



ST PETER & ST PAUL CHURCH BLOCKLEY

Reordering consultation
Some of the questions raised so far
(November 2021)

Can you please explain the decision-making process?

This project started off with consultations with individuals and groups who use the church and also a public questionnaire. The requirements were collated and given in the form of a briefing document to the architects Acanthus Clews. They were chosen after a rigorous selection process which culminated in presentations to members of the PCC by a short list of architects. We are currently in the middle of further consultations with both churchgoers and interested parties in the parish as well as the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC). The next steps are further meetings with groups such as flower arrangers, cleaners, choir etc and a visit from the DAC in December. In the new year we hope to refine the plans with the architect which will involve some further survey work (e.g. sewer connection). In late spring we hope to be able to bring a revised proposal to a church meeting which, if approved, would then start the formal approval process with the DAC and Cotswold District Council. The DAC, in turn, have a statutory duty to consult interested parties such as Historic England and The Victorian Society. If things go well, the tender process for choosing a contractor could start in the winter of 2022. In the meantime, we will need to start applying for grants to add to the monies already received from the sale of the Bier House and Paxford Mission Church.

Will Father Brown filming be able to continue?

We are keeping in close touch with the BBC to try to ensure they continue to use the church for Father Brown. We believe the only significant things to contend with are:

Putting the pews back temporarily for each filming which will involve storing them locally. The interior of their confessional which will probably have to change as its position would clash with the new servery. We will also try to ensure that the reordering building work does not happen when the BBC want to be here.

Do chairs need arms to assist less able risers?

It is common in churches which use chairs to have chairs with arms at the ends of rows. We plan to do this.

Could there be different heights of chair?

This is a good point. We are not planning on disposing of all our existing chairs so, once we are closer to a decision on the chairs to buy, we will need to look at the total mix to ensure we meet a wide range of needs.

Where will we put hymn books etc if we have chairs?

We will choose chairs which have book storage either underneath the seat or between chairs.

Will we be keeping the oak memorial chairs which are currently in the chancel.**Could they be used for the choir?**

There is no plan to dispose of the oak memorial chairs. We will consult the choir as to whether they think they are suitable for their use. The oak chairs are very heavy so using them in a location where they do not need to be moved often is highly desirable.

We know the sample stacking chairs have been used in several cathedrals including Gloucester. But in those large spaces where the eye is drawn to the great pillars and vaults, the effect of the chairs is less. In Blockley, it is the seating which strikes one – especially a visitor – immediately on entering. Blockley needs something more graceful.

We are intending to get further sample chairs. The issue with more substantial chairs is they either do not stack or don't stack very high and may be heavy to move. One possibility is to have, say, sixty higher quality chairs which are normally left out and supplement these with around a hundred high stacking chairs. More research is needed.

What will future generations think about exchanging pews for chairs?

We understand that many current churchgoers have grown up with pews and sitting on a pew is an integral part of going to church. The church in Blockley was, of course, built long before anyone had thought of putting pews in churches so removing pews is taking the church closer to what the original builders intended. However, the Victorians thought pews were a good idea and that has been the legacy in most churches today. Pews have the advantage of being hard wearing, orderly and able to accommodate large numbers of children for school services. However, they do not allow flexible layouts, impede air flow for heating and must seem very strange for those not used to church - just the people we want to welcome in. Many of the people consulted from that generation of churchgoers in Blockley feel that, with hindsight, the decision in the early 1990s to replace old pews with new pews rather than chairs was a mistake. Removing pews can be a contentious issue. However of the reordered churches we have visited none have regretted it.

What is the impact on maximum capacity if pews are replaced by chairs.

Although people normally tend to sit spaced apart on pews, it is possible to squeeze more people onto a pew than an equivalent run length of individual chairs. However, with the proposal to clear the North West corner of the church, which has excellent sight-lines to the front, and the reduction in size of the platform around the organ, the architect has calculated a maximum comfortable capacity of 200 which is about 20 fewer than the current, less comfortable, arrangement using a combination of pews and chairs. 200 is sufficient for Christmas services, school services and large funerals and weddings.

Have you been in touch with the people who run the other halls in Blockley who could potentially lose users and income?

Yes we have consulted with the Parish Council and other clubs and societies. It is not our intention to take business away from the other halls in Blockley. We want to continue to run our usual services and events but better.

Can the memorials be cleaned?

All the memorials need cleaning and some require professional restoration. Improved lighting in church will, no doubt, highlight the need for both. We intend to undertake basic cleaning of the memorials at the end of the building work. Full cleaning and restoration is not currently in the scope of this project. We are, though, intending to include repair and restoration of the East Window which has considerable damage.

The planned new steps for the Rushout Vault will keep the area inaccessible. Could a ramp be designed instead?

