

General information

Central to our vision to put Christ Church at the centre of the local community is our desire to create a greater sense of value, local ownership and responsibility for the church building. To do this we recognise that the church needs to be seen as a valued, cherished, welcoming, accessible local resource, available, not just for worship, but as a unique venue for local gatherings such as civic events, concerts, markets, Christmas fairs, charity events, public debates and festivals.

We have completed the first part of the plan by building a modern community centre on the church site and this continues to bring large numbers of people from across the community to our site, who otherwise might not be aware of the church. The church building itself however, is looking untidy, tired and does not easily lend itself to more flexible uses as the fixed pew platforms reduce the circulation space within the church and are a barrier to wheelchair and pushchair access for the old and young.

It is also a cold, dark and poorly lit space which does not present a welcoming face to those who are perhaps already reticent to enter it. Our proposals seek to remedy a number of these issues and in doing so hope to create a building that is a unique space in the town and which offers the community a sacred space that is flexible, inclusive, accessible and above all useful.

What is needed?

Christ church urgently needs to address its failing heating system. Over a long period of time the existing wall mounted flue heaters have been maintained by a process of on-going cannibalisation and careful maintenance. They have given good service but are now failing to the extent that our heating engineers have condemned 13 of the 16 heaters. This puts considerable pressure on the system which is unable to adequately heat the church.

Lighting in the church is also in a serious state. A large number of our existing halogen lamps have failed - the lights in the chancel area are particularly badly affected. This makes the whole church very dark and unwelcoming. The cost of high level access to and repair of our lights combined with their relative operational inefficiency means that we need to come up with a more sustainable, controllable and cost effective method of lighting throughout the church as soon as possible. We have commissioned a lighting survey which provides us with a 2 phase proposal. Phase 1 to address the urgent lighting needs in the chancel and Phase 2 to replace the remainder of the church's lights with cost effective and more controllable LED lighting.

Christ Church also needs to be made much more physically accessible, welcoming and flexible. It is one of the few remaining regularly used Grade II star listed buildings in Swindon and, as such, affords a great opportunity for us to strengthen our links with the local community. We recognise that many local people, whilst not regularly attending church services, do feel a strong attachment and affection for the church building itself.

Equally we understand that non-church goers need to be encouraged to experience the peace and magnificence of the building so that they can come to appreciate its real value and significance as a local resource. Both in terms of its practical value as a meeting place, but also, when things go wrong in life, as a source of spiritual comfort.

The raised pew platforms prevent free access to all parts of the church and are a barrier to more flexible uses for the building. The lack of circulation space means that visitors are discouraged from staying to socialise at the end of services. The elderly and those with young families find it difficult to get round the church. There is insufficient storage space to store cleaning materials and chairs. Gathering spaces are few and there is a general sense of clutter and disorganisation

which detracts from the peace, beauty and splendour of the building. The side aisle pews were partially removed 20 years ago to make way for the large unsightly wall mounted heaters. This leads to an untidy and rather random mixture of chairs and pews which both restrict access due to the pew platforms but also, visually, do little to enhance this part of the church.

The fixed 1970's carpeted dais also presents a barrier to free movement around the front of the church and crossing. Its large size limits our ability to create close intimate worship or informal "in the round" services or other experimental worship. On occasion though, we have large concerts and then the fixed dais is not big enough. We have a large number of events during the year involving schools, local musicians, choirs and instrumental concerts. These would potentially benefit from the ability to shrink or increase the size and shape of the dais.

Our current audio visual solution is a temporary projector and large floor standing canvas screen which requires at least 2 able bodied operators to assemble and disassemble. There is limited integration with our existing PA system and thus wires necessarily trail across the dais creating possible trip hazards and giving a very amateurish impression of our capabilities. In addition, erection and removal of the screen is long-winded, disruptive and hard work. This in itself discourages the use of audio visual materials during services and at other times. We have sought professional advice on projection from Jim Drennan, the DAC advisor and other consultants and have a proposed solution which we believe will greatly reduce the disruption to services of visual presentations.

