

St Peter's Church, Heversham – Entrance Area

Statement of Need - Notes prepared by the PCC

October 2019

Our mission is to build a strong, healthy, outward-looking community, living in relationship with God, through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit.

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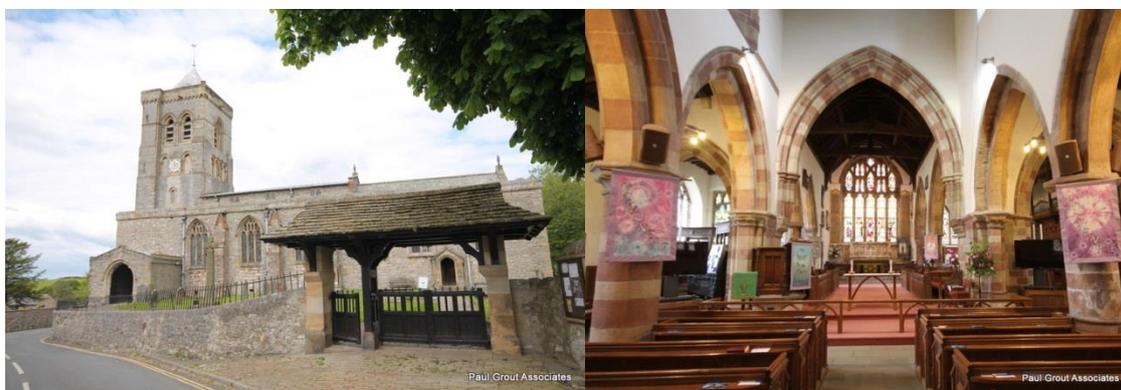
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Section 1. General information

St Peter's is a lively church with a congregation that is committed to faith in Christ and to the church's place in the community.

There are 100 people on the electoral role and attendance at morning service is between 45 and 55 people each week. The population of Heversham at the time of the 2011 census was 699 and the 2017 estimate was 717. The current trend suggests that the proportion of residents who are elderly will continue to increase. The church is an active and busy one and the building is use almost every day.

It is part of a three parish grouping in a combined benefice with St. Thomas' Milnthorpe and the benefice of St John the Evangelist, Levens. Together the three churches are part of the proposed Kent Estuary Mission Community.

The 8am Sunday service alternates between Heversham and Milnthorpe and is attended by between 5 and 10 people. The 9.30am service is attended by more than 40 people representing 90 regular worshippers. On the first and third Sundays in the month this service is Parish Communion, the second Sunday Common Praise and the fourth All Age Worship. On any fifth Sunday there is a joint service with Milnthorpe and Levens parishes. A 6.30pm service of teaching and fellowship for the Heversham, Milnthorpe and Levens congregations takes place once a month. The Parish uses "Open the Book" with Milnthorpe Primary School and holds the annual Dallam School Award Evening and Carol Service. Funeral Services can involve 150 people. 200 people can be seated in the church by supplementing pews with additional chairs. The church acoustics are good and some concerts are held. The church is open during the day with signs inviting in walkers and other visitors for biscuits and drinks. Refreshments are served in the Dallam Chapel and for larger services and concerts people are waited upon to avoid bottlenecks and accidents.

Section 2. What do you need?

We need a more accessible and welcoming entrance without steps and an additional toilet that is accessible to people using wheelchairs.

The objectives of the proposals are as follows:

1. Remove the step at the main entrance and to form a new ramp in order to enable access for wheelchairs and those with mobility difficulties
2. Provide a second toilet, one that will have provision for those with mobility difficulties
3. Provide a more open and welcoming circulation area at the church entrance
4. Improve the entrance through the use of glass doors that will allow more light in as well as to act as a draft lobby
5. Relocate the Anglian cross shaft from the porch to the interior of the church
6. Carry out the necessary bat mitigation measures

The main south door entrance to the church is currently through a porch with an uneven stone flagged floor. While the south entrance has a shallow, level approach there is a single step up into the church at the main, medieval, door. There is a removable ramp here but when it is in use the main door cannot be closed. One then passes through the draft lobby which is ill-lit, restricted in its space and claustrophobic, a rather gloomy place before entering the church via doors in the screen. Within the western part of the draft lobby around the south door a very narrow WC has been inserted. This tiny WC is useful in its way but inadequate and impossible to use by people in wheelchairs.

There is also a particular problem of draughts from the south door. The original medieval door does not have a timber frame and, not surprisingly, does not fit tightly into the stone surround. Likewise the existing timber screen cannot easily be draught proofed.

