

## **Notice to the Church Family at St. Paul's**

### **Update on the Building Project**

**23<sup>rd</sup> March 2024**

In person at the 10:30am service and online on the website afterwards

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It's hard to believe that it is now two years since I gave an extended update on our church buildings here at St. Pauls. Although very few physical changes have taken place here at Warwick Road or up at Prescott Avenue since that time, the PCC and the Next Steps Team have done a lot of careful thinking, praying and preparing behind the scenes. I'm hugely grateful to every member of both of those committees for their prayerful support, encouragement and gospel focussed input over the last couple of years.

In particular, I want to thank Mike Moir with quietly getting on with arranging for various things to be fixed and all the other things that he does (like clearing out drains) – Mike we are hugely grateful for all that you do for our church family here at St. Paul's. Thank you!

I also want to thank Jonathan Patterson. Juggling the building project alongside work and family commitments has not always been easy, but Jonathan has been a rock, organising and making sure Next Steps Team meetings happen, following things up, being a sounding board and a confidant, and, perhaps most importantly, giving me a gentle elbow in the ribs when I needed it. Thank you brother!

As with the last update notice I gave, there is lots to say. I will try again to keep it short but if you miss any details, a written version of this notice will be posted on the church website and the link will be in the notice sheet over the next few weeks.

### **Re-Cap**

I'm going to start with a re-cap of how we got to where we are today, to refresh our collective memories, and especially for those new to St. Paul's. If you want more detail on any of this, please go back and re-read the notice dated 19<sup>th</sup> June 2022 on the website.

- We've known for a long time that our 1950s church hall here at Warwick Road needed replacement. Ideas were put forward in 2009 to replace it, but, for various reasons, this never progressed further.
- A revised buildings group formed in 2012/2013 to develop a new project for an integrated church centre, this was launched in 2014 and was known as the Space Project. The cost of the project cost was estimated at £2.4 million and we began fundraising towards it.
- By 2022, by God's gracious generosity we had raised £1.25m towards the Space Project, which is an incredible achievement, but still only 50% of the target.
- As we came out of the Covid-19 lockdowns in 2021, the PCC started a review of the project in order to discern the best way of moving it forward and getting the work

underway onto site. At the same time, the Quinquennial Inspections, or 5 yearly condition surveys, of our buildings here at Warwick Road and up at Prescott Avenue were also carried out, and the findings of these fed into the review.

- This review identified a number of issues with the project finances:
  - Firstly, that by 2025 the cost would have been at least £3.2 million. This would have meant we would have had to raise through grants and giving, around £0.5 million per year every year from 2022-2025, on top of our normal ministry giving, which, as you know, has been running at a deficit since the pandemic.
  - That our annual giving/ fundraising for the project at that point was not keeping up with inflation, meaning the real value of what we had raised so far was slowly being eroded.
  - That grant funding for a single project would only raise around £150,000 – much lower than originally budgeted for.
- The Quinquennial Inspection reports identified that:
  - Unsurprisingly, the hall at Warwick Road is at the end of its serviceable life.
  - That around £200,000 worth of urgent work was required to the church building at Warwick Road, and that further investigations were required in certain areas that could lead to substantial additional costs being identified. None of which was included in the Space Project budget.
  - That around £150,000 worth of urgent work was required to the church centre at Prescott Avenue.
  - Funding for all these repairs had not been planned for, and was and is in excess of what the PCC budgets for buildings maintenance on an annual basis.
- In addition to the above, the review also identified that replacing the church hall at Warwick Road with temporary buildings was not a viable option and that legally, the majority of the money raised for the Space Project was classed as ‘restricted funds’ meaning that it could not be used for other purposes, such as developing the church centre at Prescott Avenue. However, since the Space Project originally included the refurbishment of the Warwick Road church building, it could be used towards that, providing the original aim of replacing the hall also formed part of the wider plan for the site.
- Putting all this together, and with all the finer detail that I haven’t covered in this recap, the PCC decided that we couldn’t proceed with the Space Project as it was originally planned, and that we needed to come up with a new plan that was more achievable. A sub-committee known as the Next Steps Team was set up to discern the way forward.
- In addition, the PCC committed to carrying out the follow up investigations identified in both of the Quinquennial Inspection Reports and the urgent repairs to both buildings, working our way through the priorities identified in the reports. The largest and most pressing of these were the gutters and drains to the Warwick Road church building.

