

1735 Devizes, St Mary's

Executive Summary and Documents Summary April 2020

Executive Summary

St Mary the Virgin is a Listed Grade 1 church located in the central Devizes Town Conservation Area. The church is part of a multi-parish benefice with St John's, but having applied for redundancy in 2006 due to lack of a viable congregation, a major fire at St John's stayed proposals for closure of St Mary's. There is now a vision in the parish to see each church with a distinctive role with the main worship function being at St John's. The proposal for St Mary's is to adapt it for wider performance and community uses alongside regular worship to complement the ministry at the other church.

In September 2010, an architectural competition was held to design a scheme for additional facilities at St Mary's followed by consultation with English Heritage, Wiltshire Listed Building Officer and the County Archaeologist to discuss the agreed architect's concept.

A public meeting was held in August 2012 to invite responses to the winning proposals by Batterham Matthews Design, before a planning application for a contemporary circular 'cloister' design extending north from the church across the churchyard, was submitted in December 2012, and resubmitted in May 2013. Planning permission was refused in October 2013 and an appeal was dismissed in August 2014 largely due to the significant scale and impact on the site. (Further details of the planning history for St Mary's Devizes can be seen in the Heritage, Design and Access Statement)

In June 2018 Chedburn Dudley (now Chedburn Codd) were appointed Inspecting Church Architects and instructed by the PCC to revisit the proposals, and in collaboration with the client, compiled a series of sketch options to illustrate a 'Levels of Change' document (see appendix 6 of the Heritage, Design and Access Statement). These options examined the extent of reordering and additional facilities required to ensure that St Mary's could operate as a sustainable community facility, in conjunction with a detailed Business Plan and Statement of Need. In January 2019, a pre-application submission with several options for schemes with smaller footprints was made to Wiltshire County Council, with mixed responses from WCC and HE.

In August 2019, a revised pre-application submission was made to all parties concerned including Salisbury DAC, and a meeting was then arranged on site on the 1st October.

All parties were largely in favour of ensuring the internal spaces of the church remained uncluttered, which works well with the idea of a multi-functional performance space. However, concern was expressed over the glazed link and new doorway proposed below the central window on the north side. The DAC, HE and CBC all expressed a preference for a reduced scheme with landscaping on the north side to open up the churchyard and create a better connection with the church itself.

Following discussions with the client in order to ensure that requirements for a viable community venue were still being met, we revised the proposals, picking up on the clear preference for a reduced size extension, set within complementary landscaping with the intention of linking the wider churchyard with the new facilities at the church. The proposed relocation of the organ and a new doorway in the far east wall of the North Aisle allows access from the church to the extension. This ensures that the north elevation of St Mary's is not altered or obscured.

The extension no longer has a glazed link along the North elevation but instead, a gently curving low level stone wall draws visitors around the west side of the church towards a new entrance, office, meeting room, toilets and kitchen in the north east corner. There are wide steps from the lower paved area inviting people up in to the churchyard. The new facilities now sit more comfortably within the site, and views from the perimeter and neighbouring buildings are largely unaffected. The rooflights introduced to the extension allow natural light into the building whilst maintaining security, and the proposed sedum roofs are an environmentally friendly solution, which will blend into the surroundings.

Initial responses from both HE and WCC have been favourable and we believe the extension is an improvement in terms of siting, footprint and height than previous proposals.

We have responded carefully to each stage of the planning and consultation process (see more details below) and we are keen for this revised design to sit harmoniously within the context of the church itself, whilst providing much needed modern facilities which will enable this complex to host regular worship, community meetings, and large performances and so become a sustainable public activity venue with benefits to the wider community, within the parish in conjunction with St John's

Documents Summary

Appendix 1 - Listing Description, Historic England

The listing describes the remarkable Listed Grade 1 church as of Norman origin but mostly rebuilt in the C15 except for the chancel. It notes how the tower is a dominating feature of the street scene here in the centre of Devizes which emphasises what a great location St Mary's has to become a vibrant community venue for all types of events. The current proposals are designed sensitively so as not to obscure important historical features such as the north elevation with additional buildings, and to keep the interior of the church free from unnecessary additions.

Appendix 2 - Statement of Significance, St Mary's Future Group

The major significance of this Listed Grade 1 building is fully appreciated by the client and the designers. A major element of the proposal is to alter as little as possible of the structure and architectural identity of St. Mary's above floor level and thus preserve the clear uncluttered medieval interior for the appreciation of visitors. For instance, all new seating and staging will be moveable in order to be able to reconfigure or clear the space if required. The church community recognise St Mary's as an important venue for regular worship in Devizes and the proposals set aside the chancel as a dedicated space for regular services. The relocation of the font to the west entrance will help to emphasise this area as a baptistry and focal point on entering the church.

