

Dear All

SHAPED FOR MISSION
High Street Methodist Church, Harpenden
Consultation on Reordering of the Church Nave and Transepts

The Church Council will be meeting in July to vote on the proposed reordering of the Church nave and transepts. The Trustees would like to hear from you as to your views on this matter before they take this vote.

The details of the proposals can be found at highstreet.church/project
Paper copies are also available from the church office on request.

If you would like to contribute to the Church Council's considerations, then please complete the online form to submit your views by 5pm on Sunday 21 April 2024. If you are not able to contribute online, written submissions may be posted to the Church Office to arrive by Sunday 21 April 2024.

All submissions will be provided to the Trustees in advance of their meeting in July, when they will be considering this project alongside the Mission Action Plan for 2024-2025.

Every blessing



Revd Mark Hammond
16 March 2024

High Street Methodist Church, Harpenden

Consultation on Reordering of the Church Nave and Transepts

Those wishing to participate in this consultation are encouraged to read all three parts of this document.

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Part 1 – Project History

Whilst the project proposals and their mission benefits, as set out in Part 3, will make sense without any prior knowledge of their history, the story of how this project started nearly a decade ago, and how it has subsequently progressed, is important because it explains the motivation behind it and the very great amount of work, investment and consultation that has got us to this point.

How we got to this point ...

The proposals contained in this paper have their origin in a resolution made by the Church Council in July 2015, when, at the same time as agreeing our now well established two-service pattern for Sunday morning worship, they also agreed that *'proposals be developed to make the Church more conducive to worship of all styles. This to be done sensitively so as to enhance the ambience of the worship space.'*

There followed a thorough consultation about how our building might best be adapted not only to enhance our worship but also our many other current and future mission activities. Whilst the consultation about our buildings centred upon the reordering of the nave and transepts of our main Church space, it was expanded to include a thorough review of our whole site. Nevertheless, following a further consultation on the resulting architect's feasibility study, in November 2017 the Church Council further resolved *'that we should proceed with the detailed design of [the re-ordering of the Main Church] with a view to unlocking as soon as possible the full capacity of our most important space.'* At that time, the Church Council agreed the specification for a major project to re-vitalise the Church to increase our accessibility, flexibility and attractiveness to drive mission forward. This comprised the seven phases as summarised on the following page. The total estimated cost for all seven phases was then about £1.55 million, with most of this figure relating to phases 4-7 which would all involve considerable building works.

Building Project Phases in proposed order of priority

Phase 1 - AV Project
Completed Summer 2021

Phase 2 - Replace pews with stackable chairs
[does not require planning consent but does require conservation officer approval]

Phase 3 - Lighting
flexible and environmentally friendly architectural LED lighting in the church plus retractable black-out blinds to the windows
[does not require planning consent but does require conservation officer approval]

Phase 4 - Front Elevation
including disabled ramp to main door & glazed frontage
[requires planning consent]

Phase 5 - Reconfigure the North-East Corner
Including new storage, larger choir vestry, new choir toilet, improved kitchen access and fire exit
[requires planning consent]

Phase 6 - Nave access to Hall & Wesleys
[does not require planning consent but does require conservation officer approval]

Phase 7 - Mezzanine
including enlarged entrance foyer and lift
[does not require planning consent but does require conservation officer approval]

Church Council further approved the establishment of a project team and – having for many months worked on the detailed design proposals with an architect and other advisors - this team was on the cusp of presenting detailed proposals to Church Council in early 2020 but then the COVID pandemic struck and the development plans were put on hold.

In mid-2021, as the church was re-opening after the lifting of the pandemic restrictions, the first phase of the project, the AV improvements, was approved and implemented at a cost of £120,000. The new AV element has been most successful and very well received across our church community.

In November 2022, Church Council agreed that it is no longer sensible to pursue the remainder of the development project on the scale originally specified and costed. Instead, the Building Project Team were asked to consider which elements of the original plan should be progressed as bringing the most material mission benefits at a cost thought achievable through fundraising and church/circuit financial support.

Present day

The Project Team have given their new remit careful thought and now believe that the improvements envisaged in Phases 4 to 7 would require considerable finance, are likely only to be deliverable at unacceptable cost and would additionally require a lengthy process of seeking planning consents. Whilst these would still deliver mission benefit, the Project Team are of the view that the cost of Phases 4 to 7 will remain prohibitive for the foreseeable future.

However, the Team believe that those remaining elements which have always been at the very heart of the large scheme - Phases 2 (pew removal) and 3 (church lighting) - will provide material mission benefit, will not require additional external permissions, and will enable us to honour the Church Council's long-held intention to 'make the Church more conducive to worship of all styles', and to do so 'sensitively so as to enhance the ambience of the worship space.'

As listed below in Part 2, beyond Phases 2 and 3, the current proposals also include additional improvements and repairs that will ensure that on completion our Main Church space will be fully fit for purpose and in good condition.

Part 2 – Project Overview Estimated Costings and Funding Sources

This part provides a simple one-page summary of the estimated project costs and funding.

a. What does the proposed project include and what will it cost?

	Cost Estimates (inc. VAT)
Phase 2 – Pew Removal	£109,788
Includes:	
- pew removal	
- floor re-surfacing	
- armless chairs (320)	
- chairs with arms (30)	
- chair-linking/stacking dollies.	
Phase 3 – Lighting improvements	£77,286
Includes:	
- replacement lighting units (LED)	
- electronic black out blinds.	
Additional improvements	£56,000
Includes:	
- complete redecoration	
- improved access to the south transept	
- renewal of dais steps	
- disabled lift replacement.	
Contingency	<u>£10,000</u>
Total Estimated Cost	<u>£253,074</u>

b. How will the project be funded?

The aim and hope is to raise at least half the project costs via a special appeal to the members and friends of High Street Methodist Church. As it clearly meets the criteria of their grant making policies, we will also seek grant funding from our local West Hertfordshire and Borders Methodist Circuit, the Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire Methodist District, and may also make applications to other local and specialist grant making bodies where the project also meets their criteria. There may be limited support from our reserves for any funding shortfall.

