

Update on the St Margaret's Church Revitalisation Project 8th January 2024

About the project

The project started in October 2021. The clear wish of the village was to ensure that the church stays open and be partially repurposed to act as a community hub.

Three working groups were established under the auspices of the Parochial Church Council. The building group is looking at the needs and requirements for the project, appointment and coordination of architects. The fundraising group is focussed on organising local events e.g. Tractor Run, Coffee Mornings, Christmas Event. The grant group is looking at the availability and requirements for grants.

An architect was commissioned to undertake a scoping study based on the terms of reference developed by PCC. The architect reported back in autumn 2023. The project cost estimate was £1.1 million. £420k for a new roof, £210k for church repairs and £470k for the community hub.

Village support

80 people came to the initial meeting in January 2022 and 25 people joined the various groups. As of Jan 2024, 12 people are actively engaged in organising the project. This loss of people is down to numerous factors, the time burden, disagreements and "event fatigue".

Commitment and enthusiasm from Stradishall residents is in question and is concerning. For instance, five people took the time to come and look at the architect plans in September. Footfall at events is declining marginally and events are not attracting new visitors.

Money

Events and the Sponsor a Tile initiative have raised £14,000 to date. (£9,000 events and £5,000 tiles). Events are raising approximately £4,000 per year. Current funds, which include the PCC building fund, are £30,000 (PCC) and £4,000 Friends.

Grants

In early 2022 seventy agencies and organisations were identified who might support the project. Currently that number is just over 20 agencies. This change is, in part, due to the rationalisation of agencies but also driven by the fact that Covid and the cost of living crisis has meant that charitable donations are far less. Only three agencies are likely have the resources to support the project – The National Churches Trust, The Benefact Trust and The National Heritage Lottery.

Match funding is a major issue. For example NCT requires 50% match funding. To match fund repairs to the roof would require a further £176k which, at current rate, will take over 40 years to accumulate.

Way Forward

The project is at a critical crossroad. There are a number of options (7) under consideration ranging from continuing the project as currently envisaged to stopping all funding activities for both the Church and a community facility. Decision as to which way to go will be driven by cost, aspiration and the commitment of the village.

Current Help Sought from Stradishall Parish Council and HERA

Fundamental to defining the way forward is to establish the level of interest and commitment of the village for a community centre. Basically does Stradishall really such an amenity and would it be used. If the answer is yes, would the village prefer a facility within the Church or elsewhere in the village.

The suggestion is to carry out a short survey briefly setting out these issues and asking the core question as to whether a community facility is wanted or needed.