



Summary extract from Statement of needs for St Mary's Nantwich proposed Visitor Centre



April 2021

St Mary's is known as the "Cathedral of South Cheshire" and dominates the town. Nantwich has one of the largest collections of historic buildings in the county, second only to Chester and the oldest Grade 1 listed building is St Mary's Church.

The church has always been at the centre of the community, but has fluctuated in its fortunes, a nadir being in the Victorian era when the church was not well attended and was in a poor state prior to the renovation by G Gilbert-Scott. These works, delivered within the historical context of the ancient church, ensured a revival in church attendance and fortunes.

Why is a Visitor Centre needed?

The existing shop is tucked away off the South porch and not readily seen or accessible for visitors entering the church via the West door. The cafe / shop is very small and can only accommodate one or at a push two customers.

The PCC has concluded that our facilities are limited and indeed are outdated in respect of today's changing culture. A new visitor centre has been discussed over a number of years. To support this enterprise the St Mary's PCC has adopted a vision statement for the new Visitor Centre:

'St Mary's seeks to create a warm, welcoming and safe environment for all who enter the church building, especially our visitors, showing the love of the living God through the gift of hospitality.'

The mission is clear, and as a church we have to ensure that our response meets the needs of our local community and those who visit the church from outside the area. In summary the facilities proposed include (and in no particular order);

- *A focal place of welcome for all who come into the church.*
- *An area to serve light refreshments.*
- *A retail outlet for sale of goods.*
- *A facility for an exhibition space.*
- *Opening up of the north door.*
- *A control point for the sound and vision displays to enhance worship and events.*
- *A facility where people can come to talk and be listened to confidentially.*

Proposals

The Visitor Centre proposal covers a wide area of ministry and can be distilled into the following elements;

i. A focal place of welcome for all who come into the church.

To provide the visitor with a "starting point". The aim is to provide an information point with all the historical literature, guides, visitor book and facility for donations. By removing the two back pews of the church on the north side, this will open out the area as a place where people can "gather".

ii. An area to serve light refreshments.

A fully equipped servery for the preparation of drinks and light refreshments, complete with counter and seating area for 12 visitors. This will be in the NW corner of the church and will necessitate the removal of the pews from the North aisle as far as the North door.

iii. A retail outlet for sale of goods.

Alongside the shop will be a retail area for the sale of souvenirs, books and cards. This will be done through the use of display cases and will require stock storage area.

iv. A facility for an exhibition space.

Running through the Visitor area and alongside the north aisle will be the provision of facilities to allow displays by local artists and temporary displays.

v. Opening up of the North door

The door on the North side of the church is used in case of emergency egress when an evacuation of the building is required. The door will be "opened" in a way providing more permanent access and allowing more light into this part of the church.

vi. A control point for the sound and vision displays

The controls for the audio visual and sound systems are spread around the church, including a portable rack on castors. All these will be consolidated into a central sound /

visuals desk located within but on the edge of the Visitor Centre. This is a separate objective and will run in parallel to the Visitor Centre proposal.

vii. A facility where people can come to talk and be listened to confidentially.

The vacated area off the South porch, where the shop was, will be turned into a confidential listening/meeting space. The whole room will require refurbishment and new soft furnishings. This is a separate objective and will run in parallel to the Visitor Centre proposal.

What does this mean for the building?

Changes will need to be made sensitively and will require consultation with the Church of England and Heritage amenity societies. Necessary approvals will need to be obtained, in order to achieve all this in a way that minimises impact. Proposals (at this stage) include;

- Removal of a small number of pews (already agreed in principle)
- Creation of kitchen and servery area in the NW corner of the church with associated plumbing, electrics and heating.
- Seating for up to 12 people with cafe furniture aesthetically appropriate and comfortable!
- Display areas for sale of merchandise (in some cases illuminated displays)
- Information displays in the “reception” area
- Additional storage facilities will be needed for stock etc. and this will be located in the North transept on the NW wall.
- The old coffee shop off the South porch to be refurbished into a “calm reflective” type accommodation
- Removal of the two existing audio and sound control desks from elsewhere in the church and creation of a new sound desk raised 150mm above floor level

The impact of the changes would result in the loss of a number of seats and reduce the church capacity for large services by approximately 50. This can be managed with additional seating put out around the church and in the chapels.

The Benefit:

a. Increased revenue through the cafe and retail space.

By moving the shop / cafe within the church it will become more visible and therefore more accessible to all. This would encourage more people to browse, as there is a tendency for those visiting to seek retail opportunities. By including the historical guides and information within the visitor centre, this would encourage a longer stay within the church, perhaps with a refreshment stop and purchases from the shop.

Within the improved layout at the back of church, there will be a better “milling around” area where people can gather before services.

It is important to reflect the architecture of the church building in the new facility, and also recognise the impact it will have on the rest of the church.

To increase the revenue the products being provided by the Visitor Centre must meet customer expectations and have a uniqueness not provided by other outlets in the town.

It is not sustainable to simply transfer what is currently provided by the cafe / shop into a larger facility. The key issue that confronts the running of the Visitor Centre is volunteer resources.

