

Willen St Mary Magdalene

Statement of Need

Version 2 – November 2023



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Executive summary

The church community at Willen is ecumenical, with 43 members from four different denominations. Together with the other four churches of the Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership it serves a population of just under 44, 000. Locally, the population is due to rise steeply with the construction of 5,000 new homes as part of the Milton Keynes East development.

The church has historically had strong links with the neighbouring Priory of the Society of the Sacred Mission, and it was at the Priory site that church events such as quiet days, courses, Sunday School, and social evenings were held. The Priory also provided WC and servery facilities to support events at the church, such as large concerts, and festival services. When the Priory was closed in 2019 the church community lost access to these facilities and meeting spaces, and the majority of events that relied on these have ceased. A small number now take place at Willen pavilion, a sports facility c.10 minutes walk away from the church.

The church of St Mary Magdalene, Willen, is a unique building by 17th century polymath Robert Hooke. It is currently used for around two hours a week, excluding casual visitors on the two days a week it is open to the public. Its interior retains a functionally complete set of 17th century box pews. The building cannot be internally reordered to any substantial degree, or extended, without severely compromising its historic significance. The architectural quality of the building, and importance of its architect, present an opportunity for education-based outreach both to the growing local population, and beyond.

The current and proposed activities that the church community wishes to conduct on site present a demonstrable need for, primarily, part-M compliant WC facilities, servery provision, and a modest flexible space that can serve as a classroom/study space, green room, exhibition space, and social space.

1. Our parish

1.1 Location and setting

Willen is located to the west of the River Ouzel in north Buckinghamshire. The earliest evidence of settlement in the area dates to the Romano-British period. However, a village does not seem to have developed in the current location until the late-12th/13th century. Since 1967, the historic village of Willen has been part of the larger Willen area within the Campbell Park civil parish in the city of Milton Keynes.

The church is at the centre of the old village, surrounded by a small number of historic properties. Milton Road/Newport Road forms a semi circle to the north of these older properties with modern housing developments to the north. To the south of the village is the large Willen Lakes complex. The smaller, northern lake close to the church is a designated wildlife sanctuary with bird hide. The larger, southern lake is a leisure attraction and public park with various activities on offer. A 320 kilometre network of cyclist and pedestrian routes (the redways) crosses most of Milton Keynes. Two redways pass close by the church, to the east and west.

Immediately to the east of the church is a small village green and war memorial; alongside this is the former village school, now a residential property. To the north, sharing a boundary with the churchyard, is 5 Milton Road, a large c.18th century property that may historically have been a farmhouse. To the south is the site and the surviving buildings of the grade 2 listed manor. The manor site is now occupied by Willen Hospice, providing free care to people affected by life limiting illness in Milton Keynes and surrounding areas. To the west is open ground, with a long lime tree lined avenue leading to the west gate. To the north of the avenue is Willen Children's Playground next to a small car park on Newport Road. In the 1970s, the Milton Keynes Development Corporation categorised this part of Willen as a contemplative area with the cluster of church, hospice, Priory and, from 1980, peace pagoda.

The larger settlement of Willen includes Willen Pavilion, doctor's surgery and pharmacy, pub, supermarket, and a number of smaller retail units. The Milton Keynes East development plan includes proposals for 5000 new houses approximately a mile (by road) from St Mary Magdalene church; construction on these has already commenced. Currently the plans do not include proposals for a new church in the development.



Above: OS 1885-1900 overlaid on modern aerial imagery - note extent of modern development on the north side of the village and in surrounding areas, due to establishment of Milton Keynes. Routes south and east of the village have been truncated and/or removed, leaving the village a quiet, if much enlarged, residential enclave.

1.2 Population and demographics¹

Willen is part of the civil parish of Campbell Park and the ecclesiastical parish of Stantonbury and Willen. The ecclesiastical parish covers 7.7 square miles and has a deprivation rank of 4386 out of 12,307. The population at the 2011 census was 43,637 in 17,483 households.

In 2011 the parish age profile was as follows:

Age group	% of population
0-4	7.4
5-17	15.8
18-29	16.3
30-44	21.6
45-64	26.8
65+	12.2

52.1% identified as Christian in 2011; the next highest group was those with no religion at 31.6%.

¹ This section uses data from the 2011 census, which is the latest available data and is presented broken down into Cof E parishes at <https://www.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=67bce0ed36dd4ee0af7a16bc079aa09a&extent=-2.2584,52.8791,-2.0048,52.9659> . Note that the 2018 population update shows an increase in the population of the parish - up to 45,645 from 43,637. The NOMIS report for the civil parish (Campbell Park) is available at <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea?compare=E04012181>

1.3 Worship and Prayer

St Mary Magdalene church is part of the Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership (<https://stantonbury.net/wp/>). St Mary's remit as a place of worship within the Partnership includes the village of Willen, Willen Park and Bolbeck Park, both of which fall in the civil parish of Great Linford. The Partnership combines the traditions of the Baptist, Anglican, Methodist and United Reformed Church, welcoming all denominations or those still exploring the Christian faith. There is an annual Partnership service that moves around all the SEP churches, but it cannot currently be hosted at Willen due to the lack of WC facilities.

