

Identifying a future use for St Mary's

1 Introduction

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

It has been established by the Parish of St John with St Mary that St Mary's Church cannot continue to operate in its current manner. Either a viable new use has to be established or an application for redundancy will have to be made.

The Parish has been told that there must be informed and objective consideration of the issues and constraints in any new use. The problems of implementing that use must be acknowledged, as well as the opportunities it would give to the parish and the community. These deliberations should lead to an optimum future being identified that allows St Mary's to become part of the community again and cause the least harm in both the short term and long term. A widely advertised and attended seminar should go a long way in achieving these aims.

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 stmarydevizetrust.org.uk web site.

This document lists the most likely new uses from all those suggested and then produce criteria that can be put forward to a wider consultative audience drawn from Devizes and District. These invitees will include those who took part in the original Delphi Survey, those on the St Mary's Future Group mailing and any other local organisations who might be interested. The Devizes Town Council and the Trust for Devizes have consistently supported work towards a new use that will benefit the town and will be invited.

Information will also be sent to the Salisbury DAC; Wiltshire Council – Development team, which includes planning and conservation; Historic England, Church Building Council, the Victorian Society; Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings; CPRE.

It will also consider the assessments made in the St Mary's Conservation Management Plan and the likely impact any suggested changes or new work might have. This will be the preparatory document to the Heritage Impact Assessment.

It is still necessary to establish if Wiltshire Council Planning, Wiltshire Council Conservation and Historic England will accept the need for new construction in the churchyard if it would enable a new use to be implemented.

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 Suggested uses

A number of possible new uses have been suggested since the original application for redundancy in 2006. In alphabetic order:

- Action venue such as paint balling, go carts
- Art gallery
- Bowling alley
- Café
- Carpet warehouse
- Central home for different charities

Church for another congregation
 Cinema
 Dual use church and community space
 Craft workshop
 Dedicated theatre
 Drop in centre
 Food store/food bank
 Murder mystery / crystal maze venue
 Non-Christian worship space
 Redundant church
 Residential and office use
 Soft play area
 Sports centre - climbing wall, skate boarding, volley ball

3 Ranking the viability of possible future uses

3.1 Ranking methodology

The table lists the attributes that were used in the initial evaluation. A higher score indicates a more liked or likely new use, while a low score indicates the use is unlikely to be supported or viable.

It was originally suggested that a score of “1 to 5” for each point should be used to indicate graduations of difficulty or possibility, but early responders felt this was too complicated to use and it might be difficult to decide between, say a 3 and a 4. The scores of these early responders were altered to the range “1 to 3” (1 and 2 became 1; 3 became 2; 4 and 5 became 3) and no significant difference in results was observed.

If no score was entered by a respondent because, for instance, they felt unable to comment, then a score of 2 was entered. This being the most neutral, as score of 0 would skew the result.

3.2 Ranking criteria

	Score - the number to put in the table	1	2	3
	Physical			
P1	Lack of onsite parking & access issues	problem	difficult	no problem
P2	Impact of necessary changes for this use on interior	high	low	none
P3	Impact of necessary changes in churchyard for this use	high	low	none
P4	Impact on churchyard biodiversity	high	low	none
P5	Setting of the church	high	low	none
	Funding			
F1	Can it be financed by Poor Lands	unlikely	possible	good
F2	Likelihood of commercial funding	difficult	low	good
F3	Likelihood of charitable funding	unlikely	possible	good
F4	Likelihood of on-going financial viability	unlikely	possible	good
	Human resources			
H1	Likelihood of Parish of St John with St Mary support for implementation with human resources.	very low	low	good
H2	Likelihood of community support for implementing change of use	very low	low	good
	Social benefits			

S1	Benefit to the life of the town	low	neutral	good
S2	Importance for local tourism	low	neutral	good
S3	Prospect of community support/ success of new use	low	neutral	good
S4	Employment opportunities - paid jobs	low	neutral	good
S5	Employment opportunities – voluntary sector -including disabled	low	neutral	good
S6	Educational benefits	poor	low	good

The full Parochial Church Council completed the questionnaire at a PCC meeting and some Future Group members also responded, a total of 15 people.

As phase 1 the PCC decided that the possible future use list should be reduced to about six before the list was taken to a wider consultation group in Devizes, any more would result in lack of concentration. The remaining suggestions should be discarded.

The questionnaire results were considered in two ways:

Counting the total points awarded over all responders, where the higher number the more likely the use was considered to be.

Considering the individual rankings for each responder and producing each person's top six choices.

3.3 Ranking Results

Overall score in ranking order, the top eight are in bold. There being a significant break at this point.

Dual Use Church & Community space	656
Art gallery	610
Dedicated theatre	590
Central home for different charities	563
Craft workshop	549
Church for another congregation	539
Café	537
Drop in centre	531
Non-Christian worship	498
Redundant church	489
Food store/food bank	488
Sports centre -	476
Bowling alley	468
Murder Mystery / crystal maze	461
Soft play area	461
Cinema	456
Action venue,	445
Residential and office use	434
Carpet warehouse	399

Consolidating individual votes for most popular use. They fall into groups, the top four, a group of four then the remainder, the top eight in bold.

