

Thinking about our church building

Introduction

Over the past two years the PCC and others have been thinking about our church building and how it might be improved for all the people who use it on Sunday, through the week, and over the year.

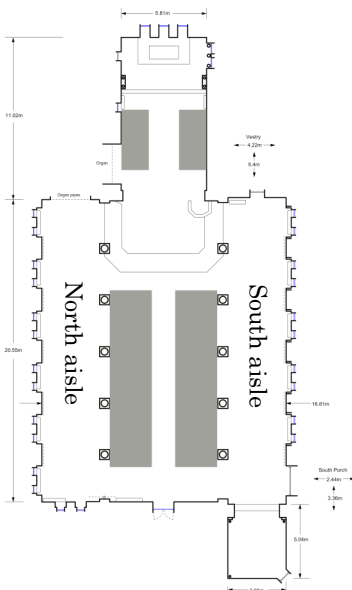
We are well aware that many aspects of the building are much loved, and have been cared for faithfully over 150 years. Yet it is evident that the church needs at least redecoration before too long, and in other ways is due for a 21st Century refit. We have concentrated on what are the issues with the building as it is now, and what might



help us in the future.

Several years ago St James's received a legacy that is set aside for projects for church growth. We also have a fund for work just on the building. It is the PCC's intention to fund a large percentage of the future building work from these funds. We still have to cover the ongoing cost of church life from current giving.

This note is a summary of a paper that the PCC received in January. That paper and any comments will form the brief, as we select an architect to take forward any work. Nothing has been decided yet!



Introduction

St James is a church that has long prioritised welcome. In recent years we have taken strides to make the building more accessible: upgrading the heating system, installing a modern AV system providing toilets, and making safe the tower. The work we are considering on the building in the next few years will continue to have this aspect - of opening the building to newcomers and visitors. Nevertheless the building has an intrinsic beauty appreciated by everyone. The church has been fashioned for the glory of God over 150 years, and must continue to sustain those who come for worship.

Features that we need now and going forward

- grand piano and chairs (the Ark and the choir)
- votive candle stand / prayer area
- standing room for Clavinova and amplifier
- display area for leaflets
- 30 stacked chairs (needed for the Ark, Connections and 11.00 etc.)
- children's quiet area (Sunday and the Ark.)
- Storage: between columns (flowers, the Ark, archive), two double units in NW corner (the Ark), in baptistry (cupboard for the Ark, 'food' for 11.00, table storage)
- Seating for up to 330 people

Pinch Points Now

The Ark: the more natural shape for a playgroup would be a circle or square, in fact the group operates as a ring with the pews in the centre. The floor is in part carpeted but otherwise hard, not great for toddlers and babies. With no dedicated servery



coffee has to be set up on tables and particular care taken re boiling water etc. One of the best areas for floor play is the dais but it is bounded by steps / hard rail.

Connections: similarly a larger common meeting area would be much better. Based in the South aisle, when the North aisle is used the group feels even more divided if the dais is not used. When the dais is used the step is a hazard.

Concert Venue : the church is used monthly for cinema presentations and increasingly for concerts (especially at Christmas). The AV equipment is high spec, the organ a fine quality and the acoustics are good. But the pews are shallow, shabby and hard. We put cushions out, or people bring their own, but that only partly solves the problem. (On Sunday some people prefer to sit in the side aisle for the seating for comfort). The lighting is adequate, but some dedicated stage lighting would be brighter, and more flexible.

Medium / Small room : the church does not have ready access to a smaller space (the hall is let for income). Hosting a small discussion group or PCC in the church is not ideal for sound etc.

Large space : the hall seats comfortably up to 60 around tables. It is likely that this will impose a ceiling on growing events such as Harvest or Quiz Night. (Other occasions such as post funeral refreshments can be uncomfortable with large numbers.) With fixed seating the church is not an option for larger social occasions.

Decoration: in a number of places the paintwork is peeling or discoloured. The PCC sees this as an obvious part of any building work.



Blockers to growth from now on

- **Visibility:** while many people know where St James is, many people do not. Floodlighting the Spire would highlight the church at night-time by its most obvious feature. It would also speak of a confidence - 'look at us, we are proud of being here'.
- **Welcome:** we have two 'main entrances'. We encourage people to come in through the South porch, but it is not very 'open' or bright, and the ramp is not secure. (There are other problems with the West entrance).
- **Hospitality:** while we do not serve hot food, a permanent kitchenette would make providing hot drinks easier.
- **Unquantifiable:** how many people are less attached to Ark / Connections / Pop Up Cinema / services because of the decoration of the building or the seating? Certainly if we had (twice?) as many young families at 11.00 the arrangement of seating would be a real issue.

Blockers to new things

- **Flexibility of use** - there are more things we might do - if we had volunteers - such as a cafe / cafe church, children's after school group, lunch club for older people (bringing in food).
- There is a moral imperative to use the building more - it is a community asset that is used only slightly. Becoming a 'venue' is not directly our mission, but is the building a 'talent' that is under used? Comfort of seating would be an issue for more frequent concerts / films.

What's next?

The PCC is sharing with the congregation its thinking prior to offering a **Statement of Need** to a field of architects, with a view to appointing the firm that makes the best response to our situation. Then they will be tasked with drawing up specific proposals.

If you have any comments to make please write to Rev Derek Winterburn via the Vicarage or vicar@stjames-hamptonhill.org.uk.