

Old church is set to move



Heritage

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A 126-year-old South Taranaki church will have a new role preserving local history when it is moved about 12 kilometres down the coast.

St John the Divine Anglican Church has stood beside SH45 at Otakeho since 1894, but closed a few years ago.

Mark and Trish Stevenson, from nearby Pihama, bought the deconsecrated building in 2018.

They planned to move the church on to land beside their historical homestead, where it would still be available to the families connected with it.

This week, the South Taranaki District Council's Environment and Hearings Committee agreed to grant a resource consent for the move.

The decision, made on Wednesday, will be formalised by the committee meeting next week, after some conditions are revised, and the appeal period will start then, STDC communications manager Gerard Langford said.

Mark Stevenson told the committee at its meeting in Hāwera that he and his wife plan to repair the church once it is moved, and



The last service at St John the Divine Anglican Church was held at Christmas in 2016. Owners Mark and Trish Stevenson plan to share the church and its history with the community.

PHOTOS: CATHERINE GROENESTEIN, ANDY JACKSON/STUFF



will preserve its history and chattels, including memorials to local families. They will use the vestry to display items collected by his late father, historian Ian Stevenson.

"My father had a private history collection in his house, and we always thought a little private museum would be great for the family and to share with the local community," he said.

Of the 23 submissions on the resource consent, only Heritage New Zealand opposed the move.

In a report it said "removal of the building from its site and set-

ting will significantly detract from its heritage values" and should be considered a "last resort".

Heritage New Zealand said the repair work, repiling and ongoing maintenance could be undertaken and security arrangements could be installed on the existing site.

But many of the 20 submitters in support stated they trusted the Stevensons to care for the church and preserve its history and that of the local community, a report by STDC planner Maria Hokopaura said.

Some cited the damage to the building already inflicted by extreme weather, and preventing it from becoming an eyesore as factors in their support.

The last service held at the church was at Christmas in 2016, and it was later deconsecrated and then put up for tender.

"We won the tender not just because of the financial side but because of what we want to do with it," Mark Stevenson said.

"They know that we will restore that church right back to the original church that was there when it was built."