

Report for Diocesan Advisory Committee – October 2024

Front Entrance Project – St Peter’s Church, The Willows, Stevenage SG2 8AN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are a Church of England church of all ages of around 60 adults plus 20 children worshipping every Sunday. During the week we run several activities for the community.

We want to make changes to the front entrance so that people walking past can see in, to make it accessible to wheelchair users, and make it more welcoming to all.

The cost of the project will be around £x. We currently have £27,000 towards this project and we may be looking for some grant funding depending on the full cost. We are currently obtaining quotes.



BACKGROUND

We are a Church of England church of all ages of around 60 adults plus 20 children worshipping every Sunday. During the week we run several activities for the community such as a thriving Toddler Group and Noisy Church which is church for people with young families. We are also about to start up a Wellbeing café on a Tuesday afternoon. On Tuesday mornings we operate a food bank, working with the deprived members of the community. The church is also used by the wider community on other occasions, e.g as a polling station.

We have good links with local schools who come into the church for special events such as harvest, Christmas and Easter and class visits.



THE NEED

The current entrance is very uninviting, and it is not even clear that it is an entrance. Solid doors and a tiny porch window mean that people can't see inside the building before they enter, which stops people entering for the first time. The desire is to make the outside of the building reflect the inside – meaning that inside the church is very warm, friendly and welcoming, but the outside is off-putting. We also need to make the entrance accessible to all. Currently access is via some worn-down steps, making it inaccessible to those in wheelchairs, and difficult for those with walking sticks or mobility issues.

Back in February 2022 we submitted a proposal to the DAC setting out details of our proposed development of the front entrance. The plan was to replace the small brick porch with something larger made of glass with full accessibility. At the same time, we wanted to modify the inside door so that it was larger for accessibility reasons and so that people can see inside.

This vision did not become a reality because it was too expensive and was overtaken by the need to sort out the church heating (our Warm Church Project).

Now that we are closing in on obtaining the funding for the Warm Church Project we have turned our attention back to the front entrance. Our proposal is to do something much simpler so that the cost remains manageable, but the criteria remains the same.

The 4 criteria are:

1. Be fully accessible with ramped path
2. Be clearly visible as an entrance
3. Designed so that people can see inside the building
4. Incorporate cycle and mobility scooter parking

The entrance will not be enlarged but the existing window will be replaced by one much larger, the doors will be replaced with ones made largely of glass and a window will be inserted in the church wall next to the entrance. This will mean that people can see inside and it will look much more inviting. In addition, we will develop a fully accessible entrance with a ramp running up from the foot path, and provide parking for mobility scooters at the side entrance.

Much more information is contained in the architect's Design and Access Statement.

BENEFITS

The poor accessibility of the entrance and lack of visibility does put people off coming into church. It could really help our mission to have a new entrance.

It's important that everyone is able to access the main entrance, not just the able bodied.

The visual impact of the church will be improved with planting and new steps.

We already have £27,000 donated towards this project which gives us a good financial start.

IMPACT OF CHANGE

This is about serving the long-term needs of the community and the church. If we can make the entrance more inviting and accessible, it will enhance our ability to continue to provide mid-week

activities for the community and we can start new things. Those with disabilities will be able to access the building front entrance and will be treated equally.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

St Peter's is within the Broadwater neighbourhood of the 1950s new town of Stevenage.

St Peter's Church is identified as a Building of Local Importance in the Broadwater Conservation Area. It was designed by N.F. Cachemaille-Day and Partners and built in 1954.

The church building has a footprint of 325 m² which increases to 612 m² with the hall. The space is flexible with chairs and it is used flexibly, with furniture regularly rearranged to suit the activity in the space. There is an office, kitchen and store.

CONTACT

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