



TOTNES with BRIDGETOWN PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

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The Future of St Mary's Church, Totnes

THE VISION

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Totnes with Bridgetown Parochial Church Council. Registered Charity Number 1128123

The VISION

The Totnes with Bridgetown PCC's vision for St Mary's Church in Totnes is to provide an inspiring, fully useable and fit-for-purpose place for worship, music, performing arts and art displays to serve the community of Totnes, its surrounding district and visiting tourists. The vision also includes the provision of a centre for education both within the history of the church and monasticism and for schools as a resource for Christian understanding. The aim is to enable the church to be a living, vibrant place, that meets the needs of all comers, serving visitors and community alike, in providing a place for prayer, but also welcoming a wide variety of community events and activities with special emphasis on musical events, performing arts and art displays.

The PCC seeks to achieve its vision by embarking on a project that provides for the restoration, refurbishment and reordering of the church. The project will:

- ensure that the tower and structure of the building is fully repaired and safe. The Church provides an important Totnes landmark and is a historic building of exceptional significance but is currently on the Heritage at Risk 2015 register with a designation of "Condition – Poor"
- replace the rapidly deteriorating floor which is beginning to give rise to concerns for safety
- improve the environment, making the building a light, warm, welcoming place that is accessible to all those attending the church for services as well as community and visitor events
- make the upkeep of the church building more sustainable by broadening its use and community engagement by accommodating, inter alia, musical events, performing arts and art displays

It is anticipated that this project will be partly funded by appeal and fund raising within the local community and the possible sale of St Mary's Church Hall. The PCC will also look to explore other means of finance through grants and financial assistance through the services of a professional fundraiser.

General Information

Totnes (population 8000) and its architecture is a world class tourist attraction, and together with its New Age image attracts many people seeking spiritual guidance.

St. Mary's Church, being the most prominent Christian building in Totnes, receives over 50,000 visitors annually and 6000 votive candles are utilized in a year. The church is open for visitors from 8.45am – 5.00pm every day of the year.

Whilst looked upon as the Civic Church for the major town events, St. Mary's enjoys a well established pattern of regular worship, including Morning and Evening Prayer, Sunday and Weekday celebrations of the Eucharist, Choral Evensong and Sung Compline.

St. Mary's has a committed, enthusiastic and friendly congregation (approx. 80 on the electoral roll). The PCC acknowledge that growth is difficult within our changed society, but it manages to draw a good attendance at specific well-prepared services, including established Advent and Carol services as well as the more unconventional, but popular, Pet Service and in support of the local Hospice *Light Up a Life* service.

The church has a well established adult choir with a strong choral tradition. A new junior choir was established in April 2015, which has opened up opportunities to reach out to a wider and younger community, with the establishment of a family Eucharist. It is now in a position to establish positive links with the Cathedral music and hence resourcing other churches with workshops both for adults and children.

Other church activities and events which seek to reach out to the local community and visitors to the Totnes include:

- A well established regularly updated website that is actively used particularly by the influx of tourists and visitors to the town
- Choir practice (summer months only)
- Regular pattern of concerts as a popular concert venue (summer months only)
- Charity events, both musical and social
- School visits
- Music workshops (RSCM)
- Organist association gatherings encouraged by the fine Willis organ
- Organ recitals
- Historic visits - U3A
- Exhibitions
- Children's orchestra and music events
- Coffee mornings
- Popular music events to promote young bands
- 'Show of Hands' Concert
- Active Children's corner
- Friends of St Mary's shop
- Bell ringers and visiting teams of ringers
- The Sea Change Festival

The capacity of the church is considerable and more than adequate for major events and services such as Remembrance Sunday, Carol Services, Christmas and Easter services, Pet Service and Civic Services. The church provides the only venue large enough within Totnes which is ideally placed and with car parks nearby, to accommodate numbers in excess of 300 people. On an average Sunday the congregation in the morning and the evening is between 50-60 people in attendance. Weddings and funerals vary in numbers and concerts average around 100 people present. The church is inhibited in its opportunities to expand and broaden its depth of worship and community activities by the rigidity and limitations of the furnishings and the lack of facilities that match up to modern day standards and expectations.

