



St. Mary's Church
St. Mary's Street
Ely
CB7 4HF

14 January 2019

PROPOSED REORDERING - RESPONSE TO REPRESENTATIONS FROM THE DAC AND CBC

We are pleased to detail below our response to the comments received from the Church Buildings Council (dated 17/07/2017) and the Diocesan Advisory Committee (dated 19/07/2017) following the meeting held on 14/07/2017 at St Mary's Church. Written comments have not been received from the representatives of The Victorian Society or Historic England who attended a meeting at St Mary's Church on 19/10/2017.

As well as the DAC and CBC, this document will be circulated to all relevant statutory stakeholders and should be read alongside the revised Statement of Significance and Statement of Needs which are enclosed.

Following receipt of the responses from the CBC and DAC, and the considerable research we have undertaken into the 1876 restoration, some changes have been made to the scheme. These include removal of proposed screen to south chapel, removal of proposed door opening in west wall of south chapel, repositioning the font to the east end of the south aisle, new floor to be in stone, enhancing the lighting to accentuate the painted ceiling in the nave, the piscina in the south chapel, and the piscina and sedilia in the east end which will also remain visible to visitors.

Phasing: the overall scope of the project remains, but it is now proposed to deliver the overall project in two phases: the first phase to comprise of the works to the medieval church [and limited works within the link between church and halls], while the second would complete the scheme with the works to the halls and the remaining works to the link. Due to funding constraints it is likely that there will be a number of years between phases.

This document is structured following section 4 of the DAC site visit notes dated 19 July 2017, noting where comments also respond to points raised by the CBC in their letter of 17 July 2017. There then follow responses to the other issues raised by the CBC.

4a. Extent of works: Our proposals do represent a significant change to the current internal arrangement of the building. We believe that this change is justified not only on practical grounds, but also in terms of the overall cultural significance of the building. Please see our revised Statement of Significance and particularly our Statement of Needs which hopefully give the careful justification required.

Representatives from both the Victorian Society and Historic England attended a meeting at St Mary's Church on 19 October 2017. Despite our request at the meeting for feedback to our proposals, none has been received. They will be sent a copy of this document and asked for their views.

4b. Font: At the time of the meeting the font was shown relocated to the north aisle. It is now proposed to locate this at the east end of the south aisle, as suggested by both the DAC & CBC.

4c. Statement of Significance - Victoria County History: Statement of Significance clarified.

4d. Statement of Significance - Furnishings: Our Statement of Significance has been revised, with the benefit of a good deal of archival research which was carried out at the Cambridge Records Office, and, in respect of the pews, at the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

A full extract of the article published in the Cambridge Independent Press on 26 April 1879 and giving an account of the Restoration of 1876-79 is included. Whilst this article and other documents we found give considerable detail regarding the structural repairs carried out, we have found very little regarding the pews - either those in the Chancel which were designed by Ewan Christian or those in the nave. The newspaper article goes in to some detail regarding parts of the restoration but in respect of the pews only says: 'The old pews have been replaced by open benches having shaped ends of simple and graceful design, giving a pleasing appearance to the body of the church'.

We have been unable to trace any evidence which states that the pews designed by Ewan Christian are particularly notable examples of his prolific work. He completed over 2000 projects in the period 1851 – 1895 when he was Architect to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Copies of his designs for the chancel pews at St Mary's are included in our Statement of Significance.

Because of their simplicity with open backs and lack of detail in the design, we believe it likely the nave pews were obtained from one of the many suppliers of church furniture at the time. Whilst we are unable to provide definitive proof of this, we have equally found no indication in our research that the pews are of any particular historical or liturgical significance.

4e. Adaptations to furnishings: The PCC has considered whether adapting furnishings, and particularly the pews, will meet practical requirements and concluded that this is unworkable. The pews are very heavy, cannot be stacked, and are inherently uncomfortable. Whilst we presume it would be possible to reduce them in size and mount them on wheels, they would remain uncomfortable and take up too much space when 'stacked' to the sides. We are also concerned that there is a potential safety risk, particularly to the elderly or infirm, should the locking mechanism to the wheels not be engaged or fail, as they can be expected to do over time.

4f. Flooring: The proposal is now for a stone floor in the nave, aisles and south chapel. In order to provide a degree of differentiation, it is proposed to divide the floor into four main sections, with the existing north-south and east-west alleys marked by means of a change of stone size. The intention is to provide a degree of orientation on entry from the north or south, but also within the main space from west to east, and provides a memory of the current pewed layout. This also is sympathetic to our baptismal practice which often takes place in the round: we place a portable font centrally within the nave, with each of the quadrants of the church occupied by one of the four baptismal parties.

