

What we have and how to preserve our Heritage

We have inherited a building which externally and internally has changed little since it was last altered in 1864. The only manifest change has been the introduction of electricity and even this advance has not been upgraded to keep pace with modern requirements.

"It's always cold and damp; the pews are too hard and cold; can't you improve the lighting; it's no good for community events; concerts won't work - there's no loo; it doesn't encourage you to go,". These aren't just excuses, they come from churchgoers who have remained loyal.

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) has been discussing plans for the re-ordering of the church following the arrival of the new team in 2015. We set about looking at three aspects. First, what was the role of the church, ministry and building, in the locality; second was taking responsibility for the fabric of the building which had been neglected over previous years, hence the granting in 2017 of a Faculty for the roof and third, dealing with the challenge "does the church building lend itself to having a wider role in the local community?".

We have therefore been working hard over the last two years to find answers to the above. This has involved working closely with the Architect in looking at what is practical with the building, visiting other churches to understand what they have done, talking to the major grant giving bodies to gain experience of what has happened elsewhere, talking to organ specialists because we have a listed organ and generally sounding out a variety of people about our thoughts and ideas.

In summary we must repair the south roof which leaks like a sieve and for which we have been granted a Faculty. The cost of this work is estimated to be about £80-90,000 . We then turned our thoughts to the existing layout of the church which remains largely as it was bequeathed to us by our Victorian forefathers. It is cold; the heating is completely inadequate; it is damp; the lighting is inadequate for services let alone anything else; the pews are riddled with woodworm and restrict the use of space, they cannot be cleared for uses that require open space, cannot be rearranged to face in other directions, and restrict access for wheelchair users; we don't have mains water or drainage so social and community functions are not practical. We plan, therefore, to open up the church by removing all the pews except those in the Chancel, installing a servery so we can offer refreshments, moving the organ to a new position which will enable the organist to be visible during recitals, and also make space at the base of the tower for an accessible lavatory. The bell ringers would be relocated onto a new mezzanine/gallery above.

Seating for services and other events will be chairs which can be moved as appropriate. We also plan to install a new heating system and improve the lighting and increase the number of power sockets (we have only one socket in the whole church) around the church which would prevent the hazard of trailing leads for items such as the Christmas Tree.

It is also planned to fit a loop and audio/visual system. External ramping to the main door will make for much easier access for disabled people.

PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE

1. How will the proposals help the ministry and enhance the liturgical space

At present it is difficult to use the church for anything other than worship and there is very little liturgical freedom because of the fixed internal layout. There is one word that needs to be paramount in any thoughts of or decisions on future use, and that is 'flexible'. For mission to succeed in this church we must be able to cater for the many different types of liturgy, ranging from Common Worship Communion Services to Baptisms, Weddings to funerals and 'Fresh Expression' style worship. The Family Worship, or Worship4All as we call it, wants to expand into using drama for examples of scripture. Equally, a music group needs to be catered for. All this is not possible with the traditional layout of the church.

Removal of the pews would allow different forms of liturgy and enable such worship to take place but still retain some traditional characteristics. We believe that a Nave altar would suit the church layout. Also, we wish to expand our Baptism ministry, as historically many indigenous residents in the village were not baptised for “not feeling welcomed or included” to quote several parishioners.

It would be easy to make space for a band or visiting choir at the front or back of the church. Worship could happen in the round, processions could take place and for baptisms seating could be arranged round the font.

At present the church is not accessible for all Clergy or Parishioners. The planned Vestry will allow for preparations before services and for a dignified entrance for the Clergy. It could also be used for signing the wedding register or counselling/prayer.

Those without a Christian faith may feel excluded. By using the church for secular functions, more people will start using the building, will feel that it's 'their' church, and realise that the church is for them. Over time they will become familiar with the building and may find it easier to attend church.

A quiet contemplative space compatible with art or photography displays would also be of value and appreciated.

In summary, we need to be able to address the needs of the various types of liturgy that we are expanding.

2. Mission and wider activity

Creating a more flexible space, which is well heated and lit with modern technology, will enable us to offer the building for more community use over and above services. For example, at present a number of week day services at the Primary School take place in the School because the church is not suited to those purposes. More flexibility in church will allow those services and events to take place in church. Similarly there are some groups which have difficulty in finding suitable accommodation for short duration. Once we are able to accommodate these groups they will be invited to come to the re-ordered church at less cost to them but at a profit for us, particularly if we have them in mind in our planning.

In June this year for the first time we have organised two concerts to be held in church in spite of the known deficiencies in the building. We will learn from those experiences before we finalise our detailed planning and proposals but indications from those providing the concerts are that what we have in mind will make it a much more attractive venue for the future. We must make it clear that we are not in the business of commercial activity per se but have to recognise that we would be failing in our duties as trustees if we did not utilise our asset to its fullest without damaging the heritage and ethos of the original building and that means generating income to support our mission and ministry.

3. Financial implications/benefits

We have to think and act in a much wider way and that is why we are organising concerts and other fund raising events this year but those activities alone will not be sufficient. We are not here just to raise money. But, money is vital if we are to survive. It is not just a question of what can we do to raise money to keep us going. We have another purpose and that is the mission of the church and that is why we want to expand the functions and role of the church to reach a wider audience and become an integral part of the local community and village life. Therefore, we must look to make our biggest tangible asset work for us in different ways- financial and spiritual.

One of the driving forces behind our plans is to increase our income. Experience shows that a wise initial capital outlay can reduce ongoing running costs and that is what we will be exploring in great detail in our planning.

We are keen to explore the possibility of ground source under floor heating and photovoltaic panels on the south facing roofs. By these means we would be carbon neutral and have the benefit of a feed in tariff from the roof panels. Fitting inverters to the electrical intake would also enable us to use the stored electricity for day to day use in church at no cost.

4. Justification

We have spent the last two to three years looking at options to meet our objectives set out in the preliminary paragraphs above. That process has of necessity required us to look at benefits and their possible consequences. For example it would be cheaper to dispose of the organ and replace it with an electronic one in preference to moving it but we concluded we would be losing a great part of the heritage of church music and church Architecture. On balance therefore we decided to retain it but in a better position where it would be more appreciated.

Overall we believe that our proposals do not detract from but improve all the internal features of the building resulting in liturgical freedom, being able to use the church in a much more viable way which is consistent with its role as a place of worship and mission and pastoral wellbeing.

5. Likely capital costs