

St John's Church, Bollington

DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

Introduction

St John the Baptist Church, on Church Street, is one of the most important and largest of the historic buildings in Bollington. One of three Church of England churches in the Parish of Bollington, it was built in 1834. The other two CofE churches are St Oswald's at Bollington Cross and Holy Trinity in Kerridge.

St John's closed in May 2003 and has been classified as redundant by the Church of England. The costs of tackling the necessary re-wiring (to meet fire regulations), renewing the heating system, counteracting some serious long-term foundation and subsidence problems and other general repairs to the building and its exterior were estimated by the local parochial church council to potentially require as much as £1-2M. The small and declining size of the congregation also led to the decision to close the church.

Historical photographs of Bollington, held by the Civic Society, show what a significant building St John's was in its heyday. Sitting up prominently on a platform of land, it commanded a view down the valley towards the Cheshire plain. Even today, views down from the two overlooking hills, Kerridge Hill (White Nancy) and the Nab, illustrate what a focal point the church and its associated graveyard still are for this historical part of Bollington. The church sits within the largest of Bollington's three Conservation Areas and is a Grade 2 listed building.

Background History

The land for the church was donated by William Turner, the then MP for Blackburn. Mr Turner lived at Shrigley Park, which is now the Shrigley Hall Hotel. The church's history is closely related to the industrialisation of Bollington and the need, in the early part of the 19th Century, for new churches to provide places of worship for the increasing town population, being drawn to the work in the cotton mills. The population of Bollington increased from around 1,200 in 1800 to about 3,000 in 1834. Today it stands at about 7,200.

The history of the church is well described in a booklet written by Nigel Watson and published in 1984, to commemorate the 150th year of St John's. The church was consecrated by the Bishop of Chester on 30th June 1834 and cost £4,002 to build. There is a rare organ in the church, which is worthy of repair and conservation.

Planning Context

The church today turns its back on Church Street, with the front façade facing down the valley and not visible from the road. Despite the new railings at the Church Street entrance, this approach remains somewhat un-welcoming. The mature trees in the graveyard and on land adjoining the Tullis Russell (Coated Papers) industrial site, rather mask the church, when viewed from the west. The graveyard gives the appearance of requiring some repairs and more regular maintenance.

The eastern end of Bollington is the oldest part of the industrial town and the Church is an important townscape feature. The churchyard provides a green setting for the building. Access to the site is from Church Street, although it would be

possible to access the churchyard via the Tullis Russell entrance drive from the main road through Bollington, linking the building more directly with the town centre.

The Tullis Russell site lies immediately adjacent to the church. The long-term use of this industrial land remains a key issue with regard to the development of Bollington.

Development pressures in Bollington have been great in recent years, particularly for the building of new houses and conversion of premises to offices. It is estimated that more than 600 new dwellings have been constructed in the town in the last 15 years. The loss of shops and the fear that the town will become a dormitory for Macclesfield and Manchester remains an issue for many residents. Traffic and parking are an issue in most parts of the town and Church Street receives considerable traffic, including everything for Ingersley Vale, and has parked cars along its whole length.

Study Brief

An options study of the future for St John's Church and graveyard is now required. This study should cover the following matters:

- A structural survey of the building to assess what is needed to make it safe and fully repaired and what costs would be involved
- An assessment of the significance of the building, bell tower and bells, the organ and other features in a local, regional and national context with recommendations of what should be conserved, if possible
- An architectural assessment of the building to determine whether it is viable without demolition and re-construction, and to generate ideas as to how it could be used in the future
- Discussions with the church authorities, Macclesfield Borough Council and English Heritage concerning the potential use of the building and graveyard. The issue of car parking will be critical to the future uses of the building.
- Consultation with the local community concerning potential future uses of the building. This should involve discussions with the following:
 - Local residents, particularly those immediately adjacent to the building
 - Bollington Town Council
 - Bollington Civic Society
 - Bollington Arts Centre Trust
 - Bridgend Centre
- The generation of a number of options for the future use of the building and land. Some possibilities could include:
 - A performing arts venue (discussion with the Bollington Arts Centre Trust would be required concerning this option)
 - A cinema
 - Apartments
 - Business premises
 - Youth centre

- A heritage centre/museum
 - Shopping
 - Partial or total demolition to create a park/open space
- The broad capital and revenue financial implications of each option should be presented

An illustrated report on the options should then be provided in draft form for discussion and debate. Following this, recommendations concerning the best way forward to redevelop the building and the site should be added to complete a final report.

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for Bollington Civic Society
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