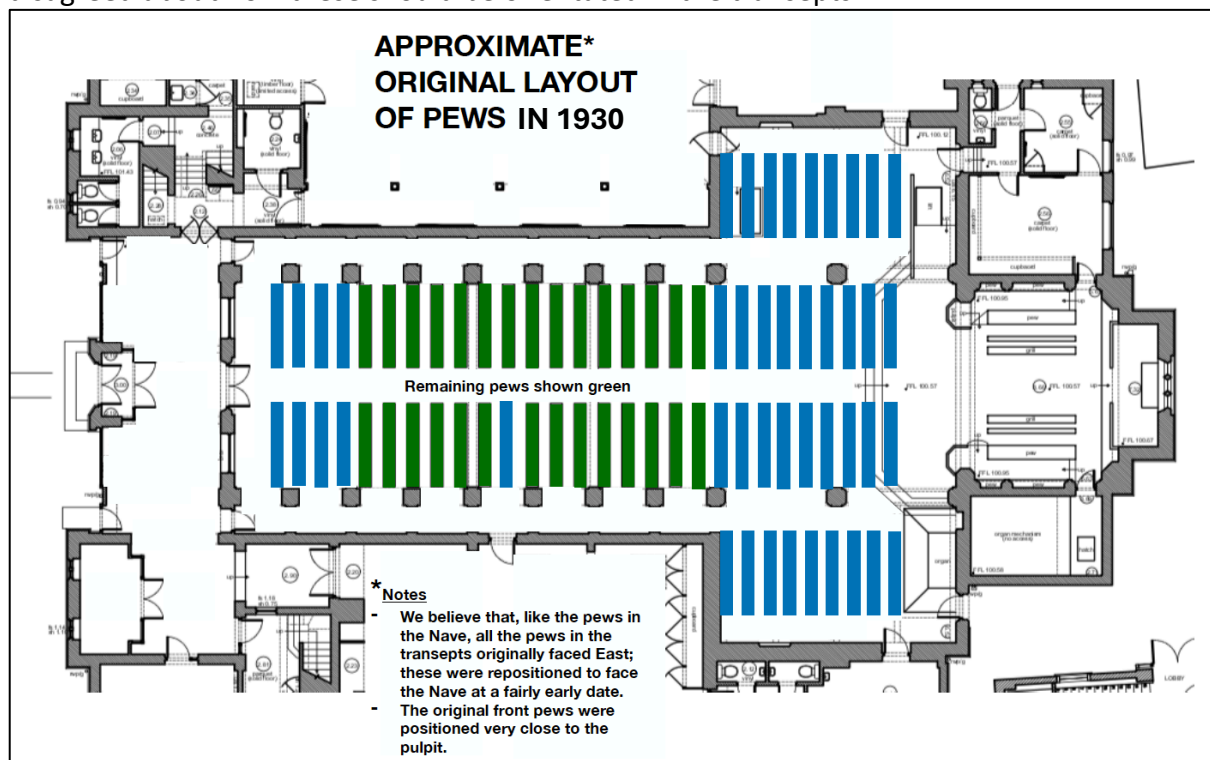
Part 3 – The Project Proposals and Mission Benefits

This part sets out both the regular activities that currently take place within our church buildings and some examples of the range of new activities that will be capable of taking place as a result of the development project (phases 2 and 3). It also sets out the problems we currently experience in running existing activities, describes the design solutions we propose to remedy them and points towards the positive impact we believe these solutions will have upon those activities. The project, once completed, will benefit both our worship and our outward mission.

A flexible, inclusive and comfortable space

The Church premises were built in the 1920s and the core structure, although improved in 2003 and again in 2008, has remained essentially unchanged since then. Nevertheless, in each generation the desire to create ever greater flexibility has resulted in the gradual removal of pews. The following plan shows the pew layout when the church opened in 1930.

Letters from the architect Alan Brace show that the trustees' decision to fill the nave and transepts with pews rather than chairs was only finally confirmed in December 1929, so whilst the current pews were designed for the space, it appears that chairs had been considered to be a suitable design option. Even once they had settled upon pews, the architect and trustees disagreed about how these should be orientated in the transepts.



Since 1930 45 of the pews (those coloured blue on the plan above) have been removed, leaving only 29 pews in the nave (those coloured green). As a result of this, our largest space currently still contains a central section filled with fixed pews, and we have space at the front of the church with moveable seating of a design that takes up a large amount of storage space even when cleared and stacked. The fixed pews prevent the possibility of alternative creative seating layouts and make it impossible to clear the whole space of seating. Access is difficult

for people with disabilities or mobility issues and for those with buggies and young children and their choice of where to sit is extremely limited.

Our lighting is now very limited, out of date and starting to fail. There is no centrally located control unit, so light switches are unhelpfully positioned in various parts of the building. As we strive to become an eco-church we need to be conscious of improvements we can make to reduce our energy consumption and our current lighting fails us in this regard. The illumination of the dais is inadequate, and those leading worship or other events are poorly lit. The inadequate lighting and lack of blinds mean that during daylight hours we cannot use our new visual technology to its full effect as it is impossible to control the amount of sunlight flooding the church. For external events such as charity concerts, conferences and school events, our current equipment is not suitable for anything requiring more than basic lighting.

What we will change

Under this project we will remove all the remaining pews to make our largest space fully flexible. The floor will be refurbished and resealed, and the pews replaced with attractive, easily stackable, comfortable wooden chairs. Having consulted the Methodist Conservation Officer about acceptable chairs for our quality of historic building, the Project Team have narrowed down their search to those that not only meet our requirements but are also approved to be acceptable for listed buildings. A prime example now being used in some cathedrals is the Theo wooden stackable chair (images at Appendix A). The Conservation Officer has confirmed that we will not require a separate storeroom at the back of the church building for these as we will be able easily to accommodate all the stacked chairs in a small portion of the transepts so the main space can be completely emptied.



Artistic impression of the Church nave with chairs

We will install centrally controllable lighting for the whole church space, easily adjustable to provide the ideal light levels required for each event. This will incorporate controllable

architectural lighting with the ability to change the colour scheme, and sufficient lighting levels to the dais and front of church to ensure good visibility of those leading both for onsite and online congregations. Some of the lighting units will double-up as safety lights, so that we can completely remove the current rather ugly safety-lighting units. There will be a single control panel at the back of the church, with single-button presets for standard lighting schemes for our most regular types of services and events, making life much easier for our Church Stewards. We will also install easily controlled electronic window blinds to provide instant control over lighting levels even during daylight hours.

The benefits

We strongly believe that everything we do will be greatly enhanced by opening our church to be more visible, more accessible, more flexible and more welcoming.

The flexible seating in the nave will enable us to arrange the seating to suit each act of worship and each event we host with complete freedom. The ability to clear the entire space gives us maximum flexibility. We will be able to increase our capacity for one-off events such as holiday clubs.

The electronic window blinds and new lighting will provide everything we do in that space with appropriate atmospheric lighting and enable us to make full use of our existing live stream and AV technology.

