

The future of St Paul's House

For many years, St Paul's House in Edison Road has been a financial asset to the Bromley Parish Church. Without the revenue it has generated over the last ten years, the church would still be paying of 'the debt' incurred by the building of the Rooms, Youth Centre and organ.

In February this year, the Red Cross ended its tenancy of the ground floor suite. The PCC therefore had to decide what to do with St Paul's House. There were basically three options:

- Sell the building with vacant possession.
- Retain the building and seek new tenants.
- Demolish and rebuild flats, offices or even a surface car park.

Each had its own strengths and weaknesses, but the PCC decided that retaining the property was the best option.

Finding new tenants for St Paul's House had proved difficult in the past, but the PCC were approached by an NHS community service – BAIS - who wished to lease the ground floor suite vacated by the Red Cross. BAIS is part of the Specialist Directorate of South London and Maudsley NHS Trust.

BAIS are the community drug treatment team for the Borough of Bromley. The team of workers (which includes doctors, nurses and social workers) treat people who are addicted primarily to heroin. They also provide support for health care professionals, and families and friends of drug users.

BAIS have been looking new premises in central Bromley where there are good transport links to all areas of the Borough. As a community drug treatment team they

are placed in the community where the problem is, rather than in a hospital setting.

BAIS opens during normal office hours Monday to Friday and alternate Tuesday evenings. It does not dispense drugs and does not hold any drugs on the premises, but provides patients with prescriptions to collect from community pharmacies. It also has a needle exchange where dirty needles and syringes are returned in safety bins in exchange for clean equipment.

The PCC have investigated the work of BAIS and considered the impact the organisation has had on its locality. The PCC has been satisfied by the references received and from detailed discussion with those running the project, that BAIS are responsible and considerate neighbours. They operate strict boundaries as to how patients may attend and there is nothing to suggest that the presence of BAIS encourages an increase in anti-social behaviour in its immediate vicinity. This is supported by police statistics.

BAIS have applied for planning permission from the Borough Council for a change in use of St Paul's House. A date has yet to be set for the planning meeting. The proposal has received a mixed reaction from the residents. While the PCC are sympathetic to the concerns of the residents, it feels that working with a project like BAIS is compatible with the social responsibility that one might reasonably expect of a church.

If BAIS are granted planning permission then the PCC is likely to agree to a 15-year lease. This will provide BAIS with a permanent centre, while BPC will receive a regular income that will open up all sorts of possibilities for the development of our mission.

Michael Camp