THE HEART OF HIGH WYCOMBE
All Saints’ Church Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Redevelopment Appeal
All Saints’ Church has been serving the market town of High Wycombe for over 900 years. It is the focal point of this historic community where people are christened, married and remembered as well as providing a place for people of all faiths and none to meet, share news and care for each other.

The church building has a special character and significance for many local people and provides a calm and peaceful haven in the middle of the town; a space away from the hurly burly of modern lives and the hustle and bustle of a busy town centre.

Providing a long and rich heritage, All Saints church is a large building which should continue to play a significant role in the life of the town and its people. In order to provide facilities and suitable spaces to serve the local community, a reordering and updating project is now underway.

The Heart of High Wycombe

The Heart of High Wycombe project seeks to maintain the inherent beauty and magnificence of one of the most architecturally important churches in Buckinghamshire, with the needs of a busy and needy local community. The project will cost in the region of £1m and will see significant improvements to make the building flexible, adaptable and suitable for wider community use.

The vision is to create a space that is flexible and attractive, exploiting its outstanding acoustics for concerts and artistic performances and offering café, bookshop and tourist information facilities as well as smaller spaces for use by local groups and for counselling and support of vulnerable members of our community.

Contained within this booklet are details of the ways in which we intend to make All Saints fit for the future. Please take time to read through the plans and consider how you might respond.

This shows an artist’s impression of how the west end of the church might look in future years with both galleries in place and the font relocated to the north aisle.
A place for Christian worship and community sanctuary has been established on this site for over 900 years. During that time there have been many changes and extensions to the building taking if from its original cruciform design with a central tower to the form we see today.

The past 100 years have seen some major changes the most radical being those introduced by G E Street – the box pews and gallery at the west end were removed, many tombstones disposed of, the window above the chancel filled in and a new pulpit and font in Caen stone (designed by Street) installed.

In the 1990’s the Victoria green glass was replace by clear Georgian glass, a fine polished stone plinth was brought forward into the chancel and the reredos was relocated thereby making space for a sacristy, ambulatory and choir vestry under the east window. Other minor improvements included additions to the lighting and introducing an inner porch to the south door.

Despite these welcome additions and improvements, as the 21st century dawned it was evident that further improvements were necessary to meet with the expectations of a more diverse and multi-cultural local community. Additionally, work to conserve and renovate the building to preserve it for another millennium would be necessary.

This beautiful building could however be used for so much more with some alterations and improved maintenance.

The high cost of upkeep of this, the largest parish church in Buckinghamshire, has, up to now, prevented much funding being assigned to updating this beautiful building and making it fit for purpose in the 21st century and beyond.

Notwithstanding, during the past two years the congregation has raised £175,000 to provide the building with essential modern facilities: modern toilets; a kitchen and servery; improved areas for children; upgraded heating and sound systems; and a verger’s office.

Recently, work has commenced on urgent restoration and maintenance work to the bell tower: dealing with death-watch beetle; strengthening the tower structure; installing a new ring beam, and a new peal of 12 bells. Fundraising for this has been going on for almost two years with over £265,000 being raised towards the £375,000 total cost.

The church exists to serve all the people of High Wycombe, together with tourists and visitors to the area. It plays an important role as the Parish Church where daily and Sunday services are held, civic occasions take place, weddings and baptisms are celebrated, and lives remembered at funerals. All Saints’ is also involved with drawing together the faith communities of High Wycombe. In addition, the church provides a hub for concerts, theatre, school visits and local community groups to use.

It is a place of peace and tranquillity for all to enjoy.

But more needs to be done

In recent years, the congregation has raised around £400,000 to fund the essential work that had to be done to provide the basic of services expected to be available in an historic church and community building but it can no longer go it alone.

In this jubilee year and beyond, our appeal aims to raise a further £750,000 towards the remaining restoration, conservation and re-ordering work that is needed to take this building forward to the next century.

