

LISMORE CHURCH CONSULTATION

REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP: SATURDAY 18TH FEBRUARY AT LISMORE PUBLIC HALL

ATTENDEES: 24 participants

Sebastian Tombs
Noelle Odling
Mairi Campbell
Dugald Cameron
Rosemary Barry
Archie McGillivray
Mandie Currie
Douglas Breingam
Carol Wormleighton
Hazel MacCormick
Julian Wormleighton
Sarah Campbell
Mike Hyatt

Clare Haworth
Freda Drysdale
Duncan Drysdale
Margot Bell
Donnie McCormick
Katy Crossan
Kirsty Wright
Iris Smith
Nancy Ashford
Tamsin McVean
Duncan MacGregor

APOLOGIES:

Stuart and Pauline Ross
Bob and Dot Hay
Jennifer Baker
Roger and Gilly Dixon-Spain
Lesley Crouch
Heather Urquhart

Laura Savill
Seonaid MacDonald
Laura Cook
David White
Stephen Green
Eva Tombs

FORMAT

Participants split into four groups to discuss the top four ideas for the Church and the top three ideas each for the Church house and Glebe land that were indicated as a preference at the drop-in session on 28th January (these ideas were also most frequently suggested in the questionnaire survey). Participants were invited to discuss the pros and cons of each idea and their compatibility with the other ideas and to offer comments. Each group was led by a facilitator, who was provided with a template to record comments and gave feedback to the wider group during the plenary session. Following the plenary session there was a brief discussion about a solar array idea, followed by a summary, general conclusion and winding up.

SUMMARY

There was consensus in the meeting that most of the uses discussed were compatible. These were the ideas / uses most frequently chosen in the questionnaire survey and indicated as preferences in the drop-in session.

It was agreed that the package of uses overall needs to be revenue generating and financially sustainable, although some elements may contribute more income than others. The idea of a commercial aspect to a venture was supported – for example, with a community interest company or trading arm working with local businesses and helping to set up new businesses.

It was noted that community ownership would bring considerable capital and revenue cost burdens that need to be identified clearly.

Whatever happens in the Church, a multi-use space was supported but it was felt that some pews should be retained or at least – not all to be removed.

Restoration work to the Church building might bring opportunities to offer training and apprenticeships to young people in traditional building skills and crafts.

The Church house could be offered as a long let in the short-medium term until the proposed uses of the Church building are up and running. However, in the long term it may be integral to whatever happens in the Church and its use should support the Church in a way that contributes most revenue to the project.

COMMENTS AND POINTS RAISED

Church

- There was agreement that whatever happened in the Church would be the main attraction / key use and that the other assets should be best used to support this
- Church should continue to be available for worship – multi-faith; up to the community how used. Are there organisations looking for spiritual space – would they need to pay a fee?
- Dunollie – example that started small and now employs up to 15 staff
- Needs careful marketing - world- wide marketing
- Various funding opportunities – including crowd funding and grants
- Business Plan required - needs short, medium and long term plans
- Can't take anything forward without paid staff/ project manager; volunteer capacity is limited
- Could set up a "Friends of the Church" – with participants paying annually e.g. £100
- Someone asked why we are in this situation – it hasn't been raised as an issue in the last 20 years. (Answer: Falling congregation sizes and rising costs mean that CoS have decided to dispose of church buildings and assets around Scotland and Lismore Church is one of those to be disposed)
- Challenges relating to utilities for Church or increased use of Church house – especially water and drainage
- Challenge of access – disabled, difficulty moving coffins etc.
- Challenge of long-term maintenance of the building: aim to get all the substantial fabric refurbishment works done asap, to a good state of repair, with a cyclic maintenance regime introduced thereafter, for small expenditures regularly. The current state of the roof, for example, was not clear, with different views from separate consultants; the acid test would be a detailed on-roof investigation. Copper nails had been used for slate fixing, but their current state, and that of the slates and sarking remained subject to conjecture
- Could the weekly 'collection' be allocated in part to the future of the Church, rather than being swallowed up by 'George Street'? This might build up a fund towards future insurance and heating costs
- Could the congregation hold services during the winter months, in the meeting room of the Church House, to save costs in the short term?

