

Identifying a future use for St Mary's

Have your say to get St Mary's future back on track

1 Introduction

St Mary the Virgin, New Park Street, Devizes SN10 1DW

The Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) is a statutory committee which provides advice at diocesan level to parishes, the Diocesan Chancellor and the Archdeacons, in relation to church buildings and other places of worship, their contents and churchyards. They are an integral part of the process to be gone through in obtaining permission to do work in or around an Anglican church.

This document assumes, as a premise, that the Diocese has accepted that the building must change from being used only as a church. A comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CMP) has been drawn up and is available through the stmarydevizestrust.org.uk web site. This identifies and ranks in importance the features of St Mary's which must be considered in any proposal.

The ratings are:

- Exceptional
- Considerable
- Some
- Little
- Negative

Any new construction in the churchyard would need acceptance from Wiltshire Council Planning, Wiltshire Council Conservation and Historic England, as well as the Diocese of Salisbury, before many of the suggested uses could be implemented.

Wiltshire Council planning need evidence that any proposal for change represents the optimum viable use of St Mary's and that substantial harm to the building and setting is avoided

The main issue raised by the Planning Inspector following the planning appeal was whether the benefits of providing a new building for community use outweigh any harm to designated heritage assets.

Given the decaying state of the floor in the nave, any new use will require a replacement flooring system with adequate sub-floor ventilation and proper heating, together with complete rewiring.

2 Recent history of the project

- Aug 2014 Planning appeal resulted in rejection of our plans for a curved cloister
- Autumn 2014 Meetings with Wiltshire Planning, Conservation and others on what building might meet with approval in the churchyard. These were inconclusive, suggestions of having all facilities within the church were proposed but this did not satisfy the St Mary's Future Group.
- Oct 2015 Meeting with the Salisbury DAC to review progress at which they advised the preparation of a Conservation Management Plan (CMP). Background work started on collating existing research for this document. Wiltshire

Conservation and the DAC call for a much better examination of possible future uses or a way forward for the church.

The Parish make it clear in the CMP that either a new use for St Mary's is found that is acceptable to all parties, including the parishioners, or an application for redundancy is inevitable.

Feb 2016	First meeting with Richard Morriss, conservationist, who advises on CMPs
Apr 2016	Draft framework received from Richard Morriss. This led to more research to fill in gaps
Sep/Nov 2016	Further advice from the DAC
Jan 2017	A Faculty prepared to obtain permission to remove the front three rows of pews permanently.
Feb 2017	First draft of the CMP circulated amongst parishioners for comment on the structure, the language and omissions.
Mar 2017	CMP circulated to the DAC for advice and also to Wiltshire Planning, Wiltshire Conservation, Historic England and Church Building Council
May 2017	CMP modified following informal advice from the DAC
Jun 2017	Faculty granted for the removal of the front pews.
July 2017	Initial research on ranking of suggested new uses started
Jun 2017	Ecological report on the church and churchyard commissioned as suggested by the DAC
Sep 2017	A new edition of the CMP sent to the DAC and further advice received
Oct 2017	St John with St Mary PCC and St Marys Future Group ranked suggested new uses and this resulted in a top 8 concepts.
Nov 2017	Further informal advice received from the DAC regarding the CMP. This document is now regarded as essentially complete but will need to be kept under review as new information is received or researched.
Dec 2017	Work on the CMP and new use summary. Preparing for Future Use seminar
	January 2018

3 Uses now being considered

In alphabetic order the top eight suggested uses are:

- Art gallery
- Café
- Central home for different charities
- Church for another congregation
- Craft workshop
- Dedicated theatre
- Drop in centre
- Dual use Church and community space (performance space, meeting rooms, office)

A number of factors affect the likelihood of a successful use and they include:

The physical alterations needed to the building and grounds, with especial reference to the assessments shown in the CMP. Other factors include vehicular access, the impact on biodiversity, the setting of the church in the townscape and employment opportunities.

There are practical issues to be considered.

- Who would manage the change process?
- The funds required for alterations.
- How might these funds be acquired / where would they come from?
- Is there a critical mass of users to support the facility?

Who would run the facility?
Is it viable in the long term?
Would YOU support or participate in the use?

