ST LUKE'S CHURCH, BUCKFASTLEIGH

The future of St Luke's Church building

AN EXPLANATORY NOTE ON THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND to accompany the PCC's agreed statement, November 2026

In 1992 Holy Trinity Church, the medieval parish church of Buckfastleigh, was burnt out in a fire. The decision was then made by the PCC (Parochial Church Council) that Holy Trinity should not be restored because of its location remote from the centre of Buckfastleigh. Instead, the existing Victorian chapel-of-ease, the original St Luke's Church, should be demolished and replaced with a modern building, to provide both a centre for the congregation of St Luke's and a resource for the wider community. The new St Luke's was consecrated in 2002.

Unfortunately design and construction failings meant that the building leaked in heavy rain from the beginning. Attempts were made to cure the leaks, with minimal success. Claims for financial redress for the failure were made, but this yielded only a small amount. Over the last 10 years or so, the leaks and related issues have got much worse, and are now causing very significant damage within the building, (loose roof panels, roof insulation, internal ceiling panels and ceiling lighting, and buckets are needed to catch the worst of the water ingress).

In 2018 a major survey was carried out, which determined that the whole roof would need replacing, but the cost was estimated as being at least £400,000, and therefore quite beyond the financial resources of the church.

The idea was then put forward of selling the land behind the church for redevelopment as housing, with the aim that his would give the financial resources needed to solve the problem, either by repair or by a totally new building.

Savills in Exeter were then engaged in July 2023 to explore various options, with their accompanying cost implications. These options were subsequently narrowed down to the single preferred option of selling most of the site to a developer for housing, with the front part of the site being available for the Church to construct a new church building. It was suggested the new church building should be 120 square metres, which is very much smaller than we have at present, but would be sufficient for a multi-purpose building that would provide a well-designed space that could be used both by the church congregation for worship, etc., and by the community. This proposal would of course require planning permission, and its viability would depend on a developer taking the site at a sufficient price for a break-even financial result, or at least near enough to that for the church to be able to fund the shortfall.

To explore the planning issues that might arise, Savills submitted a "pre-app" to the National Park Authority in March 2026. The response in September 2026 raised various issues which Savills estimate would cost £150,000 to answer before a full planning application could be considered – this is totally beyond our means and raises enormous questions as to how we proceed from here.

It is clear to us that the life of the existing building is limited, as indicated in the agreed statement by the PCC, and we have to be open to all possibilities.

We are therefore seeking to arrange meetings with Exeter Diocese authorities, and we have also decided that the time has come to inform both our own congregation and the local community about the current situation and the difficulties of seeing the way forward.

We cannot change the past, but we seek under God's guidance to provide for the life of our church congregation and for our service within our local community.