Our audio control desk is well equipped and we have recently upgraded some of our systems following previous advice from Diocesan experts and other advisors. It is however, sited too far back and slightly behind one of the tower supporting columns. This, we have learnt, creates a dead spot such that operators cannot always easily hear or see what is happening at the front of the church leading to audio failures and disruption. We need to re-site the audio desk to improve its line of sight and sound.

We believe that to secure Christ Church's future, we need to create a church that balances continuity with utility and which preserves and enhances the beauty of the church whilst improving its accessibility and usability.

Our proposed changes taken together will, we believe, help us present our much loved building as a working, relevant, useful and valued resource for our local community and at the same time secure its future.

Our proposals

Heating proposals

We have conducted a comprehensive heating survey which concluded that our current wall mounted, stand alone, gas heaters are not up to the task of heating the church building efficiently. The wall mounted heaters are ugly, rusting and obtrusive and are operated via a simple time clock system which is unable to take account of prevailing weather conditions and temperatures. They are also increasingly failing. Having researched various forms of heating we have decided that a gas fired wet radiator system with modern environmental controls will provide us with additional flexibility and more cost efficient and effective heating during the winter months. We have identified a suitable boiler location and pipe networks for the church using some of the original hot air ducting from the 1908 installation.

Following advice from Church Care, we have further consulted with heating experts to work out how to deliver heat to the central area of the church to enhance the efficiency of proposed wall mounted column radiators. We are proposing to use

trench heating and have integrated this requirement with a proposed new flat floor.

Flooring

We intend to create a more welcoming, flexible and inclusive church by installing a new flat wood floor extending from the rear across the main body of the church building, to a level which runs through to the Lady Chapel in the south eastern corner of the building and across the transepts. This will give level access to all parts of the church. We have had a full survey of the church interior and our architect Antony Feltham King has produced plans for the floor which accommodate the need to provide some access ramps at the west end of the church. We hope to create a beautiful floor incorporating designs that reflect the original layout of the church and at the same time afford an opportunity to create under floor ducting for trench heating to deliver heat from a proposed new gas heated wet radiator system to the centre of the church.

Design features in the floor will also allow us to re-anchor our original central pews in place whilst retaining the capability to temporarily move some of the front pews for occasions that might require larger areas of flat floor, particularly in the crossing and transepts. By raising the floor level to create a "deck" floor which retains the pew platforms and tiled pavement beneath the aisles, we intend to take a reversible approach allowing for re-discovery if future generations wish to implement a different ordering.

Dais

To maximise the advantages of the new flat floor, we propose to replace our fixed dais with a modular one which, when required, could be dismantled and stored out of the way. This will be extendable to accommodate concerts and other performances and will incorporate a ramp to enable disabled access to the chancel. This will allow us to create a significant space at the front of the church and will enable more creative and inclusive styles of worship to be tried out as well as providing more flexibility for other events in the church. Specifications and quotations are being secured from various suppliers. The design and finish of the dais will be similar to the existing one.

Storage area - North Transept

To reduce the clutter in the church and accommodate additional storage for chairs and the dais staging when required, we also propose to build a storage area at the end of the North Transept. This will be in the form of a simple screen with four doors and has been designed by our architect, Antony Feltham King. This will enable us to keep the church tidier and less cluttered and maximise the opportunities afforded by the new open spaces created in the crossing and transepts.

Aisle & rear pews

By completing the removal of the N&S aisle pews (begun many years ago when new standalone gas heaters were fitted around the walls) and levelling the floor, we will not only create new, potentially more flexible, spaces but will improve access and circulation space for both worship and non-worship events. On occasions where maximum seating is required, the aisle spaces will be filled with chairs.

The removal of 3 small pews on each side at the rear of the church will create a more generous welcome area, and a significantly improved space for circulation and processions. It will also allow us to relocate our audio visual control desk forward to a better position. This will greatly improve our internal communications giving a better line of sight to the altar, pulpit and lectern. The new desk will be created as far as possible with old wood to blend in with the central pews.