The current steps are not really safe to allow public access to the Rushout Vault. The proposed new steps will be a big improvement. However, you are right in that the area would still be inaccessible to those who cannot manage steps. A ramp (maximum incline 1 in 12) would almost certainly not get approval and would take up a very large amount of

space. A wheelchair lift or lift/steps combination would be expensive to purchase, install and service and would probably be used very infrequently. Sadly the area will continue to be inaccessible to some although, with the pews removed, it will be possible to get much closer to view it from ground level.

Will the room in the base of the tower be accessible?

The plan is to keep the current floor level in the tower (approximately 1 metre higher than the nave). This will allow level access from the West tower door but there will have to be steps up from the nave to the tower room (within the thickness of the wall). It is not practical to lower the tower room floor for a number of reasons including undermining the foundations!

Is there enough room for a power wheelchair to access the toilet?

The architect has drawn the toilet and corridor to current accessible standards. Your question reminds us that we need to verify that there is sufficient space before finalising the plans.

There is no provision in the current plans for a storage area for cleaners and flower arrangers and a separate sink and work surface for flower arrangers.

You are right - there is insufficient storage in the current plans and that is something we are working on to correct in discussion with the flower arrangers, the cleaners and the architect.

What about noise if the servery is open?

A fully enclosed servery would be ideal for a number of reasons - sound isolation, cleanliness and not having to put everything away out of sight. However, the DAC and architect feel that fully enclosing the servery will detract from the character of the building and it is looking unlikely that the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) will allow an enclosed servery in the planned position. Unfortunately, there appears to be no other better location. We should be able to have walls on the West and South sides but keep the North and East sides open. Such an open servery will be more pleasant whilst it is actually serving and it will allow light from the window West of the North porch to illuminate the rear of the nave. Many reordered churches have open serveries. They do, of course, require a high standard of joinery to be in keeping with the rest of the church.

What form of heating is proposed?

We have recently installed high efficiency gas-fired boilers in a new boiler room above the vestry thus taking the very damp and unsafe basement out of action. The intention was to have these boilers heating the existing iron pipes until they are replaced. However, on cleaning out these pipes a large number of leaks appeared and they are not usable. We have, therefore, installed temporary electric heating using fan convectors. We have as many as the electricity supply will allow which means that we will need to keep coats on in very cold weather.

The proposed heating in the reordering scheme consists of boiler-fed fan convector heaters with variable speed electric fans. Most will be inset into the floor with grilles over them similar to the existing grilles over the heating pipes. Others will be mounted under pews in the chancel and the remaining North aisle pew and under the organ platform. The variable speed fans and powerful boilers should enable the church to be warmed up more quickly than in the past with the fans then reduced in speed once the target temperature is reached. They are extremely quiet when in operation. A number of churches have a near identical arrangement which has proved very successful. Supplementing this heating with

underfloor heating from a heat pump was considered but rejected by the DAC heating advisor and would have a high capital cost.

What about redecoration and lighting?

The proposed reordering includes redecoration of the nave including making good cracks in plaster etc. We are also intending to upgrade the lighting to not only help people see better but also to emphasise the architecture of the church.

The sound system needs upgrading ASAP please

It is proposed to replace the current loudspeakers with better quality units with greater directionality aimed at the congregation. These should enable us to use lectern and handheld microphones which do not need to be positioned so close to the mouth - a significant problem with the current system. At the same time, we are proposing a projection screen which would normally be hidden above the chancel arch in the chancel and would be electrically lowered when needed. This is a common and well-tried arrangement in churches. A projector would be mounted high in the South West corner of the nave so the system would be near invisible when not in use.

What is the necessity to use the South Porch - could not the Rushout Vault be used for quiet prayer?

The South Porch is one of the architectural gems of the building and it is very sad to see it being solely used as somewhere to store stuff. The Rushout Vault does not have the privacy needed for quiet prayer and improving access to it and lighting it better will make the vault more frequently accessed by visitors. Having glass doors on the nave side of the porch and installing glazing in the porch roof will bring more light to that part of the nave. It is important, though, that we provide adequate storage for items currently in the South porch and this is being addressed at the moment.

If we remove the box pews can we find a good way to reuse the joinery?

The pews are part of the story of the church. Joinery has normally been reused throughout the various reorderings and we will try to do the same. The choir cupboards are expected to be re-used in the tower, for example.

Will the font be moved?

The plinth of the font will be removed and the font relocated slightly to line up with the centre line of the tower arch and the rearmost column between the nave and the North aisle. The plan is to use a stone pattern in the floor to give it emphasis.

Would it not be better to do the work in phases?

This was the initial idea but there are economies of doing the work in one go. So much of the work is inter-related (e.g. heating and electrics) that it is difficult to separate it into phases. Multiple phases means having to professionally protect the organ more than once from dust. Fund raising is something we want to do once - not repeatedly year after year. A multi-phase project produces diminishing returns on each phase. The PCC feel strongly that we should get this done rather than have it drag on for many years.

Who should I contact with more questions or suggestions?

Please email blockleychurch.office@gmail.com