

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE SITE

**1.1 Location:** The Church of St Mary the Virgin Godmanchester is located within the north part of the town, a parish of 6620 residents (estimated 2016) which lies to the south of Huntingdon on the southern bank of the River Great Ouse. The settlement has Roman origins associated with the northerly route of Ermine Street from London to York.

**1.2 Context:** The church was mentioned in the Domesday Book (1086) and has Grade 1 listed building status. The stone structure, built in mixed Gothic or Early English style, consists of a chancel with organ, nave, aisles and tower with spire. The roofs are of timber covered with lead. The chancel is 13th century, the nave 15th century, the tower and spire early 17th century. The nave is separated from the aisle on each side by five corresponding high pointed arches. The clergy vestry is off the north side of the chancel and the choir vestry at the base of the tower.

**1.3 Church services and attendance:** There are five services a week including a Children's Church service which is held (during school terms) concurrently with the main service on a Sunday. On the fourth Sunday of alternate months a Parish Praise service is held in the local school instead of the 9.30 service.

On the fourth Sunday of each month, either at the 9.30 Sung Eucharist service or on alternate months at the Parish Praise service, the whole service is signed for the benefit of those with hearing difficulties. In addition to the regular services there are baptisms (both within and outside regular services), weddings, funerals and special services with particularly large congregations such as the Civic Service, Crib Service and Festival of Carols. The average attendance for a normal Sunday morning service is 70-80 with over 300 for special services and events.

**1.4 Access to the Church:** The Church is open every day with the support of the insurers. There is disabled access through the north porch.

**1.5 Other activities that take place in the church:** The Church is used as a venue for talks, concerts, the Summer Fete (if the weather is inclement), the Christmas Bazaar and Flower and other church festivals. The Church has hosted events by the Boyan Choir of Ukraine, The Hermitage Ensemble of St Petersburg, Huntingdon Philharmonic, the Huntingdon Male Voice Choir and the Huntingdon Children's Orchestra. Other town events, for example the GMC Town Show and Porch Museum presentations, are held in the Church. There are also regular educational visits from the local schools.

**1.6 Funds available:** There will be an application for funds through a professional fund-raiser. There is around £39,000 available in the Development Account for initial work. Fundraising has been significantly successful for previous projects such as the replacement heating (£95,000), rebuild of the Bryceson Organ and installing electric stop action (£74,000), repairs to the ringing chamber floor (£15,000) and major work to the north roof (£64,320).

**1.7 Current Quinquennial and maintenance:** A Quinquennial inspection was completed in 2013 and many of the issues highlighted have been addressed. There is not a maintenance plan but the Quinquennial report serves as a structure through which priority issues are visible. A list of outstanding recommendations to be achieved over various timeframes is at Appendix 1

## 2.0 EXPLANATION OF NEEDS

Medieval churches are increasingly being used as multipurpose buildings for the community, thus taking them back to their original use when the nave was used for a wide range of activities. Current activities might include play groups, scouts and guides, women's and men's groups, keep fit, choirs, councillors' surgeries, drop in centres, coffee mornings and much more. In addition, the community uses the Church for a variety of fundraising events including the annual Town Show. The aim of the Church, and a fundamental part of our mission, is to provide a warm, comfortable and welcoming atmosphere.

**2.1 Facilities:** To allow the Church to be used in this way and also to aid the day to day running of the church relevant facilities are needed.

**2.1.1 Choir Vestry:** At present, there is no self-contained choir vestry so the choir robe in the tower ground-floor area which is also the west entrance to the church. This gets extremely crowded when there is a large choir and there is no security for the choir robes, books or personal belongings. There is also little room to store choir music and very limited provision of flat surfaces on which to lay out music for use before services.

**2.1.2 Storage:** At present there is minimal accommodation for larger objects such as staging and equipment used by the Flower Guild. Suitable storage, a sink and proper work-surfaces are essential requirements for their work.

**2.1.3 Parish Office:** The parish office is currently located in an outhouse in the vicarage. This is very small and unsuitable for the role. The church is open every day and there is no suitable location for a volunteer to welcome visitors or manage the administration of the church. There is a need to store parish documents securely on site.