With these improvements and the installation of a wider fire door in the south transept, the upper limit of our safe seating capacity – which covers the total seating in the church (including nave, transepts, choir pews and dais) will increase from 350 to 450. This will mean that for peak capacity events, such as the annual Rotary Carol Service - when much of our allowed capacity is taken up by a massed choir of primary school children filling the dais and choir pews – we will be permitted to accommodate 100 more people than we can now.

How will this enhance our activities?

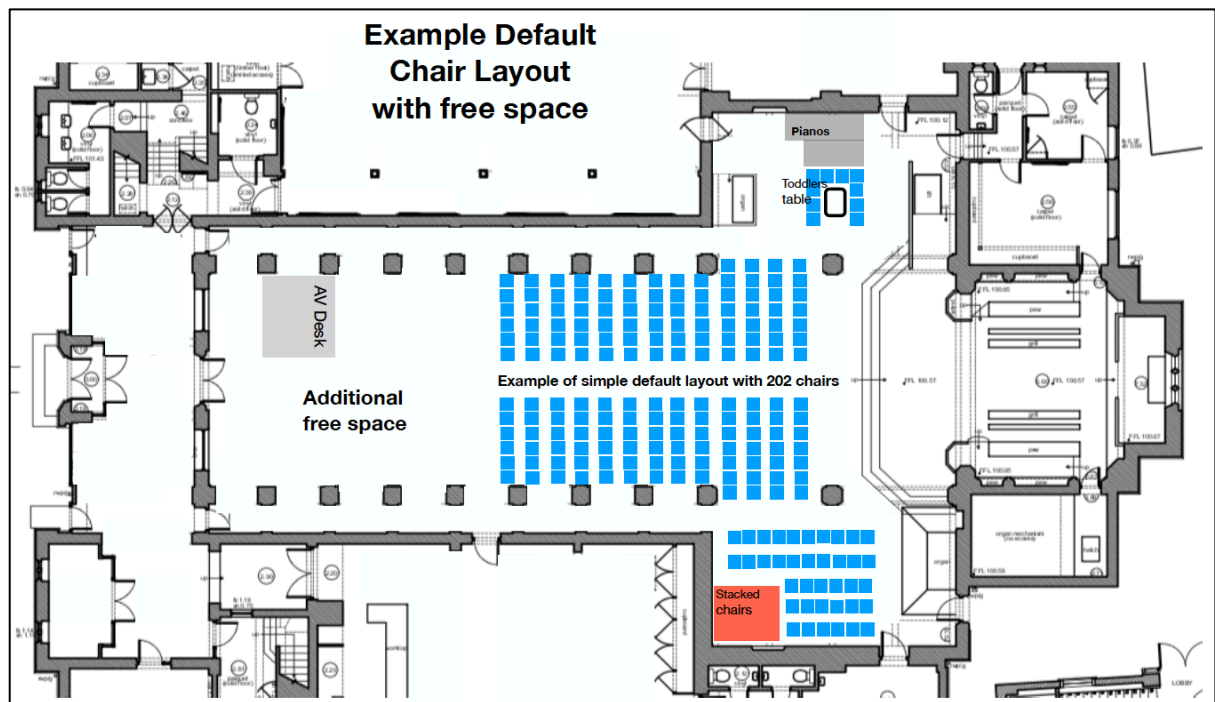
By way of examples, we set out below the most regular activities that take place within our church buildings, setting out the problems we currently experience in running these, describing the design solutions we propose to remedy them, and pointing towards some of the positive impact we believe these solutions will have upon those activities. This is not intended to be fully comprehensive but rather illustrative of the wide range of activities that are already central to our being a large and vibrant Christian Church seeking to do God's work.

Enhancing Worship

We gather as a Christian community to worship God, both on site and online. Our acts of worship seek to make all people welcome, enable all to encounter God, to be equipped as God's people and to be encouraged to extend God's Kingdom out into our town and beyond.

Most acts of worship take place within the main church and are livestreamed out. These range from our two main Sunday morning services, approaching a hundred adults apiece, to smaller and more intimate evening and mid-week congregations.

Removing the fixed pews provides the possibility of alternative and creative seating layouts for all acts of worship. Flexible seating in the nave can be arranged to suit particular services, and the default Sunday morning set up will maximize the seating at the front (east end) and create additional circulation space at the back (west end) of the nave. The following sample layout plan shows how, as a simple default set-up, 200 chairs might be arranged at the front of the church in front of the door into Wesleys, leaving a large free space at the back of church. This free space could be left free for circulation, or is ideally located for such things as, for example, a welcome point, temporary exhibitions, display boards, sign up tables etc.



When desired, congregational seating may be arranged in differing patterns, with or without a central aisle. Week in week out we can provide a comfortable environment for more people, with complete flexibility for those with disabilities. We will be able to space out the chairs to provide more freedom of movement at communion services, create more intimate spaces for our smaller midweek acts of worship, create changeable private prayer spaces, move the congregation nearer the front, or arrange worship in the round!

Our existing lighting technology is very limited, and this sometimes inhibits the quality of the worship experience. This is especially so for more contemporary services but affects both services negatively in terms of our inability to livestream a stable image because of the lack of control we currently have over the lighting. The proposal is to install adaptable unobtrusive architectural lighting, improved lighting to the dais and front of church, and electronic window blinds.

Those leading worship will thereby be well lit and therefore appropriately visible to the congregation. Summer or winter, day or night, the electronic window blinds and new lighting will provide every act of worship with appropriate lighting.