For the purposes of this report the level of our enterprise proposed is for the Visitor Centre to be open and manned with Volunteers Tuesday - Saturday 10:00-15:00. There is a very strong case for also opening on Sunday Afternoons especially during the summer months when "footfall" is high and other facilities in Town are limited.

b. More efficient operation of running the church

The volunteers will be key in providing a service, information and support to all who come in. The shop / cafe area will be staffed with volunteers who are able to "chat and assist" those wanting help or guidance. There will also be a Steward who will be more involved in guiding and explaining to visitors the historical aspects of the building.

Having a Visitor Centre designed with the needs of volunteers in mind, will help with the development of a larger volunteer team. Having a cash register system will provide an easier and efficient way of producing and keeping track of the finances.

Outside the operating hours of the Visitor Centre, the area could be used to host church groups, obviating the need to hire other venues; for example church meetings.

The worship band could use the space to meet together and practise, strengthening our worship.

c. Open to all seeking support through Listening

We want to become a Place of Welcome, under the Transforming Lives Together banner. People want to discuss and seek help for their concerns with those who are not directly connected with them (for example; family, health service, social services etc.) in a supportive and confidential way. As a church we have a calling to be able to do this by creating an area which is comfortable, secure and safe.

We can provide a place which is "neutral" where visitors can come and interact with other church members. A quiet room would provide a place where the Listening Team could offer both a drop-in service and Listening by appointment sessions but it could offer so much more than that. We have seen more people coming to the church just to be with others, for a chat or something more.

In addition, the quiet room would be a space where everyone in the church could take people in need of support. The Ministry team and Pastoral team would have a place to meet members of the congregation who are struggling, and offer support.

d. Strengthen our support for cultural activities

The church can be hired out as a venue. At present there is some staging and chairs that can be deployed to support an event. However there is no refreshment area for performers or audience currently. The opportunity would be taken to use the new cafe area from which to prepare drinks and to circulate. This additional facility could be offered as part of the hire arrangement and would bring in additional revenue to the church.

The area could also be used as an exhibition space; either retail for aspiring artists or as an information exchange, or display of local talents. The new circulating area at the back of the church could be designed to support this activity. There is also an opportunity to review the rest of the church building to understand what other exhibition areas could be opened up for a wider display on a walk through basis or in support of worship. If an exhibition space is taken on a commercial basis an additional revenue stream would be opened for the church.

e. New Mission opportunities

There is the opportunity to extend the types of activity using the cafe area, for example small prayer groups, youth activities, Alpha courses and other forms of outreach. The cafe / shop area provides the potential for developing our ministry. The area would be provided with an IT facility to allow broadcast media to be shown, and support meetings.

We plan some existing church activities to use the area (for example, Encounter) and develop some new ones (young mothers drop in, after school drinks for children to meet and chat, Church Nurse etc.)

By stocking the cafe and shop with Fairtrade items, this provides a statement to visitors as to our position on ethical trading. This could provide an outreach opportunity around festivals and for promotion campaigns.

The “Footprint” (impact on current activities, finance staffing and sustainability)

a. Interaction with other church activities

The Visitor Centre will be only one part of daily church operation, and its interaction with other activities should be understood and mitigation measures should be considered as part of the design. Initially this can be done through the design and the materials used in the Visitor Centre to ameliorate the impact, but more importantly in the method of operation.

As the design for the centre is developed, our use of the building for other activities will also develop. It is important to keep this question of interaction constantly under review.

b. Operating expenditure

The day to day costs for items such as stock and consumables would be accounted for as part of the “shop accounts”.

The revenue returned from the cafe / shop after accounting for all expenses, operating costs and stock will be returned to the church PCC for the overall running of the church.

With an increase in the opening hours, improved product range and quality, better location, and focused publicity we are aiming at a first year growth of sales. As the scheme is developed the Business Plan will be refined as we get a better understanding of the position.

c. Staffing

The staffing is the key element to ensure the success of the enterprise. Thirty people will be needed to run the Visitor Centre on opening if each person does one shift. It is anticipated that having a more central, open and rejuvenated Visitor Centre will attract additional volunteers.

A Visitor Centre Management Board will be created to be responsible for overseeing the operation of the centre, prepare a business plan and submit accounts. (The composition of this Board and exact remit is to be defined).

A Visitor Centre manager (part time) would be required. The Centre manager will be needed in meeting statutory requirements for health, safety and welfare. The person would be responsible for stock, ordering and the financial performance of the operation as well overseeing the volunteers. This person would be responsible to the Management Board for the running of the enterprise, and delivering the Business Plan.

In order for an effective Listening service to operate, a number of people with a calling and suitable training will be required. There is such a team of people within the church, and this will continue to function using the new facility.

d. Sustainability

The aim of the cafe is that all products on offer and consumables used in the preparation of refreshments will be sustainable. As part of a wider initiative to be a Fairtrade town, the cafe will adopt the Fairtrading standards. This will be a key point in our publicity and marketing of the cafe.