Then there are the benefits that could result from a revitalised building.
To the life of the town in cultural and leisure activity provision
Increased availability for education and tourism
Employment and voluntary opportunities

4 Comments on the suggested uses

4.1 Introduction

These are general comments provided to stimulate debate and further analysis; they do not pretend to be exclusive or comprehensive.

A common requirement will be to renew the flooring, electric supply and fittings, heating system and create a proper supply of water.

4.2 Art Gallery

The assumption is this would be a dedicated art gallery run as a commercial enterprise. The prime concern would be the financial viability of this concept.

The town's last commercial art gallery in Wine Street was forced to move to a unit on Hopton Industrial Estate, where they now open only for specific exhibitions.

There is no critical mass of local artists such as exist in Calne or Marlborough,

The local amateur art groups hold exhibitions about once a year and would like to have an exhibition space but are unlikely to fund the necessary works or be able to keep the building open for visiting year round.

This use would require the majority of changes envisaged by the Dual Use option and could be regarded as a sub-set of this concept.

4.3 Café

Devizes has many cafés. The number of places where coffee, tea, etc can be purchased in the town has been counted as over twenty. The church is a destination and has very little passing footfall compared with cafés in the Market Place, the Brittox, Monday Market Street and the dozen or so pubs in the surrounding streets.

The use requires many changes to make the serving of food possible. If the church was made into a tourist attraction then the footfall would increase. However, this requires investment in human resources to provide a presence.

4.4 Central home for different charities

There are two types of facility needed by charities: storage and office space.

The use of the nave of the church for storage would require the construction of cages or racking. This would interfere with the uncluttered mediaeval space and prevent its use for anything else.

The requirement for office space again requires internal construction of walls and ceilings to allow reasonable working conditions and has the same drawbacks as use for storage. If a Dual Use concept was carried through, then some "hot desk" office administration facilities could be made available, for instance with a modern telephone system providing dedicated phone numbers for different users.

4.5 Church for another Congregation

Whilst St Mary's provided the congregation of St John's Devizes a temporary home following the fire ten years ago, it is not a practical alternative home for worshippers. St John's is more centrally located; is adjacent to the Parish Rooms; has some parking and is closer to the town hall as befits its function as the civic church of Devizes. It would also mean that St John's would be potentially redundant.

The assumption is that this would be another Christian congregation. If it were another faith then the issue of continued funding from the St Mary Church and Poor Lands would come into question.

No suggestion has been made or identified for use by a non-Anglican faith, all such churches seem content with their establishments. Within the Anglican group of churches it has been offered to St Peter's but the offer has been rejected. The only other Anglican church in Devizes is St James'. If they moved into St Mary's it would leave another redundant building and require the redrawing of parish boundaries.

4.6 Craft Workshop

This use would require internal construction to provide storage and useful rooms for the different types of craft. It is imagined that pottery, upholstery, weaving, jewellery, embroidery, glass engraving, etc would all have differing spatial requirements. While some of these local groups would probably like to have a dedicated premises, the financial viability of constructing and running the facility might be questioned.

4.7 Dedicated Theatre

Devizes already has a very commercially successful theatre in The Wharf, recently revamped. If the church was used by the Wharf company it is presumed the Wharf facility would close. If used by another theatre company, then it is unlikely to be used more than a relatively few weeks a year. Again it is difficult to see how the building could be regularly open.

This use would require the majority of changes envisaged by the Dual Use option and could be regarded as a sub-set of this concept.

4.8 Drop in centre

The town already has one drop in service for homeless and vulnerable adults. Opendoors currently operates using the existing facilities of other churches in the town. Their basic requirements include catering facilities, washing and showering facilities. The problem faced by them is one of finance, primarily to fund the professional staff required to run on a daily basis. If contained within the nave of St Mary's, then storage and partitioning would have to be constructed as discussed above. A drop in centre aimed at the tea and chat market would require staffing.

Again regular access by the general public is questionable.

4.9 Dual use church and community space

This use has been extensively researched in earlier years and has been shown to be a viable new use. The community space would allow for performance by theatre, dance, music and choral groups. It would be able to support art and other types of exhibition and provide the necessary office and green room accommodation. All such uses would require some elements of storage space.

