

Llantrisant Fawr Community Council

Incorporating the wards of Llantrisant, Llanllowell, Gwernesney, Llangwm and Llansoy

Notes of the public meeting held at the Parish Hall, Llangwm Wednesday 28th February 2024

Councillor Glyn Williams (Chairman) opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the hall and explaining the Council was hosting the evening to enable local communities to come together with members of the Church in Wales to discuss the Sale of St John's, Llangwm and to put forward any questions they had. He went on to introduce Bob Evans, Chair of the Monmouth Diocesan Advisory Committee for the care of churches and the Rev'd Sally Ingle Gillis, Vicar of St Mary's Usk and the new Ministry Area leader.

Mr Evans thanked Cllr Williams and went on to say how pleased both he and Rev'd Sally were to have the opportunity to speak about the proposed sale of St John's and to be able to answer everyone's questions. He explained it was his job to look after the churches and churchyards in the area and he was aware the previous decision and action taken to close St John's hadn't been handled in the best way. Both Mr Evans and Rev'd Sally expressed their strong wish to improve the way things are handled now.

Rev'd Sally introduced herself and gave an insight into her role in the church saying she was responsible for twenty churches in the area and wanted to allay all fears over the closing of the churchyard. She explained that even when churches close and are no longer functioning the graveyards remain open. She placed great emphasis on the churchyard of St John's staying open and confirmed anyone with a connection to Llangwm still had a right to be buried there. Rev'd Sally confirmed the care of the churchyards was of paramount importance to her.

Mr Evans said St John's was owned by the Church in Wales and explained that following a survey undertaken some years ago the church had been deemed unsafe for use. A renovation figure of around £150,000 was quoted and so the church took the decision it should be closed. St John's has continued to be maintained despite it being closed and money for this purpose is set aside in a restricted fund specifically for maintenance and upkeep.

The Church in Wales has now decided St John's should be sold and plans have been drawn up confirming boundary lines and the area of land included with the sale. These plans demonstrate the closeness of the Church to the Churchyard and any new owners whilst having right of access via the Church path would not own the Churchyard. This access can be granted without selling the Churchyard which remains the property of the church.

Both the Friends of Friendless Churches and CADW were approached to take on the building but unfortunately due to the structural issues and renovations required, the costs were considered too prohibitive.

The Church of Wales has instructed the property company Linnells in Newport (specialists in residential and commercial property) to handle the sale and once the valuation figure has been agreed, St John's will be put up for sale and marketed.

Signed _____

Date _____

Whether the church is sold as a commercial venture or a domestic property, there are many restrictions placed on the building which would ultimately affect its use. Planning permission would be required for any alterations/improvements to be made, particularly as it is Grade 2 listed. St John's will be sold with a very small area of surrounding land which would not encroach on the graveyard. The graveyard would continue to be maintained by using the restricted fund set aside for St John's which is currently £19,000.

Mr Evans said they were aware funds had been raised locally to maintain St John's church and that an annual donation from the Community Council also helped towards the upkeep of the churchyard. When questioned over the possibility some of the proceeds might go back to Llangwm, he replied the monies donated had been for the specific purpose of maintaining St John's and could only be used for that purpose. Although, he added if there were things needed by the community then residents should say now and this could be investigated.

It was highlighted to Mr Evans that the community remained disgruntled by the way in which St John's was closed. It was felt the poor condition of the Porch was used as an excuse for the church closure and with no consideration given to local feeling or thought, the Church had gone ahead and closed St John's simply by placing a padlock on the door.

Mr Evans reiterated the Church had learned from its mistakes and that previous experience had shown the need to do things in a better way. Clear communication and a mindful process was required going forward and he would keep the Community Council updated as things progressed.

Cllr Glyn Williams ended the meeting by saying how pleased he was that that the Church was trying to do the right thing and added the Community Council wanted the best for its residents and if further questions arose or another meeting was required going forward then the Council would oblige. He thanked everyone for attending and sharing their thoughts.

The meeting closed at 9pm.

Signed _____

Date _____

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Date _____