

# SAVE

PRESS RELEASE

7 August 2009

## SAVE CRIES FOUL AS COUNCIL AGREES DEMOLITION OF VICTORIAN CHURCH



**SAVE is shocked by Gravesham Council's decision to grant consent for the demolition of the handsome former Milton Congregational Church, currently a Sikh Temple (the Siri Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara), on Clarence Place in Gravesend. Although unlisted, this fine building, dating from 1872, is in a conservation area and in good condition. In approving demolition to make way for a new residential development the council failed to heed objections from SAVE, the Victorian Society, Urban Gravesham and local residents.**

The church was built in 1872 to the designs of Sir John Sulman (1849-1934). Sulman, worked in partnership with John W Rhodes and designed and built over 70 churches in the British Isles. However he is best known for his work in Australia, where he became a leading architect and an important figure in the field of town planning. He designed a number of civic and institutional buildings including the Civic Centre buildings in Canberra and is credited with playing an important role in the development of Australia's cultural identity.

The church falls within the Windmill conservation area and has also been included in a list of buildings of local interest. In objecting to the application to demolition, SAVE

supported local group Urban Gravesham in arguing that this was a landmark building which made a positive contribution to the conservation area and its loss would not be outweighed by the public benefits of the new development. As the building has been more or less in constant use since its construction it survives in good condition. Despite some damage caused by bombing during WWII and some unsympathetic conversions it has preserved its integrity and much of its original fabric.

It is SAVE's opinion that the decision to permit demolition is contrary to Gravesham Council's conservation policy, as laid out in the recent conservation area appraisal. Also, crucially, SAVE believes the council failed to pay proper attention to national heritage guidelines for the demolition of buildings within conservation areas as set out in PPG15. The motive for demolition seems to be purely financial and there is little evidence that the feasibility of other uses have been seriously investigated.

Given that the damage inflicted upon Gravesend during the Blitz and later as a result of post-war road-led redevelopment, the decision to condemn this building seems all the more tragic and short-sighted. SAVE is now considering judicially reviewing the council's decision.

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

**SAVE Britain's Heritage** has been campaigning for historic buildings since its formation in 1975 by a group of architects, journalists and planners. It is a strong, independent voice in conservation, free to respond rapidly to emergencies and to speak out loud for the historic built environment.

For further information please contact William Palin or Catherine Townsend on 020 7253 3500 or email: [office@savebritainsheritage.org](mailto:office@savebritainsheritage.org) Website: [www.savebritainsheritage.org](http://www.savebritainsheritage.org)

**PRESS RELEASE ISSUED BY** SAVE Britain's Heritage, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ Registered Charity 269129