



[proud to be **paulsgrove**]

KEY LEARNING FOR STAKEHOLDERS

ST MICHAEL'S
FINAL LEARNING REPORT

Introduction

This report outlines some of the key learning from each of the stages (development, delivery, opening and community (re)engagement) of the St Michael's project. It is intended to give readers something of a 'flavour' and the key insights from the project. This project, with the generous support of the Lottery, has been an eight-year engagement by the Council for Social Responsibility (CSR) with the parish and local community in Paulsgrove. For CSR, the parish and the local community this has been a significant commitment and undertaking. This report seeks to provide useful feedback to the main sponsor of the project (the Big Lottery) and also learn the lessons to shape future projects. Over the eight-year life of the project much has changed, most of which could not have been anticipated or envisaged in the original outcomes (see appendix 1) let alone the original project indicators. Despite major challenges there is no doubt that overall, the project has breathed fresh life into St Michael's and that there is a much stronger base position for taking this invaluable community amenity forward.

This report draws on key project documentation, observation, structured and informal feedback and the key results/outcomes from the project. As an essentially capital project the physical elements were the main project element. But it was always argued that the rejuvenation of the building needed to act as a catalyst for engagement and not as the end in-itself (see appendix 2). This report will seek to give a balanced appraisal of both the tangible (capital) issues and some of the key intangible (community) issues which arose during the delivery of this important project (see appendix 3).

Background

CSR operates primarily in the areas of disadvantage across the Anglican Diocese of Portsmouth and the need 'to do something' in Paulsgrove' was identified. Paulsgrove and some parts of the surrounding areas score highly on the various indices of 'deprivation' and was often seen negatively by those elsewhere in the city and surrounding districts. The latter was partly down to the stigma associated with the area due to historical events and a widely held, but incorrect, perception of endemic anti-social behaviour and crime.

CSR endeavors to take a gifts and assets-based approach to its work and so revisited these supposed 'social facts' and relooked at the changing community dynamics and the longstanding/emerging assets/strengths in the area. The project began with the existing Church of England presence in Paulsgrove, to enable a positive difference. St Michael's is the parish church covering most of Paulsgrove but over recent decades it has had a somewhat unstable history. The arrival of a new incumbent (Fr Ian Newton) provided some stability for the parish. It began to rebuild some key local relationships and within the existing limited resource available endeavored to increase the accessibility and offer of the church for the local community. But the possibility of 'doing something' bigger presented itself with the potential for investment from the Big Lottery funding...



Project Development

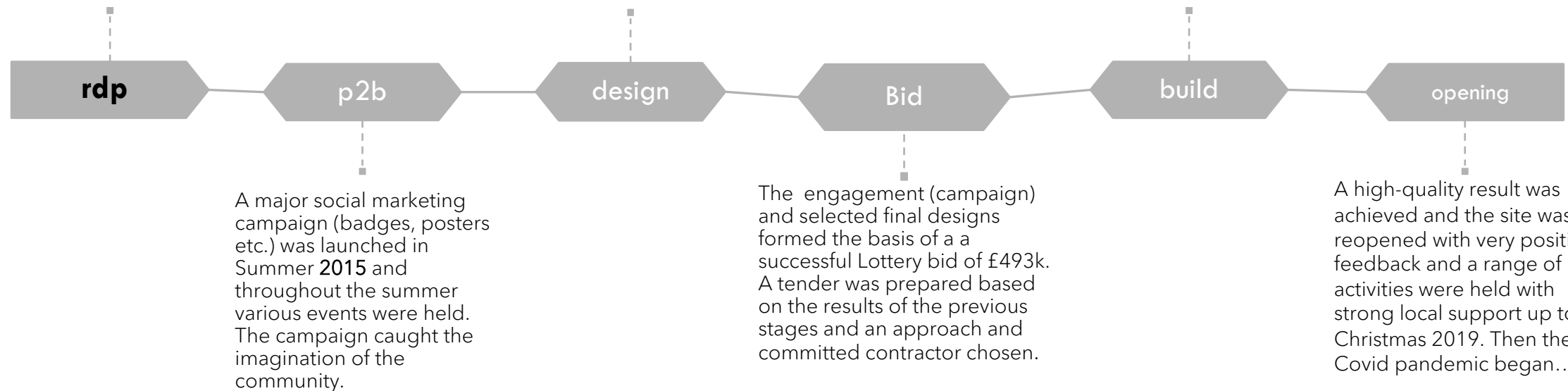
lessons from engagement and project conception

Brief Project Timeline

A Rapid Development Programme (**rdp**) programmes was run in 2014 with the parish and some local attendees. Initial key strengths of the community and hopes of the parish were identified and the 'proud to be Paulsgrove' theme emerged,.