Possible use: Quiet space (10 votes in drop-in session)

- Could be compatible with multiple other uses

Pros	Cons
<p>Natural extension of current use pattern. Community might contribute. Could be used for pilgrimages. Ecclesiastical/heritage/study courses or silent retreats; pilgrimages. Peace, quiet and ambience of island are selling points- numerous visitors already (see Visitors' Book) who appreciate the qualities of the space and its peacefulness. Could make use of vestry, mezzanine etc. Or create space near entry, separated from main space with glass doors or curtains – so close off or open to use whole space. Promote historic qualities. May encourage philanthropy / donations. Would respect traditional purpose of church Can be delivered alongside other ideas. Not costly / no major constraints. Compatible with neighbours.</p>	<p>Not likely to generate much income (unless organised retreats / courses etc.) although donation boxes well positioned, and supported by 'give-aways' or beside a lively exhibition etc, could generate some small steady income. May be difficult to manage public vs private space. Would need some pews removed for a multi-use space. Accommodation might be difficult for pilgrimages involving large groups/ staying longer. Finite volunteer resource (true for most ideas). Dampness etc – financial liabilities. No disabled access. Electricity costs. Time limited. No impact on island businesses.</p>

Potential use: Performance space (19 votes in drop-in session)

- Could work well as a venue for festivals etc. working with other locations e.g. Taproot

Pros	Cons
<p>Wonderful acoustics. Could be used as a recording space? Potential users – Taproot, Care for Carers, Pilgrimages, Tours. Multi-use space, aided by some removal of pews. Good location – equidistant between ferries. Compatible with other uses. Significant income possible. Can be compatible with hall / heritage etc if work together. Opportunities to collaborate with hall on fund raising.</p>	<p>Compatibility with other uses? May be constrained. No disabled access / access to balcony difficult for some. Dampness etc and financial liabilities. Requires some upgrade – heating, better lighting etc. Overlaps with hall / heritage if they don't work together. Organisation needed. Potential increased traffic / noise (depends on type of event – would need neighbours to agree if major use). Limited parking.</p>

	Pews removed for flexibility but needed for life events. Replacement chairs would require storage. Cost new chairs vs income from selling pews?
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Potential use: Life events (weddings, funerals etc. including destination wedding venue) – (37 votes at the drop-in session)

Pros	Cons
Provision of destination wedding packages could make significant money – business venture for residents / work with existing local businesses? Employment opportunities. Make use of other island locations/venues and businesses – work with hall, heritage, café etc Done already – popular with Lismore residents. But potential to offer to others on a charged for basis, with packages of other services / facilities – potential business opportunity. Would generate funds.	Requires exclusive use at times (but these can be managed). Careful marketing required – commercial approach. Availability of kitchen and lavatory facilities (particularly if run as a commercial venture) – although temporary facilities can be used (mobile loos etc). Capacity issues, especially if space is divided for different uses (although can be flexible – moveable interpretation stands etc). Dampness and financial liabilities. Monetise a space that has previously been free to all (but could charge for off island people only and can offer a package of services/ facilities).

Potential use: Interpretation and exhibition space (visitor centre?); ancient history; St Moluag etc – (23 votes at the drop-in session)

Pros	Cons
Focus on St Moluag – strong story – and ancient history. Building and history will draw visitors. Compatible with use of building also as a quiet space and for performances – different uses can be managed in space and time. Can complement and strengthen the heritage centre offering. Offer as paid-for facilities – would need to separate out areas for quiet reflection and areas available to rent for retreats etc. Potential as mini visitor centre. Permanent exhibitions possible. Interactive displays and videos.	Architectural input required to show off best of building. Want to preserve peace and quiet of the island, which is a particular asset – impact of high visitor numbers? Dampness; financial liabilities. Needs dedicated space (although can be flexible if exhibition material / stands can be moved). Needs to be carefully managed. Potential retail offering would compete with heritage centre – unless done in collaboration and focuses on the St Moluag / ancient history aspects.

Opportunities to run educational workshops / courses etc. Good info for visitors Can also generate donations Could include a gift shop	Donations rather than steady income (but can run as a centre with interactive displays – cost to enter or to view the material).
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Church House

- Uses can vary over time – renting early on then change to other uses
- Consider use as care facility? But expensive and not compatible with other uses
- May not be easy to extend building for any purpose (archaeology etc.)
- Interest in use for Pilgrimage visitors, where a ‘real potential’ for growth of a ‘business’ income stream was mooted. Additional accommodation provision would need to be sorted if such a venture was to be developed. This would be compatible with both interpretation/ education facilities and destination venue in Church, if managed carefully
- Church house offers a number of routes for some income generation – the choice of appropriateness for which could best be left open and flexible; based on the principle of supporting the Church Reuse Project as a whole.

Potential use: Accommodation for visiting speakers; performers; hols for disadvantaged etc – (27 votes in the drop-in session)

Pros	Cons
Scope for development of centre for pilgrimage – mini Iona? Could generate income and employment. Works with event space – packages possible.	Not much space and suitable for budget end accommodation only. Competition with existing providers – unless they work together for large events etc. Possible water / sewage issues if higher use? Limited scope to expand building. Maintenance and organisation costs. Building needs upgrading. Not compatible with affordable housing, unless long let done as a shorter term / initial option.

Potential use: Long term let – (21 votes in the drop-in session)

Pros	Cons
Will provide some income. Combines public and private use (potentially). Possible option until Church brought into other uses. Meets needs of island; affordable housing.	Not very compatible with other uses or combined with Church activities / use but might be an option for first few years until Church use is up and running. Possible water / sewage issues if higher use?

<p>Stable and regular income. Income would help cover maintenance costs.</p>	<p>Possible need for further internal separation. Needs upgrading. No employment possibilities. New arrangements for tenants' rights mean less control over letting contract versus short lets or associated with Church uses, which might generate more income – but require greater levels of management. Insurance and fabric/services quality etc.</p>
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Potential use: Catering etc. and back-office for church events / exhibition space – (18 votes in the drop-in session)

Pros	Cons
<p>Fits with use of Church. Supports Church – facilities for church events and activities. Storage space. Potential to retain part for public access and part for accommodation.</p>	<p>Not compatible with other uses unless building is partitioned. Does the Church need an office? (Not now but may do if interpretation centre is developed).</p>

Glebe

- Note – existing tenancy in place

Potential use: Historical site – archaeological excavation & interpretation – (36 votes in the drop-in session)

Pros	Cons
<p>Opportunity to make archaeology more accessible to visitors. Complements heritage centre – builds capacity for visitor activities. More likely to lead to further excavations and research interest. Possibility of further long or medium term major archaeological excavations. Generates interest and potential income. Compatible with / supports exhibition / interpretation in church.</p>	<p>Limited scope for development because of archaeology. Not compatible with grazing animals unless fenced (although boards can be used alongside sheep grazing, as per National Parks interpretation boards).</p>

Potential use: Burial grounds: area for scattering ashes; contemplation – (33 votes in the drop-in session)

Pros	Cons
Suitable for a Garden of Remembrance; plant a tree? Income stream potential from selling “burial plots” – potential promote to clan members? Urgent need for additional burial ground for resident (being progressed).	Potential impacts on water supplies and sewerage? How would this be compatible with farming? Would need to identify a specific area for this? Restrict grazing area. Would there be enough space?

Potential use: Farming – (19 votes in the drop-in session)

Pros	Cons
Improvement of drainage would increase agricultural possibilities. Regular income. Grazing maintains environment (at right levels of intensity). Potential to demonstrate traditional farming methods and skills to visitors?	Limited income. Drainage needed to improve land. Whatever happens in Glebe must not impinge on neighbouring water supplies. Restricted access/ use (unless zoned).

POINTS MADE IN PLENARY DISCUSSIONS

A ‘volunteer’ model for this project was unlikely to succeed – so a more commercial model should better be sought. There are many existing businesses on the island, many already working in harmonious relationships of mutual support, which could be developed; and potentially ‘unlock’ other areas of potential, too.

Shared conversation within the community are vital, before any decisions are to be made; but serious worries that the community might ‘bite off more than it could chew’!

It is clear that this community facility could not replace the Public Hall, given the severe constraints on the Church assets. Both capital and revenue costs would be very substantial, therefore concerns that such a project could have a strongly negative impact on the community – and in particular, on the use of the Hall.

