact on conservation area

This proposal does present a physical change to Brancaster Church. As such there will be a noticeable change to the exterior of the church and as a result an impact on the conservation area.

However, as discussed this impact on the church will be minimal and the church will still retain its unique and important character. As a result the small change to the church would have a less than substantial impact on the conservation area. It is therefore considered to meet the legal test of preserving or enhancing the conservation area.

CONCLUSION

By enabling this addition the viability and longevity of this community asset is promoted. Churches must now incorporate a wider community function than just traditional worship and by incorporating sensitive modern additions new functions can be enabled that further integrate the church into the community. This proposal is such an addition. The proposal will help to create a modern suitable space in conjunction with the main body of the church. It will also help to ensure the removal of the interior draft lobby; a current requirement to ensure the interior maintains heat and is protected from the elements. With the addition of these more modern doors on the exterior this lobby can be removed exposing traditional walls and doorways whilst helping the church to improve accessibility. This further supports the church becoming more viable by being able to cater to wider community needs.

However, Historic England argue there are problems with this application on heritage grounds. They state that this application presents a level of harm that could reduce the significance of this listed building. Historic England would like to see the porch maintain its historic use as an open space. However they also propose a more traditional alternative to the glazed door in the form of a more timber orientated door. This they state, would be more acceptable. Historic England argues that this application fails to meet the requirements of paragraphs 7, 8, 193 and 194 of the NPPF.

Overall, this application does create a small element of harm as explored in this report and by the conservation officer. However, the public benefit outweighs the limited amount of harm caused by the installation of the doors. A condition has been added to ensure that the existing lobby is removed within 3 months to ensure the improvements are carried out. As such this proposal is compliant with the NPPF (Paragraph 196) as well as the Brancaster neighbourhood plan policies 2: design, style and materials and 8: Protection of heritage assets and views. This proposal also supports the enhancement of the church as an environmental and cultural asset; again this is compliant with Local Plan policies CS12 and 13. The council places an emphasis on such enhancement where appropriate and as detailed, this proposal is appropriate and will be a benefit both to the church and the local community.

RECOMMENDATION:

APPROVE subject to the imposition of the following condition(s):

- 1 Condition: The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.
- 1 Reason: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1990, as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, 2004.
- 2 Condition: This Listed Building Consent relates only to works specifically shown on the approved drawing detailed below. Any others works, the need for which becomes apparent, are not covered by this consent and details must be submitted to the Council as Local Planning Authority and approved before work continues.
 - * Proposed, Drawing number: 2/671/3B
 - * Proposed Sketch, Drawing number: 2/671/11A
 - * Site & Location Plans, Drawing number: 2/671/12
- 2 Reason: In order that the Local Planning Authority may retain control over the development in the interests of the amenities of the locality in accordance with the NPPF.
- 3 Condition: All works shall be carried out in such manner that no unnecessary damage is caused to the fabric or decorative features of the building, and any damage so caused shall be rectified to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.
- 3 Reason: To ensure that the fabric of the Listed Building is properly protected during the works in accordance with the principles of the NPPF.
- 4 Condition: Within 3 months of the installation of the glazed doors, the internal draft lobby as shown on 'Existing' Drawing number: 2/671/10 shall be demolished and removed as shown on 'Proposed' drawing number: 2/671/11A, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
- 4 Reason: Because the removal of the draft lobby was part of the planning balance in the consideration of this development and its removal helps to mitigate impact.