



DIOCESE OF EAST ANGLIA

## **Diocesan policy on REDUNDANT CHURCHES**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Diocese places considerable value upon its Catholic heritage and acts to ensure that its buildings are professionally inspected at 5 yearly intervals.
- 1.2 The Diocese adopts procedures to ensure that remedial and maintenance works are identified and undertaken so as to preserve its buildings for the use and benefit of future generations.
- 1.3 It is recognized, however, that times change and there may be occasions when the viability of ongoing use of a building is called into question. Reasons will vary and viability could be questionable perhaps due to falling Mass attendances, population shift, declining numbers of priests or even the prohibitive costs of continuing to maintain a building.
- 1.4 Accordingly this policy has been prepared to ensure when ongoing use of any church is at risk that clear, consistent and adequate procedures are followed to ensure that a considered decision is reached only after all relevant factors have been taken into consideration. Circumstances leading to the possible closure of a church often differ and flexibility may need to be exercised.
- 1.5 Such procedures will be particularly important when 'listed' places of worship are involved, and consultation with the Historic Churches Committee will be required.
- 1.6 Churches and Chapels which are subject to the jurisdiction of the Bishop and which are in the ownership of the diocese are exempt from some of the provisions of planning legislation, subject to approved alternative controls and procedures being exercised by Church authorities. Within our diocese these controls and procedures are exercised by the Historic Churches Committee under the Ecclesiastical Exemption (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Order of 1994.
- 1.7 Churches and Chapels subject to the jurisdiction of the Bishop, although not owned by the diocese, (such as those owned by Religious Orders or society of apostolic life or another ecclesiastical organisation) and which are covered by the Ecclesiastical Exemption are subject to similar procedures as for those owned by the diocese.

### **2. Procedures relating to Non Listed and Listed Churches**

- 2.1 Initially the Bishop will ask the Parish Priest to arrange for a process of full, open and transparent consultation with the Parish Community.
- 2.2 The title deeds to the building will be examined to identify whether any restrictive covenants apply to change of use or disposal or demolition of the church.
- 2.3 Every effort will be made to obtain as much information as possible regarding the history of the church and its contents.
- 2.4 Where it is thought that land or buildings or significant items may have been donated or bequeathed to the parish, efforts will be made to trace donors or their relatives and views will be sought.
- 2.5 The Bishop will seek views from the Diocesan College of Consultors and the Diocesan Council of Priests.

- 2.6 The Bishop will seek the views of the Diocesan Property Surveyor and will also seek to establish through the Secretary of the Historic Churches Committee whether there is any likelihood of an unlisted building being spot listed.
- 2.7 If following the above consultation process the Bishop is able to satisfy himself that the overall good of the spiritual life of the diocese and parish would not be unduly harmed and the church may cease to be used for divine worship then he will take appropriate steps to progress change of use or disposal or demolition.
- 2.8 Disposal of objects from the church that are of interest and/or of value or importance should be in accordance with the latest guidance issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.
- 2.9 During the above process attention should be given to ensuring that the building is properly maintained, with particular regard to preservation of the fabric and to health and safety requirements.
- 2.10 The insurers of the building must be notified at the time that the church becomes disused and will require details of the security arrangements that have been put in place.

### **3. Additional procedures relating to Listed Churches**

- 3.1 Following consultation with the Parish Priest and Parish Community the Bishop will commission an expert report describing in detail the architectural and historic interest of the church and its contents.
- 3.2 The Bishop will consult with the Secretary of the Historic Churches Committee and the report will form the basis of the consultation.
- 3.3 This consultation will enable the Historic Churches Committee to make recommendations to the Bishop about the future of the church.
- 3.4 Such recommendations may be that occasional services are still held or that the church should be preserved intact by handing it over to a trust or similar, or that it may be re-used for some secular but not unbecoming purpose, or that it may be demolished. (It should be noted that when a listed church becomes redundant it loses its Ecclesiastical Exemption status. It then immediately reverts to the Secular Planning and Listed Building Consent status and any change of use, alteration, demolition or part demolition will need consent from the Local Planning Authority).
- 3.5 If following this consultation the Bishop decides to progress the matter then the remaining procedures as above will be followed, to the point where the Bishop may decide that the church should cease to be used for divine worship.
- 3.6 Before any further action is taken the Bishop will notify the Secretary of the Historic Churches Committee of his decision.
- 3.7 This notification will allow the Secretary of the Historic Churches Committee to inform the local planning authority and English Heritage that the building will no longer be covered by the Ecclesiastical Exemption.
- 3.8 Recommendations may also be made on the disposal/retention of objects from the church that are of interest and/or of value or importance and such disposals/retentions should be in accordance with the latest guidance issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.
- 3.9 During the above process attention should be given to ensuring that the building is properly maintained, with particular regard to preservation of the fabric and to health and safety requirements.
- 3.10 The insurers of the building must be notified at the time that the church becomes disused and will require details of the security arrangements that have been put in place.

#### **References:**

- 1) *Directory on the Ecclesiastical Exemption from Listed Building Control para. 44-48 inclusive.*
- 2) *Notes and Guidance from the Bishops Conference Patrimony Committee Annual Conference 2003 "The Sale and Disposal of Items from Churches".*

*(Policy dated 14<sup>th</sup> December 2006; approved by Historic Churches Committee 13<sup>th</sup> December 2006)*