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BACKGROUND

Wrigton church has seen two recent phases of reordering, and this request effectively represents a revision of the first reordering phase, in light of the second reordering.

That first reordering phase is a ground-floor tower vestry, accommodating a variety of functions: vestment storage, safes, electricity cupboard, a sink and cleaning equipment and materials, as well as a passage to the tower's stair-vice door. While this puts strong demand on the limited space, the solution effectively maximises its potential, and arguably exceeds it as part of the work is a storage chest and laying-out surface immediately before the west doors, obscuring this major feature. This piece, it is argued, can be taken out should the bells need to be removed.



Plan of the tower as existing (B2 Architects); tower (N side, exterior)

The second more recent reordering involved the removal of western pews to create space for community activities as evidenced and justified through the Faculty application. This space is supported by a kitchenette at the west end of the south aisle, and storage for activities in the north aisle. The neo-Georgian style of limed-oak raised and fielded panels used for the joinery of the first reordering was to some degree respected for the second, so that there is a synergy between the two phases, though they do not physically meet, and the surface treatments and colours are different.

The area of concern to your proposals is this social space at the west end of the nave and in particular, the ground floor of the tower.

SIGNIFICANCE

The 35 metre-tall western belltower of Wrington is unusually fine, and probably of the second quarter of the C15. It was built by the masons of the tower of St Cuthbert's Wells (as evidenced by masons' marks) and is also comparable with Evercreech, all ultimately derived from the design of the west towers of Wells Cathedral of c. 1400. As a property of Glastonbury Abbey, Wrington's elevated patronage is very much in evidence, and presents a striking landmark. Inside, the west window is sophisticated, the fan vault with oculus for bell access very fine and readily visible, and the inside face of the west door and the entirety of the north door are original features.

Internally, the responds to the tower arch are finely conceived and moulded, and these have been left visible in the first, 'vestry' scheme by setting the neo-Georgian doors within a narrow façade beneath the tower arch with canted sides to leave space for the arch responds to full height.

POSSIBLE LOCATIONS FOR WC

The external mouldings at the base of the tower are vigorous in scale and effect, and one approach toward the church is a footpath from the north with this aspect of the tower in plain sight (picture above). Hence although breaking through the north wall of the tower into an adjacent new structure for internally- accessible WC and storage must be considered as a possible option -and would be viable in some cases- in this case we can assume that it is unlikely to be approved. Still, its merits and disadvantages should be set out.

Similarly, the main body of the church is not viable for a W.C.. The western end having recently been cleared for defined functions is too public, would be difficult to insert services, and leaves no space beneath the window levels, while the window levels are too low for an inserted ceiling. A WC 'pod' would likely be judged an encumbrance, and ill-suited to a prominent position in a place of worship. This also needs to be articulated.

The options in creating an accessible WC are essentially these:

- A new stud-walled cell built beneath the tower area

- A revision of the extent of the tower's joinery to accommodate it
- A new and isolated external structure

You have pursued and proposed the former and commissioned architect's plans from Emma Green.

An obstacle persists in the west doors' scale and function. While the present chest obscuring the west doors could arguably be removed so that the doors may be opened to remove and reinstall the bells in the way the tower was conceived to function, a substantial new plumbed and fitted space would at best permanently obscure the west door and at worst, prevent bells from leaving the tower. It would also affect the perceived generosity of the space beneath the vault, which the current scheme has respected.

Furthermore, the floor level beneath the tower which the joinery sits upon is elevated by about 4 inches from that at the west end of the nave. Accessibility would require a ramp or flat surface, and sufficient space. You may have data to support a conclusive argument that groups cannot use an external WC at Wrington, though it is noted by the FAC that many churches do have them and use them successfully. A faculty application carries the burden of demonstrating why this is not viable or desirable amongst other options.

Any solution of floor lowering would be costly, though this is inevitable in comparison to a scheme designed to accommodate a thoroughly considered set of functions including access *ab initio*. The culture of church use is quickly changing, and it is understandable that changes are not always predictable, but the building impetus for community uses and new involvement presents an opportunity to fully consider future possibilities as a flexible system. These needs will inevitably include storage.

STORAGE

We discussed the ongoing need for storage, highlighting the stacked modern chairs set behind dark-varnished pews before the tower arch, so that the care taken with the vestry joinery details is significantly affected by layers of open storage. Storage will be necessary and the more successful your delivery of the proposed community uses that justified the recent intervention, the more need for storage for diverse groups of church users. Hence it is always worth thinking of the church as a whole with its potential usage some decades ahead, allowing space in which to grow.

The greatest potential gain of storage space would be through external storage space and WC in one purpose-built structure, which has certainly been successfully implemented in numerous churches. This is a compromise that affects comfort. We also discussed chair storage beneath the western window of the north aisle: this is however where children are expected to play- so what are the dangers of stacked furniture? How can they be secured or contained?

