

# St Mary's Re-ordering Vision

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## **Our Vision is to make our beautiful building a stronger focus for both Christian worship and community use by:**

Making the wonderful space we have more flexible and welcoming, both for the church family and for the local community, so that worship is enhanced and this historic building is well-used throughout the week.

Enhancing its wonderful architectural and prayerful heritage.

## **The current situation is that:**

Entrances are cramped, badly lit and there is little room to move around at the back of the church, thus creating a log-jam at the beginning of well-attended services or other events. There is no space for notices or for information about the history of the church, which is a barrier to communication.

The aisles are narrow and are therefore very difficult for wheel chairs and buggies.

The pews are uncomfortable and the wooden floor badly deteriorated.

It is cold and draughty in winter.

Specifically with regard to worship, the pews mean that only one configuration is possible and people at the back and sides can feel visually detached from the service or other event. Children cannot be seen at the front if helping to lead worship or if performing.

There are no facilities for a multimedia experience, which is important for many, particularly children and young people and those with special needs so that they can engage in ways other than words and traditional music.

Noise from the children's corner can be distracting during services.

Some specific current community activities, such as 'Messy Church', the annual flower festival and the Light Up Twickenham Event at the end of November, are severely constrained by the fixed pews and narrow aisles. Potential outside users of the church have changed their mind and gone elsewhere when they have realised how constraining the pews are.

The building feels rather neglected and is in need of redecoration, and the lighting is not good. This makes it quite unwelcoming for visitors coming to see the important heritage within it, such as the grave of Alexander Pope and his memorial and Sir Godfrey Kneller's coat of arms as well as the many other memorials around the church.

### **To address these issues, the initial plan is to:**

- Remove the fixed pews from the nave and replace them with high quality moveable benches and some stacking chairs.
- Relay the floor where the pews were and install under-floor heating.
- Improve the catering facilities so that refreshments can be offered in church for community events and after certain services.
- Make improvements to the lighting and install multi-media outlets while the floor is being re-laid.
- Create a children's area under the tower.
- Carry out works to the Vestry including the provision of catering facilities.
- Provide for heritage interpretation.
- Redecorate.

### **Further phase**

If sufficient funds are raised, whether now or at a later date, the west gallery will be reinstated and the north entrance will be fitted with an internal glass door, permitting visibility into the church even when it is closed to the public.

### **We are endeavouring to achieve:**

- A building where there is a feeling of welcome. One where the light, warm and lofty space not only speaks of God and the history of prayerfulness in the place through the centuries, but which welcomes all people who enter it in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- A building which is accessible for both young and old, where able and less able-bodied can move around freely.
- A building which can be used much more by the local community, building on our current programme of events and activities.
- A building where it is easy to greet people, where people can pick up resources and to get to where they want to go for prayer or a service, with a level of comfort that aids their spiritual experience.
- A building with easy access and helpful information on both the heritage in the church and the links between the church and the people and history of Twickenham. Alterations to ensure that visiting the building to see the heritage is an enjoyable and informative experience.
- A building where the configuration of seating arrangements can be varied to suit the occasion and with good sight lines.

### **Examples of things which can be achieved for the church family include:**

A stranger in a wheelchair or mobility buggy can easily enter the building without obstructions and find a place to join in a service or event without fuss or embarrassing questions.

A large group arriving for a Christening can be greeted and can move on easily into the building so no log-jam is caused.

There can be different configurations of seating for different services e.g. face-to-face 'chapel' seating for services such as the Nativity play (where the protagonists can enter from several different directions), a crib service with the crib in the centre which all the children can process to and see in the service, a wedding 'in the round' where family and friends can all be close to the bride and groom, more inclusive Christenings where the congregation does not have to turn through 180 degrees, Messy Church in an open space large enough to cater for the 90 or so children from the church family and local community who currently attend, services with smaller congregations in areas where they are more intimate, traditional seating for a formal dignified funeral, and services where people can visit 'stations' around the church with images that take them on a participative spiritual journey.

Services for the whole of St Mary's School (they cannot all fit in at present).

Quiet corners of the church for contemplative prayer and private conversation.

Children and parents feeling more involved in services – with less inappropriate noise.

A range of places to lead music from, including a good place for the choir.

Outlets around the church for creative multimedia.

Enhanced catering facilities mean that Christenings, Weddings and Funerals could have receptions in the church after those events. Better facilities will also support and increase the number of the church's own community events e.g. summer fair and Light Up Twickenham Event.

What we are aiming to achieve is a place of spiritual refreshment, which helps to bring us closer to God and to each other. The alternative seating arrangements will offer a more varied experience of worshipping together, with better sight lines for everyone to be able to see and participate more fully in services and other events.

### **Examples of things which can be achieved for the local community and visitors to the church include:**

There is the potential to build on our links with the Twickenham Museum to investigate the possibility of partnering with them to put on exhibitions and displays in the church, including displaying some of the museum's artefacts and making our own heritage and our place in Twickenham's history more accessible to the local community. We could even explore the potential to offer a schools programme for school visits.

The church has the potential to play a leading role in the arts in Twickenham as an attractive venue for a wide range of groups and events. For example, large musical and dramatic events could be staged with comfortable seating and better sight lines for the audience. Currently Richmond Concert Society uses the church on occasions, but the enhancements would mean they and others would be able to use the building for performances on a more regular basis. Currently, because of the issues noted above, other Twickenham arts and

music organisations do not think of the church as a venue even though it has such a central position and a potentially large capacity.

There is the potential for a small music festival during Twickenham Festival week, a joint art exhibition with Orleans House on 'views of the Thames', and jazz evenings.

The space could be let for regular community activities such as rehearsal space for local choirs/orchestras and for activities such as yoga classes or a children's dance class.

The fixed pews mean that there is at present very little space available for exhibitions or displays, and their removal would, for example, allow for reasonably large art exhibitions and would also significantly enhance current community activities, such as the annual flower festival.

Multimedia facilities would mean that the church could be used by organisations and for events for which it has never been used in the past.

Other one-off events which could be envisaged include: the rendezvous point for a long distance run with refreshment facilities; a celebratory 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary dinner for a couple who were married in the church; a promotional event by the chamber of commerce; a wine tasting; an Eel Pie Island artisans fair.

The current community Light Up Twickenham event could be made even more compelling with sufficient space for the children's choirs that perform on that evening and for the visitors who pass through the church. Further such events could take place at other times in the year.

There is significant potential to provide volunteering opportunities (and training of those volunteers) in relation to all these extra activities.

What we are aiming to achieve is to make the church a space and focal point for the local community and visitors to Twickenham, where people feel welcomed by the Church, a Christian body which serves the community. We want the church to be buzzing with community activity through the week, with secular activities which are in line with the ethos of the Church.

### **The way forward:**

Faculty permission to carry out these proposals has been granted by the Chancellor of the Diocese and fundraising for the initial plan is underway. The formal launch of the fundraising will coincide with the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2015 of the rebuilding of the nave following its collapse in 1713.