There is much to be done and this brochure sets an exciting challenge to those who are involved in the overall project.

The restoration and conservation of the South Porch, one of the oldest parts of the building, is long overdue and awaits funding to meet the estimated cost of £150,000.

However, before this can be done it is essential to install new inner glass doors at the West End under the tower to provide a new entrance foyer and (possible) town information centre together with a mezzanine floor above at an estimated cost of £80,000.

We want to further upgrade the facilities and make the building accessible and appropriate for much greater use by the community. Our plans include:

- extending the mezzanine floor in to the side aisles at the West End (£75,000)
- the installation of new lighting (£150,000)
- renovation and overhaul of the Willis organ (£250,000)
- obtaining a grand piano for use at concerts (up to £30,000)
- refurbishing (and draft-proofing) all the external doors (£30,000)
- making improvements to the church hall which is used primarily for community and charity activities - currently the HQ of Wycombe Homeless Connection (night shelter), CRUSE and DrugFam (£100,000). The whole building is in need of essential maintenance and upgrading - to include providing disabled access to the upper floor and facilities - and this is included within this overall project.

This ambitious vision can only be realised with the help of the wider community. There are many who enjoy the church building on a regular basis and those for whom the building is associated with. There are opportunities to have your gift recognised publically through naming rights and other more discrete acknowledgements, or remain anonymous if you prefer. All Saints Church is a registered charity and is able to reclaim Gift Aid on gifts made by UK tax payers.

As well as supporting this project financially, you can help by encouraging others to support or by working with our Project Team to identify people, companies and trusts who can make a financial contribution.

There are opportunities to help with project events, presentations and meetings as well as to come along to a fundraising or social event being held to support this project. Maybe you could hold your own event with your friends, colleagues or neighbours?

Please take the time to think, pray if that is appropriate for you, and identify how you can help this magnificent facility to continue to be at the Heart of High Wycombe.
Renovating and Improving The Oak Doors of the Church

Along with the west door (shown opposite and the choir doors (shown below) the two remaining doors in the north aisle and the south porch double doors are all in need of urgent renovation and repair.

While the weather barrier problems associated with the west door will be overcome by the improvements planned for that area, the remaining doors offer no real protection from the worst of winter winds and temperatures. In addition to general conservation, repair work and re-treating with suitable protective coatings, suitable weather barriers need to be installed to prevent the ingress of draughts and the cold.

At present we lose a lot of expensive heating through cold air entering the church around the existing unsealed doors. The scope and cost of the work will be more fully understood when the pending Quinquennial inspection has been done. An initial estimate as to the cost of the work for all five doors is between £75,000 and £100,000.

Improving the West Entrance and Base of the Tower

The provision of a warm, bright and welcoming entrance foyer providing an uninterrupted view in to the church interior will be a significant enhancement to the building in so many ways. In addition to providing much need storage space, it is planned to make the cupboard doors multi-purpose with display racks built in to the back of each door, to be used possibly as the town information centre. Our hope is to start this work towards the end of the year, subject to approval.

The work on the west entrance has to be completed in advance of the restoration and conservation work required on the south porch.

The view to the left shows the main west door of the church as seen by the majority of shoppers as they pass along Church Street in to the High Street. Alternatively, if shoppers wander into Church Square enroute to Costa’s, they will see a view of the south porch and usual entrance to the church. The impression gained is that of a building that is closed, sombre, past its best and unwelcoming. The reality is very different and the building is very much alive, warm, available and very welcoming and we want to show this.

The design concepts for the proposals for the west door are:

• To be able to have the west (outer) doors open for most of the time
• To install wood framed glass doors on the inner wall to provide an effective weather barrier while providing an uninterrupted view of the interior of the church
• To install a further set of wood framed glass doors beyond the western arch thereby creating a foyer and usable area under the tower. This would have a mezzanine roof above, appropriate heating and lighting together with multi-purpose cupboards providing much needed storage space and display options.
• A possible use of the foyer would be to provide a tourist information area for the town centre
• The mezzanine floor above would have a balcony overlooking the interior of the church, provide a usable space and include more storage options

The improvement to the west door are essential if the conservation and restoration work needed to the south porch are to go ahead.

