

Houghton on the Hill Neighbourhood Development plan Submission by St Catharine's Church

St Catharine's Church, Houghton on the Hill has for some years been seeking to move the settlement boundary so that a proposed site for development (site J) could be allowed. St Catharine's Church owns a large parcel of land behind the church, and part of that land comprises a barn. We would like the settlement boundary moved so that planning permission could be granted to develop the barn site into a residential dwelling.

We made submissions in the initial consultation period at the encouragement of the Parish Council. We worked closely with them to ensure we put forward a strong case as possible. We were disappointed, despite such encouragement, for site J not to be within the allocated sites for development in the latest version of the Neighbourhood Plan.

We would be really grateful if you would consider the below representations and recommend the moving of the settlement boundary to allow for development of the barn site.

1. We have provided suitable evidence in the form of an extract of the will of William George Davis and confirmation from the relevant Solicitors, that any proceeds of sale of the land will indeed be for the benefit of St Catharine's Church. This was at the request of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group.
2. Our rationale for requesting our site to be allocated as one for development is to raise funds for the work and ministry of St Catharine's church into the future. Any such funds would therefore, be used to recognise, sustain and develop the Church as a Heritage Asset in accordance with paragraph 203 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sections a-c or paragraph 210 of the new NPPF. The funds could be used to enhance, develop and improve the current building (re-ordering) but also to help fund in part the provision of a Vicar into the future.
3. Possible uses of any funds (these are options at present) could be:
 - A more welcoming, flexible and useable space for both the church congregation and local community. This would be achieved by removal of the pews which would be replaced by chairs. Removal of the pews is essential since they are increasingly becoming unsuitable and dangerous to sit on. Examples of community uses would be for the school who increasingly use the church but are limited by the current layout and developing the number of concerts that happen in the village.
 - A new kitchen facility which would enable more activities to be run in the church that centred on providing food. This could also have the capacity to run as a café

to operate during the week, offering something different to existing provisions whilst not detracting from their importance and place. This would give the chance for the church to become a sustainable community hub.

- A new floor which would have underfloor heating installed. This would be the most efficient and environmentally friendly way of heating the church. This would also help us with the Diocesan plan for making our churches as environmentally friendly and efficient as possible.
- A new audio-visual system which would benefit Sunday morning services as well as being useable for community events, such as concerts.
- Improved access to the front and rear of the church building which would especially benefit those with mobility issues.
- A more welcoming front door to the church building.
- Helping towards the cost of external stone work on the tower.
- Funds could also be used in a tapered manner to help fund the provision of a Vicar for the years to come. This is potentially needed due to the changing nature of Parish Ministry in Leicester Diocese. The continued presence of a Vicar greatly benefits the village in providing essential emotional, spiritual and practical support to those who come to church and those who do not.

We would also suggest that our proposed development is in line with the majority of the policies of the draft neighbourhood plan as evidenced below:

1. Page 9 point 42 and page 78 paragraph 226 reference the Site Options and Assessment Report. This report states “the site is potentially suitable for housing and therefore potentially appropriate for allocation in the Neighbourhood Plan,” and (...) is in a relatively sustainable location (...). Furthermore “any development proposal will have to conform with the character of the Conservation Area (...)” Any potential designs for future development of the barn would be designed sympathetically to the neighbouring conservation area.
2. Policy D3 page 42. An existing plan for a 1-bedroom dwelling received no objection from the barn’s immediate neighbours.
3. Policy EM3 page 46. Our proposal complies with all the criteria for re-purposing an agricultural building. In fact, when we have consulted the neighbours to the barn, in relation to a previous planning proposal, they were keen for the barn’s removal.
4. Policy S1 page 48. Any proceeds of sale from the barn site would be used for the benefit of St Catharine’s church to safeguard future ministry in the village.
5. Policy S3 a(i) page 50. Again this is a policy recognising the importance of the churches in Houghton and their improvement.
6. St Catharine’s Church is a key community facility as evidenced in Appendix 8.1.8. Any proceeds of sale can be used to protect, sustain and enhance St Catharine’s church in its vital community role.