Lighting

Probably the biggest impact will be achieved through the replacement of our out-dated high-level lighting, which is expensive to operate and maintain, with new LED based spotlight arrays. Our lighting designer has made a survey of our existing light provision and has provided a cost comparison with the proposed scheme and this demonstrates a significant operational cost saving as well as a reduction of maintenance and replacement costs. The success of our lighting trial in

the Lady Chapel and our visits to other churches in the Diocese has clearly demonstrated the great potential for this change of technology. The proposed new system will allow us greater control over the lighting and we believe will give more cost effective and more efficiently distributed light across the church.

Due to the failure of our existing chancel lights, we have commissioned a separate quotation for replacement lights. Much of the new design for the chancel is a like for like replacement as far as location of lights although the designer has made provision for some new slightly lower level lighting above each of the choir stalls to improve light distribution throughout the chancel area. Full details of this proposed emergency installation are available in our uploaded PDF - Lighting Design V3.

At this time we would also like to formally apply to retain the temporary chandelier in the Lady Chapel as a permanent feature.

Audio visual proposals

There is increasing demand for the use of audio visual materials during worship and in meetings and presentations given in the church building. An upgrade of our projection capabilities will enable significant improvements to be made to the delivery of presentations, films and text. These upgrades will enable a less disruptive and more seamless and professional experience to be offered to all users of the church building by avoiding the need to man-handle screens onto and off the dais during worship. The proposed system incorporates a motorised drop down screen which will be housed unobtrusively behind the main chancel arch for most of the time and only dropped into position when required for services or meetings. We have specified that such a screen will operate quietly and as unobtrusively as possible.

On expert advice we also propose to mount a powerful new projector capable of daylight projection on the wall of the organ stall. This will enable keystoned back projection and will not be visible from the main part of the church. It and the screen will form a fully integrated system with our new audio control position.

A permanently installed and integrated system will also remove the need to connect complex and unsightly cabling each time the AV is required to be connected into the sound system. This will significantly reduce the time and effort needed to prepare the church for services or events requiring audio visual input. At the same time we are aiming to de-skill the job of audio visual control by applying modern scene setting control systems and remote operation capability to our newly integrated systems. We also intend to introduce clergy and lay staff training in effective use of presentation media to ensure that we maximise the benefit of the new capabilities.

Notice Board at the West Entrance

Finally, in order to provide more professional and effective information to visitors to our site, we would like to install a new lockable, notice board adjacent to the West door. This will feature a panel of fixed contact information and additional panels to advertise and promote activities within the church and the Community Centre. This will enable us to remove unsightly and difficult to read notices from the church door and porch and deliver a more professional and tidy way of communicating with the community.

Why are we making these proposals?

Our church needs to be seen as relevant to its community. The changes are necessary to not only improve and enhance worship, but also to enable better access and facilities for a far wider section of our community. Whilst we do have the community centre next door which carries out this role as well, the church building delivers an entirely different experience to the visitor. By maintaining and developing this inclusive, well equipped, yet historic space, we hope to ensure that it continues to play a central and trusted role in our community for many years to come. The replacement of our heating and lighting systems is particularly important since both are failing badly and we hope not to have to incur further repair costs for what are essentially out dated and redundant technologies.

Justification

We believe that our proposals represent a sensible and carefully thought out approach to the use of church in a modern society. Encouraging greater use of the church building both for secular and religious purposes is more likely to secure its future as a place of worship and spiritual significance for years to come. To do this we believe that we need to meet modern expectations of comfort and utility as well as to offer a genuine and warm welcome to all those who enter. It is vital to us that visitors and congregants perceive the building to be well looked after and cherished. This, in itself, is a reflection of our faith.

We do not believe that our proposals will harm any of the significance. The additional flexibility and space will allow us to be more creative in worship and improve our connections with our community and the changes will enhance rather than detract from the significance.

It is central to our plans that Christ Church remains the archetypal Victorian symbol of God's greatness but at the same time it proves itself a valued and cherished asset for its community.