In the longer term, the possibility of developing the areas above the kitchen in the south aisle and the toilet block in the north aisle would provide additional office space, quiet meeting areas and social spaces.

The design work for both are being done as part of a coordinated project that can be implemented in stages as need and funding allows.
Replacing and Improving the Church Interior Lighting

On a bright summer’s day natural sunlight entering through the many clear and stained-glass windows provides a reasonable amount of light within the church. However, on most days and, of course, in the evening, artificial light is necessary.

Over the years there have been a number of changes and additions the last being in the late 90’s. As a consequence: there is no coherent lighting plan; many of the lighting units are inaccessible without specialist equipment; some lights are unsuitable for purpose; areas such as the choir stalls are very poorly illuminated; very few lights are dimmable; and controls are scattered around the church.

More worrying is the condition of the wiring and we are encountering more faults in this area. As most of the cable runs are unprotected and run along the roof beams, there is always the risk of fire should a serious fault occur.

In the 21st century expectations are much higher and rules and regulations more stringent. While there are some exemptions for Grade I Listed Buildings we are expected to comply where and whenever possible.

A recent informal survey by a specialist church lighting advisor concluded:

- That the existing pendants – ideally suited to their positioning – needed to provide higher illumination and, possibly, up-lights to high emphasise the arches.
- That the altar area lights should be replaced with suitable pendants and some hidden (wall mounted) spots providing general and focused light to key points and to the choir stalls.
- The existing halogen lights around the church be replaced with modern and easily accessible lighting.
- Removable emergency exit signs are available for use when the church is being used as a concert venue.
- That special effects lighting be used to enhance special features of the church eg. Organ, monuments, arches etc.
- That all lights should be dimmable.
- That the controls are centralised and made programmable.
- New lighting wiring be installed throughout.

While traditional forms of worship are the foundation of the church, more contemporary forms of service are becoming very popular. With all these differing styles, the use of specialist lighting can greatly enhance the theme or message being delivered through the service.

Key elements of the Mission and Vision for All Saints’ for the coming decades is to make the building more accessible to the local community. In recent years it has become a much sort after concert venue and, more recently, established itself as an ideal setting for historical drama and musicals. The recent addition of catering and toilets facilities has significantly enhanced its utility and effectiveness as a venue for the performing arts. The proposed new wiring, lighting and control systems will bring greater functionality and flexibility with significantly enhanced and more environmentally efficient lighting.

The initial survey of the church indicated that the overall cost of the electrical work required to install new wiring, improved lighting and a centralised control system would be around £150,000 to £175,000.
The Willis Organ - Urgent Refurbishment and Renovation

The organ of All Saints High Wycombe is built to a high specification and is one of the most impressive examples of English romantic instruments in England today.

In need of major refurbishment and renovation, this historic instrument is played almost every day of the year; accompanying the singing of liturgy at services, for concerts and recitals, major civic and community services throughout the year, wedding and funerals, in addition to its use as a teaching and practise instrument by many talented young musicians from local schools.

Redesigned and rebuilt by Willis in 1931, All Saints organ is widely acknowledged to be one of the finest examples of Willis’ work. J.A.G. Beaumont comments in, The Organ magazine:

“We have here an organ of the first magnitude, a striking example of that new spirit in English organ design…”

The last major rebuild was undertaken in 1984 when a few alterations were made which detracted from Willis’ conception affecting the voicing and tonal quality of the instrument. The present three-manual organ consists of 46 speaking stops across four divisions (Great, Swell, Choir & Pedals).