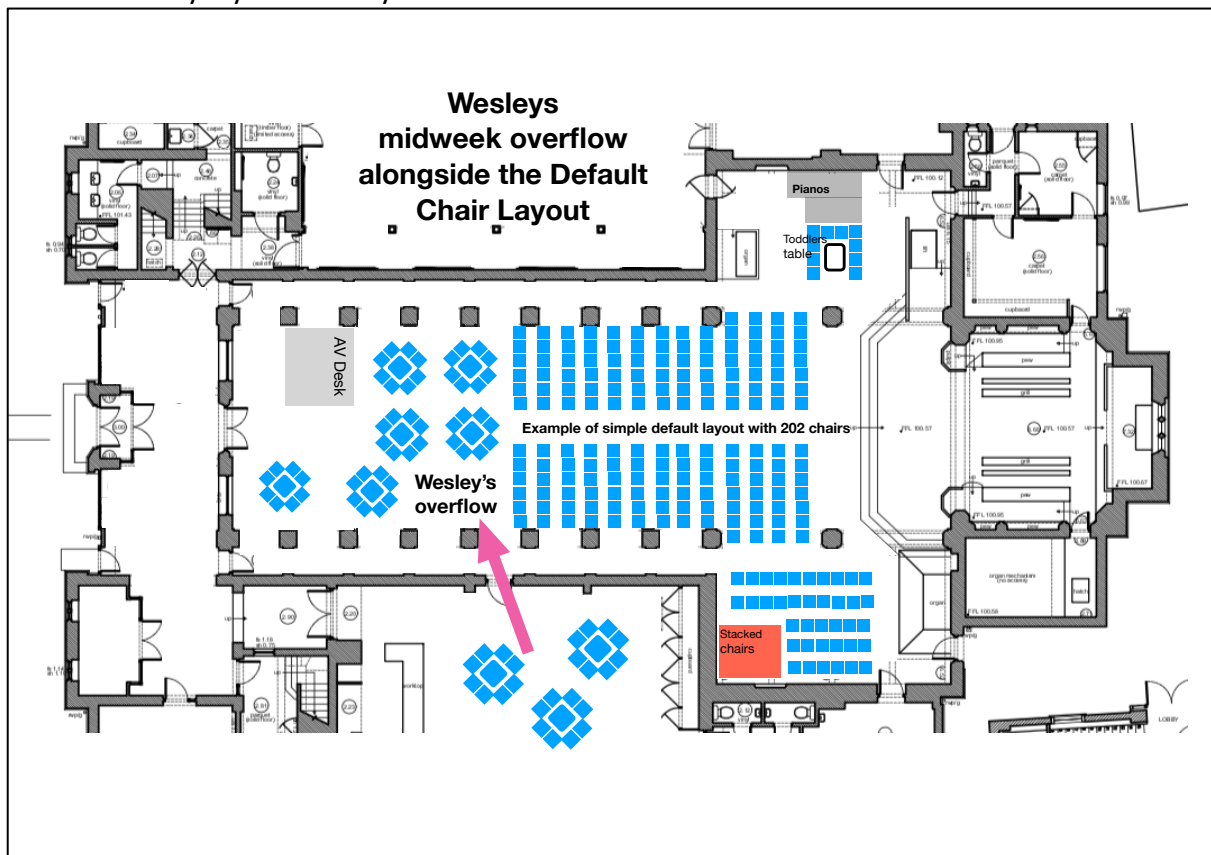
Beyond our Sunday morning services, those who plan and provide our other acts of worship will benefit from the high level of flexibility, the ease with which the lighter stackable chairs can be rearranged, and the ability very easily to select the best lighting scene to provide just

the right mood. This will enhance weddings and funerals, but equally our monthly midweek contemporary act of worship (The Space) and Dementia Friendly service. In addition our monthly act of worship for adults with additional needs and their carers which currently takes place in the hall, will be enabled far more easily to create in the church a helpful arrangement of chairs, tables and wheelchairs. To make our main worship space sufficiently flexible to much more easily host an act of worship for those with additional needs, would be a wonderful thing, offering a truly equal invitation to all.

It is envisaged that with the much greater adaptability of the space will come new creative possibilities for worship, which is no-longer constrained by the current lack of flexibility.

Enhancing outward mission

The benefits of the project are by no means limited to worship. As a 7 day a week church we have numerous outreach missional activities that are on-going and we have hopes for more! This project will benefit each one. At a basic level, our main church is the largest and most visible space on our site. It currently sits empty for most of the week, and this does not convey to our many passers-by how active and vibrant we are. As the church space is currently not flexible enough, we tend either to run midweek activities in the hall or we do not yet run them at all. Building Blocks and Stay-and-Play are great examples of this. With a completely flexible space in the church we could host young families in our main space that is visible to our town as they walk past. Our main church space would be transformed into a visible place of life and activity. We could, for example, make our ever-popular Wesleys cafe visible to the High Street during the week by overflowing into the back of church. The following layout plan shows how this could be set up in the free space created by the possible default Sunday layout already mentioned.

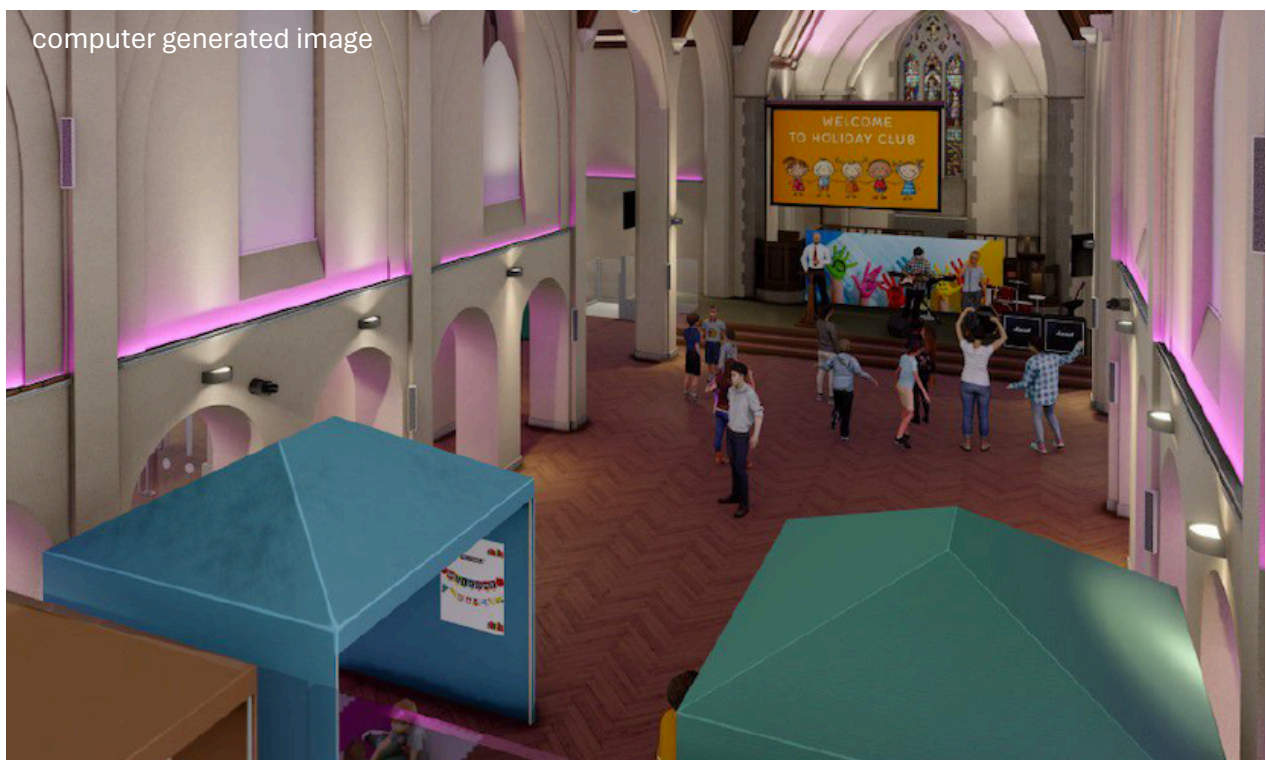


Here are some more examples of material improvements to our mission.