## Repairs to Warwick Road Church

**Structural monitoring:** You may have noticed little reflective targets around the church building. One of the concerns raised in the Quinquennial Inspection was over the cracking to the outside wall of the north aisle. This was reviewed by a structural engineer who noticed that the roof of the nave had spread outwards slightly and that the outside wall of the aisle was leaning outwards as well. He recommended that we carry out a programme of monitoring using laser scanners to check if the movement was ongoing, or if it was ancient history. The scanner uses these little targets to check if the walls have moved from one visit to the next.

We are now 6 months into an 18 months monitoring programme. The PCC has been praying hard that the monitoring would show that the building was stable. I'm pleased to report that so far, the results show that the building is not moving at all – praise the Lord!

Many of you will know that a small fragment of stone fell away from one of the window lintels by the kitchenette a few weeks ago. Whilst that was a bit alarming when it happened, the engineer has checked back through his photos, which shows that that fragment had cracked away a long time ago. The fact it fell on that Sunday was, then, just a random occurrence, rather than being a sign of further structural movement.

The engineer has now identified, with the help of Google Earth, that the cause of the cracking along the north wall of the aisle was a very large tree growing in the neighbours garden, which has since been felled. When it was growing it dried out the ground, causing the wall to lean and bow outwards. Its now stuck in that position, and the next step, once the monitoring is finished, will be to re-point the cracks.

**Drains:** Another of the concerns raised by the Quinquennial Inspection was the condition of the drains serving the gutters and downpipes and we were recommended to commission a CCTV camera survey of all the drains on the site. This came up with some 'interesting' results:

- The foul drain, that's the one serving the toilets and running to the sewer in the road, is cracked and displaced. This means its is potentially leaking raw sewage into the ground and we therefore need replace it.
- The storm water drain along the north side, that's the one that takes the rainwater away, is completely blocked and broken and is no longer functional. In addition, there are no storm drains at all on the south side. This means that when it rains, all the water goes into the foundations of the building, making it damp.
- The report also located an existing connection to the public storm sewer in the street, meaning that we won't have to build a soakaway on the site. Praise the Lord!

**Gutters and downpipes:** Many, if not all of us, will have noticed that the inside faces of the bricks are falling off in the centre of the north aisle. This is also happening in one or two other places as well. Anyone who has ventured up onto the stage and looked behind the pulpit or the chancel arch, will have seen that the situation there is even worse. The reason for all of this is that the gutters and down pipes to the church are broken, meaning that, on top of the drainage problems, I mentioned above, they are soaking the walls above ground every time it rains as well and anywhere you can see failing bricks inside, there is a failing downpipe or gutter externally outside making the wall very wet. The problem is made even

worse by the type of paint used to decorate the walls, which traps the moisture in the bricks, causing the face of the bricks to come away.