**2.1.4 Toilet and kitchen facilities:** The lack of toilet and kitchen facilities restricts the hosting of diverse events and meetings.

**2.2 Seating:** The current arrangement of fixed pews severely restricts the use of the nave for other than formal worship. For non-church events this arrangement provides very limited space in the aisle for people to circulate. A more flexible seating arrangement (chairs, mobile benches etc.) would allow us to:

**2.2.1** Use the proposed balcony over the meeting room/chapel for concerts, performances etc. with the chairs facing west and additional chairs on the large nave altar platform.

**2.2.2** Stage performances in the round.

**2.2.3** Set up tables and chairs etc. with plenty of space between them for large community activities such as the bazaar and Town Show.

**2.2.4** Provide accommodation for meetings and study groups and an open area for activities requiring space e.g. scout meetings, play groups, keep fit etc.

The church is the largest community building in the local area and can currently seat over 350 people using additional chairs. Other halls for hire in Godmanchester are listed at Appendix 2.

## 3.0 THE PROPOSALS

### 3.1 Tower area:

- The installation of one disabled and one other toilet plus facilities for the Flower Guild and limited storage space.
- Replacement of the inner door with glass doors, and refurbishment of the outer door if required.
- The ceiling of the new facilities to form the floor of a mezzanine room with an access hatch to allow for the lowering of the church bells from the ringing chamber.
  - There is a proposal that we believe has recently been accepted to allow the Porch Museum to relocate from the old QE School building in Godmanchester to the mezzanine room in the tower area. This would give them secure storage and, with the considerable interest in local history, ensure addition footfall in the church building. It would also provide a focal point for local schools to study the history of Godmanchester and the church with the option of providing tables and chairs on the balcony.
- Access to the mezzanine room through the balcony area by stairs and lift with an emergency exit through a re-opened door into the tower staircase.

### 3.2 West end of nave: (From the rear of the nave to the cross aisle)

- Installation of an open-topped choir vestry in the NW corner with storage facilities for robes and music.
- A chapel/meeting room with a tea station and storage area in the centre of the nave.
  - The aim of the tea-point is to provide hot drinks for members of the congregation after our services to encourage them to stay and socialise and for those who, hopefully, use the two meeting rooms as well as the occupants of the parish office. For any large events we plan to use two separate distribution points elsewhere in the church for hot or cold drinks and we have two hot water boilers and large thermos jugs for that purpose. We currently use the church hall for any events where cooked food is served and we aim to continue that in the future as the hall has a comprehensive kitchen and associated crockery. If hot meals were to be served in the church we would employ an outside caterer who we use regularly and can provides hot food with all the associated crockery and cutlery. There is insufficient room in the church to provide a full kitchen service and that option was dismissed early in our deliberations.
- A parish office to the south of the chapel.
  - As well as providing a focal point for parish administration containing the colour photocopier, telephone and internet access, the parish office would ensure that, for the majority of the week, there would be someone available to greet and inform visitors to the church and museum.
- A balcony over the parish office and chapel to be accessed by a small lift and a staircase in the SW corner.

### 3.3 Main nave:

- Removal of all pews and replacement with portable seating.
- Installation of underfloor heating in the areas currently occupied by pews.
  - The existing radiators will remain as they are the same colour as the walls and will have minimal effect on the look of the church (We did spend £97,000 in 1999 installing the new heating system). We estimate that they, together with proposed underfloor heating, should provide adequate heat levels. We looked at many other heating systems before installing the current radiators and they were deemed the most efficient and cost-effective.

### 3.4 Audio visual equipment:

- Earlier this year the PCC purchased a very good quality video projection system including a high quality 9ft square portable screen and audio amplification system with speakers to facilitate the showing of films and presentations in the church and church hall. The projector, CD player and amplifiers are all in a secure wheeled container and could be used anywhere in the church or hall. The purchase was made possible by a very generous grant from the Friends of St Mary's. There is an ongoing project to improve the speaker system in the church.

