
VISIT TO THE CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS, KEMPSTON: 2 SEPTEMBER 2021

Purpose of Visit: *Heating options; introduction of facilities; broadband and wi-fi*

1. The DAC was represented by Dr Christopher Green (DAC Chair), David Baker (archaeology; conservation), Evelyn Baker (archaeology); Trevor Groom (quantity surveyor) with Emma Critchley (DAC Secretary), David Bevan (Historic Church Buildings Support Officer) and Joanna Chandler-Clarke (Pastoral & Advisory Officer). We were met at the church by the Reverend Eric Lomax (Vicar), Dr Barbara McKay (churchwarden) [with Isabella, potential future churchwarden] and David Webster (PCC member).
2. All Saints church (Grade I) is located away from the busiest part of Kempston, an important pre-Conquest settlement. The west tower, chancel arch and parts of the chancel date from the 12th century. The nave, north and south aisles with three-bay arcades and east end of the chancel date are of the 13th century. The clerestory was added in the 15th century and the window tracery largely renewed at the same time. There is a two-storeyed perpendicular south porch with a tierceron star-vault. The nave has a rood gallery above the chancel arch and a West gallery, approached through the ringing room. This was where the original 1860s organ (sold in 1964) was once located. The present pipe organ, acquired in 1973, stands under the West arch.

Heating options

3. The parish was aware that the existing oil-fired boiler was likely to require replacement within the next few years. As part of their consideration of future options, a member of the congregation had arranged for an Energy Audit to be commissioned with a grant from the national church through Parish Buying. The report had made a number of recommendations of simpler, lower-cost changes and more expensive interventions such as moving to electrical heating. The report had not yet been considered in detail by the PCC, but would form a useful starting point for discussion, in conjunction with the current visit report.
4. It was noted that, where possible, churches were encouraged to move away from oil-based heating systems (or other fossil fuels, but gas was not available at All Saints) in order to reduce their own carbon footprint and assist in meeting the national church's commitment to work towards Net Zero Carbon by 2030. The emerging national strategy was for churches with relatively low usage outside regular services to consider electrical heating which would be used intermittently when people were in the building. The Energy Audit recommendations were in line with this, suggesting options including under-pew heaters, which the audit suggested might be the best option for All Saints, overhead radiant heating chandeliers or radiant infra-red panels.
5. The DAC visitors suggested the parish might want to consider installing some electric heating in the near future. This would provide back-up in case the existing boiler failed and could provide – or be the first stage of – a new electrical heating system. Under-pew heaters could be considered, although it was noted that in the medium-term there might be a wish to consider the replacement of the existing pews with movable seating to support and facilitate alternative expressions of worship and extended activities (e.g. concerts) whilst enhancing the liturgical character of the building. If there was a likelihood of changing the seating within, say, 5 years, then it might be better to consider radiant heaters, either chandelier fittings or panel heaters.

6. Any provision of electric heaters would mean first upgrading the existing electrical supply to 3-phase and this would be an initial expense.

Provision of facilities

7. The DAC visitors noted that the DAC and Chancellor very much supported appropriate change, particularly to enable the church building to be accessed by all and used by everyone in the community. There was general recognition amongst bodies such as Historic England that even a highly-listed historic church should be able to accommodate basic requirements such as an accessible toilet and refreshment facilities. Whilst heating would make people more comfortable, an equal or even greater priority was to ensure that the church building could be accessed by everyone including wheelchair users and others with restricted mobility and that, once in the building, people had the availability of a toilet and refreshments.
8. It would be useful for the PCC to consider and document the available options for siting a toilet within the church:
 - a. The east end would require people to walk right through the church to use the toilet during a service or concert.
 - b. At the west end, the font was sited at the west end of the south aisle.
 - c. The area under the tower could not easily be accessed around the organ.
 - d. The most likely area was therefore the west end of the north aisle. There was sufficient space to consider inserting a freestanding box/pod incorporating an accessible toilet and separately-accessed tea-point "cupboard" which would open out so that refreshments were served into the adjacent space.
9. Whilst it appeared that the provision of a toilet and refreshment facility was feasible and in principle was likely to be permitted by faculty, a sensitive and high-quality design would be needed. A new facility in the NW corner would be directly in the line of view of someone entering the church through the main south door. Pew platforms, pews in the north aisle, wall memorials and the west aisle window would all need to be considered. There was already a tap in the NE vestry, but a new pipe run would be needed as well as a connection for drainage, preferably into a main drain (pumped in necessary), but otherwise by means of a cesspit or a trench arch drainage system. The existing storage/flower cupboards at the west end of the aisle would need to be replaced within the scheme. Examples of schemes in other churches and information about issues to consider are given in the DAC advice leaflet **Tea-points and Toilets:** <https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/Tea-Points-and-Toilets-2.pdf>. It was important that people should be able to get into the church building as well as having facilities and so the project should include the replacement of the temporary ramp with step-free access e.g. by altering the levels within the south porch, noting that there was a ledger slab just inside the south door. A budget figure for the whole project, including services and fees, might be of the order of £100-150,000. For information and advice on potential funding sources for toilets and kitchens, see <https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/dac/grants-for-specific-types-of-project/>.
10. The PCC would need to develop its thinking as **Statements of Significance and Needs**, including an options appraisal as indicated in paragraph 8. Again, a DAC leaflet is available (currently being updated – please ask the DAC team for more details). The Statement of Needs should include concrete examples and stories of those currently unable to access the church or attend services or events, as well as identifying how the church would be used in the future and the impact of the proposed development. Researching the needs of the church and wider community and talking to people about how the project might engage with and benefit them would not only form a good basis for the project, but might identify people to be involved in fundraising and other aspects. It was also useful to engage with the PCC and wider congregation in developing the Statement of Significance, for example by encouraging each person to identify their favourite part/feature of the church or the part of the building each person thought most needed change. The DAC visitors commented that providing facilities could alter the perception of a church building. From discussion about the needs and priorities, the PCC could develop a Project Brief which could be put to the existing church architect and/or to other architects with the appropriate design experience and understanding of the PCC's vision. Advice about commissioning a project architect could be found at <https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/DAC-Advice-Leaflet-Your-Professional-Adviser-24.8.20.pdf>. There are also very full and useful resource about all aspects of undertaking a

building project from the Diocese of Hereford at <https://www.hereford.anglican.org/parish-support/community-partnership/crossing-the-threshold-toolkit/>.

Broadband/wi-fi options

11. Over the past 18 months of the pandemic, many churches had moved to on-line services and were now looking at how to make continuing provision for streaming or recording services from the church. DAC advice on the options that churches could consider is at: <https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/Connectivity-for-streaming-services-v2-July-2020.pdf>. The DAC Secretary can offer assistance with issues experienced by some parishes in working with BT Openreach and has worked to support parish applications which the Chancellor has been willing to consider for an Interim Faculty to enable equipment (fixed cameras) and connections to be put in place quickly.

While we were there...

12. At the previous DAC meeting, the Committee had considered options for the **19th century font cover**, which was very heavy and which relied on a suspension mechanism. The Committee suggested the cover did not have the level of significance of the (fourteenth century?) font and could be replaced with a simple wooden cover. The lifting mechanism had some historical significance as an example of 19th century mechanical equipment. A faculty application to remove the font cover should indicate how it would be disposed of e.g. by offering for use in another church via the Church Commissioners' listing service. [Contact Vivienne Chick: vivienne.chick@churchofengland.org.]

13. This was a parish for which historic **chancel repair liabilities** had been extensively researched and registered against major landowners. Barbara McKay was in communication with at least one landowner concerning the funding of chancel fabric repairs.

14. There had been separate correspondence about the **weather vane**, which was thought to be to be unstable. A member of the PCC's fabric committee was gathering together quotations and background information about a proposal to remove the weather vane for storage and to make the tower roof weathertight. This was supported in principle by the DAC visitors and the details would be awaited for consideration under the faculty or Minor Matters process.

15. There was evidence of damp within the **south porch**. Externally a stone stair had been added on the east side of the porch in 1837, to access the upper porch room. One or two members of the PCC/fabric committee wondered if water might be getting in behind the steps and if they might need to be removed. The DAC visitors suggested that the problem might well be due to factors inside the porch, such as the lime render potentially containing tallow which would prevent it being "breathable" and the lack of ventilation in the enclosed porch space. In consultation with the church architect, providing some through-ventilation and removing the render at low level might allow the wall to dry out. The DAC visitors did not support the idea of removing the external stair.

Recommendations

The visiting members of the DAC invite the Committee to:

- (i) Endorse the advice given in its name.
- (ii) Encourage the parish to proceed in developing its plans.

Emma Critchley
6 September 2021