



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
SUFFOLK

All Saints Church, Chelsworth, underwent a huge renovation.

Grade 1 listed All Saints Church in Chelsworth has just completed an amazing £330,000 project to make it a valuable community center whilst retaining its important role as a place of worship. The Church lies in the heart of pretty Chelsworth (population 120) and is now providing a venue for meetings, film shows, concerts etc.

The project dates all the way back to 2010, with the initial planning application and draft designs being submitted to the Diocese DAC in September 2011. After 6 years of expensive work and many heated debates, conceptual designs were finally agreed in 2017 between the PCC and Diocese. But after several retirements, the PCC lacked the skill base or financing to take the project forward.

Andrew Brash, who was recently retired, and had experience as a large scale project manager was co-opted onto the PCC in 2016 and took on the project. An early meeting with James Halsall, the then DAC Secretary, was very important to clear the air after so many years of design disagreements. With James' encouragement, the conceptual design was submitted formally by the PCC's architect – Simon Smeaton of OWL Architects - for Faculty approval, which was finally granted in June 2018.

The approved plan included the entire re-wiring of the church with a new heating system of chandelier mounted infrared heaters, a new kitchen and WC, a sound system, and the complete restoration of the organ by Boggis & Co of Diss and its repositioning on a new mezzanine floor, which itself is a restoration of an original nineteenth century gallery.





Money was now the key to the project. Chelsworth village has for many years been hugely supportive of its church and has raised money for maintenance of the church fabric with its Open Gardens and other events, but the sums needed were way in excess of the village's fund raising capacity. A new fund raising committee was formed, part village and part PCC, and fundraising started in July 2018 with gusto, as approximately £330,000 was needed. Over the next 2 years, a total of 19 grant applications were made by the committee, and 11 were successful. Expertise in the drafting of applications was quickly developed and it became clear that the tailoring of an application to the objectives of the potential donor was crucial.

A couple of early large wins from Viridor Credits and Garfield Weston meant that the project could be split into 2 phases, separately funded. Phase 1 was therefore started in 2019 and involved the entire rewiring of the church with its new chandelier heaters. The final piece of funding was achieved in June 2020 with very generous donations from the Babergh Council Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Community funds. The second - mostly building - phase was undertaken by local contractor Andy Richford. The project was finally finished in its entirety in June 2021, with the return of its newly refurbished organ.

So, what happens next? The pandemic has delayed some of the activities planned, however the church is now actively being used by the village for committee meetings and more. The restored organ is played by several visiting organists in the area. With rain threatening, the church hosted 125 villagers for a knees-up to celebrate the Jubilee and it will again be a central location for the Open Gardens event this summer. The community has really benefitted from a better equipped church building, cool in the summer while warm in the winter and the addition of the kitchen and WC (configured for disabled visitors) has added to its appeal.

Edmund Harris, arrived as the new Diocesan DAC Secretary (Church Buildings Adviser) in January 2022 and visited the church to see the project first hand. He said:

Caring for Church Buildings

“What Andrew and his colleagues have achieved at Chelsworth is extremely impressive. They have seen through to completion a major development project and completely overhauled the building services to make their church fit for purpose in the 21st century and an asset to their community. It is a model of its kind. I’m conscious of the fact that any one of the components of a project like this requires a great deal of hard work and good organisation on the part of the parish. The dedication with which they have approached the delivery of it and the drive to secure funding are truly exemplary. We are enormously grateful to Andrew and everyone else who has worked so hard at Chelsworth. What they have achieved testifies to the continuing vitality of the Church of England in Suffolk, but also to our debt to the volunteers who give so generously of their time and expertise”.