## 4.0 POTENTIAL IMPACT

**4.1 Continuing use of the Church:** If we are to ensure that our church continues to be available to future generations and also make more effective use of the historic building, we need to develop the building to meet our present and anticipated requirements and start the planning and fundraising processes now.

**4.2 Accessible to all:** Our overriding aim is to make the church, both as a worshipping community and as a building, more open and accessible. We wish to encourage the wider community of Godmanchester to see the church as a central and important meeting place in the town. Our programme of concerts and other public events throughout the year, and the recent work which now enables the church to be open every day, are all part of this mission.

**4.3 Improved facilities:** The church is by any measure the largest, most significant and beautiful public building in Godmanchester. Considered simply as an auditorium it has more capacity than any other building in the whole district of Huntingdon. Removal of the quite uncomfortable pews and replacing them with good quality portable furniture, installation of more effective and cheaper heating, and the provision of facilities such as toilets and a tea station, will make the church a flexible and very attractive space for a greater range of events. Every gathering, including ones that are not an act of worship, provides an opportunity for the church to present its best face to those who visit. We believe that our proposals will draw even more people into the church and will enable us to demonstrate the welcome and the invitation of Christ to all. The proposed 'winter chapel', will allow mid-week services to take place without the need to heat the whole church and will, in addition, give us a meeting room for up to 30 people. At the moment, the only place for small groups to meet is in the Vicarage, which is less than ideal as the upper limit is around 12 and family life sometimes makes even this impossible. A well-appointed and comfortable room will be an attractive place for outside groups to use as there is nothing comparable available in the town. It will also be an ideal location for our Children's Church

as they currently leave the Church during the main Sunday service to use the hall outside the churchyard.

**4.4 Continue use of the church hall.** With regards to the use of the church hall in the future. We intend to maintain the church hall alongside the new development and will continue to hire it to the nursery school during weekdays as it provides a significant income for the church. It is available every evening and at weekends for church and other users and provides additional facilities for choirs and orchestras etc to change plus additional toilet facilities to those planned for the church. We will eventually be faced with the prospect of replacing our 100-year-old wooden hall but recent repairs should ensure that the hall will last for at least another ten years.

**4.5 Visual impact:** With the new seating laid out in a conventional pattern of rows, roughly corresponding to the current pews, the visual impact of the church as a worship space looking towards the chancel will be very little changed. In addition, the removal of the pews and their platforms will reveal the nave columns right down to their bases at floor level. They are currently hidden by the pews, which are fitted around the columns. This will restore the interior of the church to something closer to its original appearance. Nothing that we are proposing affects the 'ceremonial' end of the church, from the nave platform eastward. We will not end up with a space that appears 'multi-purpose' and for those taking part in worship it will still look like the beautiful and traditional church interior we now enjoy.

**4.6 Finance:** In the short term the project will require a great deal of effort to raise the required funds and we have already engaged a professional fund-raiser. We anticipate that the improved facilities will attract a wider use of the building for non-worship activities. Consequently, this will generate additional income to meet our church expenses and to provide savings for developments, charitable giving and maintenance in the future. This additional income and reduction in non-essential heating costs should put the church on a more secure financial footing. We currently run on a very small annual surplus which limits our ability to budget for any significant additional projects such as a replacement for our 100-year-old wooden church hall.

**4.7 Environmental sustainability:** The provision of a small meeting room, which can be used as a chapel in cold weather, would reduce the overall heating requirements significantly as the occasions on which we need to heat the whole church will be reduced. The installation of efficient under-floor heating in the main nave area would reduce the energy required from our current oil-fired boiler and reduce our carbon footprint. We are examining a possible change to cheaper gas heating. This would be more secure and less expensive but depends on funds available after we have completed the main project. We will also be taking professional advice on the potential for solar panels and ground source pumps as potential sources of electricity and heating.