Large scale children’s events – Prior to the Pandemic, each year we held a number of large scale events, such as summer holiday clubs, the Light Party (Halloween) and X:Site (an ecumenical children’s worship event). These types of events for children were full of fun and energy, designed to communicate the gospel in a fun way. Our hope would be to explore what similar events may be established future, working ecumenically to pool volunteers from different local churches. Reaching out into the community to provide fun activities for children and families, and a space for them to learn about God, to experience God’s love for them and to encourage them to share Her love with others.

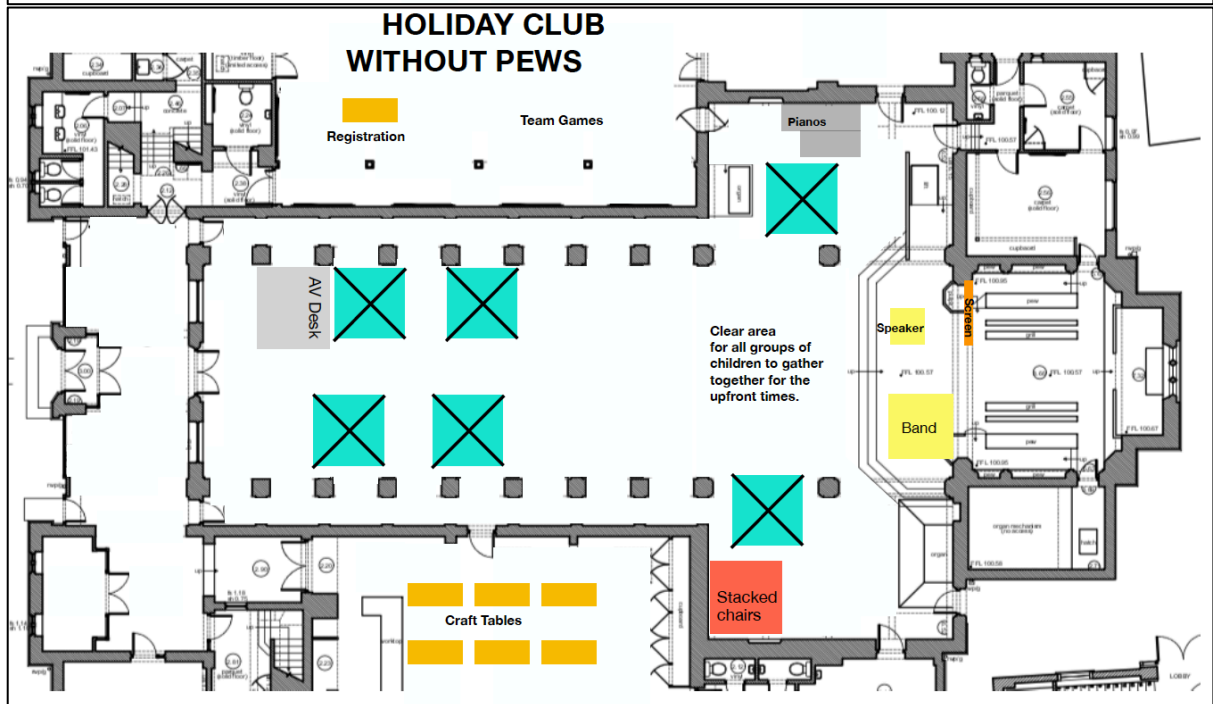
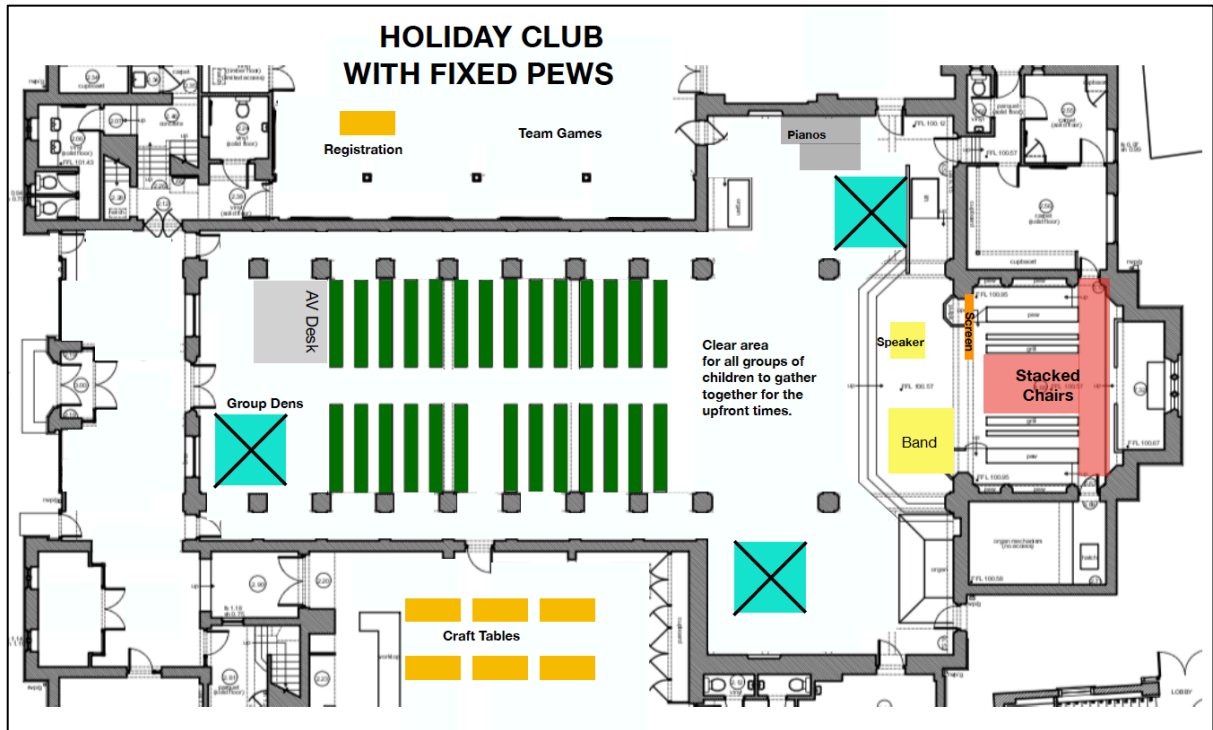
The problem, as we have experienced in hosting such events in past years, is that – working ecumenically - we have enough helpers to take more children but are limited by the inflexibility of the church space which currently contains a large block of fixed pews. In addition, the existing church chairs are heavy to move, and still take up too much space even when moved and stacked. Our ecumenical team have access to promote these events in schools, with increased capacity we would be able to step up our advertisement to reach more children and families, and with furniture designed for flexibility we would be able to set-up and set-down with much less effort and time. What is more, the experience of the children will be greatly enhanced by our increased capability to tailor the set up and ambience of the venue to render it perfect for each event.

