

Lauriston Place Church

Planning Committee 7 August 2008

1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 To request the Planning Committee's approval to commission a Schedule of Works and Valuation for Lauriston Place Church.

2 Summary

- 2.1 Lauriston Place Church is a C(S) listed building in a prominent location in the city centre, which has suffered from neglect and vandalism and is on the Buildings at Risk Register. A schedule of works and valuation of the building would provide an accurate assessment of the condition of the church, allowing the Council to determine an appropriate course of action to safeguard its future.

3 Main report

Background

- 3.1 The property is a former church in a prominent position on the corner of Lauriston Place and Lauriston Gardens. It is of gothic style, designed in 1859 by Archibald Scott and is Category C(S) listed.
- 3.2 In 1982, the church was bought by the Arab Social League of Edinburgh with the intention of converting it into a social and cultural centre and Arabic school, for which consent was granted. This was not carried out, and the building has been left empty and disused in the intervening years. The fabric of the building has not been maintained during this time.
- 3.3 The condition of the fabric of the building has been the subject of concern to the Council and local residents for a considerable time. The Council has contacted the owners about the state of neglect of the property over the years but has received no substantive response. In 2001, the church was added to the Buildings at Risk register at the Council's request. Two months later the interior of the building was damaged by a fire that was treated by the police as suspicious.

- 3.4 In May 2002, the Planning Committee approved the serving of an Urgent Works Notice on the owners, requiring essential repair and maintenance. The owners did not comply with the notice and the work was undertaken by the Council at a cost of £20,000. The costs incurred by the Council have not been recovered from the owners.
- 3.5 The building has deteriorated substantially to include (but not limited to) extensive fire damage, a leaking roof, broken windows, and pigeon infestation. While in very poor condition, some interior features, such as the decorative wooden screen and tiered gallery survive.
- 3.6 Over the last 10 years the Council has received a significant number of enquiries from third parties wishing to purchase and restore the building for uses including a church; an urban activity centre and housing. Negotiations by prospective purchasers with the owners have not been successful and none of the proposals have reached the planning application stage.
- 3.7 The building has been in a semi-derelict condition for a significant period of time, and it appears likely that some form of statutory intervention may well be required in order to prevent further deterioration and secure a positive future for the building.

Statutory powers

- 3.8 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 provides Local Authorities with the following means of intervention if a listed building is in a poor state of repair:
 - Urgent Works Notice: Under Section 49 of the Act, a planning authority may execute any works which appear to them to be urgently necessary for the preservation of a listed building in their district. The owner of the building must be given not less than 7 days notice in writing, and the Planning Authority is entitled to recover costs. Works undertaken should be those designed to keep a building wind and weatherproof, to provide necessary structural support in cases of potential danger or to prevent damage by vandals.
 - Repairs Notice: under section 43 of the Act, a planning authority may serve a notice specifying the works that are necessary for the proper preservation of the building and requiring the owner of the building to undertake such work. This is more comprehensive than under Section 49, allowing for repair and preservation rather than short-term emergency measures. However, Service of a repairs notice under Section 43 is a last resort, because if action is not taken by the owner to satisfy the requirements of the Repairs Notice, the Council has no option but to proceed to compulsory purchase.

Proposed action

3.9 In order to determine the most suitable course of action for the Council to take in regard to Lauriston Place Church, detailed information on the condition of the building and level of work required to restore it is required. It is, therefore, recommended that the following work is commissioned:

- Schedule of work detailing what is required for the proper preservation of the building.
- Valuation of the property.

3.10 There has been an expression of interest in the property from a prospective restoring purchaser, however this would require to be the subject of detailed discussions prior to proceeding to the stage of compulsory purchase if such action were to be determined the most appropriate. Should a Repairs Notice and Compulsory Purchase Order be deemed the most appropriate course of action, this will be the subject of a further report to the Planning Committee.

4 Financial Implications

4.1 This report has financial implications resulting from the cost of commissioning the District Valuer and Consultants to undertake the valuation and schedule of works. It does not commit the Council to any future financial responsibilities and has no implications with regard to any future decisions on the serving of notices.

4.2 The likely cost for the valuation is in the region of £600 and the schedule of works up to £1,000. It will be met from the Department's existing revenue budget.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Commissioning a valuation and schedule of works is required in order to assist in making an informed decision on protecting the building and halting its deterioration.

6 Recommendations

6.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves the commissioning of the District Valuer to undertake a valuation of Lauriston Place Church, and a Consultant to compile a Schedule of work required for the proper preservation of the building.



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Director of City Development

Appendices Appendix 1: Location Plan and photographs
Contact/tel Alison Martin 56235
Wards affected Meadows/Morningside
**Background
Papers** None

Appendix 1

Location plan and photographs



