

ST MARY'S HITCHIN



Dear Friends of St Mary's,

We are embarking on an ambitious fundraising campaign to secure funding to make our glorious Church fit for purpose for this century. Our dream is that St Mary's may continue to be a beacon of Christian hope for Hitchin and the surrounding area in the years to come. As you will see from what follows, we have developed plans for accessible toilets in St Mary's and a servery area, so that our space may be more hospitable for members of the congregation and visitors alike.

In a substantial Grade 1 Listed building like ours, this is considerable and costly project, costing in the region of £1m. We have begun our fundraising campaigning with external donors, but for us to achieve our goal, we will need help from our congregation.

Please could you prayerfully consider helping us achieve this goal? If you would like to discuss the further, please do get in touch with me, Julia Cooper or Colin Davies.

We look forward to hearing from you,

The Rev'd Christopher Bance

Team Rector of Hitchin

Congregational Appeal for the St Mary's, Community Hub Project

The PCC of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Hitchin, St Mary Registered Charity No: 1132874. St Mary's Church, lies right in the centre of Hitchin an ancient English market town in Hertfordshire, providing a very large and impressive landmark in the town. The Grade 1 listed medieval parish church dating mainly from the 14th Century is the symbol of Hitchin. Featuring on everything from local estate agents' brochures and company logos to daily Instagram photos, souvenirs and artworks, it is open to the whole community and attracts visitors from both near and far.



The recorded history of worship on the site, situated by the banks of the river Hiz, stretches back over a millennium but may even date to Roman times well before the year 792AD when Offa, King of Mercia, established a Minster Church here.

St Mary's is a much loved landmark at the focal point of the town – the author Simon Jenkins has labelled it **“the largest and jolliest church in Hertfordshire”**. Although not now a Minster, St Mary's is part of a network of roughly 300

'Greater Churches' in terms of size & importance in the UK, between Parish churches & cathedrals.'

It is very much a focus for the life of the town. Its ancient walls welcome a host of commemorations and celebrations, concerts, fundraising events and civic services such as Remembrance Sunday. It is used by all the local schools' yearly services, for their Christmas carols, and a variety of community group activity. The church is open seven days a week to visitors and those seeking a quiet place to reflect.

Over a year in the region of 60,000 people of all ages access the church as visitors in addition to those attending events and religious services.



Description of Project: Due to its age, current configuration, and amenities there is a need to make some major improvements and alterations to improve the facilities in the building, which when completed, will greatly enhance the experience and environment for all those who use it and address the current issues which are restricting much wider use. The church has inadequate heating, lacks toilets and washing facilities, and does not have any hospitality resources, which greatly reduces its ability to be used as a community “hub”. This limits its huge potential, as the largest capacity venue in the town, to be used more widely.

The planned building works and installations will enhance the experience for all that come to St Mary's Church, create opportunities for new usage and regular work, address safeguarding problems, and disabled access issues caused by the lack of toilets in the building. There is wide support for the planned works from the community with many organisations expressing their interest in using St Mary's as both a regular venue and for large events which previously have had to be held elsewhere.

The project will cost in the region of £779k and we are seeking funding to support the work from trusts and foundations, local support, events and through our own efforts. As well as running fundraising events we are planning an appeal to the congregation and wider community which will be designated for this purpose.

The planned improvements will be phased. Our first phase will be the creation and installation of a new Plant Room. The installation of the Plant Room is a priority of all the works planned as the plant room will feed into all the other elements of the planned developments.

Project Need: St Mary's Church must improve the facilities currently available to bring it up to a higher and more suitable standard to meet the needs of both the church and the community.

The heating is inadequate, and a new and more energy efficient heating system needs to be installed to ensure people are warmer and more comfortable. Comments are often heard and fed back to church representatives regarding the poor heating. There is now an expectation that the church should be warm, as other public buildings are.

The church does not have any toilets in the building itself. The nearest toilets are a short walk away across the Churchyard, and into the community hall. However, even the facilities at the hall, which is run by a separate Trust, are also old and inadequate. For church services and for concerts and events or indeed any group or community activities, the issues around the lack of toilets have continued to be a problem and has been a barrier for people when looking into hiring or utilising the building.

The lack of facilities in the church building causes issues with safeguarding, as children and vulnerable people need to be accompanied to the nearest available washroom, and this can cause inconveniences and disruptions. For example, at choir practise if a chorister has a need for the toilet, two adult choir members have to accompany the chorister, interrupting the practise.

For people with disabilities the lack of accessible toilets in the church causes issues for those with reduced mobility as does the cold environment.

The church does not have any hospitality facilities. There is a limited supply of water inside and none is drinkable, so currently bottles of clean water need to be brought over from the hall kitchen. The church itself does not have any kitchen facilities which again limits the provision of refreshments, and this affects community gatherings within the church.

The lack of toilets, poor heating and no in-house hospitality facilities all discourage organisations from booking St Mary's. It is vitally important that we urgently address all the issues which are preventing St Mary's being the 'go to' place in the town, not just for worship but all manner of community events, group activities, support work, commemorations and celebrations in the town.

Our Plan: Over the past year we have looked at what we can do at the church to improve the facilities for church and wider and more extensive community use. We formed a development group, made up from members of the congregation, Church Parish Council representatives and people from the local community and voluntary professionals, to look at existing limitations within the church and to devise a plan to bring St Mary's facilities up to modern and expected standards.