Due to the inadequate and sometimes faulty heating system the church is often too cold in

the winter months to comfortably accommodate events and choir practice. It also lacks any washroom or toilet facilities. The nearest is a parish room approximately 100 metres away from the church, with outside male and female WCs.

The church has very limited facilities to enable an effective and modern catering service to be provided in support of many of the community events mentioned above.

The last Quinquennial report is dated 18 February 2015 and was produced by John Scott, architect, following a thorough inspection of the church in November 2014. The report at "E1 General Comments" states "Major repairs are necessary in the near future – particularly to high level stonework, parapets and floors". Section E2 of the report provides a schedule of recommended actions including those of utmost urgency which require immediate attention and those classified as urgent requiring attention within 12 months.

The Need

By reference to the Quinquennial report there are parts of the church that need immediate repair and parts that need repair within 12 months. Major repairs falling within these categories include the high level stonework and parapets and the floors.

There is listed below those parts of the Quinquennial report that highlight some of the significant defects which require urgent attention:

- A complete crocket has fallen from the north west pinnacle and part of a crocket from the south east pinnacle. Both are still on the tower roof or at the head of the stairs (D1.1.2 WALLS)
- There are pointing defects at the bottom of the pinnacles, primarily on outside faces but also inside the parapet, which have increased since the last inspection and now require urgent attention. (D1.1.2 WALLS)
- There is a pronounced crack in the Beer stone top to the SW pinnacle The stonework is in a really poor state and urgent works are needed if parts are not to become unstable and original detail lost. (D1.1.2 WALLS)
- The defective pointing is advancing fast and areas on the south buttress are now very poor, and they will not stay structurally sound for very long (D1.1.2 WALLS)
- Stonework to all minor pinnacles and niches is badly eroded and it is to these that really urgent repairs are needed to avoid loss of significant and precious historic fabric. (D1.1.2 WALLS)
- West belfry window tracery is badly eroded (D1.1.2 WALLS)
- Parapets are in increasingly poor condition and as other isolated defects progress they present a more comprehensive picture of decay. The defects are becoming increasingly urgent, with now significant risk of falling stonework posing serious health and safety concerns (D1.3 EXTERNAL WALLS)
- Outer North Aisle – West window stone tracery to mullions partly delaminating, one mullion very badly. Now urgent for repair. Western north window also now defective and deteriorating rapidly and tracery erosion and defects to other windows. Inner North Aisle – West window mullion stonework badly damaged – getting worse and soon to be unstable. (D1.3.2 SPECIFIC PROBLEMS)

- Chancel – North parapet all merlons loose and pointing poor. The parapet leans quite acutely and may well be unstable (D1.3.2 SPECIFIC PROBLEMS)
- Parapet bowing outwards and increasingly dangerous. Pointing very poor to parapet (D1.3.2 SPECIFIC PROBLEMS)
- South Porch and South Aisle parapets – most parapet merlon stones remain loose and other defects are getting worse (D1.3.2 SPECIFIC PROBLEMS)
- Eroded stone tracery to window west of porch. Broken mullions to window tracery east of the porch much worse than before, and the cracked parts have now fallen off. More erosion will soon destabilise the tracery. (D1.3.2 SPECIFIC PROBLEMS)
- A comprehensive programme of stonework repairs is increasingly the only option as the moment for localised repairs has now passed (D1.3.2 SPECIFIC PROBLEMS)
- Nave tiled floors have many cracked, loose and broken tiles, generally it is in very poor condition and is becoming dangerously uneven. Areas in front of the screen and elsewhere appear to have “heaved” and are now very uneven and sound hollow. (D2.8.2 FLOOR)
- A major programme of floor repairs is becoming inevitable and very urgent (D2.8.2 FLOOR)
- Generally all stonework is flaking at cill level and internal ferramenta has rusted, expanded and split stone mullions and jambs in places. Cill stonework is badly broken to all windows with internal ferramenta. This has got, and is getting, worse and in need of urgent repair. (D2.11.3 WINDOWS)
- The lighting provision is very poor. The potential improvement in the lighting and controls cannot be overstated. (D3.1 ELECTRICAL INSTALLATION)