Also, in 2015 with support and resources from the University of Portsmouth's architecture department several design events were held. Utilising UK and international students, design options were developed for the church and community to consider.

Despite external delay, a contractor was appointed, and the refurbishment and the decoration work proceeded with few issues and despite budgetary pressures was delivered on-time and on-budget.



Background of Project Development

CSR identified Paulsgrove as the area of disadvantage in the Diocese where it had not been previously involved and undertook a rdp programme. The programme and final report identified the following key issues and recommendations:

1. Consistently raise the profile of the church's role in the wider community as a local animator and amenity.
2. Upgrade and make existing spaces more available for more animating and contemporary community use - particularly those spaces which are currently under-utilised.
3. Increasing the resources and the numbers of volunteers (and support them) to get involved in community activities (in both the church and outside of it).



Project Conception Learning

When the St M's project began there was no plan for a sustained involvement of over eight years but rather it has emerged as implementation, conversations and the opportunities evolved. The key conclusion from the early exploratory work in 2014 was that while the 'kit' (see appendix 4) did need significant upgrading the key issue was prioritising a relaunch of St Michaels and finding out more (and from new voices in particular) about the future possibilities for the church *with* its community (see appendix 3 for strategic options).

What emerged in 2015 was the idea of a [proud to be paulsgrove] social marketing campaign which provided a structured and positive narrative, campaign resources (badges, banners, postcards, linked events and activities) which facilitated the initiation of conversations and listening with the local community see, this is illustrated [here](#)). This campaign generated excitement, awareness and involvement and provided a way for the church to talk, in a new more positive and generous way, with its neighbours. In all 500+ people were reached through a range of campaign activities. The results of this work provided a sound basis for further project development. The idea of a Lottery bid and the brand association this proved to be a useful focus but also a strong project development model and templates which assisted greatly in turning an ambition into a deliverable project.

Key lessons

- Preparing for a project such as this has involved significant elements of analysis, understanding to identify and the key elements of the contextual 'fit' for the project for it to have a chance of success.
- The [proud to be paulsgrove] approach/campaign was very successful. A strong, simple positive narrative which was consistently deployed resonated and can cut through generating awareness, new involvement and excitement as well as new insights.
- The engagement process and campaign provided a frame, structure, resources and it provided more confidence to underpin parish efforts to reach out to their community.
- Residents/attendees appreciated being asked (in a positive and informal way) for their views on what was wanted, design issues and future possibilities for their church.
- 100 people tried out variations on seating and the chair with the most votes was selected



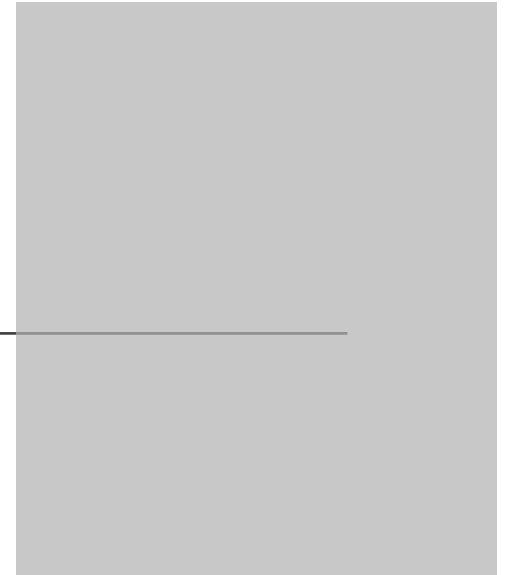
Redevelopment

lessons from project design
procurement and project
delivery

BACKGROUND TO PROJECT REDEVELOPMENT

The end results of far too many church redevelopment projects are uninspiring. In part this is because they are constrained by obsolete ways of working with a professionally dominated and 'closed' project iteration process and many use a limited range of advice and options and delivery models which result in similar poor-quality uninspiring results. Project stakeholders wanted to do something much better and more positive with a set of unique spaces in a disadvantaged area.

Work with the University created an opportunity to secure professional advice, new views and insights and a range of new and potentially more creative options not normally accessed by church's who follow the conventional approach to church/project redevelopment. The results from the engagement, designs, the quinquennial report and the strategic options analysis (see appendix) and the ongoing work with the staff, students and residents provided a creative basis from which to develop a project prospectus and to approach the Lottery with for funding.



Project development learning

The project 'team' and Parochial Church Council (PCC) spent a great deal of time developing the fundamental project rationale, clear objectives and prospectus drawing on the earlier engagement work. This ensured that something relevant was developed and enabled the following contracting and management phases to be more efficient and 'flow' better. Ultimately saving time and money, and in comparison, with many other church-based projects this approach facilitated a much more focussed and timely delivery (around 70% faster). CSR's underwriting of the project and acting as the 'locally trusted organisation' was invaluable in achieving progress.

However, a key and largely unnecessary delay (of approx. one year) was the intervention of the DAC (Diocesan Advisory Committee) which, despite earlier positive feedback, rejected the project on essentially unfounded grounds such as it being a significant 20th century building despite the earlier expert opinion that it was not and an unhelpful focus on maintaining some (obsolete) original features in an unlisted building.

There were lots of reasons to think carefully about the procurement process for the project. The project team wanted to 'break' the pattern of poor-quality refurbishment in local churches and also raise expectations locally about what could be achieved. It was not to be about producing another uninspiring, old fashioned and unwelcoming church "hall" or a 'that'll be ok for Paulsgrove' result, but they wanted to deliver an invaluable "wow factor" built on the intrinsic strengths of the spaces for such an important amenity.

Alongside this, several steps were taken to ensure that the procurement responded to the core project objectives as well as meeting the requirements of the Lottery, good practice and the imperative for greater sustainability. Efforts were focused on appointing an affordable, reliable and quality contractor to ensure that we would deliver a good result. The implicit aim was to reach out beyond the regular 'go-to' contractors for church-based work.

A final criteria/checklist covering quality, impact and affordability was utilised. The final shortlist included two Portsmouth-based contractors who had a good reputation and who have delivered to a consistently high standard work for major local organisations, in both the public and the private sectors. A further potential specialist heritage contractor was excluded on price.

Key lessons

1. Consistent engagement with project stakeholders based on a clear focus and project brief around the core project (community) objectives and a commitment to doing things differently can actually help the project move at pace.
2. A procurement process which was more iterative, and collaborative is ultimately cheaper, creates mutual trust and produces a much better result.
3. Inviting and engaging with contractors beyond the usual suspects and having a clear assessment criterion weighted for quality, impact and price provided new insights, saved money and worry.

What was delivered by the redevelopment?

Any visitor, and all the feedback consistently confirms positive comments on the set of impressive spaces in the rejuvenated St Michael's. Visitors are often surprised at the quality of the spaces produced from the refurbishment. The refurbishment has delivered:

- A large very flexible community space and amenity.
- A large updated and brighter worship and flexible space.
- A refurbished up-to-date kitchen which can better support events and activities, "kitchen envy" from local churches
- A high-quality smaller studio space which can be used for meetings, craft sessions, workshops etc. .
- An improved and more accessible approach and exterior.
- Updated and much more accessible facilities .e.g. a disabled toilet, baby changing facilities.
- More vibrant and attractive proactive landscaping/community garden.





Community Launch

lessons from project opening and the pandemic

Opening and community launch activities

Ultimately the point of the project was to refresh and reintroduce St Michael's as a meaningful and more contemporary spiritual and community amenity. A project at this scale provides a unique opportunity to reintroduce and relaunch, even with a 'facility' which has had a long-standing presence. The association with the Lottery assists greatly in achieving this. The community reopening and the St M's project launch (the revenue elements of the project) was always going to be very important. There were several clear success in the early months of the project launch and initiation:

- A vibrant and very successful launch event with well over 300 people attending.
- The beginning of several new offers and several popular market-testing events and activities in performance, crafts, parents & toddlers etc.
- An immediate sign up of 12 volunteers, not the 'usual suspects' was encouraging for enacting greater reach and project direction
- The development, marketing and testing of the first business packages with weddings, meetings with local businesses and the local hospital.

But sadly, we all know what happened in early 2020...



After the launch and pandemic

After a successful opening at the beginning of the 2019/20 season with a set of events, emerging activities and offers the latter part of this first St M's season saw the beginning of the Covid pandemic. The pandemic dominated the crucial 'business development' phase of the project, the timing could not have been worse. The pandemic has had a wide range of substantial direct and indirect impacts on the project. The direct impacts included:

- The lock-downs meant that the church was closed for several months. Many of the planned and developed community activities and event business offers were now banned.
- Despite furlough the appointed staff member left and recurring lock-downs hindered the recruitment of new staff and retention has proved to be problematic which has limited the on-the-ground consistency of presence.
- The direct health impacts of the pandemic and the tragic loss of some key players affected project momentum.

Some invaluable work was carried out during the pandemic (e.g. a 1000 Meatball Monday meals distributed across the community and hand delivered Christmas cards). However, these direct external and issues were compounded by some indirect effects which have affected the post-launch trajectory of the project specifically:

- The period of the pandemic saw the incumbent leave with a significant impact on both parish profile and morale.

The closure of the church substantially affected the income streams of the parish pushing them into a 'survival mode'. This was compounded by a similar dynamic in the Diocese where there was a major delay (2 years) in the reappointment of an incumbent as an economy measure.

Unfortunately, as elsewhere, the re-opening of the church and the project has not seen the end of the effects of the pandemic which have to continued to evolve. There has been a substantial loss of community confidence both amongst members of the community itself but also in 'the community' itself. A national survey, which included Paulsgrove in the sample showed low confidence increasing from 30+% to 70+%. The St M's project itself had developed a strongly upbeat message and profile - post-pandemic the local/national zeitgeist has been different and there was a need to recalibrate messaging and activities.

As elsewhere there has been a substantial mental health cost or legacy from the pandemic. Paulsgrove is now seeing high levels of anxiety and an increase in social isolation due in part to a loss of a socialising habit. Interestingly before the pandemic the project had noticed amongst attendees some significant numbers of the community suffering from chronic mental health /isolation issues. These health and wellbeing factors have actually worsened with the end of lockdowns. The inclusion of community gardening elements and the relaunch activities has helped improve morale and created both renewed profile and some new momentum.

It is clear that without Lottery flexibility and CSR's underpinning and additional resource the project would have struggled to reopen and would not have benefitted from the extended duration of staff for the project. This has been especially important as, with the arrival of the 'cost-of-living' crisis, there have been additional community stressors and further project headwinds.



Community (Re)engagement

lessons from project (re)opening
and pandemic fallout



Community (Re)engagement

lessons from project (re)opening
and pandemic fallout

Going Forward

On top of the challenging post-pandemic context has come the “cost of living crisis” and an impending recession. This has tipped many households into a survival or crisis mode. The pandemic and now this ‘new’ challenge means that many households are adverse to any risk taking (“do not have the bandwidth”) including becoming involved in any ‘new’ activities or initiatives. A concept like the joining/formation of a community cooperative struggles in an environment which is now significantly more change/risk averse. The concept of a coop has been hard to get off the ground in this environment and particularly as people often associate it with the local (coop) shop and funeral directors. Other transitional forms of sustainability are now needed.

St M’s is one of many community ventures impacted by the pandemic and the current crisis and it is notable that many projects and both social and private businesses did not reopen or are now closing. There is still community support for St M’s (see the successful Jubilee event). Unlike pre-pandemic this is not an appropriate time for ‘starting something new’ and this needs to be reflected in how the project presents itself going forward (i.e. as safe & reliable). There is a need to acknowledge the real challenges, without promoting despair and also simply pretending that everything is ok.

The Meatball Mondays food project during the pandemic and the recent Fishcake Friday’s are strong examples of adapting with a nimble and targeted positive response. The key lessons from some of the 2022 pilot re-engagement activities around reengaging with old friends (Uni) and new friends (Army) are important to inform a partial rethink. The involvement of Beacon View School with the community garden is another positive example of engagement and reengaging.

Paulsgrove continues to be identified in national research as being in the top decile for difficulties arising from escalating costs-of-living. St M’s has a key role to play here. In the short-term this will mean reverting to a more conventional ‘community project’ mode with fundraising being the primary focus for initial resource generation. There are also opportunities which have been identified to take the key learning to other sites in lower-income areas of the Diocese. There are emerging opportunities in Paulsgrove and more widely which could be built upon. These include:

1. The appointment of a new incumbent which could provide confidence for the parish and increase its profile (and reassurance) with the community.
2. The successful piloting of several food-based activities in response to the “cost-of living” crisis and new involvements/collaborations which could help to rebuild community profile and confidence sustainably.
3. The opportunity to share learning and resources with other parishes which could mean the development of a shared development and delivery capacity with other equivalent communities.

The recent development of a new strategy by CSR, which draws on the lessons from the St M’s project envisages a more centralised/consistent community building team. This could alleviate some of the staff recruitment and retention issues which have impacted the presence and profile of the project. In this challenging period there is no doubting the advantage of the project operating under a CSR umbrella as it has provided a project underpinning facility and resources for delivering and sustaining the project.

Key Project Lessons (Summary)

what didn't work

1. Opening a new community amenity and launching a community enterprise on the eve of a pandemic when many of the planned activities were essentially banned!
2. Loss of incumbency and particularly during a pandemic and the long delay in replacement which resulted in a loss of momentum and involvement for both the parish and project.
3. Staff isolation led to retention, staff development and then recruitment issues affecting project presence and profile and inevitably affected delivery. Different approaches were put in place and by mid 2022 the project saw a stabilising of staff, with more positive outcomes
4. Innovative projects such as St M's need a consistently resourced on-the-ground presence and additional targeted outreach and communications efforts to reach out beyond the immediate locale and existing networks.
5. Covid and cost-of-living issues has created a high-level of anxiety and 'noise' which blocks out any project communications efforts. More resources are needed to 'cut through' with a new safe but also hopeful narrative.

what worked

1. A pre-project process and positive engagement with the community and collaborators (e.g. University) helped set a positive and dynamic broader frame for the project'.
2. An upfront investment in positive community engagement was particularly important and well received in an area which has suffered from stigmatisation, it helped to establish profile and some generative insights with new cohorts.
3. An informed good project brief based on seeking new voices, ideas and perspectives can actually help the project move at pace and if followed through into new more open and collaborative ways of procuring helps to reduce costs and improve the quality of delivery.
4. High-profile and well promoted positive community events and activities can cut through and reach significant numbers across a broad range of segments. But given current challenges and mood, a sensitive tweaking is also required.
5. The association with the Lottery has been very positive and utilising CSR as the 'locally trusted organisation' has secured the investment and underpinned both the delivery of the capital and revenue elements of the project during very challenging times.

Recommendations

Stakeholders (to build on learning)

1. Local actors should continue to work with Lottery and other potential strategic supporters on addressing the extensive post-pandemic issues in our more disadvantaged communities.
2. Lottery can support those communities most affected by the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis to work on new positive resilience and transition models in light of the new circumstances.
3. The Diocese needs to make a formal commitment to prioritise consistent support for parishes undertaking equivalent major projects to avoid weakening delivery and impact.
4. Parishes if they are to be successful need ongoing support and encouragement to develop and maintain a more outward looking generous/risk-taking culture.
5. The Parish with CSR support now needs to host community conversation events with local organisations and local people on the 'next steps' given the current issues affecting the community and the next stage in its future journey and mission.

CSR (to take things forward)

1. Work with the new incumbent to rebuild church and community confidence and profile-raising activity to secure momentum in community activity.
2. Maintain the identified key elements of delivery within a community project mode for 2023.
3. Extend the successful project elements to new identified areas with a particular focus on lower-income peripheral residential areas.
4. Develop a core community building team/capacity to reduce worker isolation and to pre-empt future recruitment and retention issues in future projects.
5. Work up a model of change with local communities drawing on the key lessons from engagement, capital and revenue elements of St M's to better inform itself, partners and future collaborators and be better at telling stories in order raise ambitions locally.

Appendix 1: Delivery on (Lottery) Outcomes

Original (bid) headline outcomes

1. New sustainable ways of involving local people will be developed with a minimum of 100 new active volunteers.
2. Ten sustainable inspiring community offers are running and local people value St Michael's as a community asset.
3. The confidence and well-being of local families will be enhanced with more involved in producing and consuming fun community activities.
4. The image of Paulsgrove is improving with 1,000 local people attending community events and positive media coverage being regularly generated.

Results

1. The envisaged 'signed-up' volunteers has not being achieved but on an activity basis there has been some progress achieved with 26 new people helping on a specific activity basis (e.g. gardening, meals, Jubilee). Establishing a good community supporters network should be the focus of new community activity programmes/bids.
2. Initial progress on craft, performance, parents groups were side-tracked by the pandemic. Groups have come and gone. Over the life of the project approximately eight have met, currently three are regulars. The Community Garden initiative connected with locals and enabled an on-going partnership project for St M's and the church. A micro Paulsgrove Pantry set up in the church entrance highlights both need and the generosity of the community. Consolidating a defined community offer should be the priority in 23/24, retaining the principle of generosity.
3. Events, parents groups and activities have seen strong community support and they have been very well received and attended. But a lack of a consistent on-the-ground presence has limited the ability to build on these individual success. A focus on co-production activity with other projects and organisations in the area has post Covid encouraged greater reach, i.e the Wilding project, workshops with Followyourdreamz and Seekers Create.
4. Over the course of the project this has been achieved and very positive local and national media coverage has been generated and on social media some positive results (e.g. 5000 views on YouTube). The social media presence/network continues to grow with a total of over 12,000 views for garden posts and Fishcake Fridays. A clear and consistent on-the-ground presence to be reflected for all future programmes.

Appendix 2: Project Drivers

Physical refurbishment

- Building on the strengths of the current spaces and site (e.g. natural light, wood, intrinsic flexibility).
- Improve the quality and flexibility of the spaces to allow for more flexible usages.
- Improve the environmental performance and reduce the running costs.
- Improve the existing and create new amenities to make the spaces more useable by a wider range of local groups.
- Create a more contemporary and cleaner look and positive feel for visitors, worshipers, friends, neighbours, users and guests.

Community renewal

- Building on the strengths of the current community relationships and activities.
- Develop new and even more energising, contemporary and sustainable usages for St Michael's.
- Be a positive and inclusive place of personal and communal celebration.
- Involve a broad range of local people in the running of St Michael's.
- Generate new event and activity revenue streams to underpin and maintain the refurbishment and to invest in new community offers.

Appendix 3: Strategic Options for St Michaels

Option	1. Maintain	2. Relocate	3. Virtual	4. Upgrade
Detail	Maintain the current configuration of St Michael's; the carry-on as we are option - keep on top of the maintenance but no major changes in spaces or offer (ongoing - but eventually a structural refurbishment will be required).	Relocate to a new local site; with services closing locally several sites are becoming available - including potentially on the shopping parade (£80-£100k refitting costs).	Virtual networked model: have no site (sell-off) and become a floating but potentially endowed community organisation (£70k per annum).	Investment in upgrading; thinking about and investing in how we reuse the existing spaces and update the offer with local people to attract new users (£300-£400k).
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less cost. • Comfortable for the current congregation and the older residents who know it • It is not 'posh', so it is accessible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newer site - possible lower running costs • Potentially higher profile • Possibility of asset transfer (priceable asset). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No fixed accommodation costs • Potentially helps with innovation • A clear focus on outreach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deals with the identified maintenance issues • Allows for an updating of offer • Increased and new income streams • New cohorts of users • Relaunch is opportunity to increase local involvement.
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential perceptions of being cliquey • Tired/sad state of spaces reflecting poorly on any offers • Not accessible to newer or younger and some groups with special needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of historical connection • The only iconic building • Loss of access to the green • Potential loss of ownership • Community backlash • Loss of consecration - new planning etc. obligations • Loss of income (mast rental). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No fixed accommodation • Becomes a project, not a presence • Loss of a local base for renewal • Unclear financial value. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High initial capital costs • Time delay • Become too posh - inaccessible • Spaces are used more so there is an increase in running costs.

Appendix 4: Key 'physical' issues identified from the site analysis

site strengths

- A fantastic level of natural light which could be increased further
- An intrinsic flexibility in a good range of sizes in the current spaces
- Wide and attractive use of (light) wood that can be enhanced and create the basis of a consistent high-quality design or 'look'
- An accessibility in the reading and populating the spaces so it is not off putting/excluding.

site weaknesses

- Poor state of the decor
- Obsolete and inconsistent fixtures and fittings
- A need for updating to ensure suitable amenities such as baby changing, adequate and accessible toilets, a suitable kitchen and Wi-Fi etc.
- A need to remove the inappropriate barriers such as partitions and dark pews (later additions) to enable more light and flexible use.



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