Dual Use Church & Community space	14
Art gallery	13
Central home for different charities	13
Dedicated theatre	13
Craft workshop	9

Drop in centre	9
Cafe	8
Church for another congregation	8
Non-Christian worship	6
Food store/food bank	5
Redundant church	4
Bowling alley	3
Soft play area	3
Sports centre -	3
Action venue,	2
Murder Mystery / crystal maze	2
Residential and office use	1
Carpet warehouse	0
Cinema	0

4 Working towards Phase 2 of the evaluation

4.1 Phase 2 uses

There was a reasonable amount of consistency in the two scoring methodologies if the top eight suggested uses are taken forward for further examination and wider consultation:

- Art gallery
- Café
- Central home for different charities
- Church for another congregation
- Craft workshop
- Dedicated theatre
- Drop in centre
- Dual use Church & community space

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?
- Would YOU support or participate 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 .

4.2 Comments on the suggested uses

4.2.1 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.

4.2.2 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.

4.2.3 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 the changes listed in the introduction 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.

4.2.4 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.

4.2.5 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.

4.2.6 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 special 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.

4.2.7 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 of 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.

4.2.8 Drop in centre

The town already has one drop in service for homeless and vulnerable adults. Open Doors 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.

Again regular access by the general public is questionable.

A drop in centre aimed at the tea and chat market would require staffing.

4.2.9 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 The next step

5.1 A Public Meeting

It is considered that a Public Meeting in the January/February timeframe would allow more detailed consideration of the uses listed above.

The format for the event would be:

- (a) Presentation highlights of the CMP
- (b) A summary of the suggested top eight new use list
- (c) All invitees would be invited to produce a SWOT analysis of these uses.
- (d) Other suggested processes

5.2 What is a SWOT Analysis?

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 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, SWOT analysis makes it easier to decide whether or not to move forward.

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

Strengths describe the positive attributes, tangible and intangible attributes, internal to the potential use. They are within the control of those running the activity. What could be done well? What resources are available? What advantages are there over the competition?

You may want to evaluate the strengths by area, such as marketing, finance and organisational structure. Strengths include the positive attributes of the people who might be involved, including their knowledge, backgrounds, education, credentials, contacts, reputations, or the skills they bring. Strengths also include tangible assets such as available capital, 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.

Weaknesses Note the weaknesses of the idea. Weaknesses are factors that are within the concept being considered, they detract 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. These are factors that are under “your” control, but for a variety of reasons, are in need of improvement to effectively accomplish your marketing objectives.

Weaknesses capture the negative aspects internal to the idea that detract from the value on offer, or place the idea at a competitive disadvantage. These are areas that need to be enhanced in order to compete with other facilities. The more accurately the weaknesses are defined, the more valuable the SWOT will be.

Opportunities assess the external attractive factors that represent the reason for this use to exist and prosper. What opportunities exist for this use, or 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?

Opportunities reflect the potential that can be realised through implementing the concept, they may be the result of market growth, resolution of problems associated with current offerings, positive perceptions about this concept, or the ability to offer greater value that will create a demand for increased use. If relevant, place timeframes around the opportunities. Does it represent an ongoing opportunity, or is it a window of opportunity? How critical is the timing?

What factors are potential **threats** to this use? Threats include factors beyond your control that could place the suggested new use at risk. It may be beneficial to have contingency plans to address them if they should occur.

A threat is a challenge created by an unfavourable trend or development that may lead to deteriorating use and revenues. Competition – existing or potential – is always a threat. Other threats may include governmental regulation, economic downturns, devastating 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? Get your worst fears on the table. Part of this list may be speculative in nature, but still add value to your SWOT analysis.

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

The better you are at identifying potential threats, the more likely it is that they can be identified and proactively plans made to respond to them. You will be looking back at these threats when you consider your contingency plans

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 strength measured from 1 to 5, on a post it. They could then come and stick them on a four segment board.

6 Statement of Community Involvement

It has been suggested that any planning application is accompanied by a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). In the past years the Parish has already obtained a significant number of responses from the local community; however presenting it in a format known to planners should make it more acceptable.

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 - a. Adjoining landowners and residents
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 - c. Historic England
- ii. List of other consultees
 - a. Devizes Town Council
 - b. Trust for Devizes
 - c. Church Building Council
 - d. St Mary's mailing list, incorporating local amenity and service organisations
- iii. Project timeline
- iv. Information sent to residents
- v. Information leaflets, web page information, press releases, future use diagrams and models
- vi. Press coverage

vii. Summary of consultations carried out

7 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 educational and tourism
Wall Memorials of Hull and Garth
The south entrance internal door.
The west door

Some Rating

The bells
Monuments & 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