

St David's developer speaks out on plans 'All I want is to see the church put back into use'

THE owner of Carmarthen's St David's Church has said he wants to see the building restored and is working hard to do that — but feels he has been vilified by some in the town.

The ongoing saga of efforts to save the church from ruin has seen owner Aaron Hill back at the church continuing to clear the overgrowth and further repairs to the building.

Mr Hill, who lives in Caernarfon and has transformed other listed buildings in the past, has spoken to the Journal about how plans to turn it into a private property are shaping up.

Speaking at the church where he was carrying out clean up work and repairs with a small team he said: "I sometimes wish I had never bought the place, it's been tough since I bought it five years ago and some people have had a real problem with me through articles in the press, saying all sorts.

"I'm a nice guy and all I want is the same as them, which is to see the church put back into use.

"Yes I bought it for a £1 from the Church in Wales but also spent a few hundred thousand after buying it to make it safe so I could start on my plans."

A stumbling block has been the fact planning permission

EXCLUSIVE
by IAN LEWIS

01267 610452
ian.lewis@swwmedia.co.uk

has been refused by Carmarthenshire Council for the plans to convert into a home.

However, Mr Hill then resubmitted them and is awaiting the outcome from planners.

Despite being criticised over the past few years by some corners Mr Hill said: "I have to say though that the majority of people in the town I have spoken to have been very supportive of the plans and want to see the church put to use and not left to ruin.

"I have had tea and biscuits brought to me and lads while we have been doing work."

Despite his efforts much has been made over the old graveyard at the church which comes as part of owning the church.

There are a number of war graves there and calls have been made for the area to be cleared of overgrowth.

Former town mayor Richard Goodridge who has been vocal in his criticism towards Mr Hill and what he saw was a lack of progress at the church said he planned on starting a charity to take over the old graveyard site — where he has relatives.

Mr Hill said: "I think the words Mr Goodridge said were that I should 'hang my head in



Aaron Hill at St David's Church in Carmarthen.

Picture: Mike Walters

shame' over the situation.

"The thing is, I'm glad there are plans for a charity, I would happily talk to him and anyone else about the graves being taken over, we could have done this two years ago. I want to see the church saved."

Mr Hill said it was his passion for old buildings that drove him to snap up the church and want to turn it into a home.

"I currently live in a grade one listed building myself in North Wales and I just love old buildings, its my passion."

Looking ahead, Mr Hill said he is eager to hear from Carmarthenshire Council planners over when the application to turn the church into a home will be discussed.

Among one of the stipulations set out by the council is that a ceiling would have to be put in which would come over part of the windows of the church according to Mr Hill.

"I'm waiting now to see what happens next.

"In the meantime I have been here tidying up, getting rid of fly-tipping too on the site.

"I just want to get on and see the job finished and I need the planning permission to do that."



The volunteers who took part in Reflect Project was set up by Xcel alongside Towy Community Church and Bethel Church