The overall impact of this proposal in concept and use will be high, because a major change is planned: from a potentially redundant place of worship to a place of worship with value and benefit to a wider community. However, the physical impact of the proposal on the church interior will be low since we are looking to retain the completeness of the unencumbered internal space which will hopefully enhance its features for all to enjoy.

Appendix 3 - Historic Building Assessment, Matthew McMurray 2009

This comprehensive report has detailed paragraphs on the many alterations seen in the church over several hundred years. There is mention of the organ and its various positions, the various galleries that have been built and removed from first floor level including within the tower, and the different arrangements of seating and pews over time as well as the

relocation of the ledgers currently positioned within the nave and aisles. Please see relevant paragraphs quoted in the Heritage Design and Access Statement for more detail about the organ, the pews, the galleries and the ledgers.

Appendix 4 - Statement of Need, St Mary's Future Group 2020

St Mary's Future Group have recognised that in order to ensure the long term survival of St Mary's Church and avoid redundancy and the building falling into disrepair, then new facilities are urgently needed in order to create a community venue that will support a wide variety of activities. With thorough consultation with church members, the wider community and various consultant bodies, the Statement of Need details the precise requirements for a place of worship that will also house other events and meetings both big and small. These requirements include accessible modern toilets, a kitchen, a parish/administration office and a flexible meeting room that would operate as a green room for the performance space created within the main body of the church. Level access to all ground floor spaces is vital in order to include all members of the community, and an open and welcoming aspect from the town.

An upgrade in utilities is also required including heating, lighting and communications to create a comfortable environment to hold events and to meet and worship. Repairs to the decaying subfloor are also vital to protect the fabric of the building, and the internal re-ordering proposed will include this repair work. The remaining pews will be removed, and the existing ledgers (moved into their current position during alterations in the 1850s) will be lifted and repositioned in the side aisles, and once the floor structure has been repaired, a new stone floor will be laid over an efficient new underfloor heating system. The new floor and adjustable seating and staging proposed will also allow the axial integrity of the nave to be appreciated.

The StMFG realise that an upgrade of high quality is vitally important to meet the needs of the occupants, for longevity of the new facilities and also to be a well designed, striking and welcoming addition to the church which will draw people in again and again.

The community of St Mary's also see an underlying spiritual need to share the space of St Mary's with the local community as part of their Christian Mission.

Appendix 5 - Planning Refusal & Appeal Decision, Wiltshire Council 2013

The original circular cloister scheme by Batherham Matthews Design was rejected for various reasons. It was considered to be too big for the churchyard, leaving awkward spaces between it and the boundary wall, and involving too much harm to the historical elements in the churchyard and to the church itself.

We have studied the feedback carefully and applied the comments to our current proposals, and along with ongoing discussions with all consultant groups, we have shown careful consideration for the surrounding areas and buildings as part of the design process. We feel that the nature of the revised proposals with the low level curved wall and sedum-covered flat roofs will not cause any substantial harm to the setting of the nearby listed buildings outside of the site boundary. Our current scheme has a much reduced footprint with new facilities clustered around the northeast corner of the church, in place of the existing vestry. This now leaves the north elevation of the church unobscured, whilst enhancing the outdoor space which will become a more useable and welcoming environment.

Appendix 6 - Options Appraisal, by Chedburn Codd Architects 2020

This document examines the pros and cons of 9 options for extension and/or internal re-ordering at St Mary's Church. By comparing and contrasting a wide variety of different ideas and layouts with the client and the community in mind as well as the historic significance of the existing building and site, we came to the conclusion that Sketch Option 9 (Level 4 Change) was the best proposal.

This includes the removal of the vestry extension to the north side of the sanctuary/ chancel and construction of a new single storey extension with new office, toilets, kitchen and a meeting/green room. The main church to also be reordered with the removal of the existing pews and introduction of movable seating to provide flexibility for a number of events and services. The external areas to

the north side of the church are also to be landscaped to provide a positive connection between the churchyard and church.

The many advantages of the current scheme include:

- New facilities accessible to all
- New extension can be treated and accessed independently to the rest of the church
- Large events can be held at the church with the new facilities proposed
- Removal of the pews provides flexibility for events and services
- Reduced archaeology and ecological impact compared to original cloister scheme.
- Maintain views of the original architectural details (buttresses, windows etc) to the north elevation.
- 'Un-cluttered' church interior
- Improved and welcoming entrance and landscaping to the west and north sides of the church to provide a positive connection between the churchyard, church and new extension. The landscaping also provides safe assured access (currently an antisocial and secluded area).
- 1no. new opening to be formed to access into the extension opposed to two in other schemes.

