



Ebenezer Baptist Church



William Powell AM
Chair, Petitions Committee,
National Assembly for Wales,
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA.

Your ref: P-04-322
13th February 2012

Dear Sir,

I am replying to your request in October 2011 for suggestions as to what further help the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage could offer to address the issues I have raised. I have been requesting advice in light of the Minister's letter and apologise for the delay.

I am encouraged that the Minister accepts in his letter that churches should not be "preserved without any changes so they are not relevant to modern day worship". (para 2). Also significant is his statement that CADW and the Local Authority Conservation Principles have built into them the need "to be pragmatic in appreciating the needs of present day congregations in worship." (para 7).

I continue to have several concerns and these are listed towards the end of this letter. However to answer the committee's request directly there are two ways the Minister could consider, if he really believes there is any substance to the complaint of this petition.

1st In my initial petition and its supporting document I suggested a two tier system which would relax some of the regulations if CADW were dealing with a charity where the building was in constant use. The Minister did not address the merits of this suggestion.

2nd I notice the Minister is keen on the idea of a "Task Force" working group to look at the long term future of chapels in Wales, and is "in the process of meeting with several

different church and chapel denominations in Wales”¹ He is correct in stating that “the places of worship mentioned in the Petition are generally independent churches”. May I therefore suggest that the remit of this Task Force is expanded to gather details from churches which are independent, such as those members registered with AECW (Associating Evangelical Churches of Wales) which represents about 100 active, growing churches in North and South Wales. This would put him into contact with our church, and many others that would be eager to present their views. I can provide further details if the Minister wishes to pursue this.

Response to the letter from Minister Huw Lewis AM

1. It seems that the Minister is protecting CADW by explaining the part played by the Local planning authority in his letter paras 5, 6 and 7. Nevertheless in my experience of over thirty years’ ministry, churches have relatively few problems with the local planning authorities but persistently when CADW gets involved.
2. May I illustrate frustrations with CADW using details from Ebenezer, my current church? I believe they are typical. We have been attempting to introduce changes and improvements which would allow the free movement of disabled people into and around the premises, to fulfil the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act to make “*reasonable adjustments*” to the features of our premises. I have been Ebenezer’s minister for six years and CADW was involved then. So large are the delays that one of the necessary quotations became invalid as the building firm went out of business. I was saddened when one elderly member recently said she honestly expected to be dead by the time any plans are enacted. CADW have just requested for the third time a further breakdown on figures relating to permission for new windows.
3. These are the kind of delays that make many churches question whether what is claimed on paper actually occurs in practice.

¹ Reported in the South Wales Evening Post in an article by Mike Hedges Swansea East AM “Chapels have a special place in our History” Fri Feb 10th 2012.

4. Can the Minister cite actual instances where the needs of present day congregations have been taken into account to the satisfaction of the congregation, when considering modernizing features to assist their mission to the local community?

5. Finally, the Minister quotes the grants we at Ebenezer have received from CADW. Yet despite CADW's "generosity" we are found setting forth a petition questioning CADW's practice. This conveys the measure of our discontent with CADW's behaviour. If there was an overall benefit from their involvement we would not be leading a petition of this nature. Nor would it be supported by over 100 signatures from all parts of Wales.

Yours sincerely

Rev Graham John
Lead Petitioner.