It is hoped that, whilst urgent repair work is undertaken, a rebuild will also provide the opportunity to restore some of the stops that featured in the original specification and to make some minor improvements to bring greater balance and integrity to the voicing of the instrument and ensure that the organ remains fit-for-purpose for many years to come within the context of a community-focused church reputed for its high standard of music.

Any instrument of this size and complexity requires regular attention and tuning; however, over the past couple of years, a succession of serious failures in different parts of the organ have made the need for major restorative work even more pressing.

Nicholson and Co., who have been responsible for maintaining the organ in recent years comment in their report from 2009 on damage to pipe-work, failing leatherwork, soundboards in need of refurbishment, repairs needed to the wind chests amongst a number of other concerns. They were called out early in 2012 to ‘attend to serious faults on the organ’ after which they remarked in their most recent correspondence that:

“This highlights the fact that the organ is desperately in need of a major over-haul”

Currently, the organ is shrouded to protect the pipes and supporting equipment from the dust created by the re-ordering work that is being done in the west end of the church and the bell tower. However, while this does not adversely affect the performance of the instrument, the problems outlined above are having an increasing detrimental effect on what can be performed on the instrument. Clearly, we need to act very soon to prevent further deterioration.

The estimated cost of repair and refurbishment is in the region of £250,000; however, this will ensure that the instrument will maintain its position as being one of the finest church organs in the country for many years to come.

In addition

With its fine acoustics, good sightlines and large capacity, All Saints’ is a much sought after venue for orchestral and choral concerts – large and small. In addition, the church runs short lunchtime concerts every Monday with free admission. Regrettably, the church does not have its own concert grand piano and has to ‘make do’ with a small upright instrument. For the larger concerts, orchestras have to hire a piano adding significantly to their costs in staging the performance.

By having its own instrument, the church would benefit from its use for in-house events and gain from hire fees charged to visiting orchestras. The purchase of a second-hand grand piano would significantly enhance the quality of music performed at All Saints’ and its attractiveness as a concert venue.

Improving the Oakley Hall

Although not an attractive building, the Oakley (Church) Hall provides a number of facilities for the church and local community. The building forms part of the former Woolworth development and All Saints’ holds a 250-year lease on its part of the overall complex. While the current owners (Devonshire Holdings Ltd) are responsible for all external maintenance and repairs, the church is responsible for all interior rooms that it occupies:

- Ground Floor
  - Large (high-ceiling) community hall
  - St Andrew’s Bookshop & Coffee Shop
  - Toilets and storage room

- Upper Floor
  - Large community room with partitions
  - Five offices
  - Conference Room
  - Toilets
  - Storage Rooms
  - Kitchen

Three of the offices are currently used by local charities as part of the All Saints’ outreach programme – Wycombe Homeless Connection (WHC), DrugFam and CRUSE. The church uses the other offices. The ground floor hall is used daily (am) by a local playgroup, pm by WHC on 2 days a week and in the evenings by some local organisations. The upper hall is used less but is one of the locations used by WHC to provide overnight accommodation during the winter months. However, overall, the lettings and income achieved does not meet the running cost of the building.

The building is in desperate need of refurbishment and modernisation. There is no lift and, consequently, no disabled access to the upper floors. The kitchen is very small and its equipment old – in addition to being enlarged, it requires a complete replacement of all units and equipment. The building requires redecoration throughout, the heating system refurbished and the electrical system replaced to meet current regulations. The fittings and fixtures all need replacing.

Plans to sell the lease and redevelop alternative facilities elsewhere came to nothing and so the church must look towards making improvements to make the complex more attractive to hire out to the local community. To complete most of this work an initial estimate puts the cost at around £100,000.

To donate, support or play your part in the All Saints’ Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Redevelopment Appeal, please contact us at:

All Saints’ Appeal Office • 8 Castle Street • High Wycombe • HP13 6RF
01494 527526 • allsaintsofficehw@ukgateway.net • www.allsaintshighwycombe.org