For eleven years, between 1974 and 1985, the Society of the Sacred Mission took responsibility for the parish and provided the vicar. The Society had a Priory at the 18th century vicarage c.150m west of the church, which became an ecumenical lay community and retreat centre in 1997 when the SSM brothers moved into a smaller property in the village. The two communities merged in 2007. The Priory closed in 2019, and the Society's main work in the UK is now carried out from St Anthony's Priory, Durham. The closure was a substantial loss to the church community, which had maintained close links to the SSM and used the conference facilities at the Priory for hospitality and meetings, as well as WC and servery provision supporting events at the church. Church activities such as Sunday school, the APCM, quiz nights, Harvest Supper, embroidery groups, quiet days, prayer days, weeks of guided prayer, Congregation Leadership Team meetings, and Advent, Easter, and Lent courses all took place at the Priory. The Priory building is now leased by SSM to Willen Hospice, who do not currently permit any use of the facilities by the church. Since the closure, some church activities, such as suppers and Advent activities, have moved to Willen pavilion. Others take place in private homes, or have ceased altogether.

Regular worship

Morning worship takes place at 9.30am on the first Sunday of the month. On the remaining Sundays there is a 9.30am Communion, using forms of worship from different traditions. These regular services have an attendance of c.25.

Festival services

At Christmas there is a carol service with an attendance of 70-100, with music again provided by Quorum. On Christmas Eve there is a children's service and a midnight service, and on Christmas Day there is a family service. Attendance at these varies, up to a maximum of 80. At Easter there is a Palm Sunday service, a meditative afternoon service on Good Friday (att. 12-15), and a service on Easter Sunday. Maximum attendance is c.50. The church also marks Mothering Sunday, the patronal festival of St Mary Magdalene, Harvest, and All Souls, with festival services; these have c.40 attendees. The Remembrance Sunday service is also held at the church, moving outside to finish around the village war memorial on the green; it has c.30 attendees, with additional people joining the services and it moves to the memorial. On average, four of the festival services - usually Palm Sunday, the Patronal festival, Michaelmas, and the carol service - are Evensong services sung by Quorum (see Section 1.4 below) and have an attendance of c. 40.



Above: Remembrance Sunday service taking place at the village war memorial

Occasional offices

In the last four years requests for occasional offices have generally declined. The church hosts around three weddings a year, with roughly the same number of enquiries that do not go any further due to the lack of facilities in/near the building. There are an average of three funerals, and 5-6 interments of ashes. The number of baptisms is small, usually no more than 1-2. Baptisms are conducted as part of the main service, and use the font situated at the west end of the nave. Maximum attendances for occasional offices are 60-100

Informal worship and ancillary activities

The church does not currently run a Sunday school or any youth work due to the lack of suitable space. School visits are welcomed, and there has recently been one by 50 children who came for a curriculum-linked RE visit.

Some seasonal church community activities take place at Willen Pavilion, including the Harvest Supper and Advent wreath making. These generally have 30-40 attendees.

The church is open on Sundays and Mondays until c.3.30- 4pm for private prayer. It cannot currently be opened beyond these hours due to a lack of volunteers to lock up.

Congregational Membership Numbers at St Mary Magdalene:

Anglican	33
Baptist	1
Methodist	1
URC	0
Ecumenical	0
Others	8
Total	43

1.4 Music at St Mary Magdalene

We host a number of regular concerts throughout the year, as well occasional visiting choir performances. Concerts are restricted to a maximum of 45 minutes - 1 hour due to the lack of toilet facilities. Refreshments are provided with water, crockery and cutlery being brought to the church from neighbouring houses.

Quorum (<http://quorummk.org.uk/>), a small chamber choir specialising in Renaissance and Contemporary sacred choral music, is based at the church. The choir rehearses in the church approximately 72 times per year. Throughout the year they sing at local churches, cathedral services, and private engagements such as weddings and corporate events. Quorum have their own following and people will travel to watch them perform. The choir sings four Evensong services at our church, including the popular annual carol service. Peak capacity for the carol service within the past seven years was in 2018 when we had an audience of 144. With the exception of 2020 when there was no concert and 2021 when there was a coinciding concert at the hospice, attendance numbers are regularly 100 or above. Dignitaries such as the Lord Lieutenant and Mayor have attended past events.

Prior to 2019, post-carol service refreshments were served at the Priory of the Society of the Sacred Mission, however, the property has since been leased to the hospice and is not available to the church. In 2019, arrangements were made to use a room at the hospice for refreshments; this was not a long-term arrangement, especially with the impact of Covid-19 on hospices. In 2022, refreshments were warmed at a local residence and transported to the church to be served from the west entrance lobby. We will be repeating this arrangement in 2023, however, it is far from ideal, due to the cramped space in the lobby and the generally poor heating in the church.



Above: Members of the Quorum choir at St Mary's in July 2023



Above: A visiting choir in the choir of St Mary Magdalene

T.T.T.T (<https://www.mkheritage.org.uk/t-t-t-t-third-tuesday-twelve-thirty/>) concerts are held at the church on the third Tuesday of the month at 12.30. The events are free with complimentary cake and coffee. Currently any donations from events are put towards the Church Restoration fund. We have between 40 and 60 people attending the concerts.



Above: Members of the Milton Keynes U3A band performing at one of the T.T.T.T. concerts

1.5 Community activities and visitors

The church has a small **garden group** which meets every Saturday morning between March and October and is responsible for the upkeep of the churchyard.



We open the church annually for **Heritage Open Days** with a variety of events and activities taking place. If the weather permits, we serve tea and refreshments in the churchyard. In 2023, the church and churchyard were open for ten Heritage Open Days, and we had a team of 25 volunteers. During that time we had a small exhibition on the history of the church and the life of church architect Robert Hooke, as well as eleven live events including music, talks, cycling, films, children's storytelling, and plant sales. We recorded 397 visitors but additional footfall in the churchyard was not counted; we estimated overall visitor numbers of 477.



Above: One of the volunteers who spoke about the church during the Heritage Open Days. Note the small display relating to Robert Hooke placed within a box pew for the event

A programme of **heritage talks** is currently being developed to add to the programme of community concerts, in response to the success of the talks held during the 2023 Heritage Open Days. Branded the **2S@3 Talks** (second Saturday at 3pm), they will be promoted through the Willen Heritage Association Facebook group. The programme will start in 2024 and the first talk will be on the subject of the diaries of Samuel Pepys.

Nearby redways bring a substantial number of cyclists and pedestrians close to the church. Historically, the church was open to **visitors** on a daily basis, with members of the nearby Priory taking responsibility for locking and unlocking the doors. Since the closure of the Priory the church has relied on other volunteers to do this, and they are only available on Sundays and Mondays. For the rest of the week the church is currently closed. We estimate that c.300 people visit the church per year, both to see the building and for private prayer.

1.6 Stewardship and finance

Unrestricted funds	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Income					
Donations	£25744	£29578	£22525	£17110	£17113
Other voluntary giving	£0	£1450	£674	£562	£1425
Charitable and ancillary trading	£2055	£1372	£745	£2035	£128
Investments	£0	£0	£0	£0	£7
TOTAL	£27799	£32400	£23944	£19707	£18673
Expenditure					
Missionary and charitable giving	£425	£314	£0	£100	£368
Activities directly related to the work of the church ²	£27623	£30012	£23522	£23041	£19941
Church management and administration	£60	£60	£60	£351	£0
TOTAL	£28108	£30386	£23582	£23492	£20309
Surplus/ (Loss)	(£309)	£2014	£361	(£3785)	(£1636)

² Includes parish share, repairs and maintenance, churchyard upkeep

Restricted funds	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Income					
Donations	£0	£436	£0	£0	£0
Other voluntary giving	£18853	£0	£2000	£1150	£775
TOTAL	£18853	£436	£2000	£1150	£775
Expenditure					
Activities directly related to the work of the church ³	£9256	£3637	£1000	£6163	£0
TOTAL	£9256	£3637	£1000	£6163	£0
Surplus/ (Loss)	£9597	(£3201)	£1000	(£5013)	£775

Generally the finances for Willen church show the same trends as those for the ecumenical partnership as a whole - income through regular donations is shrinking, whilst the costs of running the church, in particular salaries/parish share, repairs, and maintenance, continue to increase. Income in the Stantonbury EP dropped by c.£40,000 between 2018 and 2022; £30,000 of which was in falling donations. There is a growing need for additional sources of income to supplement donations.

The reduction of income is partly due to the closure of the Priory. Members of the Society often gave generous private donations, and in ensuring the Church was open seven days a week they ensured a steady stream of visitors to the building, who also donated. Many of these visitors were drawn to the area by the Priory, to attend courses, retreats, or other events, and would not otherwise have come to the church.

In this context it is important that other ways are found to attract visitors and paying users to the church site.

³ Includes parish share, repairs and maintenance, churchyard upkeep

1.7 Condition of the church building

The last Quinquennial Inspection was carried out by John Radice on 3rd May 2021. It identified the following necessary works:

High priority (within 12 months)

- Investigate nave roof void to establish condition of roof timbers, ventilation, and need for timber treatments
- Check condition of stone repairs to all external walls
- Inspect timber to window W7 and ascertain extent of necessary work
- Inspect timber to door D3 and ascertain extent of necessary work
- Inspect interior timber and ascertain extent of necessary work
- Inspect floor to choir stalls
- Remove/replace rubber backed mats
- Clear out ringing chamber
- Investigate brighter lighting and check if low energy bulbs are in use
- Commission access audit
- Rebuild section of brick boundary wall
- Kill off ivy
- Clear out debris adjacent to boundary wall and inspect brickwork
- Ease gate leaves

Medium priority (within two years)

- none

Low priority (within quinquennium)

- High level external repairs to tower and south vestry, lead and coping repairs, resecure tower roof central feature, and repair to cracked parapet
- Conduct repairs to roof structure in nave roof void
- Repoint unsightly mortar repairs to external walls and replace damaged bricks as necessary, repair failed re-facings and ashlar work, replace entablature weathering, and repair cracked brickwork
- Repair dressings, repoint sills, and repair/replace ferrements to 10 windows
- Replace louvres and repair mullions to the belfry openings
- Redecorate three doors and adjust/plane down one of them
- Internally, repair/secure dado panelling, replace carpets, repoint joints between pavoids, fit hoops to tower ladder, repair tower access hatch lining, fit protection to floor opening and repair belfry floor repair mullion, carry out timber treatment as necessary, replace decayed bricks
- Improve/replace lighting installation
- Repair west wall and steps, repair paving to churchyard path, repoint boundary walls including cappings, replace decayed bricks to boundary walls, repair damaged section of boundary wall

Monitor

- Building movement after tree removal
- Stability of masonry in nave roof space due to timber decay
- Differential movement, cracking, and condition of external walls
- Open ventilators and drains
- Damp damage to interior walls
- Safety of interior floor
- Lean of boundary walls

1.8 Existing facilities at the church building

1.8.1 Electrical installation

There is a three-phase electricity supply to the church. The electrical installation is approximately 35 years old and uses PVC cables, the economic lifespan which according to CIBSE is 30 years. The last test of the electrical system was carried out in September 2019, and it found the condition of the installation to be unsatisfactory. The next test is due in September 2024.

1.8.2 Heating



The current heating system is electric and. The nave is served by a mixture of tubular heaters beneath the pews, panel heaters and night storage heaters. The north and south vestries are served by electric storage heaters. There is a dimplex electric door curtain above the south vestry door. There are also electric trench heaters beneath the cast iron grilles up the centre of the nave, these no longer operate. The other heating is in reasonable condition. Total estimated heat output is 15kw. It is costly to run and inefficient; the church is poorly heated which limits the activities that can be run during the winter months. An assessment of the heat loss of the building has been carried out which shows the heat loss to be

approximately 25kw based on a 19 degree celsius internal temperature and a -5 degrees celsius external temperature.

1.8.3 Lighting

The current lighting system has evolved in an ad hoc fashion with additions over a number of years. The level of illumination from the existing lighting is very low, such that the church can't be easily used at night, especially by those with poor vision. Lighting in the nave is provided by candle sconce type fittings with modern LED lamps. The window reveals are illuminated with wall mounted PAR reflector lamps at high level. Lighting elsewhere is provided by more modern fluorescent fittings. There is no emergency lighting.

The outdoor lighting in the churchyard was recently repaired with funding from Thames Valley Police. The area around the church is generally dark and the new system is on a timer to enable the Quorum choir to access the church for rehearsals, and to provide light for walkers passing by the church.

1.8.4 Seating and flexible space

The nave is provided with fixed box pews dating to the 17th century, and the choir with collegiate style seats. There is a very small amount of flexible space between the choir stalls at the east end. It is not possible to gather around the font or to worship in the round.

1.8.5 WC

There are no WC facilities at the church and, since 2019, the church has had no access to WC facilities at the former Priory site.

1.8.6 Hospitality

There is currently no running water, servery facilities or space for gathering after services/ events. Water and equipment are brought into the church from a neighbouring house and all washing up is done in private homes. Refreshments are served from the aisle or west entrance and people sit in the box pews to consume them., this significantly restricts the social value of the hospitality offered.



Above: Refreshment table laid out in the aisle following a T.T.T.T. event

1.8.8 AV

There is no functional, permanently installed AV equipment in the church. There is an assortment of basic portable equipment and concert performers provide their own equipment.



Above: The only entrance to the church. Note that a steep ramp is located behind the low wall on the right hand side of the image



1.8.7 Accessibility

Access to the building is at the west end, which has steps and a permanent ramp. The pitch of the ramp is steep, so it can be difficult for lone wheelchair users using manual chairs. The two ancillary spaces adjoining the base of the tower (currently in use as vestry space) are not accessible; they are both accessed by steps and through narrow openings.

Left: View from the south vestry across the entrance lobby to the north entrance showing the level changes and narrow openings.

1.9 Constraints

1.91. Heritage constraints

St Mary Magdalene is a grade I listed church of 1680, designed by Robert Hooke in the Dutch style. It is the only known church entirely of Hooke's design. An apse was added in 1862; this work was unusually sympathetic in approach, and has not substantially harmed or altered the Restoration character of the building. There have been no other additions to, or extensions of the building. The church retains an almost complete interior of 1680, alteration to which has largely been confined to the east end. Original 17th-century features include an elaborate Baroque plaster ceiling, box pews, a pulpit and clerk's desk, and a fine font. For more details, see the *Statement of Significance* (Oxford Heritage Partnership, July 2023) .

The church as a whole is of **high significance** for its evidential, historical, and architectural value, and there are limited options to develop the building without causing substantial harm to this significance. Extensions are not considered viable due to the distinctive symmetry of the building. Within the church, any proposals that make substantial changes to the nave (including furnishings and fittings) are highly likely to be rejected due to the significance of the 17th-century interior.



Above: View of the interior of the nave and apse. The box pews, font, and pulpit date to the 17th-century, as does the majority of the decorative plasterwork and the wall panelling.

Within the interior, the areas of least significance are the two vestries flanking the west tower. Although their walls, fenestration, and floor levels are of 1680, little has survived in the way of

original fixtures, fittings, and surface treatments. In the north vestry a partial original shutter has survived, and in the south vestry a dramatic ashlar portal matching that to the west entrance. Beyond this all finishes, fixtures, and fittings are 20th century or later.

1.9.2 Accessibility constraints

The only access to the church building is through the west entrance, which is set considerably above the ground level in the churchyard. The door is accessed via a flight of five steps, or by a ramp added to the west front in the 20th century. The ramp is too steep to meet part-M requirements. The area immediately inside the west door, under the tower, is narrow and often congested during large events. The north and south vestries are accessed from this space; both are two steps up from the tower floor level, a rise of c. 12 inches.



1.9.3 Property constraints

The only property owned by the Willen church community is the church of St Mary Magdalene and its associated churchyard. There is no realistic prospect of the church obtaining an additional site/land on which to place facilities that are required to facilitate and extend the use of the church building. The large area of open ground to the north and west of the church is owned and managed by local authorities for recreation and wildlife. The large parcel of land to the south is owned by Willen Hospice who also lease the Priory site. To the east is the village green and war memorial. Finally, to the north east, are a small number of historic private dwellings and their associated plots. The entire area is both a conservation area, and designated as a heritage site by MKCC.

1.10 Other facilities in the village

Other than Willen Hospice, there are no facilities in the historic village of Willen. The church is consequently the focus of community activity in this part of the settlement, albeit currently limited by lack of toilets. There has been some talk of a public cafe opening at the hospice, however, it is currently uncertain when, or if, this will materialise.

1.10.1 Willen Pavilion

Willen Pavilion serves the wider Willen district and is located approximately 0.3 miles (c. 10min walk) by footpath from St Mary Magdalene. By car, it is necessary to take a longer 0.6mile route from the church to the pavilion.

The pavilion has a large hall with an external terraced area, modern kitchen, and separate meeting room with integral kitchen facilities. It is available to hire for private parties, business meetings, sports clubs, and community activities. Regular activities include yoga, pilates, tai chi, Willen football club, and two cricket clubs. The church uses the pavilion to run some activities previously held at the Priory that cannot currently be accommodated at the church, particularly the Harvest Supper and Advent craft activities.



Above: Willen Pavilion and sports ground © Philip Jeffrey and licenced for reuse under cc-by-sa/2.0 (<https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/2922383>)

1.11 Other churches

1.11.1 Ecumenical Partnership

There are six churches in the ecumenical partnership. In addition to Willen St Mary Magdalene, the five churches are:

- [Bradwell St Lawrence](#)
- [New Bradwell St James](#)
- [Great Linford St Andrew's](#)
- [Cross and Stable Church Downs Barn](#)
- [Stantonbury Christ Church](#)

2. Our vision

2.1 Vision statement

“God of all wisdom, grant to us your grace to fulfil your mission amongst us as we seek to serve all people. Amen”

St Mary Magdalene is an Ecumenical congregation within the Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership. Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership is a partnership of four denominations; Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed. The vision is ‘Six thriving and growing congregations, making Christ known in our area of Milton Keynes.

Our vision for our project is **“an open, growing and accessible church for Willen”**. As we grow our church, we wish to be **“Building for God, serving all people”**.

The population in and around Willen is already substantial, and likely to reach 50,000 in the coming years. A large proportion of that population is under 40, and almost a quarter is under 18. 5000 new homes are under construction at the nearby Milton Keynes East development, and again many of the inhabitants are likely to be young families. We recognise our mission to these people, many of whom are not from traditional “church” backgrounds and find the prospect of coming to our church a daunting one. We have to meet them where they are, hosting events and activities at the church that appeal to them and provide an informal introduction to the worshipping community. We need to encourage them over our threshold. We need the church building to be open and welcoming to all who need it as a place of prayer and reflection, whether that is a walker passing by on a redway, or patients and families of those under the care of Willen Hospice.

As a church community we also recognise the importance of enriching our spiritual lives, of studying, exploring, and reflecting on our faith. This was the aim of many of the events that we previously held at the Priory, such as our quiet days and guided prayer weeks. Since the closure of the Priory we have lost some of these opportunities for enrichment altogether; others are restricted in number so they can fit into private homes. There is a deep need in the church community for this to be addressed.

We are blessed with a church building that is unique, with a remarkably intact 17th-century interior; it is of the highest significance for its architectural and historical value. We have a duty to protect this building, to honour the purpose for which it was built, and to tell the stories of those who built it and worshipped here across four centuries. In doing so we can tell the story of our faith, and explore the intersection of faith and science that powered the groundbreaking work of Robert Hooke and his contemporaries. We believe that these stories have the power to attract new visitors to our church, and new members to our church community. Greater visitor numbers will also increase the potential for donations to support the maintenance of the building, which is vital to replace falling planned giving. For the church building to be sustainable in the long term, it needs both a deep pool of enthusiastic supporters, and ways to generate its own income.

In summary, the key elements of our vision are:

- Our mission to a growing, young local community
- Enriching the worshipping and spiritual life of the church community
- For the church to be open for anyone that needs it
- Protecting our historic building
- Sharing the stories of our historic building, its architect, and the community that has worshipped in it across four centuries
- Enhancing the usefulness of the historic building, facilitating its wider use and potential for income generation

2.2 Willen Church Hooke Heritage Project

The CLT established the Willen Church Hooke Heritage Project in late 2022. In order to achieve the vision outlined in section 2.1, the project's specific objectives are to:

- Preserve the heritage building and its location for current and future users
- Provide discrete toilet facilities and improve accessibility with minimal impact on both the exterior and interior of the church building
- Increase space for spiritual learning, education, and community activities on the church site
- Provide interpretation and educational events that share the stories of our exceptional building and of its polymath architect, Robert Hooke.

As part of the Willen Church Hooke Heritage Project, we are investigating possible partnerships that could help us have greater impact and educational reach within the village, in Milton Keynes, and beyond; this includes talking to the Robert Hooke Society. These investigations are currently at a very early stage and will be subject to further development and approval.

2.3 Feasibility study and public consultation

A feasibility study was commissioned from James Mackintosh Architects in spring 2023; options that were explored included re-ordering the existing church or creating a separate new building. The possibility of erecting a separate new building was explored through a set of options for preliminary consultation. These demonstrated a range of architectural styles, materials and locations. See James Mackintosh document *368 A1 Exhibition Boards*.

This work was presented at a public open meeting with invited VIPs, and subsequently exhibited for consultation throughout the whole period of Heritage Open Days from 8th-17th September 2023. In total, 390 visitors viewed the exhibition, 63 visitors completed the survey (16 online and 47 hard copy) and others left comments in the church visitor book. The response was generally positive and produced a number of useful comments and contacts. For a summary of the survey responses and the source data, see additional document *Feasibility Options Consultation Report Sept 23*. An additional survey of congregation members has also been completed, a summary combining the congregation and community responses is included in additional document *Options congregation survey report Oct 2023*.

3. Our needs

3.1 Liturgy and worship

In common with many churches with fixed seating, our church works well for formal worship. The seating capacity meets our needs. The box pews help reduce draughts and provide semi-enclosed, safe spaces for those that come to the church during the day for private prayer. We have no desire to change them. However, their presence does make it impossible to hold events in the main church building that require different seating layouts, particularly anything requiring tables or seating in the round. This includes courses, quiet days and some prayer meetings, and youth work such as a Sunday school. These events were previously held with a great deal of success at the Priory, and we have felt the loss of the facilities there quite keenly, with many of the events ceasing altogether. To revive them we need a medium-sized flexible space that can seat up to 40 adults around tables, or 15-20 children with space to play. Ideally we would also like this space to be configurable for quiet study, to be used in conjunction with digital resources, so that it can in a modest way partially replace the theological study library that was also lost when the Priory was closed.

Another need related to the closure of the Priory is for the church to be open and accessible for all during daylight hours, but in a way that does not rely on a large number of volunteers. We therefore wish to investigate an automated locking system.

The current lack of any WC facility at the church, let alone a part-M compliant one, is a persistent problem for all of our worship activity. It dissuades some members of the congregation from attending on a regular basis, and is a major factor in why only half our wedding enquiries actually lead to wedding ceremonies at the church. The lack of a servery is similarly restricting; offering any hospitality at the church requires food and equipment to be brought in by volunteers and laid out on a temporary table at the west entrance or in the central aisle. In either location the table blocks circulation around the building and egress from it.

Our existing vestries are much needed, and it is important that any proposals maintain the clergy vestry provision and existing storage capacity. We would, however, like the existing storage to be rationalised and improved. A particular requirement is for dry, well ventilated space for robes and books, and for secure storage where valuables can be kept whilst the church is open.

Our specific needs related to liturgy and worship are therefore:

- Part-M compliant WC facilities with baby changing
- Servery for hot drinks and light refreshments; associated water supply
- Flexible meeting space to replace that lost at the Priory, for activities such as courses, prayer days, quiet days, and quiet study. The space needs to accommodate up to 40 adults seated around tables
- Storage for tables and chairs adjacent to the above flexible space

- Space that could be used for quiet private study
- Church accessible to all during daylight hours, seven days a week; automated locking system
- Clearly identified space/resources for private prayer; a place to write and leave prayer request cards
- Maintain existing vestry provision but improve storage and security
- WiFi

3.2 Heritage and visitors

Many of our needs related to heritage and visitors overlap with those in section 3.1, above. We already host popular annual Heritage Open Days but are limited in terms of refreshment we can offer and the material that we can display within the church building. During these events, we have placed books and documents inside the box pews and temporarily mounted poster boards on the walls. However, the space for this type of display is limited and temporary, it also requires people to enter the box pews, which creates bottlenecks and excludes those who can't physically access the pews. Our heritage plans also include permanent interpretation material relating to the history of the church, Robert Hooke and his scientific work, and the history of Christianity in the local area. We would like this to include a mixture of display boards, guides, and digital materials. We will need space to display this material that is accessible to all.

We are already extending our heritage programme with a new talk series beginning in 2024, and will be undertaking a process of activity planning as part of our application to the Heritage Fund. However, without accessible WC facilities and with only the nave space available to us, we are restricted in the duration of events and the type of activity we can offer. If we are to attract visitors from further afield, WC facilities and hospitality are both essential. We are currently reliant on ad hoc, portable AV equipment but, if we are offering talks on a regular basis, we would benefit from more up-to-date arrangements and from a hearing loop. We also need WiFi provision both for the downloading of digital resources and to enhance the talks and educational sessions that can be delivered.

It is our intention to strengthen ties with local schools and offer history based sessions in addition to R.E. visits. To improve the sessions we can offer to visiting schools, and extend the time that they can spend on site, we need WCs and a flexible space that can be used as a classroom for up to 30 children.

Our specific needs related to heritage and visitors are therefore:

- Part M compliant WC facilities
- Church accessible to all during daylight hours, seven days a week
- Updated interpretation information, including guides, a website/app, and display materials on church site
- Flexible space that can be used as a classroom for delivery of a schools programme, seating c. 30 children at tables
- Storage for tables and chairs adjacent to the above flexible space

- Storage for educational materials
- Clearly identified space/resources for private prayer
- WiFi
- Provision of a bike rack for visitors using the redways
- Consider provision of hidden/ portable screen in the church for use in worship and talks/lectures
- Explore the provision of space to study and digital resources

3.3 Music

Our church is already a regular venue for concerts, with around 16 annually. It is also used as a practice venue by chamber choir Quorum at least once a week. The acoustics and atmosphere of the church are valued by performers and audiences, and as a result concerts are generally well attended. However, they currently have to be strictly limited in length due to our current lack of WC facilities. The ineffective heating further reduces the comfort of attendees. Refreshments are offered, but create the same circulation issues as they do after a service, laid out on a table blocking either the central aisle in the nave, or partially blocking the west entrance. Our two small vestries provide just enough space for a small choir (c.6 people) to prepare for a performance, but are too small for larger choirs and performers with instruments to use as green rooms.

Our specific needs related to music are therefore:

- Part-M compliant WC facilities
- Served for hot drinks and light refreshments that can be used without impeding circulation in the main body of the church and to the west door
- Space that can be used as a green room for up to 15-20 performers
- Maintain existing acoustics in church building
- Maintain existing seating capacity in church building
- Heating to CIBSE standards in church building
- Improved light levels for evening use of the building and churchyard without causing light pollution

3.4 Accessibility

Although the church does have a ramped access at the west end, it was installed a number of years ago, and is too steep to meet current part-M requirements. We also do not have any WC provision, or a hearing loop. The light levels are insufficient for those with visual impairments, and the heating system does not allow us to provide a comfortable ambient temperature in the winter. We recognise that any work to improve accessibility within the main body of the church must be extremely fabric-sensitive given our 17th century box pews and other interior features, and we also recognise that there are some ideals in terms of accessibility, such as level floors internally, that are not possible within the main body of our church. That being so, we have a need for an alternative space on the site that is fully accessible and can be used for a social

gathering, small service, or private prayer, for example by local residents, or by patients and families of those under the care of Willen Hospice.

Our specific needs related to accessibility are therefore:

- Fabric-sensitive installation of a hearing loop and AV system for voice reinforcement
- Consider provision of hidden or portable screen in the church for use in worship and talks/lectures
- Reconfiguration of existing ramped access to meet part-M requirements
- Part-M compliant WC facilities
- A modest fully accessible space that can be used as a small worship space, for social gatherings, and for private prayer
- Improved light levels for evening use of the building and churchyard
- Heating to CIBSE standards in the church and any new buildings

3.5 Environmental stewardship and Church of England Net Zero

We take our responsibility of environmental stewardship seriously, and need to ensure that any work on the church site is in line with the broader Net Zero goals set by the Church of England. In particular, we wish to explore opportunities for microgeneration and renewable heat sources to be integrated into any new structures. We also want any new work on site to be as carbon neutral as possible, both in terms of construction - using sustainable and environmentally friendly materials, and use - requiring little energy to run, and being water-efficient.

Our specific needs related to environmental stewardship and Church of England Net Zero are therefore:

- Whole site, including any new building, to be carbon neutral
- Efficient heating system based on GSHP/ASHP
- If possible, insulate church roof voids don't seem to think it will be possible to do so
- Any new facilities to be low energy, low water, and low impact by design.
- New materials to be sourced as sustainably and locally as possible
- Consider installation of integrated solar PV array on any new structures
- Consider including carbon offsetting requirements in any building contract

3.6 Quinquennial repairs

We are now half way through the quinquennium and some of the work identified by our inspecting architect as needing to be carried out within five years is becoming more urgent, in particular repairs to the boundary wall on the south side where there are concerns it may collapse towards the hospice site. The clay soil in the Milton Keynes area, combined with changes to the church drainage since its construction, have led to shrinkage in the ground which affects the structural condition of the boundary walls and the church. Any building project at the church will also need to address the outstanding matters of repair listed in section 1.7, above.

Appendix 1: Overview of current and proposed activities with requirements

The church will be putting in an application to the Heritage Fund which will include robust activity planning to expand on this overview document. Since 2019, a number of activities have stopped due to a lack of suitable facilities. Where the CLT hopes to restart these activities, they have been marked in the table as *Suspended*. Some activities are continuing in alternative locations and this has been indicated below.

Activity/Group	Existing/ Proposed/Suspended	Estimated Attendance	Frequency	Storage	AV	WC	Kitchen	Space for meetings/creche /green room	Quiet /prayer Space
Sunday service	Existing	c.25	Weekly	x	x	x	x	x	x
Festival services (4 per year are choral evensong)	Existing	max c.100	12 per year	x	x	x	x	x	
Occasional offices	Existing	max c.100	c.8 per year	x	x	x	x	x	
Advent, Lent and Easter courses	Existing (currently in private homes)	c.8-12	3 per year	x	x	x	x	x	x
Advent Saturday craft activities	Existing (currently at Willen Pavilion)	c.30	Annually	x		x	x	x	
Harvest supper	Existing (currently at Willen Pavilion)	c.40+	Annually	x		x	x	x	
Church meetings - CLT and Partnership	Existing (currently online or at other venues)	c.12	Monthly	x	x	x	x	x	x
T.T.T.T. Community concerts	Existing	c.40-60	11 per year	x	x	x	x	x	

Activity/Group	Existing/ Proposed/Suspended	Estimated Attendance	Frequency	Storage	AV	WC	Kitchen	Space for meetings/creche /green room	Quiet /prayer Space
Other concerts	Existing	c. 40-60	c. 2 per year	x	x	x	x		
Quorum rehearsals	Existing	c.20	72 per year	x		x	x	x	
Visitors	Existing	c.300/month	Daily			x	x	x	x
Heritage Open Days	Existing	477 in 2023	Annually	x		x	x	x	
Garden Group	Existing	c.6	Weekly March to October	x		x	x	x	
Sunday school	Suspended - proposed to resume	Up to c. 15- 20	Weekly	x	x	x	x	x	
Quiet/prayer Days	Suspended - proposed to resume	c.15-20	2 per year	x	x	x	x	x	x
SEP Guided prayer weeks	Suspended - proposed to resume	c.24	Annually	x	x	x	x	x	x
Schools programme/visits	Proposed	c.30	4 per year	x	x	x	x	x	
Learning programme (talks, spoken word, classical concerts)	Proposed	c.30	6 per year	x	x	x	x	x	
Film programme	Proposed	c.30	6 per year	x	x	x	x	x	