Figure 1: Overflowing gutters and a non-functioning drains

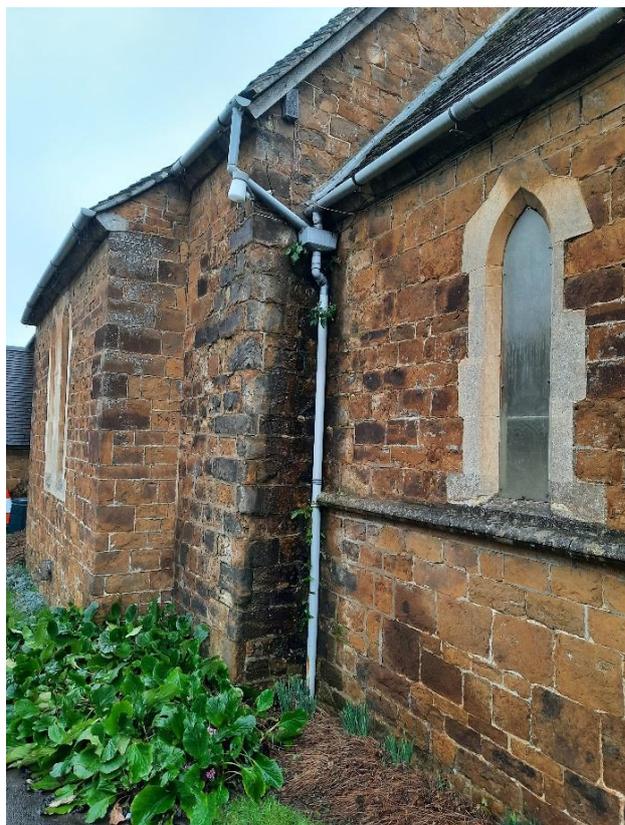


Figure 2: Badly maintained downpipes have led to saturated walls with plants growing out of them...

***New Church Architect and repair proposals:*** Those of you who remember my last update will remember that we were in the process of appointing a new church architect to oversee these sorts of repairs. We did so shortly after my last update and we commissioned her to draw up repair proposals to the gutters and drainage. Unfortunately, despite a lot of chasing, 12 months after the original appointment, no work had been done, and we decided that we needed to part company. The PCC has since appointed Christian Randall of Conservation Architects in Wantage. Christian is a Christian and has a lot of experience working on churches. He was formally appointed last August and has since drawn up a repair schedule to address the problems raised above.

Very briefly, this involves:

- The total replacement of the foul drainage system
- The introduction of a new stormwater drainage system
- The replacement of all the gutters and downpipes to the church building (including increasing the capacity)
- External stonework repairs linked to the above
- Clearance of the internal downpipes to the flat roof of the hall.

The final draft of the repair schedule was approved by the PCC at our last meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> March 2024, and has already been submitted to the DAC for approval, and sent out to builders for pricing. The works are likely to cost somewhere in the region of £100,000 to £150,000 and we hope will start on site this summer, and then to be completed by the autumn.

