

CHRIST CHURCH DOWNEND



Background

For almost 200 years Christ Church has been the Parish Church of Downend, a place that has one major claim to fame - home to the renowned cricketer WG Grace who was baptised at Christ Church and who worshipped here with his family during his early years. Sitting at the heart of this expanding, demographically diverse suburb of north east Bristol it serves a parish of approximately 27,000 including Staple Hill, South Gloucestershire's most socially deprived area. The grade II listed building has been well maintained and updated a number of times since its construction in 1831 although no significant changes have taken place for over more recent years. To enable it to remain at the heart of the community and to serve the needs of the church in the 21st century, a number of crucial repairs and alterations are needed. The proposed plans exemplify the best of contemporary church architecture whilst retaining the integrity and character of this historic Georgian building.

Our vision is focused on being a community of all ages which is "learning to live the life" wherever we are and whatever we do. Having explored over the past decade through an extensive series of consultations what changes need to be made for the Parish Church to be a much valued building that is appropriate for life in 21st century, we have prayerfully discerned a vision for Christ Church to become a place for...

- building community
- celebrating creativity and
- deepening Christian spirituality

Details of the "Building 4 Life" project for which funding is sought:

Building Community

We have a vision for Christ Church being a 'hub of life at the heart of the community' – a place that is open and welcoming to all throughout the week. This is already happening in limited ways but there is far more that could be possible with a building that is more flexible and fit for this purpose.

Hospitality - Our plans include doubling the size of the kitchen and bringing it up to current standards for catering. The fixed screen between the welcome area & the nave will be able to be opened to allow both spaces to work together, providing flexibility to do hospitality for smaller numbers or for refreshments for a large concert gathering or events such as *Downend Soup*, a crowdfunding initiative for local charities powered by Christ Church. The toilet facilities will be vastly improved to bring us in line with DDA recommendations but also to provide baby changing facilities and a small cloakroom. With the pews replaced by high quality stackable chairs, a much wider range of community events and conferences in what is one of the largest buildings in the area will become possible. Upstairs, the side balconies will be level and carpeted so that they can be used in all kinds of ways during the week as well as Sundays. So

often we hear our young people getting frustrated because there is no space for them to go with their i-phones to chill out after worship. A new look balcony would be the place!

Environment to lift the spirit - The old choir vestry (currently used as midweek offices and crèche on Sundays) has windows which are so high no-one can look out of them. It feels dark and closed in. This will be exacerbated by the lowering of the floor levels to eradicate steps. We plan to install full length windows to let in the light and to enable those meeting in this smaller room to connect with the Spiritual Garden; There will be a door to give immediate access to the outside Spiritual Garden, and bespoke storage areas to enable the church to be free from clutter. There will be a 2 toilets (one with disabled facilities) next door to this room, and a tea / coffee making point, so we envisage smaller groups being able to book this room for mid-week day time or evening groups which can run independently to activities in the main church / welcome area. We have opened our doors to the Bristol Gardening Stroke Recovery Group but they have to meet in a very restricted area of the church. Their manager has expressed her delight that the group will be able to move to a new light and airy Garden Room which will be both more accessible and more suitable for their meetings, and the displays of what has been grown and planted can be appreciated by the group once they are planted out. Many other groups from the community and church will be able to gather here and make the most of the excellent facilities.

Social issues - New offices and meeting spaces will be created which will host the centre for the East Bristol branch of Christians Against Poverty (CAP) which is financed by Christ Church and supports a large number of people who are struggling with debt. Many of our members are involved in this vital work as volunteer 'befrienders', offering prayer support and practical help to those most struggling in our society. Additional work spaces will be provided for our Children's and Youth Workers, Communications team and Discipleship leader to experience the huge benefit of working collaboratively in a shared space while freeing up the Garden Room which can be rented out by local groups such as Toddlers, Pilates, Art classes etc

Accessibility for all - A new side entrance will be formed and levels will be lowered, so that there are no steps to negotiate and free flowing wheelchair access inside and out, currently access to the rooms at the rear of the church is limited to those who can negotiate 4 steps up and 4 steps down again. Making the whole building more accessible to families, those in wheelchairs and those in pushchairs means that we are increasing the accessibility of the whole downstairs of the building to the young and the very old, and anyone with physical disabilities. This has been a significant factor in driving our vision and design.

Celebrating Creativity

Space that is flexible – creativity has been growing at Christ Church, both in the way we worship and in the opportunities we have to encourage and celebrate the gifts of local people. As part of the Creative Arts Network in Bristol we are committed to seeing this dimension of our life develop further and be a significant resource for the diocese to use for larger gatherings. If this is to happen the building needs to be adaptable. The controversial issue of 'the pews' has been amicably worked through with our members and there is a general welcoming now of the move to replace the downstairs pews with high quality chairs that are easily stackable. The worship space will be enhanced through a new lighting scheme, along with the installation of enhanced sound and vision, drawing on the latest innovative technology. This will have a major impact and create an adaptable space for worship and the creative arts. We will be able to develop for example, our Celtic Evening Worship, Spirit Space, drama in worship, use of interactive prayer stations and use of a labyrinth for prayer and reflection. The church currently hosts "Downend Folk Club" for some of their larger concerts and travelling theatre groups have successfully performed at Christ Church, but we

anticipate more groups will want to hold their concert or theatre productions in our church once the lighting, sound and seating have been adapted.

Creating Connections with Families and Children – Once a month, we host Messy Church in the Parish Hall, but space is getting limited with over 80 people there most months. Being able to do this in the church building itself will afford us more space and give the time together a very different feel, reinforcing Christ Church's vision for whole-life discipleship and breaking down the distinction between sacred and secular. Our CAP debt manager often attends and builds links with the families at Messy Church, alerting where appropriate any families who are struggling with debt to the support CAP offers.

Once the pews are removed, we will also be offering exhibition space for local artists and schools. A recent Junior School Easter art installation was hung from the balcony, the only available hanging space. It will be a huge asset to the community to have local art and photography displays which are accessible to all. Most of these are currently all held in the centre of Bristol.

Deepening Christian Spirituality

Stillness and peace - Perhaps the one thing that a church can offer that is distinctive in any community is to provide a still space in the midst of the frenetic pace of contemporary culture. The sad irony is that Christ Church has not really been able to offer such a space. Therefore, the creation of a prayer chapel is central to our plans, transforming a store room behind the organ. It will be simple and sound-proof, offering a small intimate place to know God in stillness. Following our weeks of 24/7 prayer, a deep hunger is growing among many for prayer to be at the heart of our church and to be ready to welcome anyone who is seeking space to reflect and find peace.

Spiritual life of schools – Our two Church schools will benefit from the re-ordered church as they worship in different ways, whether it be through some of our Experience Journeys where small groups of children gather round prayer stations or in Collective Worship where the whole school can sit on the floor with parents on chairs around the sides. We have very strong links with our schools, demonstrated by the fact that the 10.30 congregation (200+) has been warmly welcomed by Christ Church C of E Juniors to meet each week in the school while the building work is taking place. The plans to re-order the church have been greeted with much enthusiasm by the Heads and Governing Bodies of both our Church schools who see this as an important step in building our partnership into the future.

Stewardship - We are seeking to reduce our carbon footprint in line with Diocesan targets by using LED lighting, installing underfloor heating, excluding draughts and maximising insulation throughout so energy loss will be reduced to a minimum. All the issues raised in the last Quinquennial Inspection are being included in the project so that we make effective use of the opportunity to combine the essential maintenance with the new work being proposed.

As a church we have partnered with a small village in Moldova to build a church there through tithes of our giving to this project. That church is nearing completion as a result of our giving over £60,000 over the past years and a small team from Christ Church went out in September to open the new building.

Building4Life is the next critical step in the life of Christ Church. It will restore and re-order a landmark building that is flexible, functional and accessible to all. In realising the full design and vision to sensitively move this historical building into the 21st century, both the church and wider community will be served effectively for many years to come.