The building materials used in the construction will be specified to be from sustainable sources. Where natural materials are used, a plan will be evidenced to show their replacement (for example timber).

Financially the operation of the Visitor Centre will be sustainable. That is, the costs of operation will be offset by the revenue generated through the cafe / shop. (The additional revenue from hiring out the kitchen and cafe area for cultural events should be accounted for in the Visitor Centre accounts). It is vital that the costs to deliver services are less than the income (this is shown in the Business plan).

Why now?

The decreasing footfall to the existing shop / cafe over the last few years is no longer sustainable and does not meet our Mission aims. By opening in the main body of the church, the footfall will naturally increase. St Mary's has a higher profile during the recent COVID-19 pandemic with on line services and more people are aware of church architecture (through a recent poll on Twitter) and will come to visit. Additionally an Increase in visitor who are staying in UK rather than going abroad. The local chamber of commerce is promoting the town and we can heighten awareness of the church and facilities as *part* of the town community.

When the church fully opens again, and gatherings are permitted, a huge opportunity exists to look at how the performing space within the church and supporting facility is advertised to prospective event organisers.

Parish consultation over proposed Visitor Centre

In November 2020, the PCC endorsed the Statement of Needs for the Visitor Centre, and agreed for consultation on these to commence. As part of the church community, we are now embarking on a period of consultation with key people and organisations over the new Visitor Centre. The PCC is now seeking your views and comments by using this sheet. Please do take your time to read and reflect prior to putting pen to paper. Please return these no later than the 31st May 2021. You can respond with your comments in a number of ways:

- complete the Questionnaire and send to the Parish Office marked "Visitor Centre consultation"
- by e-mail to the Parish Office office@stmarysnantwich.org.uk with "Visitor Centre consultation" in the subject line
- or you can phone either Andrew Spiers (Mob: 07506 116958) or Gill Appleton (Mob: 07775 635124)

Please do not feel constrained with the "size of the boxes" on the questionnaire, we would much rather have expanded comments in whatever form you would wish to provide. We are not precluding views and comments and you can provide these in any way you wish (verbally, letter, email etc.) to either Gill Appleton or Andrew Spiers.

At this stage there are no plans or layouts to view as we want to understand what the requirements (needs) are for a Visitor Centre. Once these are established and understood, outline proposals can be produced. These can then be reviewed against the requirements (needs) to see how well the design meets them.

We will provide a summary of the points from the consultation, and these views will be considered by the PCC and any amendments made to the Statement of Needs. Please take a few moments to think and reflect on St Mary's and the people of Nantwich.

PRAY

Lord, help your church to be the church as you would have it be, loyal to its Lord and faithful in its calling. Save the church from compromise and self-interest, and being absorbed in its own concerns and neglecting the community. Cleanse us, revive us, enlighten and empower us that we may take on your great commission. AMEN.

Turn your thoughts to St Mary's as a church community and reflect on the Vision for the new Visitor Centre:

'St Mary's seeks to create a warm, welcoming and safe environment for all who enter the church building, especially our visitors, showing the love of the living God through the gift of hospitality.'

Thinking about the future of our Visitor Centre mission, please take time to ask yourself what you wish to see as part of the new Centre. Please review the Statement of Needs summary document, while you ponder the following:

- *Who or what is our community?*
- *Try and see this as God sees it, where are the needs, the pressures?*
- *Where can St Mary's help?*
- *What has God been speaking to the church about in recent times?*

Do continue to think and pray for what we are being asked to do through the provision of a new Centre:

PRAY

We praise you for the abundant riches which you have lavished upon us in Christ as a member of your Church. Help us to respond to your love as responsible stewards of your grace; that we as a church may freely give of our time and talents and do all in the name of Him who gave his all for us, Jesus our Saviour and our Lord AMEN

PROPOSED VISITOR CENTRE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. *Do you agree or disagree with proposals -and why?*

Proposals	Please highlight	Why?
A focal place of welcome for all who come into the church	<i>Agree / Disagree</i>	
An area to serve light refreshments	<i>Agree / Disagree</i>	
A retail outlet for sale of goods	<i>Agree / Disagree</i>	
A facility for an exhibition space	<i>Agree / Disagree</i>	
Opening up of the North door	<i>Agree / Disagree</i>	
A control point for the sound and vision displays	<i>Agree / Disagree</i>	
A facility where people can come to talk and be listened to confidentially	<i>Agree / Disagree</i>	

2. *Should there be other needs and requirements - and why? (Do please amplify on a separate sheet)*

3. *Look at the benefits that would come to the church and the community - what would be your views?*

Benefits:	Your views:
Increased revenue through the cafe and retail space	
More efficient operation of running the church	
Open to all seeking support through listening	
Strengthen our support for cultural activities	
New Mission opportunities	

4. *Are there any additional benefits you feel should be included? (Do please amplify on a separate sheet)*

5. *Are you willing to become involved in either the development of / or as a volunteer in the new Visitor Centre? Yes / No*

6. *How do you see yourself contributing to our church ministry through the new the Visitor Centre?*

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.