SUGGESTED PRIMARY OPTIONS

A faculty application will need a reasoned and fully considered set of possible options. Most can be dismissed by sketch location and a rationale. There are two leaders, as I see it, as below.

OPTION 1 from your proposals seems to me stronger than 2 and 3 in allowing for the partial reopening of the west doors, though the position of the WC is awkward and obscuring.

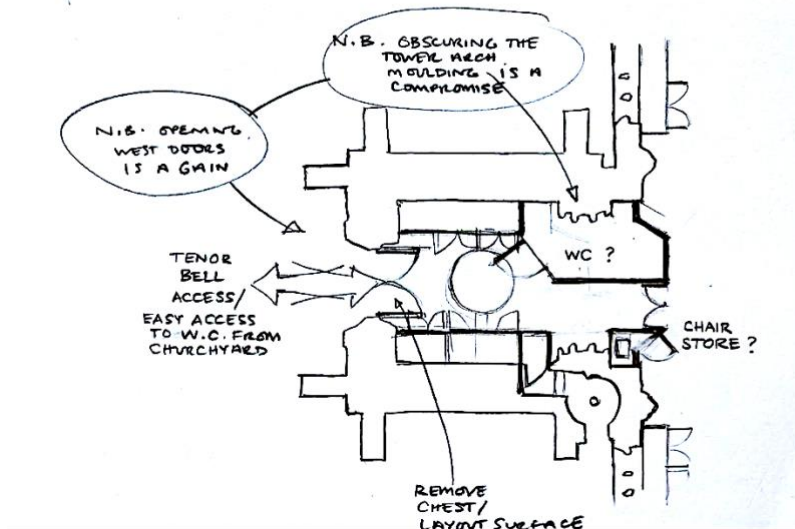
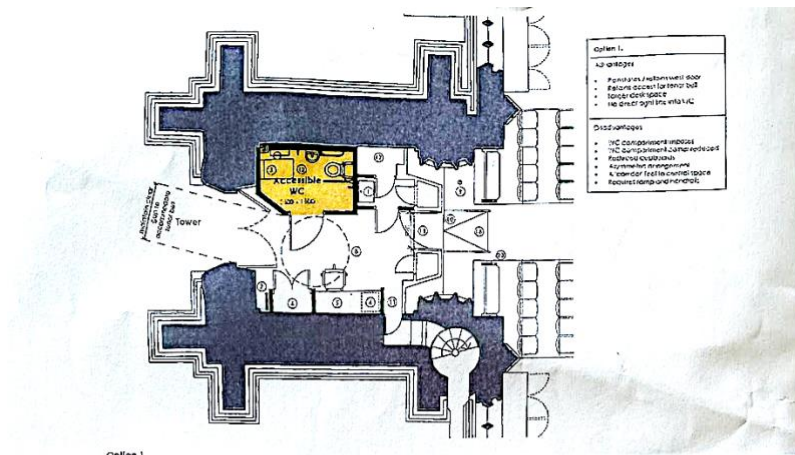
OPTION 2 as my suggestion to consider requires pulling forward the 'vestry' through the tower arch.

I would suggest that the existing joinery of the 'vestry' beneath the tower could accommodate a WC, if it is substantially reconfigured and expanded to the west. One of your proposals shows something similar to what I would recommend developing.

That is, if the central 'vestry' doors are removed, and the flanking panelling reconfigured to replicate the proportions of those doors but as blind- both being set side by side in symmetry with the real doors set to the south, then bringing forward the façade to the east might enable enough space for an accessible WC, set behind the blind panelling to the north side. This does create a compromise of encasing the lower part of the tower arch responds, but this level lies below the lowest of the arch mouldings, while they would remain visible and able to breathe inside the corridor and in the WC. Lowering the suspended floor of the tower area to match the west end of the nave would achieve accessibility without the need for a ramp, which itself would be an obstacle to your newly opened space.

If this brings a compromise in obscuring the lowest 8 ft or so of the tower arch mouldings. There are two gains: unifying the new furniture with the vestry façade in alignment; another gain is the full opening of the west doors, which will assist not only with manoeuvring the bells but optimal accessibility for future plans for community churchyard initiatives of the sort championed by such as Caring for God's Acre <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/>

A chair store might also be possible within this format, as indicated, but it is very much a proposal to be worked up to practical detail and considered.



In summary, the key is thinking through the possible permutations, if only to rule most out with demonstrated consideration and reason; and then considering possible, flexible future needs to avoid the upheaval and costs of another reordering.

I hope this helps with the project concept. Do let me know if I can help further.

With best wishes,

Jonathan