

St James Church Development Application : Executive Summary

St James needs to have a more flexible space in the nave in order to deliver its mission and improve its value & connectivity with the local community otherwise its future is in jeopardy.

The current pew arrangement severely limits the range of worship and its inclusivity & intimacy. More flexible seating and open spaces enable new & more modern forms of worship which better connect with the congregation and can attract and build attendance & involvement in the church's work. The ability to offer café style hospitality ,family friendly seating and toilet facilities opens up new and more welcoming & inclusive pathways to future congregations. These same facilities can also provide real added value to the local community by providing space & facilities for neighbourhood and social events that go beyond what is available in the parish hall , which is already highly utilised .

The proposal involves the replacements of pews in the nave of the church by individual seating, a new extension on the north west corner of the church to accommodate a kitchen, toilets and storage space for chairs, enclosing the Lady Chapel with glass panels so it can be used for private gathering/meetings and creating an office area in the ground floor of the bell tower.

The work on the proposals started some 4 years ago and was impacted by the pandemic. The proposal has evolved over time reflecting the meetings & discussions within the parish , church community and stakeholders. Various options for flexible seating were explored and it was concluded by the PCC - following consultation & endorsement by the congregation & local community - that the nave needed to be a fully flexible space if we were to deliver our mission and safeguard St James' future. Partial flexibility limited the options for worship & offerings to the community and is likely to create unattractive "dead zones" in the nave.

Fully flexible seating in the whole nave has proven to be the only contentious part of the proposal as we have gone through the planning process . The argument being that a Victorian church needs to retain some (if not all) of its Victorian pews to retain its architectural heritage. The extension, kitchen, toilets, meeting room and office etc. have all been broadly supported.

The attached submission has much in common with many other faculty applications for the introduction of more flexible seating to enable the Church of England to achieve its mission. We have included authoritative research and important context in support of our proposal.

In conclusion, your approval to replace our pews with quality and comfortable chairs will be a game changer for St James. It will allow us to offer :-

- a flexible space that almost every Cathedral and many churches already benefit from.
- our disabled & our mums with babies to fully participate within our services.
- welcoming hospitality in a quality coffee shop integrated in our church space.
- bespoke & tailored services in a relevant setting enabling us to provide a church environment which is fit for today , meets the expectation of our parishioners & local community , and that will help us grow and meet the needs of future generations.