

# St John's Church, Ranmoor



**Maintaining  
& Improving  
our Church  
building**

---

**A 5-year plan  
2018-2023**

April 2018

---

**Parochial Church Council**

This document was prepared for the Parochial Church Council of St John the Evangelist, Ranmoor, Sheffield.

The Council agreed this 5-year Plan at their meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2018.

## **Purpose of this document**

This document has two main purposes:

- 1) To inform the candidates who have been shortlisted for the role of Vicar at St John's about the current and future plans for our church building.
- 2) To ensure members of our church community and other interested parties are aware of the work that is planned for the next 5 or so years.

## **Background**

St John the Evangelist, Ranmoor is a Grade 11\* listed building. Historic England say:

“Listing marks and celebrates a building's special architectural and historic interest and helps us acknowledge and understand our shared history”.

The original building on this site was opened in 1879. It was almost entirely destroyed by fire on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1887; all that survived was the 61m-tall tower and spire (the tallest church spire in Sheffield).

The current church, designed by Flockton & Gibbs, was built incorporating the old tower and spire. The church reopened on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1888.

## **Why is the church building currently closed?**

Our church building is currently closed while repairs to the ceiling are undertaken. The closure occurred following a piece of Victorian plasterwork falling to the ground from the Nave ceiling, some 15m above the ground; the plaster probably hit the ground at around 44mph.

The plaster came down an hour after a baptism family had been congregating in the area where the failure occurred. Fortunately, no-one was in that part of the building at the time of the incident.

An investigation, by one of the country's leading historic plasterwork experts (KLLangton), did not determine the cause of the failure although it did identify that of the six panels tested, three were identified as having debonded; these could have fallen at any time.

Therefore, the PCC decided that all the 350+ ceiling panels in the Nave, Aisles and Narthex should be inspected and the church closed until the ceiling was considered to be safe.

The closure started at the end of October 2017, currently we do not know when the church will reopen.

To undertake the inspection required scaffold to be constructed throughout the building and the church organ to be protected from dust penetration. The organ pipes, Chancel and Lady Chapel were therefore sealed using shrink wrap plastic sheeting.

Just before Christmas the installation of the scaffolding was finally completed.

A full inspection of the ceiling took place, Langton's (whose previous work includes the restoration of ceilings in Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle) concluded that 35 panels needed to be replaced with about a further 50 needing to be repaired.

There is some evidence that water ingress, probably in part as a consequence of lead thefts over several years, may have been a contributory factor to the ceiling panel failure. We are currently 'in discussion' with our insurers as to whether they would regard this as an insured loss.

### **Ceiling Repair Project**

The Ceiling Repair Project is being managed by our Architect, Andrew Wiles (Wiles & McGuire, York).

Langton's proposed either the use of pre-cast fibrous panels which would be pre-painted and then installed or the reinstallation of lime, hair and plaster panels. Following discussions with the Diocese and the Church Buildings Council (CBC), our preferred method was the pre-cast panels. However, these were not acceptable to the CBC who said their use could only be temporary; the panels would have to be removed within 5 years (when funds became available) and replaced with traditional plasterwork. Had we agreed to this condition, the church would have had to close again in the foreseeable future and, if scaffolding used again, remain closed for several months while the work was completed.

### ***Church Building Council's decision***

So that the work can commence without further delay, we have agreed to the reinstallation of traditional hair and lime plaster. This plasterwork could take

two months to cure ready for painting. So that we can reopen the church without further delay, the repaired panels will not be repainted as part of this current Project. The CBC's consent is on the basis that the panels will be painted within 5 years.

The work to replace/repair the panels commenced on 9 April. It is currently unclear when the church will be able to reopen.

### ***Other repairs and maintenance***

While the scaffold is in place, a Structural Engineer has visited the site and identified the need to tie strap some of the timber rafter trimmer ribs surrounding some ceiling panels. This is because there is some evidence of movement, perhaps caused by the use of nails to secure the trimmer ribs in place; maybe nails were used instead of mortice and tenon joints to save time on the 19<sup>th</sup> century rebuild.

### ***Ceiling Repair Project cost***

The estimated cost of the ceiling repair project is £120,000. This includes £20,000 of VAT that should be recoverable from a Listed Places of Worship Grant. We are currently working on the preparation of an appeal to raise funds, although we are in the fortunate position of having sufficient money in our reserves to fund the project.