In addition to the need for physical repairs set out in the Quinquennial report and highlighted above there is a need to reorder and/or modify the internal layout of the church. It currently lacks fundamental comforts and inspiration that hampers its presence as a witness of Christian faith and as a community social, arts and cultural centre. The building, in its current state, is not particularly inviting to the wider community of Totnes and its surrounds. This is especially so during the winter months. The church copes as best as we can with the current configuration consisting of fixed pews, but are restricted in the scope of what we might creatively do to attract a greater audience, meet modern day demands and create a community centre that is both welcoming and comfortable.

In addition to the repairs set out above and in the Quinquennial report, St Mary’s needs the following as part of its proposed reordering scheme:

- Improved and flexible seating to accommodate a greater range of functions and events but still in keeping with the building
- Improved and more adequate lighting, electrical installation and heating
- Facilities for catering for large numbers at major events
- Accessible lavatories within the building
- Improved gift shop facilities currently run by The Friends of St Mary’s
- Improved children’s corner provision
- Firm and even flooring
- Vestry/changing facilities for clergy, choir and visiting performers

- Improved storage facilities for choir robes and music
- Redecoration following completion of the works

Difficulties in Meeting the Need

Since the PCC initiated our vision for the church, it has prepared a measured survey (CAD), an archaeological ground-penetrating radar survey that has identified possible archaeological sites of significance which may need to be worked round.

Other difficulties that may be encountered are:

- No existing mains drainage to the building
- Obtaining planning permission and listed building consent for possible external additions so as to incorporate some of the needs listed above
- Archaeological implications from ground penetrating radar survey
- Overcoming possible resistance to the removal of the 19th century pitch-pine pews. It is intended that the two rows of Georgian Corporation pews at the west end will be retained
- When the floor is repaired it may be necessary to consider the re-siting of the font in order to maximise the use of space

The Proposal

To make the building structurally sound and improve the comfort and communal use of the church building to its maximum potential, the PCC proposes the following:

- To repair and renovate the tower, parapets and stonework of the Church in accordance with those recommendations within the quinquennial survey identified as needing immediate repair and repair within 12 months
- To make the floor level throughout and safe and provide appropriate covering.
- To provide improved and flexible seating and other furnishing (storage) that complement the fabric of the church and that will mark an important development in the design and visual impact within the Church.
- To provide an efficient and economical form of appropriate heating.
- To update the electrical installation and to provide additional sockets and lighting.
- To re-decorate the church including the preservation of the screen and sound areas of the Victorian flooring in the sanctuary.
- To provide accessible lavatories including disabled facilities.
- To provide catering facilities sufficient to service major events
- To provide appropriate vestry provision for clergy and choir vesting together changing facilities for concert and performing arts performers
- To provide improved shop facilities
- To provide adequate facilities for art displays

Conclusion

St Mary's Church is at the heart of the community of Totnes and its surrounds as well as being a major tourist attraction within the town. Unfortunately its very existence is threatened by its condition (rated Poor Condition in Heritage at Risk 2015) and its current inability to provide a full and comprehensive community facility.

The church's vision is to reverse the building's physical deterioration and to have it removed from the Heritage at Risk register as well as expand its usage by creating a welcoming and thriving community facility that provides an inspiring, fully useable and fit-for-purpose place for worship, music, performing arts and arts display serving the community of Totnes, its surrounding district and visiting tourists.