In the event of the south entrance being improved and becoming the main access for all then there is a desire to overcome the dark and somewhat unwelcoming character of the area just inside. Here the intention is to remove two pews and to create a more open welcoming space. The intention is that timber from the removed pews is re-used in the construction of a bookcase that will form the side of the new ramp.

It will be necessary to carry out some mitigation measures in order to obtain a licence from Natural England because of the presence of Natterer bats in the Porch. The measures will be developed in consultation with an expert environmental consultant.

The PCC would like to improve the church building in order to achieve reasonable access in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act and to improve the arrangements for all who visit the church. We hope that by doing so we will make the building more usable and increase its popularity as a venue for a wide variety of community activities.



Section 3. The Proposals.

The proposals are shown on the architect's drawings attached to the application and are referred to in the specific Statement of Significance and Impact Assessment.: The main features are as follows:

- 1 New Porch door screens to create a draught lobby and a short ramp to replace the step
- 2 Alterations to the existing oak panelled draught lobby to enclose two WCs
- 3 Alterations to the existing childrens' pews, the wall panelling and the bread cupboard
- 4 Removal of two pews and the creation of an area for welcoming visitors.
- 5 Relocation of the Anglian cross shaft fragment and two grave slabs
- 6 New electrical installation and minor alterations to the existing heating system

We would like to make a draught lobby in the back half of the Porch and to provide level access by removing the step. We would add a new door and screen in the centre, in line with the roof beam and clear of the medieval door. Another modern double door would be added next to the medieval door to open inwards. The new doors would be glazed doors which will mean that more light can get into the entrance area, creating a more welcoming and friendly environment We would drop the sandstone step at the door and replace it with a short internal ramp. This will do away the awkward temporary ramp that is in use at present. At the same time we would re-bed and re-point the uneven flagged floor of the Porch with all the existing flags re-used.

We propose to relocate the existing oak framed Paley and Austin draught screen from its present position to a position across the back of the entrance area. It is an important feature of the church and its re-use as a screen behind which the toilets can be located means that it can be fully retained.

At present the existing toilet is inadequate whenever there is a large congregation in church and there is no disabled toilet available. A new wheelchair accessible toilet would be created in the corner and the existing toilet would be re-planned with its door in a new position. Both toilets would be accessible from a new privacy lobby created below the west window and both would be located behind the reused screen.

The re-planning would have reduce the amount of space available as a welcome area where people can be greeted when they enter the building. We would therefore like to remove two pews from the rear of the south aisle to create a little more space. A new bookcase would be created from the pews similar to those in the Dallam Chapel that were altered in 2010.

Finally, we would like to relocate the Anglian cross shaft to the inside of the church. At present it is tucked behind the medieval door. We have given further consideration to its location since the DAC visit in March and we now propose to locate it at the corner of the Tower where it will be more prominently displayed and where all four sides can be seen. In due course we are considering creating a more permanent historical exhibition in the building which will be subject to another Faculty application in due course and this location may be reviewed again at that time.



Section 4. Why do you need it and why do it now.

Our church is embedded in the local community from whom it receives much support. It is not only the centre for regular worship but attracts large gatherings for significant services such as Remembrance Day and Christmas as well as weddings and funerals. It is clearly an important focus for witness and outreach bringing the Diocesan theme of 'God for All' to a wide audience. Dallam School hold their carol service and senior awards evening at St Peter's and from time to time other groups hold concerts and similar events in the church. The acoustics are well regarded and the church has periodic enquiries from choirs and community groups to hold large events, but once the facilities have been considered these do not always come to fruition. Conversely, The Atheneum, the village hall, is able to provide access and toilet facilities for all and hosts events that might be better held in church. The PCC would much prefer such events to take place in church. We believe that anything that gets people into church and removes any sense of mystique is likely to extend our witness to the community.

Within the past two years there have been a number of unfortunate incidents where church access has been a factor. In one case an older member of the congregation fell on exit, such that he went full length on the ground below the steps. Whilst he was shaken and bruised he was otherwise uninjured, though other members of the congregation have commented that he never really got over the fall before dying of unrelated causes the following year. On another occasion a lady with mobility issues required help in the toilet and there was not enough room for two people although they did their best but at some cost to personal dignity.

The PCC's solution to the challenge of a stepped access at the main door has been to review alternative options. It found that:

- the Dallam Chapel door is narrow, has three steps and is more difficult to manage than the main door.
- the north door is too remote, at the other side of the building, and has difficult access both on the outside and within church

Its conclusion was that the main, south, door remained the best option for access for all and invested in a temporary ramp that is put down when needed.

