HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: The Templar Bells of Scotland

16 January 2025

Holywood Church, Holywood, Dumfries,
Dumfries and Galloway, DG2 0RH

[redacted]

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A campaign to recognise Scotland's hidden medieval heritage

[redacted] **Case Officer, Planning and Environmental Appeals Division**

c/o DPEA, Ground Floor, Hadrian House, Callendar Business Park, Falkirk, FK1 1XR

By Email

[redacted]

Your ref: LBA-170-2021

Planning Authority ref:24/1491/LBC

We reply to your letter dated 9 January 2025 and email dated 14 January 2025, regarding the position laid out in our letter dated 13 January 2025.

The reporter's response

> *'The Reporter has considered the points raised by you (the appellant) with regard the arrangements for the accompanied site inspection. It is for the reporter to determine whether a site inspection is necessary, the purpose of the site inspection is to obtain further information that is essential for the determination of the appeal. In order to fully understand the context of the appeal, the reporter requires to see both the church and the bells.*
>
> *If the bells are not made available for the reporter and other parties to view, this would form part of her consideration of the appeal. If reasonable access to the church and to the bells is not given, it is likely to affect the credibility of the appellant's evidence and the weight that it can be given as the reporter would not be able to verify the appellant's evidence.*
>
> *As the proposed site inspection date is in a fortnight, the reporter asks that the appellant confirms the site inspection arrangements previously put forward, along with the location of where the bells will be available to view and any PPE that attendees require.'*

Unfortunately, the clarification we requested has not been provided. We are dictated by prudent action, rather than further obdurate procedural behaviour that demonstrates no transparent benefit; particularly behaviour that would place at significant

risk the very artefacts we are attempting to protect against potentially negligent action and ill-informed consideration that these priceless relics are fittings better protected within the church building.

The issues surrounding the bells' removal, their nature, and physical attributes are comprehensively laid out in detail within the planning application and appeal, including the full archaeological investigation of the bells' provenance. As the reporter is not qualified to make any technical evaluation of the bells, it is still not clear what is to be gained from the exercise—the reporter not demonstrating any cogent reason to view the bells beyond 'seeing them', with only the threat that not 'seeing them' may negatively influence any appeal decisions made.

With reasonable concerns and conditions regarding viewing the bells being ignored; thus, within the context of the appeal, with a subjective view of the bells' provenance and value been exhibited by the reporter, and in balance with the risk to the bells, the bells will not be made available for the reporter's inspection.

The church building is on a publicly accessible site, so inspection of the site prevents no restriction to the reporter, considering 'the purpose of this visit is to allow the reporter to become familiar with all the physical aspects of the site and the surrounding area'. Within the context of the appeal, it is not the current internal condition of the church that is the focus of the bells' removal or pertinent to why they are removed, but instead it is the future development and security of the site. Thus, in consideration of current health and safety concerns, access into the interior of the church is prohibited.

I confirm that the application for the original planning application was made by Mark Huitson. We cite 'appellants' as both Rachel Bonde and Mark Huitson, as owners of the site and bells are concerned with this issue, thus appeal was made in both names.

As the appellant is only permitted 'to point out features of the site that relate to the appeal, and the reporter is unable to enter into any detailed discussion about the case', and the security constraints of the site are apparent, we deem our attendance unnecessary, or prudent with judicial review likely, and public and legal scrutiny of the circumstances and communication surrounding the explicit nature of the bells ongoing in entreaty.

Yours Sincerely,

For Mark Huitson and Rachel Bonde, owners of Holywood Church, Dumfriesshire