The following image indicates how the main church space would look when cleared of chairs and with appropriate mood lighting for a children’s event.



Artistic impression of Church nave set up for a large-scale children’s event

The following floor-plans show a typical layout for a children’s activity with fixed pews as we currently operate, alongside the kind of layout that would be possible following the proposed replacement of pews with stackable chairs.



Large Scale Youth Events - As a church we have over many years invested in our youth team and this work is important to us. Our new youth leader, Ruth, has great ideas for future events to reach out to the youth of our town.

When it comes to large scale Christian youth work, Ruth is building upon our well-established pattern of working in partnership with other local churches and Christian youth charities – such as The 267 Project and Step – to run larger ecumenical events. Our church space is one of the largest available for such events and this project would greatly increase our capacity to host such events much more easily, on a larger scale, and with greater impact. By replacing our fixed pews with easily stackable chairs, and providing adaptable lighting and window blinds, we will become the perfect venue in Harpenden for such events and be able to build upon our contact with the youth of this town via our work with Step in the schools and the work done from the LX youth centre with the youth of the town. We would love High Street to become the natural centre for such events, right in the heart of Harpenden, so that the youth of this town can have this local provision and do not need to travel to St Albans or elsewhere for the same experience.



Artistic impression of Church nave set up for a large-scale youth event

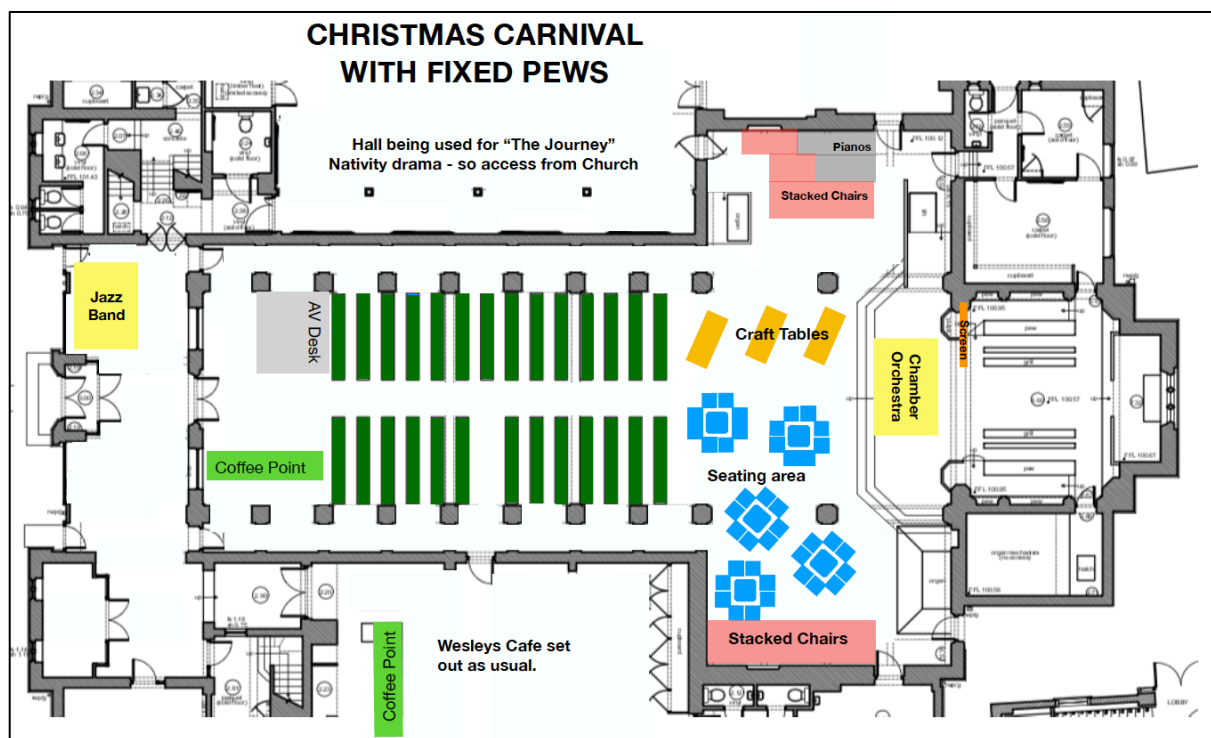
We envisage that this project will so transform the flexibility and adaptability of this our church space, that it will become a much-used space for all manner of new initiatives in youth and children’s work, from hosting larger scale ecumenical holiday clubs for children to a wide range of events for teenagers, and doubtless many other such initiatives that will increase our connection to the young people of our local community, simply by making our largest space more flexible and easily adaptable. Ruth’s ideas for how the space could be used include: 2:67 Illuminate events; Fuel worship events; indoor picnic; prayer space with stations; recycle cafe/shop or eco events; indoor Christmas Journey; Cafe Church; fundraising events; and charity events.