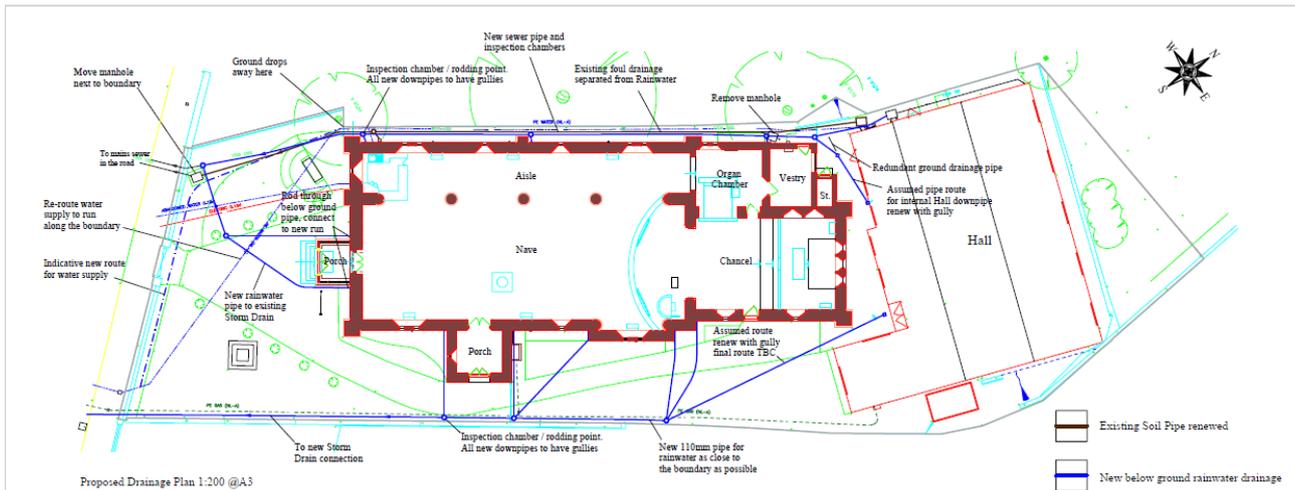


Figure 3: The plan for new drains

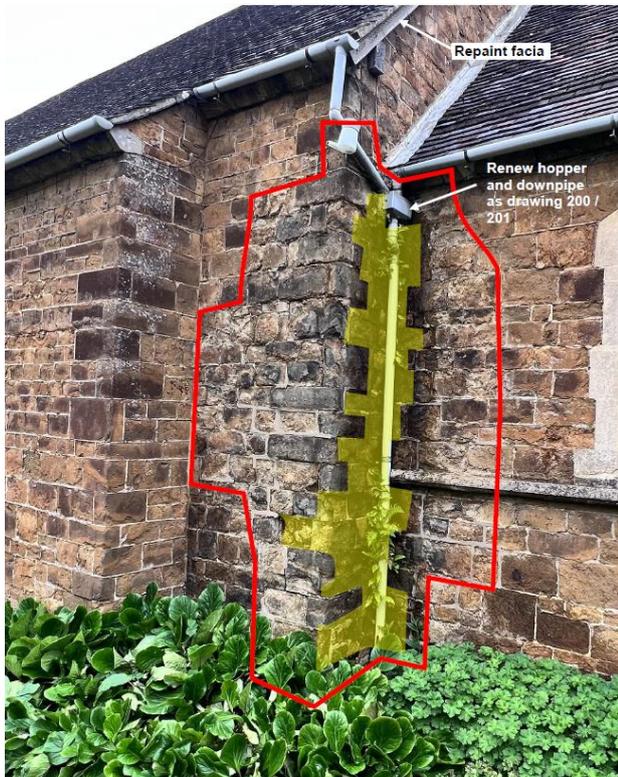


Figure 4: Area of external stonework to be repaired behind the pulpit

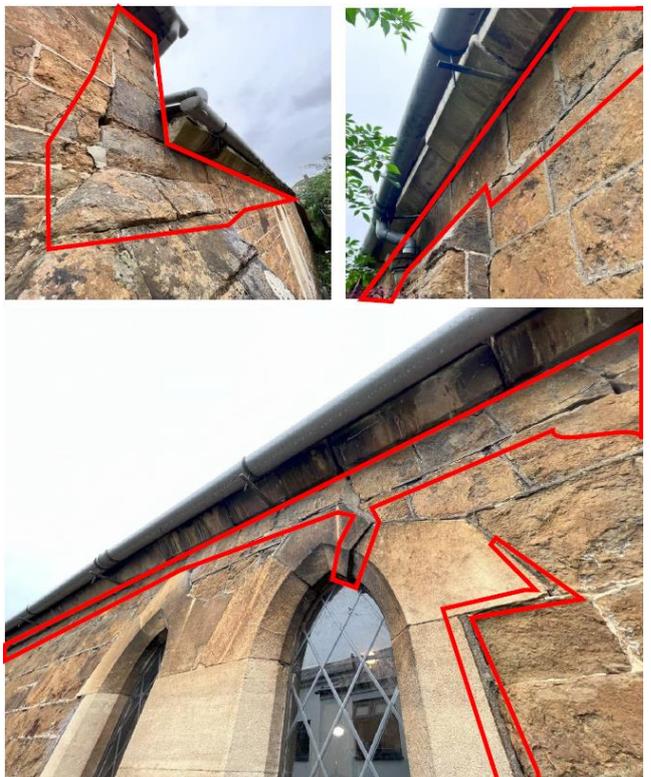


Figure 5: Areas of external stonework to be repaired along the north aisle

## A New Building Project

As you might imagine, sorting out all of these problems has taken a lot of time and energy for everyone involved. However, we haven't just been thinking about repairs, we've also, as I mentioned in the re-cap, been thinking about what the new building project should be like. The Next Steps Team have given this a lot of thought and the following key ideas have emerged:

1. The most important function of our buildings here at Warwick Road is to provide a space where we can gather together as God's people, young and old, and worship him in spirit and truth. Currently, the poor state of repair of the church building impedes that, and some of our AV problems are undoubtedly linked to the damp problems discussed above. Fixing the building and increasing its versatility and suitability for worship is therefore the first priority.
2. We need to come up with a plan for the development of the site, which includes the replacement of the hall, that can be phased, rather than trying to do it all at once. This will allow us to work towards achievable targets, and to allow improvements to be made now, rather than waiting until we have all the money in place. Phase 1 would be the repair and renovation of the main church building, and Phase 2 the replacement of the hall.
3. That to keep the cost down, we perhaps need to be a bit less ambitious and more spatially efficient – doubling up uses wherever possible to create a smaller building.
4. That despite this, we need to have an ambitious plan for growth! The previous project only added a few more seats to the church, despite the high cost. In his kindness, the Lord is adding to our numbers regularly. Our plans need to allow for this numerical growth and to anticipate more of it.
5. We need to have a long term plan and vision for both Warwick Road and Prescott Avenue that is guided by the churches ministry today and into the future, especially the exciting plans for a church plant on the Bretch Hill estate.
6. That we therefore shouldn't assume our needs in 2024 are the same as our needs in 2014 and that we therefore need to look again at the project brief.

The Next Steps Team are currently in the middle of drawing up a brief for an architect to carry out Options Appraisal for the development of the Warwick Road site that will, we hope, lead to a phased masterplan that we can take forward in stages as and when funding is available. We hope to complete the briefing document by the summer and to review and discuss the ideas at a PCC away day in the Autumn. God willing, by Christmas, we should be able to publish a new masterplan for the Warwick Road site.

In due course, we would like to carry out the same exercise for the Prescott Avenue site, but it has now been decided to hold back on that until Steve has progressed the plans for the Bretch Hill church plant a little further, at which point we will have a better understanding of what needs the building there will have to meet.

In the meantime, it is clear that we will have to live with both the Warwick Road Hall and the Prescott Avenue Church Centre for longer than we might like, and so the PCC has committed to spend some more money on these buildings, particularly the hall, to keep them going and useable for as long as they are needed. The flat roof over Jeanette's Office

at Prescott Avenue has recently been replaced and we plan to carry out some work to the Warwick Road Hall over the summer as well.

## **Conclusion**

I appreciate there is a lot of information to take in this morning, and many thanks to all of you for listening so graciously. It can feel at times like we are facing an overwhelming and impossible challenge to provide for the financial and practical needs of the ministry here at St. Paul's. When I gave the last big buildings update two years ago, I quoted from one of the songs we often sing here. Those words are no less relevant for us today:

*I will trust my saviour Jesus, when my darkest doubts befall. Trust Him when to simply trust Him, seems the hardest thing of all.*

*I will trust my saviour Jesus, trust Him when my strength is small, for I know the shield of Jesus, is the safest place of all.*

*Jesus, only Jesus, help me trust You more and more. Jesus, only Jesus, May my heart be ever Yours.*

*"I Will Trust My Saviour Jesus" by CityAlight*

When it comes to church, the bottom line is this. It's all about Jesus. Let's not get distracted by anything else. To him be the Glory, forever and ever, Amen!

**Peter Preston**

24<sup>th</sup> March 2024

## **Prayer Points:**

### ***General Prayer Points:***

Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain (Psalm 127v1)

- Pray that we would seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves (Genesis 11v3-7)

- Pray that we wouldn't be tempted to seek a name for ourselves or be proud of our achievements

The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire (Nehemiah 1v2-4 and 2v17-18)

- Repent that we have left undone that which we ought to have done.

Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin? (Haggai 1v2-8)

- Pray that we would be led to give sacrificially to the work of the Lord.
- Pray that the Lord would be glorified in our buildings.

### ***Specific Prayer Points:***

- Pray for Peter over the next couple of months as he finishes writing the first draft of the Options Appraisal Brief for the Next Steps Team.
- Pray for the Next Steps Team as they meet in May to review and finalise the brief.
- Pray for the PCC as they review and discern the way forward.
- Pray for the Wardens (and Peter) as they arrange and oversee repairs to our buildings
- Pray for Christian, our church architect, for his business, family and his church. Pray for the work that he does for us – for wisdom and clarity in his thoughts.
- Pray for our witness to Christian and to the builders who undertake the drainage works.
- Pray that the structural monitoring results would continue to show no movement
- Pray that we would find an architect for the development of the site that understands the problems and constraints and that finds creative solutions to them.
- Pray that the Lord would continue to provide for all our needs here at St. Paul's.
- Above all else, pray that everyone of us here at St. Paul's would keep their eyes fixed on Jesus.