


What are the next steps?
If you want to help further you can do so in one of three ways:

1. By supporting of the proposals. Approval won't be achievable nor can funding be accessed unless it is clear that there is real support for these proposals within the community. Of course it is important to know what objections you have too. You can complete the forms in the church or email stmarysbitton@gmail.com.
2. Join us. We would like to keep in contact with you, receive your views and tell you how things are progressing. If you can help through your time that will be welcome too.
3. Once the plans are approved we will be starting to fundraise. Your money will be welcome, but so too will your time or any events that you would like to hold in the church or elsewhere to help raise funds and awareness.



Change is not new

As explained by Henry Nicholson Ellacombe, Vicar of Bitton in 1906

“In the last century, or at the end of the eighteenth, the churchwardens destroyed the old rood screen, the old seats, and the old roof, and put up an elaborate Tuscan reredos, very ugly, as we should say, but costly and well worked. My father, in 1820, destroyed all their work as far as he could, and did some excellent work in the fashion of the day. Most of his work, I destroyed, and received his thanks and approval for so doing.

I have little doubt that my successors will undo much of my work; if the work is done solely *in majorem Dei gloriam*, I wish them all success.”

Focal Point
Supplement
April 2019



Proposals for the future at St Mary's



For the past few years, The Parochial Church Council (PCC) at St Mary's has been considering how best to respond to the future needs of the church and the community it serves. How can a church that has been at the centre of village life for over a thousand years continue, not only to be a place of worship, but be more useful and treasured as a community resource?

Some of the easier changes have already been implemented, but the most difficult and most expensive change is to determine what physical changes and abilities are needed to enable the church to operate in the 21st century.

Over ten years ago, and just before the financial crisis started to bite, St Mary's undertook a major fundraising appeal, called **Living Stones**, to undertake some pressing remedial work and to make some physical changes to the building. Amongst other things, the tower roof was repaired as was the church wall, the pathway into the church was improved with paving stones and a new kitchenette was installed to the rear of the church.

But what about the longer term? It was clear to the PCC that if St Mary's was to have a future it needed to think more strategically about what that meant both in terms as a place of worship and as a church that was connected to and serving the wider interests of its community.



The lead roof of the tower was replaced through The *Living Stones* appeal

St Mary's is a very old church, one of the oldest in the country. Parts date back to before the Norman Conquest and on a site where a church has stood since about 500 AD. a time before St Augustine brought Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons who had not by then completely conquered all of what remained of the Romano British population in this part of the country.



This photograph was taken in the early twentieth century and shows that the choir stalls were then located in the Chancel at the front of the church

Martin Palmer, a renowned church historian has shown how St Mary's reflects not only its own history, but has signs of all developments in the English church over many centuries.

The church has been changed substantially over the years. New buildings have been added and others have fallen away and the interior has been through many modifications.

ST MARY'S CHURCH
BITTON

PHASED PLAN

1726 13

CHURCH OF ST MARY'S
BITTON

PHASED RECONSTRUCTION
ARCHITECTURAL PROJECT
BY PHOENIX

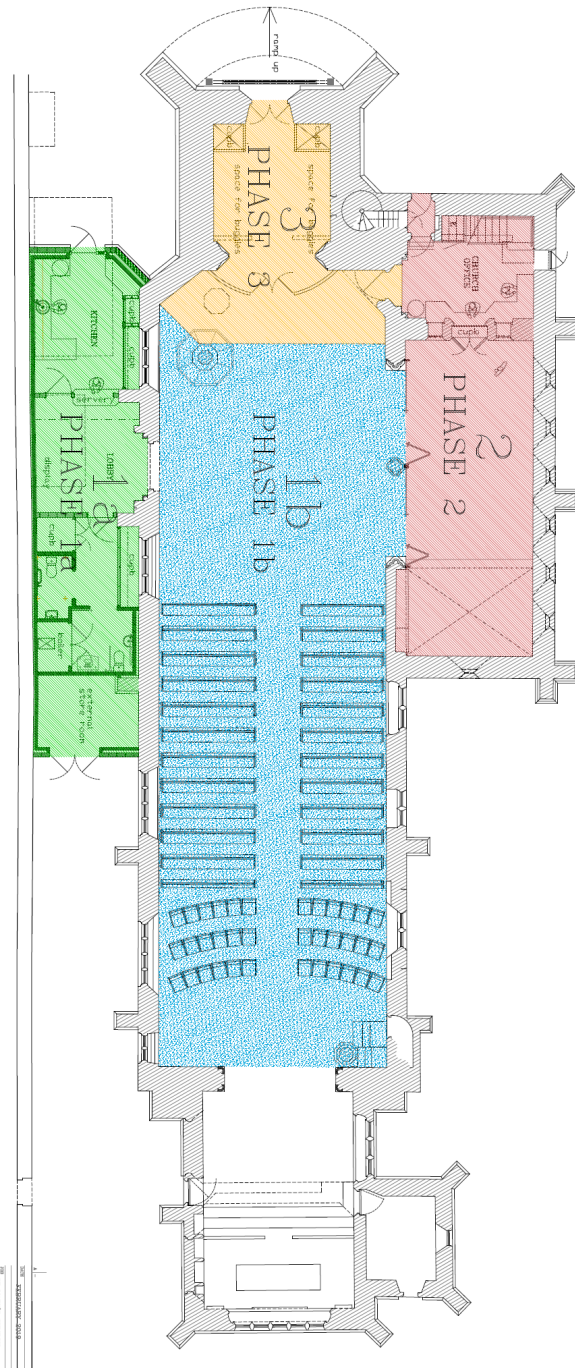
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1726 13