## **Quinquennial Inspections**

Our last Quinquennial Inspection was in 2014. For many years we have undertaken repair works identified by our QIs, including replacement stonework, gutters, downpipes and torching inside the roof. We have also reinstalled power and lighting into the roof space.

Our next Quinquennial Inspection is due in 2019.

## **Lead thefts**

Unfortunately, we have had several thefts of lead over the past few years. the damage they have caused has been considerable. Increasingly, only a part of the costs of replacement/repairs were met by our insurers.

We now have a roof alarm installed, the alarm is monitored 24/7. The system is approved by our insurers, Ecclesiastical. Therefore, should any further lead thefts occur the costs of replacement lead and associated repairs, should be met by our insurers.

## **Updating the church's facilities**

Over recent years the church community have removed pews from the back of church to create social space, introduced a children's/parents area within the church and, in 2017, replaced our 30-year old gas boilers.

### **Meeting the church community's needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

For many years now, the PCC has discussed ways in which the facilities in our church building need to be modernised to better provide for the facilities that people now expect.

In particular, we have just one toilet and this is not accessible to disabled people, we do not have a safe and clean facility in church to provide refreshments and we have identified the need for a room away from the main Service area, for people e.g., children's groups, to meet. Although all these facilities are available in the Parish Centre, getting to them necessitates leaving the church building and crossing a road.

#### ***Installation of a kitchenette***

At the start of our current interregnum the PCC were keen to pursue the proposal to install a discrete kitchenette at the back of church, the Archdeacon had given us consent to prepare plans for this project. This would replace the current, temporary arrangements by which we serve refreshments after morning worship. Unfortunately, our ceiling failure put a hold on these plans.

#### ***Plans for a extension on the north side***

Draft plans have evolved over time, these included a 'big' scheme that involved building into the bank on the north side while other plans just involved constructing a toilet block off the north door.

#### ***Refurbishing the Vestry building***

The roof and stonework of the building containing both the clergy and music vestries is in need of refurbishment. One of the more recent proposals was, once a new build was completed off the north door of the church, to make the vestry building 'private'; access would only be for clergy and choirs. This arrangement would help us safeguard young choristers.

#### ***New roof required***

Our Architect is now of the view that the church needs a new roof. This would avoid further water penetration affecting the stability of the ceiling.

## **What next?**

Once the ceiling repair project has been completed and our next Vicar is installed, plans should be put in place to address the above issues so to meet the church community's needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The Diocese is identifying whether St John's should be on the Historic England 'at risk' register. Being on the Registrar would, we are advised, help obtain grants for a future project.

Having the CBC's condition that the ceiling is to be painted within 5 years may also be helpful in obtaining grant funding. The Structural Engineer has advised that it may not be necessary to reconstruct scaffold throughout the building to undertake the painting, his view is that portable beams could be used across the floor to distribute point loads imposed by a scissor lift or cherry picker machine, so avoiding the time and financial cost of using scaffolding again to access to the ceiling.

Having a scheme that restores a listed building and includes providing the facilities that people currently expect could also attract funding.

Our Architect has therefore suggested that, once our new incumbent arrives, we should commence discussions about how best to take forward a scheme to address all the above issues in a single project.

## **Diocesan support for a large-scale project**

Julie Banham (the Diocesan Advisory Committee Secretary) has indicated that there would be support for us to undertake a large-scale project. Other churches in the Diocese, notably Ecclesfield have recently obtained grant funding for a similar project.

Two members of the PCC (Brian Parfett and Peter Lowe) recently attended a workshop, organised by the Diocese and provided by Church House in London. The workshop was about the organisation and running of large-scale building projects.

It was stressed the importance of engaging with the community and seeking to identify ways in which the building could be used to recognise any local historic events, for education and outreach.

## **Getting a project started**

Following the appointment of our next Vicar, the PCC will need to discuss how to take a project forward; with the CBC's condition and the lack of acceptable facilities in the church; doing nothing or having an acceptable further delay are not options.

Let us pray that we find ways to ensure that our beautiful Victorian building can be enhanced to better serve our church community for this and many more years to come.