In essence it requires an external build to accommodate toilets, catering facilities and offices or green rooms. If developed as previously suggested, it could accommodate at least two of the other suggested uses and possibly become a hot desk office centre for different charities. It might also become a replacement for the soon-to-be-closed Crown Centre in Devizes. The main running cost of this use would be staffing.

5 Future Use Seminar 2018

5.1 Agenda

- (a) Presentation highlights of the CMP
- (b) Overview of top eight new use list
- (c) All attendees invited to contribute to a SWOT analysis of these uses.
- (d) Other suggested processes

5.2 What is a SWOT Analysis?

5.3 Introduction

SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Strengths and weaknesses are internal factors and opportunities and threats are external factors. A SWOT diagram analyses a project by focusing on each of these factors. It normally consists of four boxes, one for each area.

SWOT diagrams can be especially useful when trying to decide whether or not to embark on a certain venture by visualizing the pros and cons. By clearly outlining all positives and negatives of an idea, a SWOT analysis makes it easier to decide which course of action to pursue.

The process should start by outlining the external *opportunities* and *threats* before considering the *strengths* and *weaknesses*.

5.4 Strengths

Positive attributes of the use that are within the control of those running it.

What could be done well?

What resources are or might be available?

What advantages are there over the alternatives or competition?

Strengths include the positive attributes of the people who might be involved - their knowledge, backgrounds, education, credentials, contacts, reputations, or the skills.

Strengths also include tangible assets such as equipment, reputation, established potential user base, existing channels of information and other valuable resources.

Strengths capture the positive aspects internal to the concept that add value or offer a competitive advantage.

5.5 Weaknesses:

What detracts from the ability to obtain or maintain a positive outcome. Which areas might be improved?

Weaknesses might include lack of expertise, limited resources, lack of access to skills or technology, inferior service offerings, or the poor location.

What needs to be enhanced in order to compete with other facilities.

5.6 Opportunities:

What are the attractive factors that mean the use would exist and prosper? How would you or your organisation hope to benefit? What would need to be done in human or resource terms to ensure this use was successful?

What facilities would have to be provided to make it work?

What is the potential that can be realised - market growth, resolution of problems of current offerings, positive perceptions about this use, or the ability to offer greater value that will create a demand for increased use. What are the timeframes around the opportunity. Does it represent an ongoing opportunity - is it a window of opportunity? How critical is the timing?

5.7 Threats

A threat is something that may lead to falling use and income. Competition – existing or potential – is always a threat.

Other threats may include governmental regulation, economic downturns, bad media or press coverage, a shift in user behaviour that reduces a need, or the construction or conversion of another building that would impact take up of the service offering. What situations might threaten the promotion of this use?

It may be valuable to classify the threats according to their “seriousness” and “probability of occurrence.”

5.8 Activity at the seminar

Seminar participants would be given a few minutes to identify one or two attributes for each of the four segments of the SWOT, together with a measure of strength, from 1 to 5, on a post-it. They could then come and stick them on a four segment board for each suggestion.

It will be necessary to say what changes or facilities will be needed to implement the top suggestions. This will impact on the Significance ratings

6 The Significance Ratings in the CMP

Any new use must be considered in the light of these ratings. An assessment of how these ratings might be affected by the necessary, and possibly desirable, changes must be made.

Exceptional Rating

- Architectural significance
- Religious significance
- Setting, views and townscape significance

Considerable Rating

- Historical significance
- Communal significance
- Significance for education and tourism
- Wall Memorials of Hull and Garth
- The south entrance internal door
- The west door

Some Rating

- The bells
- Monuments & wall memorials, tombs, ledger stones
- The organ
- Furniture, fixtures
- The south entrance external porch gates
- The stained glass
- The nave pews

Low Rating

- Font and pulpit

Priests' chairs
Pictorial works

Negative Rating

Power and light fittings
Water supply

7 How to contribute on line

Send us an email with the following information for as many uses as you can. Add more than one entry if you wish. These responses will be added to the FUS18 results.

Your name	Organisation	use	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Impact rated 1 to 5</i>
			<i>Weakness</i>	
			<i>Opportunity</i>	
			<i>Threat</i>	

