



PRESS WATCH - C of E will not 'rescue' cathedrals

Archbishop casts further doubt on future of Guildford Cathedral after local council rejects plan to raise ten million pounds, Jane Mathews writes

They have dominated Britain's cities and dioceses for centuries and represent some of the country's most impressive landmarks.

However, The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has warned that cathedrals are not “too big to fail” and confirmed the church will not rescue Guildford Cathedral from financial collapse.

The future of the cathedral is under threat after plans for a housing development on surplus land that would have raised a £10 million endowment were rejected by Guildford borough council.

The cathedral is losing up to £100,000 a year, with sources saying the relatively modern building, completed in 1961, struggles to attract the donations received by older churches.

Church leaders had hoped a proposal to demolish some clergy properties and build 134 new apartments and houses would solve its financial problems. But the scheme was criticised as overbearing by residents and was overwhelmingly rejected by councillors.

In a letter to the council days before it rejected the scheme on February 16, the Archbishop warned that the church would not “rescue” the cathedral.

Last night the Church of England confirmed the Archbishop’s position remains unchanged.

The Archbishop wrote: "It is sometimes said that cathedrals are the Church of England's equivalent of the big banks – 'too big to fail' – and that the very serious financial straits that are one of the motivating factors for Guildford pursuing this application are not so serious because the central church would 'rescue' them before total collapse. This is not the case.

"Naturally there are ways of offering assistance and advice, but it is extremely unlikely that any part of the church would be able to compensate financially for the effects of this development not going ahead."

At a planning meeting, Dean Dianna Gwilliams, reportedly told councillors: "There is no plan B. We welcome more than 90,000 people a year and the running cost of the building is immense.

"We believe the development proposal is the only way to raise the necessary endowment."

However, councillors overwhelmingly voted to reject the application. A spokesman for the cathedral said: "Clearly we are disappointed by the decision. We will carefully consider the reasons for refusal before deciding the next steps." *First published in The Daily Telegraph February 27, 2017*

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