We have consulted with building professionals and architects and spoken to other churches who have already made improvements to their venues to increase access and enhance facilities. This has resulted in plans being drawn up and approved by the development group. Plans have been drawn up by an architect for the re-development of the rear (west end) of St Mary's and these have now received faculty consent from the Church Planning Permission.

In order to improve the facilities, we need to: -

- **Install a new plant room, which will house the boilers and electrics required for the heating, and new servery facility to support hospitality**
- **Re-development of the ground floor of the church tower for the installation of the new accessible toilets**
- **Create a new servery facility to support hospitality within the church building**
- **Install drainage which is necessary to support all the planned works**

Priority - New Plant Room – In order to enable the different elements of the project, the current boiler room will be transformed into a new plant room. The installation of the new plant room is a priority and will be the first stage of all the works planned as the plant room will feed into all the other elements of the planned developments. All the water, gas and electric supplies will be sourced and operated from the new plant room. We will also need to install a sub main to support

the electrics for the church. Two new energy efficient gas boilers will be purchased and installed to support the development and provide more heating to the body of the church. A new alarm system for the church will be installed and located into the plant room. The current boiler room requires work to be carried out on the roof and external wall and this will be included in the planned works. **Cost £209,000 plus VAT**

Works to follow:

New Accessible Toilets – These will be situated in the Church Tower (the Vestry area) and the works will include lowering the floor, to ensure access for those with disabilities, installing underfloor heating to make the space warm and installing four toilets each with its own washbasin, one of which will be suitable for disabled access. **Cost £200,000 plus VAT**

New Servery – This will provide a space which will support hospitality within the church. The works will include installing and connecting the water supply, electrics, sink, storage units, fridge/freezer, hot water dispensers and catering equipment. **Cost £60,000 plus VAT**

Drainage – The drainage works will be carried out and installed to support all the above elements of the overall project. New drains will be dug out from the Tower to join the main drains near the War Memorial in the Churchyard – **Cost £100,000 plus VAT**

Project Management – A provision of 10% of overall costs would be required for the project management costs anticipated – **Cost £72,000 plus VAT**

Total Costs £779k plus VAT

Financial Information: We have secured £150,000 towards the project (allocated to the Plant Room) coming from The Valiant Trust, £25k and an allocation from the Church Fabric Fund, £125,000. Applications are currently being made on an on-going basis working on the strategy below.

Fundraising Strategy: In order to secure the funding to carry out the planned works we have devised a strategy which will look at a number of funding opportunities across a range of avenues to support the project. These include:

- Trusts and Foundations – both local and national
- Landfill Community Funding – St Mary's is in the catchment area for two landfill funds
- Individuals – Through established connections and further networking we will approach individuals in the local community who have a connection to the town for donations
- Local Fundraising – We will market a local appeal to the wider community encouraging support and donations, to include schools, business support and community groups.
- Congregation Appeal. We are planning an event to run a Day of Giving for the project asking our congregation for regular donations, one-off donations, or a pledge towards the project.
- Events – we will plan and run a number of events at St Mary's to support the appeal which will be organised and run by the Preservation Trust group.
- Allocated funding from designated funding secured by the Church

We see a strength of support from the local community and our congregation, and donations will be encouraged through a local appeal and campaign, supported by regular events and lots of publicity.

Project Impact: Once the work has been completed St Mary's Church will be able to thrive. The changes will enhance the overall experience for all those that access the church, whether this be as members of the congregation, as visitors, attending an event, hiring the space, participating in an activity or group work, or utilising the new provision now that hospitality and accessible toilets are provide in the church.

The impact for the local community will be significant. We envisage much wider usage, and this is supported by many endorsements and comments received in support of the planned works and changes, from local organisations.

St Mary's current activities: Our regular Sunday church services are at 8am and 10am with a midweek communion service on Wednesdays at 11am. We have Evensong services and a new evening service which takes place each month as well as an inclusive shorter services on the first Sunday of every month. All are welcome. Christmas Eve and Easter Festival services are especially well attended. We also host many events including: A Christmas Carol, performed by The Living Theatre; lunchtime concerts; Elvis's tribute concerts; Hitchin Chamber Orchestra & Symphony Orchestra, Hitchin Band, North Herts Choir and fundraising events for St Mary's and other local charities.



Music has always played a central part of the life at St Mary's. We have an established choir consisting of a dedicated team of sopranos, altos, tenors and basses with a number of child choristers aged 7 -18. Together they sing music spanning some five hundred years.

Leadership and Management: As a Church of England Parish which is registered with the Charity Commission (Charity No: 1132874), the Parochial Church Council (PCC) are the trustees. They have a broad range of knowledge and experience, providing a strong Leadership and Management Team to support all aspects of running the Church and delivering new projects. However, this body does not necessarily include all the skills required to manage construction projects and is supplemented by both volunteers within the church community with such expertise and experience as well as external professionals.

Two sub-committees of the PCC are particularly instrumental in the planning process of these projects, acting in advisory capacities to the PCC and valued for their practical expertise. Their members are all volunteers from within the church community.

The Leadership and Management Team are responsible for monitoring and evaluating the projects development and impact which will be reported in our annual report and on our website.

Conclusion: We have carefully planned and developed our project and firmly believe that the project will bring significant benefits to all that come to St Mary's in Hitchin. The additional facilities and amenities, addressing safeguarding and access issues, as well as enhancing the overall experience for our visitors, will make such a difference and enable St Mary's Church to continue its important presence as the biggest, most impressive and much-loved venue in the town.

Contacts



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