4g. Chancel sedilia and piscina: The proposal to shorten the usable length of the chancel is a deliberate liturgical choice as well as offering practical advantages. The space lost within the chancel is partly made up with the additional thrust of the dais. We acknowledge that the sedilia and piscina would no longer be in full view, but they are not easily seen now without entering the chancel, walking through the choir stalls and standing at the altar rail. In practice very few people, visitors or worshippers, do so. Our proposals will open up the chancel, and will highlight the piscina and sedilia

when the church is open to tourists and visitors, by leaving the new vestry door open and having an information sign detailing their purpose and history. We also hope it will be possible to bring the piscina back in to use at the end of communion services. This arrangement achieves a number of things, and, we believe, delivers a positive outcome.

Additional benefits are:

- The main altar is brought closer to the congregation. We propose a simple but elegant timber treatment behind the communion table to provide an appropriate liturgical framing. The doors to each side will be treated as sections of wall and should be barely visible.
- We are intending to use the chancel for smaller acts of worship, including Morning Prayer during the week. The introduction of a ramp makes the area accessible and with the moving of the organ console the space achieves a better proportion.
- When the church is in use for main services with the focus at the east end, the shortened chancel will provide a more 'supportive' backdrop.
- By accommodating the vestry function at the east end, a space is freed up at the west end as one of the required meeting rooms for our children's and youth work.
- We regard the ability to store discreetly and securely larger items, particularly tables, portable items of musical equipment, flower stands, etc, out of sight as key to achieving the flexible use of the church that our needs call for, while maintaining the dignity and character of the building.
- The incorporation of storage at the east end of a chancel is an established strategy – see for example the arrangement at St Stephen's, Norwich.

4h. Southern extensions – phase2: It is agreed that the halls, as modern structures, are more easily adapted than the medieval church building. However, the scheme has already been adjusted to make what we regard to be the most of that possibility, including moving the office from its earlier proposed location in the church, and removing the proposal for sliding glazed screens to enclose the south chapel.

Additional CBC items

1. South chapel (CBC letter p. 2, para. 2): it is no longer proposed to screen off the south chapel.

2 Halls (p. 2, para. 3): We appreciate the encouragement to be bold in considering demolition and re-provision of the halls. We have looked at this possibility again, but have decided against it for two principal reasons. Firstly, the increase in costs is not justified by the relatively marginal benefits, and secondly, in sustainability terms it is much preferable to work with an existing building less than thirty years old rather than to replace it. The proposed phasing of the works would allow us to revisit this decision between phases if circumstances were to change significantly, but we are clear that this would not change what we are seeking to implement within the church itself.

3. Internal changes (p. 2, para. 5): We agree that the proposals involve a substantial change to the character of the interior, but disagree that this harms the special interest of the building. It is very difficult for anyone to argue that the Victorian chapter in the narrative of the church is of particular

interest, when compared either to the other generations of work within this building, or to comparable restorations elsewhere. We are grateful to the CBC for drawing our attention to the Cambridge Independent Press coverage of the restoration, which has helped strengthen the Statement of Significance.

4. South chapel west door (p. 3, para. 1): The proposal for an opening and door in the west wall of the south chapel has been removed from the project.

5. South chapel south door (p. 3, para. 1): The south door was added when the south wall was substantially altered in the nineteenth century (c.f. 1816 Clennel view, Fig. 12 in statement of significance; removal of the substantial buttress would likely have required rebuilding of the wall). Replacing the existing door with a glazed one does indeed change the character somewhat – we argue in a positive way, by linking the interior of the church more overtly with the beautiful garden beyond, which we are wishing to encourage both regular worshippers and visitors to make more use of.

6. Seating etc (p. 3, para. 2): We have added further information on the foreseeable formats of seating and their likely frequency in the Statement of Needs.

7. Flooring (p. 3, para. 3): Lowering the floor levels within the halls, which are now part of phase2, is not practicable; and would be disproportionately expensive. In remaking the floors in the church to install underfloor heating, the change of level is extremely helpful in mitigating any possible impact on burials and other archaeology. Ledger stones within the church that remain legible will indeed be retained in the new design of flooring, where possible in their existing locations, though we believe these to have been moved during the nineteenth-century reordering. In developing the design further, an early task will be some exploratory investigation to determine the existing floor construction.

8. Gallery (p.3, para.4): The gallery is a worthwhile benefit that flows from the more fundamental need to enclose the space below to enable it to function as a crèche and meeting room. To be able to provide at least 20 additional seats, when required and with better sight lines is an additional benefit. Importantly, the proposed arrangement also brings into use the first floor room in the tower, which currently lacks appropriate access. The stair is therefore well justified.

9. Lighting (p.3, para. 5): We agree that the ceiling lends significant character to the building and is an aspect to celebrate. Following the recent Quinquennial Inspection we are currently investigating its stability with the help of a plaster conservation specialist. Our lighting proposals will include measures to accentuate the ceiling.

We thank both the DAC and the CBC for their input which has helped to stimulate our thinking and led to significant improvements to the scheme. We hope that the above demonstrates our positive engagement in this conversation and hope that our plans as outlined above and in the attachments meet with your support.

We look forward to hearing from you.