CHURCH OF ST MARY'S
BITTON

PHASED RECONSTRUCTION
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SCALE 1:50



The proposals, drawn up by the church architect, George Chedburn, set out the work to be completed over three phases. It is likely that not all three phases will be completed at once but as money becomes available and the church grows:

Phase 1:

- (a) Demolish the existing lavatory and boiler room and shed and build a new kitchen and services on the south side of the church accessed by reopening a Norman door that was closed in Victorian times.
- (b) Level the floor to allow free wheelchair access to all parts of the church. We intend to keep most of the remaining pews and make them moveable. The font will be moved to a new position in front of the south west window and all walls and windows will be cleaned.
- We will also look to upgrade and modernise our existing services such as heating and electricity and install wi-fi.

Phase 2:

- Glass doors will be installed between the main church and the Lady Chapel, This will allow for it to be used separately when required. The existing oak screen and entrance door will be removed and replaced by a new glass doorway providing improved access and more light.
- A church office will be created in the choir vestry.

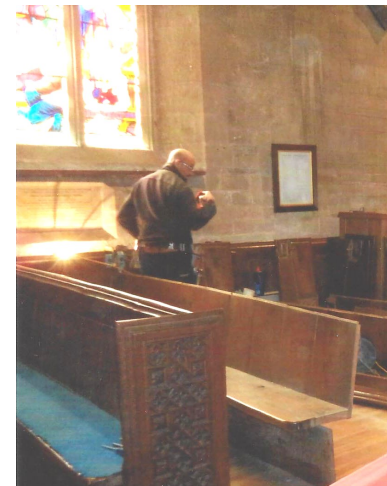
Phase 3:

- The final phase will see the reinstallation of a balcony at the west end of the church linking the current organ loft with the old muniment room. The organ will be re-sited either on the balcony itself or elsewhere. As a result the church will then have three discrete areas for meetings, or other activities in addition to the main church itself.

As a grade 1 listed building, St Mary's is costly to maintain and is largely dependent on a relatively small congregation.

The use of the church has been limited in recent years; mainly to one or two services on a Sunday and a monthly weekday service. For most of the time the building is unused. The layout of the church is traditional with the main part of the church, the Nave filled with fixed pews. The existing layout largely prevents some more modern worshiping practice. A recent innovation, that of a Family Café Church, aimed at young families, soon found itself short of space.

In 2017, the rear 5 pews on each side in the Nave and the Choirstalls were removed on a temporary authority of the Archdeacon. This allowed the Family Café Church to expand .



Removing the pews in 2017. St Mary's pews have been altered a number of times. The current pews date from the nineteenth century
Photo by Pam Hacker

There is substantial community support for the church and since the rear pews have been removed, this has enabled both the church and the local community to hold events that have been designed to raise funds and engage the community in the life of the building.

While St Mary's has sound finances and is currently well maintained, the church does not have a secure future and needs to find a way forward that enables it to grow its congregation and attract new people. General running costs are £18k each year of which church maintenance accounts for approximately £6k, but there are significant additional costs from time to time when major repairs become needed. The church is getting by, but it is not clear it can do so for much longer.

It is an under-utilised resource that could both serve the community better and more extensively and provide an income stream to maintain the building and support many more activities.

The PCC has undertaken a substantial review of the needs of the church in coming years. From this has come the following aims and ambitions for the church:

1. HOSPITALITY—Welcoming the whole community

As a place where people are welcomed and received well, so that the church is seen and is used by the community to a much greater extent for many different activities.

2. MISSION—Growing our congregation and purpose

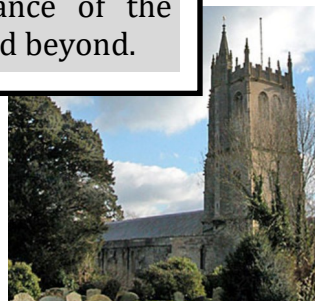
To be able to offer greater experimentation in services and forms of worship.

3. HERITAGE—Understanding our past and telling our story.

To provide better information about the church, its history and its role.

4. RENEWAL—Reordering our church and securing its future

To develop the church building so that the range of activities and events can be extended and assures the maintenance of the building into the 21st century and beyond.



The windows and walls will be professionally cleaned as part of the planned work

Since 2012, the church has been open during the day in summer months, services and forms of worship have been revised and updated, and the removal of some pews has increased the number of community events that have taken place.

The ambition is now to go further and create a church that can be used for all sorts of events and activities while continuing to fulfil its role as a place of Christian worship. The intention is to achieve this by developing some high quality facilities that people can enjoy and use for years to come, so that the building can be used more flexibly with up to date catering amenities, places for people to hold events and modern indoor lavatories. This needs to be done in a way that respects and celebrates the great heritage that the church provides, but we need to act quickly. If we don't take action soon we may be left with a church that is used only by a small number of regular worshippers and spends most of its life closed up.

At the moment these proposals are still at consultation locally and they then need to be reviewed, considered and approved by the Church, by the local authorities and the various bodies that approve work to historic buildings.

The proposals are set out in the following pages and there is a small stand in the church itself showing the architect's plans in more detail. Please take time to look at them and, comment. There are forms to do this in the church but you can also email .

This ambitious project will be expensive. To complete all three phases may cost nearly £1 million. The first phase is estimated to cost about £600,000.

St Mary's doesn't expect to raise this money through local fundraising alone. That will be an important part of the project, but most of the funding from established funders and corporations .