

# Church Buildings Support Network

## Meeting Notes

**Date of Meeting:** 4<sup>th</sup> June 2024

**Focus:** Installing a Toilet and Kitchen

Sue Garland and Christine Parker from St Mary's church Feltwell, gave an excellent presentation on The Aisle project. This project had 4 main priorities: install an accessible toilet; install a kitchen; replace part of the floor in the north aisle (pews had already been removed) to make it level; and fill an old boiler pit which was a hazard. This included the need to connect the church to mains water and sewerage.

It took about 3 years to complete, much of this time was spent on raising funds. The total project cost was £115,000 - £120,000. The PCC had £22,000 to start with which had been raised by a Friends Group, the rest came from a mix of grants, local fundraising and donations from local businesses. It did come in under budget, so there is a small amount of money left to do a few remaining items.

Funding bodies which supported the project:

- Benefact Trust
- Beatrice Liang Trust
- Bernard Sunley Foundation
- Geoffrey Watling (Norfolk only)
- Garfield Weston
- Warren Engineering (Norfolk only)
- Congregational and General Charitable Trust
- West Norfolk Borough Council Small Grants Scheme

One thing which really helped with grant applications was this video demonstrating the need: <https://youtu.be/8Wd7kwI7S6k>

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### Q&A

**Storage – one of the big things we struggle with all the time is storage (beyond kitchen cupboards) for table and chairs etc. What sort of discussion did you have about creating storage at St Mary's?**

Sue and Chris explained that the architect was keen to do it, but they couldn't see how it was possible. The aim was to maximise use of the space; all the options considered for storage would have reduced the space. Tables are stored at the bottom of the tower, but there isn't any storage for chairs they just stack against the walls. The architect came up with a proposal to have storage above the toilet pod, accessed by a ladder, but Sue and Chris had to point out that would be impractical for most of the volunteers, who are of a certain age. "Storage was definitely discussed but we decided we would rather have the space".

**All the different criteria around the different funding bodies, how did you manage it?**

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Some do require match funding, some do not. Some pay upfront, others pay once the project has been completed and some specify that a set amount must have been spent on the project before they will release funds. It is difficult to manage. St Mary's was lucky to have the £22,000 raised by the Friend's Group to help manage cashflow, whilst they waited for grant payments. Most of the grants applied for didn't require match funding. The National Churches Trust did require 50% but despite previously being told they were keen to fund kitchens and toilets, the project was turned down; the Trust felt the PCC should prioritise repairs on the opposite side of the church.

These urgent repairs had placed the church on the Heritage at Risk Register, but the cost was likely to exceed £200,000 and at the time it wasn't possible for the PCC to raise that amount. It was felt that a kitchen and toilet would increase the use of and support for the building, which would then help to make the major repairs project more attractive to funders. In addition, the Friends Group had specifically raised money for a toilet and were frustrated that, despite previous efforts, one still hadn't been installed. As the kitchen and toilet were being placed on the opposite side of the church to where the repairs were required, the DAC and numerous funders agreed it was sensible to start with the facilities.

The Joseph Rank Trust required 75% of funds to be secured before applying, but they had a very intense process (worse than Ofsted). The application was ultimately turned down, but the Trust does not give any feedback, so Sue and Chris are unsure why it was rejected. They suspect it was because their application didn't focus heavily enough on church mission.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund focus on repairs and heritage activities, not reordering and new works. The National Lottery Community Fund do support these, however, it tends to support church halls rather than churches, so success really depends on the wider community use of a building.

### **How did you manage contingency? When digging in the graveyard, the possibility of disturbing burials could be very costly.**

Chris and Sue carried out some investigations into the history of the site; it's a bit complicated as there was once a hall just across the road which was demolished in the 1970s. They managed to work out from the tithe and village maps that the bottom part of the churchyard, where there aren't any known burials, was once the orchard to the hall. The works did get very close to 1 or 2 Victorian burials. The desktop survey was sent to the DAC and it was viewed by the specialist adviser on archaeology; he was satisfied that it was okay.