Any harm done to the church where the new doorway will be formed in the east wall of the north aisle is outweighed by the benefit of linking the main church space to a cluster of modern facilities in the extension. There will be a loss of pews but the benefit of introducing flexible seating allows for a huge variety of events with adjustable staging if required.

The extension and landscaping of the current scheme covers a much smaller footprint than the original proposal but we are still aware of the excavation required to set the extension at the required floor level. This will have archaeological and ecological implications due to burials/ tombs within the churchyard and adjacent landscaping but following advice from the archaeological evaluation, any burials will be carefully recorded and repositioned. The extension has been designed to sit down into the raised churchyard and so visibility from the adjacent road and buildings will be minimised.

Conclusion from the options appraisal:

This sketch option is the proposed scheme put forward and includes the amendments and alterations which were highlighted in the previous schemes and comments received as part of the consultations with Historic England and Local Authority. The proposal meets the requirements of the church members and sensitively enables the use performances, concerts and community functions.

Appendix 7 - Business Plan by Tony Scorer of St Mary's Future Group (StMFG)

This very comprehensive document captures important information about the financial side of maintaining St Mary's Church including maintenance costs over the past few years as well as projections in to the future including plans for funding. It compares the potential of St Mary's as an events venue with other venues in the vicinity, identifying a gap in the market that this church could fill. It also lists the community uses over the past few years and details the possible future uses of the venue as a result of public consultation. The StMFG have also set out details of key responsibilities and roles that will be needed to promote and run the venue once upgraded in order to create a sustainable business model. It is a well-planned, inclusive and realistic vision of how St Mary's could serve the local community if the facilities can be provided.

Appendix 8 - Sketch views by Chedburn Codd Architects 2020

SK1revA shows how the new proposals might appear from across the churchyard on the north side, and SK2revA depicts how the proposed landscaped gathering space and entrance to the new extension might look as you approach from the north side of the tower. Both sketches indicate the low curved stone wall that encloses the new facilities together with the landscaped steps that help link the new paved gathering area with the upper part of the churchyard.

Appendix 9 - Existing Images

Photographs are included of the existing internal space and the surrounding churchyard, approach paths and entrances and particularly the north elevation. We have referred back to these constantly

when design the current extension, to ensure that the appearance of any new addition sits harmoniously within the site.

Appendix 10 - Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Investigation by Michael Heaton, 2011

This was based on the original larger circular cloister design. At the request of the County Archaeologist at Wiltshire Council, a new WSI is now being prepared corresponding to the current proposals (April 2020).

Appendix 11 - Archaeology Evaluation by Hedland Archaeology Ltd, January 2012

Report indicates that all burials in the excavated trenches were dated to the 19th and early 20th Centuries and therefore with careful removal and re-internment, the site can be handed over clean to the main contractor. The investigative trenches were based on the larger cloistered scheme but the latest scheme has a considerably smaller footprint set within the original proposals, so the evaluation would still seem to be applicable.

Appendix 12 - Arboricultural Report, by Mr Simon Turner, Arboricultural Officer with Ian Pocock. 2013

A detailed method statement was written to protect existing mature trees within the churchyard and this will be fully adhered to with the current scheme. The report was written with the original large cloister scheme in mind but the current proposal for a smaller building sits within the original footprint so all existing mature trees will still be protected during construction in the same way.

Appendix 13 - Ecological Report, Fiona Elphick, County Ecologist, Wiltshire Council. 2013

This report emphasises that the trees should have a root protection zone (RPZ) provided during the construction process to ensure that their integrity and function for biodiversity is not compromised. Also that any exterior lighting should be angled downwards and not allowed to shine directly onto the canopy of any trees, to ensure foraging routes for bats and small mammals are not impacted.

We have ensured that both these requirements have been met in the design of the new scheme. The footprint of the new rooms and the external landscaping have been kept clear of the root protection zones, and all new external lighting will be suitable for this location.

Appendix 14 - Highways Comment, Hannah Jones, Highways Development Control Technician, Wiltshire Council. 2013

No highway objection was raised to the original scheme. The revised scheme is smaller than the original one and does not have any further affect on the highways.

Response: *The Statement of Need and the Heritage, Design & Access Statement have all been updated to explain the justification of the proposals in response to these comments. Drawings have been revised and an Executive Summary with a Document Summary relating to the Appendices attached has been written for ease of understanding the process of consultations and design decisions to date.*