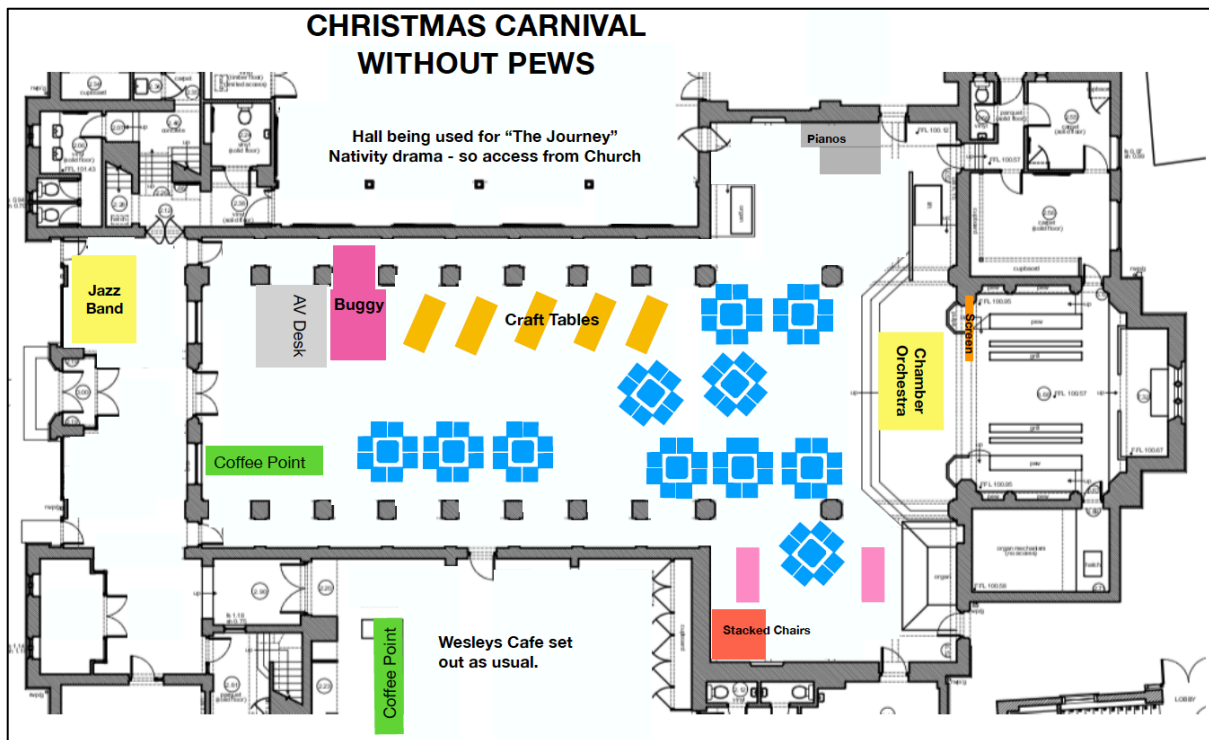
Christmas Carnival - This annual town-wide event allows us to make great use of our location and play a central role, as we open our premises to receive hundreds of guests. Providing refreshments, musical entertainment, children’s craft activities, and often an incredibly

popular dramatized retelling of the Christmas story this is our largest outreach event of the year.

With the fixed pews occupying much of the Nave, the activities provided are restricted to very limited space at the front and back of the church. Consequently, the church feels much less welcoming than it might, and people are forced to sit in rows when we would love them to be able to sit in communal groups. Wheelchair users and those with reduced mobility really do struggle in the congested areas caused by our currently fixed furniture. Those with baby buggies have nowhere to park or move around. The current lighting gives limited scope for creating ambience and enhancing visibility of presentations.

This project will allow us to set out the church just as required to maximize the number of people who can gain access to participate in and enjoy the festive activities in comfort. The following floor-plans show a typical Christmas Carnival layout with fixed pews as we currently operate, alongside the kind of layout that would be possible following the proposed replacement of pews with stackable chairs.



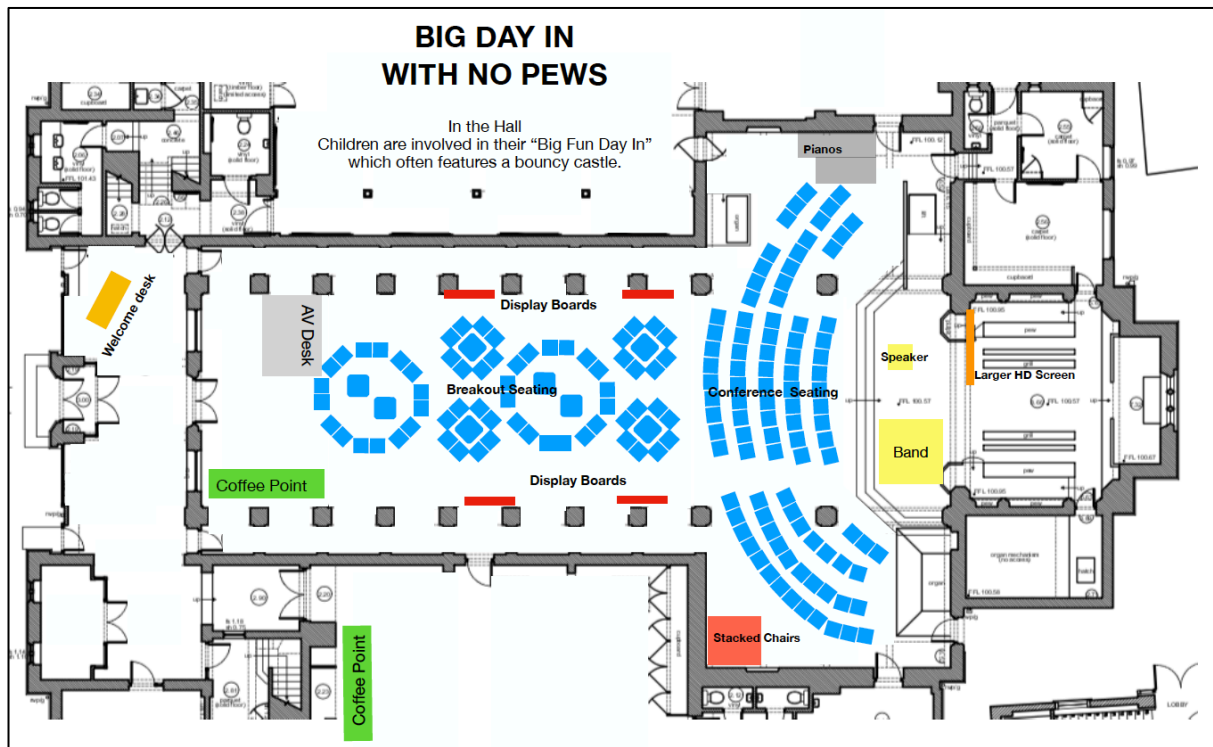
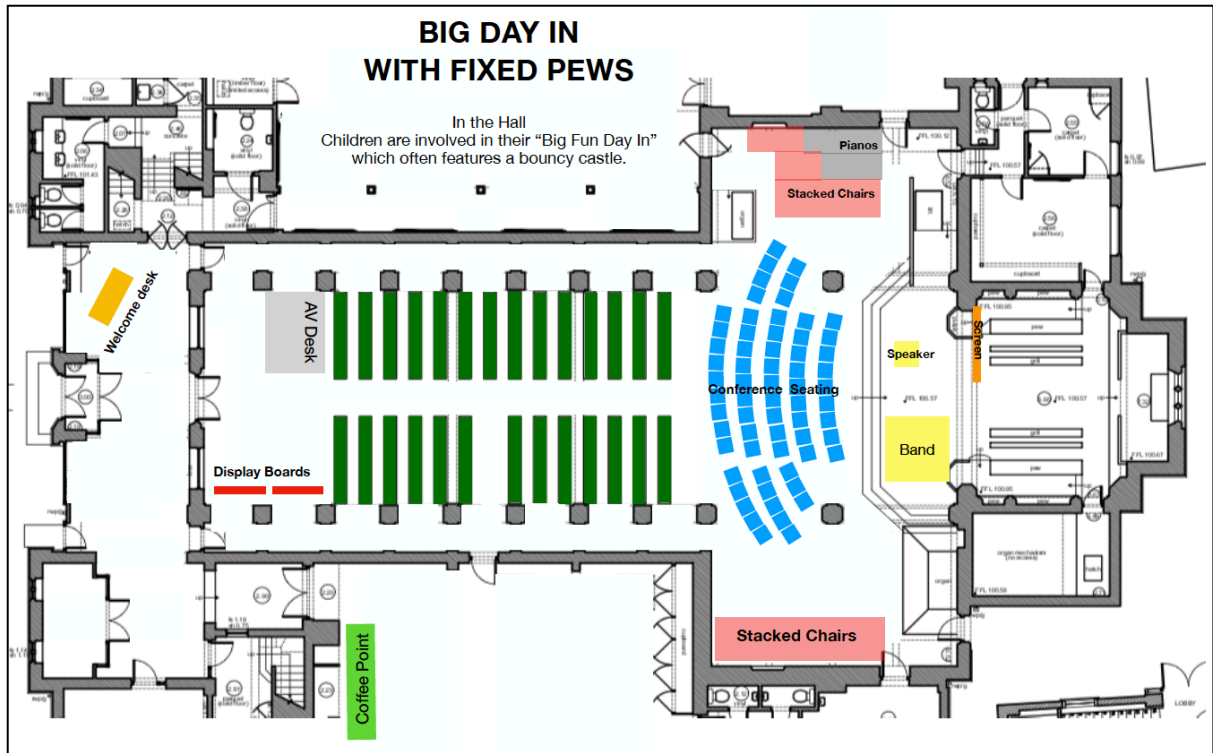