The church did look at having a septic tank/cesspit instead of mains drainage but that would have involved an archaeological dig which would have cost quite a lot and had they found anything it could have ended the project.

There was a general contingency which was managed carefully.

### **Early Steer from the DAC**

If you are just at the very beginning of a project, once you have rough idea of what you want and **before** you start to pay out for architects' drawings etc. contact the DAC. Someone from the Church Buildings Team and possibly 1 or 2 members of the DAC will be able to make a site visit to give you an early steer on the options available and what is likely to be feasible. They will also highlight the information needed and what to do in terms of archaeology and burials.

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The value of early consultation with the DAC was echoed. The DAC can have a fearsome reputation that you will never get a faculty, but they were enormously helpful and understanding and made very helpful suggestions.

- These projects aren't just for one person, you do need the support of others.
- Do consult with the DAC, Local Authority, Water companies etc. as soon as possible to minimise any unexpected shocks. Your architect should be experienced and able to manage all of this, but it helps to have an idea of what is needed from the outset.

### VAT Reclaim

Don't forget the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme – the VAT reclaim, currently guaranteed until end of March 2025. It has been regularly extended over the last decade or so, but we won't know more until after the General Election. Chris was applying for that all the way through the project at St Mary's. It helps with cashflow. The VAT, although technically not secured as you have to claim it in arrears, will be considered as match funding by most funders.

<https://listed-places-of-worship-grant.dcms.gov.uk/>

Do not be put off by the new website for the scheme which heads everything as repairs. If you scroll down the list of eligible works you will see that many other things are listed such as plumbing for toilets and kitchens, permanently routed heating systems, architects' fees etc.

### Any clarity on details of plans needed for faculty?

What is needed to get a faculty, and what might just be the preference of an architect i.e. very detailed drawings or more simple, annotated plans, and details of works i.e. traditional nailing of floors as opposed to using nail guns? *Holly will ask colleagues in the Church Buildings Team.*

### Grant Support

Holly can highlight available grants and give advice on applications, including reading completed/draft forms and suggesting changes before you submit them.

### What have you done about heating the church? We like to hold coffee morning etc. But in the wintertime people sit there and freeze.

Sue and Chris explained that they haven't done anything yet and had assumed people would not want to come in the winter. After the first successful spring/summer season, they told people the coffee morning would be stopping for the winter but people said "no you can't do that, we will come, we will come" and they did, they came in their coats and some stayed for 2 hours. They are some patio heaters to help, but people don't seem to mind.

### What are the different choices around putting in a toilet, particularly if you haven't got space in the church?

Best to start with an early visit from the Church Buildings Team and DAC, and then depending on advice get an architect to complete an options appraisal/feasibility study. Composting toilets are a good option for many rural churches.

### Ballpark figure for composting toilets – how much cheaper are they?

A very basic one in a basic shed could cost as little as £500. They will require planning permission as well as faculty.

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After the session Holly recalled hearing a company speaking at a church conference about composting toilets. She found the company name – NatSol: <https://natsol.co.uk/composting-toilet-prices/>

### **Do you have to involve an architect when you are just refitting/replacing an existing kitchen and toilet?**

Conservation accredited architects are generally only needed on projects where there is potential to negatively impact the historic, architectural, archaeological etc. value of a listed building. If you are replacing existing fittings with modern fittings and not doing anything like changing the route of plumbing pipes which requires knocking new holes in walls/floors etc. an architect isn't necessary.

### **Contacts**

DAC - all queries please use the main email in the first instance.

[DAC@elydiocese.org](mailto:DAC@elydiocese.org) or contact Sam Reeder on 01353 652718

Grants – Holly Robinson

[Holly.Robinson@elydiocese.org](mailto:Holly.Robinson@elydiocese.org)      07948 350211

### **Further Information**

<https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/get-support/buildings-maintenance/kitchens>

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### **Next Meeting:**

30<sup>th</sup> July – the first face-to-face meeting of the support network at St Mary's Feltwell.

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### **Other Topics Suggested**

Handrails and Ramps