

SLAINS KIRK TASK GROUP  
FINAL REPORT FOR SESSION NOVEMBER 2016

Background Information

The group was set up following the Conversation Evenings held in Collieston Community Centre and Ellon Parish Church of Scotland on 19<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> November 2015 respectively.

The group comprised representatives from across the Congregation as well as Office Bearers of Ellon Parish Church of Scotland. The members of the group are:

Jim Anderson

Alan Cameron

Anne Craig

Patricia Davidson

Ann Gammack

Eddie Gordon

Elaine Henderson

May Irvine

Ian Sinclair

David Smith

Susan Taylor

Rev Alastair Bruce – Parish Minister

Sandra Beaton – Session Clerk

Andy Bruce – Church Treasurer

Mary Burnett – Chair of Congregational Board / Property / Finance

Sandy Grant – Property Convenor

The Slains Task Group was set up to consider the future of the Church Building at Collieston, Slains Kirk. This building has been another place of worship for a significant time, offering members of the Congregation a service on the first and third Sunday of the month. Attendance at these services would normally be around 40, with a number of the Congregation travelling to Collieston from Ellon to attend.

Following discussion with Presbytery the Church Building was closed until repairs were carried out. At the time Ellon Parish Church was in vacancy and the decision to go ahead with repairs was put on hold. At the time, the cost of repairs, both essential and recommended was £52,100.

There are two essential points which must be made:

- This report is not about Worship and/or Mission and Outreach to the Community of Collieston and Slains
- The Congregation will make the final decision about the Church Building.

It is important to stress that this is not about Worship. This purpose of the group centres on a building and the future of this building. Indeed Worship has continued in the village of Collieston with services being held in Collieston Community Centre.

The group was not tasked with making any decision about the future of the building, which lies with the Congregation.

The group considered the various possibilities for the Church building at Collieston. The group met on several occasions and discussed at length the possible options for the Church building. The information collated from the Conversation Evenings was considered and along with the views of the members of the Group. Ambitious plans to renovate the interior to create a Community space with the capabilities to house a café / shop / post office / gallery were discussed. However, the majority feeling within the Group was that this option may not generate sufficient use and support at this time.

The task group also met with a representative of the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland, Rev Ronnie Yule. The General Trustees are the body within the Church of Scotland who oversee Church properties. The Task Group also received information and advice from Mr Brian Waller (General Trustees) through emails and telephone conversations with Rev Alastair Bruce.

Following lengthy discussion the Group came to the conclusion that there were two options which could be considered by the Congregation.

1. Ellon Parish Church does not retain the building
2. Essential works are carried out to bring Slains Kirk up to the required standard meeting current regulations for use by Ellon Parish Church of Scotland on a long term basis

There are costs associated with both options and these will have to be considered as part of the process to determine the outcome of the Church building. What is certain is that the status quo cannot remain and a decision must be taken and the future of the building determined.

Options:

1. Ellon Parish Church does not retain the building

This is not as simple as walking away. If the Congregation decided that the Parish of Ellon could no longer sustain a secondary place of worship there are important factors to be considered. The Slains building would remain the responsibility of the local congregation to maintain. There are two conditions which must be met:

- The building must be wind and water tight

- The building must be insured as an empty building

It is worth noting that when decisions are made to close churches, the General Trustees are keen to sell the building or look at further use by the community in the form of a Trust set up to maintain a building.

If neither of these options were achievable then the local congregation retain responsibility. The General Trustees may assist financially to avoid the collapse of buildings.

2. Essential works are carried out to bring Slains Kirk up to the required standard meeting current regulations for use by Ellon Parish Church of Scotland on a long term basis

Ellon Parish Church is not in a position financially to complete works as described in option 2. This would require to be funded through potential grant aid and significant fundraising by the congregation of Ellon Parish Church and the communities of Ellon, Collieston and surrounding areas.

A number of essential and recommended repairs would be needed to bring the building up to the necessary standard:

- The building must be wind and watertight
- Internal decoration
- Floor coverings replaced
- Upgraded toilet facilities
- Lead water piping removed and replaced and mains water installed
- Heating system upgraded
- Pews replaced with moveable seating

Sustainability is a key part of option 2. The monies required to upgrade the building are substantial and it would be incumbent upon the congregation to ensure that the funds were in place to maintain the building to this standard for a considerable period of time. Raising funds to secure this is essential.

## Finance

Over a number of years, Session has been made aware that the financial situation of Ellon Parish Church is not as secure as in years past. For a significant period of time overall expenditure has generally exceeded the income. Fundraising for major projects has been successful; this has only been possible due to significant donations by a small number of people. Any fundraising will have to be in addition to the annual Christian Giving.

The Church roll is a significant factor. Although we have a large congregational roll by Church of Scotland standards, like many others this is declining. Over the period 2011 – 2015 the roll has fallen by 9%. On average each year 46 members are taken off the roll and 15 are added. The demographic of the congregational roll is one of an ageing profile with a significant number retired and another group approaching retirement in the next 5 – 10 years. This is likely to impact on the level of giving over the longer term.

#### Costings

Quotes for refurbishment: It would be unreasonable to expect local tradesmen to give up their valuable time to produce a quote when no decision has been made on if and when the work will commence.

A surveyor would be willing to provide estimates for such work with the costs being in the region of £2,000 - £3,000. This is a significant burden on current finances when a decision on the future of the building has still to be made.

A significant concern to the sub group is the cost of renewing the external pointing to all wall areas of the building. The concrete pointing contributed to the problems caused by water ingress. Using lime mortar would be desirable for the long term sustainability of the building. Two years ago the approximate cost of this was £23,500. However, recent anecdotal information on work of this type suggests that the costs may increase significantly.

The sub-group used the Squires Report (Dec 2014) and local information as a guide to approximate costs.

#### Option 1:

Maintaining the building wind/water tight:

Initial outlay £6,000

Annual ongoing repairs £1,000

Annual Insurance Premium £1,800

#### Option 2:

Refurbishment of the building:

Initial outlay £120,000 (minimum)

Annual maintenance and insurance £5,000

Deliverances:

The Kirk Session / Congregational Board

1. accept the report
2. progress the process to make the decision on the future of the Church Building at Slains

Elaine P Henderson

Chair

3<sup>rd</sup> November 2016