But noted also, the potential for the Church to offer a set of different, but ideally complementary uses for community and visitors, where both facilities were viable. For example, the main income generating uses for the Church could be interpretation of St Moluag and Lismore’s ancient history (in collaboration with the Heritage Centre and local businesses) and offering wedding packages and other life events (working with the Hall, accommodation providers and other local businesses) with an offering for spiritual retreats and pilgrimages.

Noted that due regard should be offered to the existing tenants of the Glebe land and that the archaeological dig had not dealt with the drainage of the lower Glebe area, and appeared to have made matters worse, if anything.

Opportunities for farmers to practise some of the older forms of farming on the Glebe land, using many of the older items of equipment.

Noted – the need for a ‘care facility’ for those older folk who needed some enhanced care. There was not time to develop that case further at the meeting.

SOLAR ARRAY

Sebastian reported that, after the Drop-in Day, another ‘idea’ had emerged for a possible use of the extensive Glebe land to the West – between Kilmoluag House and Balimackilichen:

A ground-based solar array, potentially producing energy and some income for the Church project, and possibly other community benefit – which would have little or no visual impact and therefore stood a fair chance of acceptability by Historic Environment Scotland and the Planning Authority. Such an installation could permit continued use for grazing, to a degree.

Due to its late ‘arrival’ as a suggestion, it had not formed part of the briefing for the day, in part because it could supplement all other uses without much conflict – except marginally on the Glebe grazing position. This idea was in its early stages, and might not prove viable; but was being seen as a potential contributor to the set of ideas for securing the Church’s future.

This was noted, with some interest.

STATUS STATEMENT AND VISION

During the break and feedback session, Sebastian drafted some paragraphs for contemplation prior to the session’s close; and for future review and adaptation:

Status:

‘The site is registered as being of National, and even International importance as a centre for religious and cultural renewal for over 1500 years; the community recognise that celebrating the history of this special place and taking on responsibility for its long-term well-being, comes with very significant challenges, specifically in resource terms (i.e. people and financial) – which the next phase of community work would need to test carefully.’

Vision:

‘The Vision is of the Church Building as a lively community facility providing a mix of compatible uses for the benefit of the community and visitors alike; with back up from a set of income-generating uses of the Church House, adapted over time as appropriate; and some income from the Glebe Land.’

Also, a Vision Statement developed since the workshop event:

The Vision is for a multi-use space that is used by the community and visitors and is managed for the long term benefit of the island and its community. The Church building is the focus of the offering and will be used in ways that celebrate, promote, educate and raise awareness of Lismore’s history, culture and environment and provide opportunities for people to explore and connect with the spiritual nature of this place. Use of the Church house and Glebe land will complement the

purpose of the Church building in ways that support the long term viability of the three linked assets.

The Church building can support a variety of uses that are complementary but the main focus must be on uses that generate revenue income. Suitable uses include an interpretation and education centre on Lismore's ancient history and the story of St. Moluag, delivered in collaboration with the heritage centre – and interpreting how this helped shape today's culture and environment. In keeping with this focus, spiritual retreats, courses and pilgrimages (for all faiths/ denominations) can be offered, appealing to Lismore's diaspora. Continued worship in the Church is important to most islanders, whether they attend regularly or not but there will be opportunities for all denominations to worship in the space if they wish. Life events will continue to be celebrated in the Church and this will be developed to offer packages of services and facilities, for example as a destination wedding venue, offering opportunities to build new island businesses and support existing ones. All these uses have the potential to generate income as well as allowing an element of continued free or low cost use by residents.

While the Church house may be offered as a long let for a period, while the Church project is developed, eventually, the building will be used in a way that supports the Church facilities and activities, also providing some accommodation for people linked to the Church activities. The Glebe land is sufficiently extensive to allow space for on-site interpretation and further archaeological excavations, alongside quiet space in a garden of remembrance for scattering ashes. Farming can continue across some of the land, with a focus on traditional farming practices and interpreting these for visitors. Alongside sheep grazing, a solar array might generate income and produce energy for local use or export to the grid.

ADDENDUM: PRINCIPLES OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS IN USE

Sebastian read through the eight principles stated (at the beginning of the consultation) as those guiding the community consultation process, with some comments demonstrating ways in which they were being fulfilled. He requested that anyone with a query, or concern or comment regarding the application in practice of the principles to please advise the organisers.

No points were raised from the floor at that point.