This is not without its challenges however:

- the ramp is not easy to put down and take up
- when it is in position it is an obstruction to other pedestrians
- it can be slippery at all times and particularly when wet
- church wardens and sides people often struggle before services to decide whether or not to put the ramp down since whilst it is infrequently used and there is no point in putting it down if it won't be needed, we wish to be ready to welcome any who does need it.
- The ramp is narrow and quite steep for users, particularly those who push wheelchairs.
- On two occasions recently ramp users have almost come to grief. A pushed wheel chair and a powered scooter almost slipped sideways off the ramp

In its paper 'Temporary Ramps' the Diocese of Carlisle states:

It is important to note, however, that installing a temporary ramp is not a substitute for: where the building and site allow, working towards the installation of a permanent ramp, properly integrated with the Church, for which a Faculty will be required.

Arguments in favour of fixed ramps are

- *temporary ramps need lifting into position – this requires training to avoid injury to the lifters and correct deployment. By definition they do not provide for fully independent access, and if no-one is available to put the ramp into position there is no benefit at all.*
 - *such ramps may move while in use unless carefully designed and installed.*
- Any maintenance needs should also be carefully addressed. In most circumstances they can also present a hazard themselves e.g. to funeral bearers, and may need signing and guarding.*

This describes precisely where St Peter's now finds itself. After a number of years of struggling on with a temporary ramp we find that each of these arguments apply. We no longer have many members of the congregation who are able to put the ramp down or take it up, it can shift when in use and it is certainly a hazard to funeral bearers who have to take extreme care. Sometimes, it appears they put themselves at risk of injury as they manoeuvre to carry the coffin. The PCC is firmly of the view that the time for a permanent ramp is long overdue.

Section 5. Justification.

The Christian witness of St Peter's to Heversham and the wider community includes encouraging and enabling as many people as possible to come into and to use the church.

The PCC is encouraged that in the introduction to the Diocesan Buildings Strategy we find the following note:

Our Buildings: We are also called to seek the best for each other, for the Church as a whole, and most importantly for the communities we serve in God's name. Our buildings are a visible sign of the Church's presence (and we hope and would wish, of God's), they offer great opportunities for the work of the Church (including community use)

We fully agree with these views and intend that our proposals will help us to meet the Diocese's wishes.

The PCC is also mindful of the guidelines 'Opening the Doors' of the Ministry and the Mission and Public Affairs Divisions of the Church of England. The guidelines were produced to be presented to General Synod in July 2009.

They make reference to the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and the Disability Rights Commission (1999)* which states that:-

Churches should be aware of the requirements of the DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) and that it is illegal to discriminate against children and adults with disabilities. In 1999 the DRC (Disability Rights Commission) issued a code of practice which stated that churches should endeavour to enact the following:

'Change practices, policies or procedures which make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for people with a disability to use a service (by service the DDA means the facilities and activities of the church). Overcome physical features which make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for people with a disability to use a service, by providing the service by a reasonable alternative method. Provide auxiliary aids or services which would make it easier for or enable people with a disability to use a service.'

The World Council of Churches has also made declarations on the matter of equality of access:

- when people with disabilities are missing from the church the whole church becomes disabled.
- when the disabled are missing, the Christian community itself becomes disabled.

Archbishop John Sentamu writing in 'Opening the Doors' wrote:

The Christian Gospel, after all, is not based on humankind's awareness of God but on God's interest in humankind. For God is not a concept or a symbol, but the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is calling us to participate in his life. My emphasis, 'who is calling **all of** us to participate in his life'

In 1 Corinthians 12 St. Paul's vision of the body of Christ sets out the gift of unity in difference; the metaphor of the body makes it clear that difference is essential to its effective functioning and unity, since different members have different gifts and callings. Verse 12:- *The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.*

These statements encompass the PCC's view that what we are trying to achieve at St Peter's is not only within the expectations of the Diocese but that it is desirable for users, legally important and morally right but fundamental to the teachings of the bible to be as inclusive as we can possibly manage.

The population of Heversham is becoming increasingly elderly and trends indicate that this is likely to continue; it has become a popular village to retire to. Together with the Parish Council the PCC is considering how best it can provide for residents in coming years. These proposals for improvements to the church building will help to meet the needs of the village and the wider community as we look to the future.

It has become increasingly apparent that our present entrance and toilet arrangements limit the potential of the building and these proposals are designed to remedy that.