Large Scale Conferences (such as the Big Day In) - During our annual church conference, to which the whole church family is invited, we gather in plenary in the church and have break-out seminars in smaller spaces. We share a meal together, have coffee and cake breaks, and there are separate parallel activities for the children. With the fixed pews occupying much of the nave, the activities provided are restricted to very limited flexible spaces at the front and back of the church. Consequently, rather than the church space being adaptable to our requirements, we are rather forced to bend to fit around the fixed furniture, thus people are forced to sit in rows when we would love them to be able to sit in groups.

By removing the pews, we will be able to set out the church just as required to maximize the number of people who can gain access to participate. In the same way, the quality of whole experience will be greatly enhanced and by being easily able to adapt the lighting to provide the ambience and effect most fitting for the event.

Our church "Big Day Ins" are just one example of the type of conference gathering we could host for other Harpenden churches, the Circuit and District and to non-church organisations.

Again, the following floor-plans show a typical church conference (Big Day In) layout with fixed pews as we currently operate, alongside the kind of layout that would be possible following the proposed replacement of pews with stackable chairs.



The following images show how our main church space could look on the Christmas Carnival and Big Day In if made fully flexible as suggested in this proposal.



Artistic impression of the Church nave set up for the Christmas Carnival



Artistic impression of the Church nave set up for the Big Day In – Church Conference

Community Fundraising Concert - Throughout the year we hold concerts, not only for our own chosen charities, but also play host to charity concerts for other local organizations. These often take the form of musical concerts of different styles, from classical and choral, to contemporary and children's choirs.

Many of these events take place in the church and then have refreshments in the hall and/or Wesleys. The fixed pews prevent the possibility of alternative and creative seating layouts. With this project we will be able to set out the church just as required for each concert and maximize the number of people who can attend, thus maximizing the revenue for charities.

The quality of whole experience will be greatly enhanced by much improved lighting, and our new sound and visual technologies.

Who will move the chairs?

Our existing church chairs are often rearranged, or removed and stacked, for various events, so this will not be a new reality for us. Whilst the property team do sometimes rearrange the furniture, when it comes to larger scale events this is generally done by those who are organizing a particular event.

A vital aspect of this project is to purchase high quality chairs that are specifically designed to be much more easily rearranged or stacked. Our current chairs are heavy and do not stack at all well. The new chairs will come as a great relief to those who have been struggling with the existing ones for so long.

It is envisaged that between those events that require a special chair layout or floor clearance, the chairs will be left in their default layout ready for Sunday morning worship.

Dreaming Dreams

The church trustees have a duty to maintain and adapt our buildings for use not just by our current church family but for our future church family. The story of this church has been one of continual adaptation extending right back to the 1790s, when the first Methodists of Harpenden met in a small cottage on the Common. As the needs of the church and the mission imperatives have changed, so our forebears undertook building schemes to ensure they were equipped to serve the mission of God in their day. We believe that the proposals set out in this paper are fully in keeping with that proud heritage and will ensure we too have a mission-shaped church building.

As seen above we already have many ideas for future projects that would be enabled by the completion of this project. Some of these future projects involve the expansion and development of already well-established initiatives that, because of this project, would become far easier to set up, have a greater impact, and able to happen on a larger scale. Other future projects will be new experiments in mission. Still more are yet to be dreamt of! This is all possible in an all-inclusive, comfortable and welcoming space that also reduces our environmental impact.

Through this project, we envisage that our largest and most important space will be used more often by more people. It will become an ever-greater centre for worship and mission for all ages. It will become a more effective meeting place and sacred space for our neighbours in this town. We will be able to increase our impact – for example, by promoting action for social justice through larger-scale Just Desserts. We could hold bigger exhibitions, along the lines of our annual Train Fun Day, or the Jigsaw Festival, or perhaps a Bible Exhibition. All such events would be held in our enhanced church space, visible from the High Street, with increased space for those with physical mobility challenges.

Pamela Atkins, Richard Atkins, Charlotte Ballard Scott, John Bristow and Rev Mark Hammond.

Project Team - 16 March 2024

Appendix A
The Theo Chair



The standard Theo chair



Chair with arms

The Theo chair with arm rests

The Theo chair in different locations



Norwich Cathedral



Winchester Cathedral



St. Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh