

PARISH CHURCH OF ST PETER AND ST PAUL, RUSTINGTON - VESTRY EXTENSION – STATEMENT OF NEED

THE REQUIREMENT

Background

Plans are currently being prepared for a substantial re-ordering of the Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul, Rustington. This will entail removal of the pews, the provision of a new stone floor with heating under, new lighting and a sound and vision system. The new floor level will match that in the churchyard and thus facilitate access for those in wheelchairs and for parents with prams and buggies. The use of chairs instead of pews will also mean that wheelchair users may be comfortably and centrally accommodated instead of being consigned to narrow side aisles and the rear of the church as at present.

The flexibility provided by the new space will also allow the building to be used once more in the traditional role of a Parish Church, as an accessible and open centre for the village. Allowing concerts, exhibitions and meetings to take place there will help to de-mystify the building and make it a place to which villagers will become confident to come and enjoy its peace at other times.

The Church Membership is Growing

The main church services are well attended, but until recently congregations at church have not included many children. Efforts are being made to encourage more children and young people to attend, and a regular service for parents with young children is proving to be popular. At present this service is held in the church hall, but as the number of those attending continues to grow, it will be both necessary and desirable to move it into the church once re-ordering has been completed. The importance of encouraging young people into the church cannot be over-emphasised, as they represent its future.

Some parents with very young children do wish to attend church services now, but have been put off because there is nowhere for them to withdraw to if a child grows fractious or becomes unsettled. The provision of such a separate space is considered an essential part of the re-ordering process. It is proposed that the current choir vestry will double up as a room to which those with young children may withdraw if they wish, but still follow the service via audio and video feeds.

An additional benefit for parents with young children will be the provision of a baby change facility in the existing toilet.

Provision of Accessible WC

In any new development, the provision of accessible toilet facilities, wherever possible, is considered essential. It is particularly important and appropriate that the church should embrace and make provision for those less able.

The possibility of converting the existing vestry WC has been examined carefully, but the space is not large enough to provide a DDA compliant WC without unacceptably reducing vestry and sacristy areas. Access from the body of the church could not be provided without lowering all of the floor, which would create considerable mechanical and electrical service and damp-proofing issues.

It has been pointed out that there are existing accessible WCs in the public conveniences at the East end of the churchyard and in the church hall beyond, but the former is closed in the evening, and the latter is only open for hall events and would need staffing if open at other times. Both of these WCs are some distance away and we

believe that to cause people to leave the church in their wheelchairs, possibly braving adverse weather, to find a WC is simply not acceptable today; a view sympathetic with DDA legislation and recommendations.

THE CURRENT VESTRY

The Vicar's Vestry

The Vicar's vestry is a small space with many essential church requisites rather crammed into it. It houses vestments for the Vicar, Curate, Honorary Assistant Clergy (who still preach here) and altar servers. The room also serves as the sacristy, where sacred vessels and other valuables are stored in a safe and in locked cupboards. There is a sink for washing the sacred vessels. It is also a quiet space in which the clergy can prepare themselves for services. Before most services there are three people to robe and prepare in this space. The room is barely adequate in size to accommodate all these functions and any reduction would restrict its use further.

The Choir Vestry

The church has a robed choir of 15 at services. There is no plan to change this situation, except, if possible, to recruit more. In addition to being a space in which the choir foregathers, the room is lined with hanging wardrobes for vestments and cupboards to house a large quantity of sheet music for all occasions. As there is no storage space elsewhere in the church, cupboards in this room are also used to store candles and other consumables as well as some flower arranging equipment.

The storage space planned for the proposed extension will be used to relieve the congestion in the choir vestry; making it more suitable for its planned secondary purpose of providing a temporary refuge for parents with distressed or noisy small children.

Other Areas

There is a sink for use by the flower arrangers, and for filling buckets of water for the font when required. This facility will still be needed and space for it has been provided in the new layout.

There are at present two WCs, but, dating as they do from the building of the existing vestry extension in 1958, they are both unacceptably small and neither has a wash basin. The plan is to provide one larger WC with a washbasin and a baby change facility. This WC can be used by Vicar and choir, as well as by parents and children temporarily using the choir vestry. As mentioned above, this WC cannot be made accessible without reducing the already scarce space for other functions.

THE PROPOSED EXTENSION

What it Will Provide

The new area will provide a fully accessible WC, with a floor on the same level as that in the church, to facilitate wheelchair access. The area will also provide additional storage space, which will take some pressure off the present choir vestry.

The Position

The new extension will adjoin and match exactly the existing vestry. The flint work will be to the same high standard as the existing walls. It will be necessary to build over existing graves, but the most recent of these is

over 100 years old. There is a precedent for this, because the existing vestry also covers burials, which have been commemorated by brass plaques on the floor.

The memorial stones relating to the graves will be moved and re-sited within the churchyard, as has been done in the past to many of the existing memorial stones.

One window in the South aisle of the church will be removed and replaced by the access door to the new area. The window, which relates to one of the monuments to be re-positioned, can then be placed on the outside wall of the extension and could still be adjacent to its related monument.

The Holly Tree

A holly tree stands very close to the end of the proposed extension and we wish to remove it.

This tree (T9 on Tree Preservation Order 2/1985/R), which may be self-seeded, is too close to the existing church building. The Ecclesiastical Insurance loss adjuster, following a theft of lead from the South roof, stated that the tree, by concealing the South aisle roof, was a concern from a security point of view. In addition it prevents proper and safe maintenance of the aisle walling adjacent. It darkens an already not very attractive aspect of the churchyard, and keeps the sunlight from the South aisle windows. It is not regarded as a thing of beauty by most inhabitants of Rustington who use the churchyard. For these reasons, even if an extension were not being proposed, the church would be seeking permission for its removal.

The churchyard is shaded and made unnecessarily dark by a number of trees. We believe that by creating an open space in place of the holly tree, the amenity value of this part of the churchyard would be considerably enhanced. However, if directed to plant a replacement tree in another location, we would be happy to take advice on species and position.

SUMMARY

The church congregation is expanding in line with the population growth in the area generally, and we need to facilitate the continuation of this trend. To encourage those with young children to come to church we need to provide a suitable area to which they can withdraw if necessary and still follow the service. This will require the use of the current choir vestry, and the provision of a store, to create more open space in that room. It is also considered essential to provide an accessible WC at the floor level of the church, which cannot be provided in the current vestry area as all the usable space is committed.

Tom Mitcham
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