**4.8 Drivers for change:** The need to improve the facilities in the church has evolved over the years in response to the changing expectations of our congregation and visitors, the increase in the population of Godmanchester from around 5,000 (30 years ago), to over 7,000 once the new estates are completed and the requirement to make more use of this large building. The Church has raised substantial amounts of money over the years to carry out re-leading of the chancel and north aisle roofs and re-boarded the box gutters to modern standards. Essential heating repairs, external pointing and the installation of additional modern low energy lighting have all made the building more comfortable and useable. Although there has been a steady decline in church attendance over a long period of time and the congregation is now largely an ageing one the population of Godmanchester is increasing, particularly in light of the new housing development on Romans' Edge. With many more young families moving to the town our aim is to make the building as user-friendly as possible to cater for the needs of the entire community including the young and elderly.

**4.9 Impact on Staffing.** The church currently operates with a team of volunteers who provide all of the labour to maintain and operate the building, manage the parish office and complete the myriad of essential tasks around the parish. Removing the pews and the installation of moveable chairs would require a degree of pre-planning for services and events in the church to ensure that the chairs were correctly placed. The installation of toilets and a kitchen would require a more formal cleaning regime and the installation of the parish office in the church would require a roster to meet the administrative demands of the parish as well as the wider needs of the community.

## 5.0 JUSTIFICATIONS

**5.1 The immediate project need:** There is increasing pressure both locally and nationally to provide better facilities for worship and community events in our churches and a need to find new forms of income to conserve our ancient and important buildings. One of the levers of change recognised in the Vision and Strategy paper for the Diocese of Ely is the reviewing of our buildings. The project forms a significant part of our Church Development Plan (was Mission Action Plan). In addition, Godmanchester Town Council is looking towards a significant development of facilities in the town as a result of the expanding housing development and rise in population.

**5.2 implications relating to the Statement of Significance:** The church is and always has been a key landmark in Godmanchester and is of significant historical significance. Recognising this, but also accepting that the church building has developed over a long history, the Development Group is determined that the project will have minimal impact on the architecture and other significant items in the building. The proposals are the result of decisions evolved over a number of months by the Development Group and Parochial Church Council. They have undergone a process of review and refinement with due consideration to the historical and architectural significance of St Mary's Church. It is our view that the proposals will not affect the significance of St Mary's as a Grade I listed building. On the contrary, we believe that the visual impact of the church interior will be greatly enhanced as a result of this project, as the columns will be revealed down to floor level and the plans include full redecoration of the walls and uncovering of much of the original stonework. The exterior, of course, is entirely unaffected by the project.

### 5.3 Other options considered to meet the need:

The Development Group considered replacing the church hall in parallel with limited work in the church. This would have the potential to provide an additional meeting room, modern toilets, catering facilities and a parish office in the hall and would reduce the amount of development required in the church. Apart from the main consideration of cost, the disadvantages of this proposal are the distance of the hall from the church, which makes the use of the catering and toilet facilities impractical for events in the church, and the fact that the church hall is rented out to a nursery school during the week from 7.00 a.m. to 6.30p.m. This is a good source of regular income that we would be reluctant to forego.

As part of its initial studies to develop the scope of our proposals the Group visited several churches in villages and major towns where some form of development had taken place. This ranged from the simple provision of additional rooms in the church building to large-scale projects that removed all the pews, installed under-floor heating, provided meeting rooms, kitchens and toilet facilities and ensured that the church was used throughout the week by the local community.

The Group considered the impact of completing only part of the project to reduce cost. However, it felt that there was little point in developing the west end of the church to provide toilets, catering and

the additional facilities if we did not also remove the pews to provide the flexible space needed for a wider variety of uses. Similarly, removing the pews would give us a more flexible space but without the added toilets, catering and other facilities there would be no incentive to use the building for major events and concerts. We did consider combining the meeting room/chapel with the choir vestry in the NW corner but having taken detailed measurements it was felt that the space available would not be adequate and would result in the room being cluttered and unsuitable for any of the functions.

The Group considered the construction of a self-contained chapel in the north aisle to provide a smaller heated space for mid-week and early morning services. This would reduce heating costs considerable as we currently heat the whole church for the relatively small congregation at these services. The Group felt that this would not solve any of the problems of seating flexibility, toilet facilities etc. that were the main drivers for the project, so they recommended that a meeting room/chapel should be part of the west end development.

St Mary the Virgin Godmanchester  
Parochial Church Council

