



St. Mary's House & St. Mary's Church – Building for a Renewed Future

Frequently asked questions and answers

1. What is 'the project'?

The first parish and *Churches Together* consultations took place over a decade ago and it has now been defined as one project, encompassing St Mary's House (with facilities that will benefit the community as well as ourselves), the churchyard (improving its bio-diversity and its role as a sanctuary) and - for the church - improved accessibility, toilet and serving facilities, and a new Eco-Heating system.

2. Why do we need changes to St Mary's House, instead of just mending and decorating?

From the outset, there have always been plans to widen our facilities to serve more people, but it has become increasingly clear that the building no longer meets the current needs of the parish and wider community. Attention to its physical state also reveals severe issues; for example, ancient toilets, the variety of floor levels, severe rainwater leakage and condensation causing rotting woodwork and damp. A cheaper redecoration and upgrade might be the only alternative, if we are not successful in our grant applications, but it will defer the work that needs doing and might mean that the building would soon be beyond economic repair.

3. How much money will it cost?

While there have been two more elaborate proposals, the simpler project has a total of £3.6million currently, which includes the four parts of the project – restoration of St Mary's House, Churchyard, and improvements to heating and the west end of the church. (NB With more offers of professional and volunteer help from within our own community, it is possible that this total could be reduced).

4. How long will it take? Is there somewhere a time-line for the project? Have we planning permission?

While it is hoped that the last hurdle of planning permission for SMH from East Suffolk Council will be cleared very soon, there are two bodies involved, as for changes to the church itself, permission is sought and granted by the DAC (Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches) Already there has been much consultation of existing hirers and users, together with the more technical work of professionals and experts. As announced in church at the beginning of March the major application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund met the deadline for submission and a decision should be announced in June. A successful outcome would mean that we would be allowed to enter the Development Phase of the project, in which the proposed new activities would be trialled and existing ones enhanced, then in June 2026 we would apply to enter the Delivery Phase, which would last for up to two years.

5. Why are we creating a facility for the community when there are others in the town?

From those first consultations in the early days, there was always the intention of catering for the needs of more people. This has been echoed over the years in our Parish Plan, as we have sought to meet our own obligations and the four Diocesan Challenges of Growing in God. St Mary's House is already used by a cross section of the community. Partly that is for historical reasons, partly because of the facilities, partly because of its position on Market Hill, partly because of the size of the spaces, and partly because of its association with the church. We have needed in our grant applications to describe present and intended use, and there is no doubt that the present use of SMH will be enhanced, even

while other spaces are created, as research suggests strongly that our facilities will complement other local venues.

6. Why can't we start work on the west end of the church now with the Harper legacy and sell St Mary's House?

Two reasons. Firstly, the criteria for a National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) bid are best met if the bid is for a project that is associated with both the church and St Mary's House, rooted in community needs and heritage. The rationale for this is complex, but the clue is in the name of the fund.

Secondly, if the NLHF and other grant applications were to be unsuccessful, then the PCC would have to rethink the future of St Mary's House, which would have implications for the design of the west-end. To sell SMH would leave us without a multi-purpose meetings and activities home in its own right and to complement the worship and events in church.

7. What happens if the NLHF turns us down?

We will remain positive. The bid (Expression of Interest) passed the first hurdle last year. It is not unusual for bids to be turned down at the first application with a request for further information and an encouragement to re-submit. The application for the (second) Development Phase met the deadline.

8. What other grants might we receive?

Many other grant-making bodies might give us money for the project, or some element of it. We have refined a group to approach and are making applications in parallel to the NLHF bid; documents used to support that will be used or adapted.

9. Why did the heating stop working? Wasn't it being properly maintained and serviced? How long will it take to replace? What are the decisions that need to be made?

The answers here are complex. However, please be assured that the PCC and its predecessors have always ensured that all maintenance, health and safety checks etc are kept up to date. This includes the servicing of the boiler. In the case of the boiler, it was 'old-age' and unhelpfully was judged not fit to use at the coldest time of the year. The churchwardens and other members of the PCC are working hard, so that replacement heating system can be installed as soon as possible.

10. What contribution are the diocese making to either of the projects or the heating?

There are no Diocesan funds available for any aspect of our Buildings Project Appeal, but there are grants available for advancing our (separate) plans for a new (eco-friendly) heating system, as a matter of urgency. The Rector, David Sharples and Simon Morris are consulting with the Diocesan Net-Zero Carbon Officer on two fronts:

- 1) the recommended way forward for a Church of our size and history and
- 2) on the assurance of special funds available – for which we are grateful for Nick Cottam's support and our 'Friends' to help us.

11. How can I help, and I have further questions?

Probably in ways that you may not recognise. Help is needed to complete applications for grants, but if you feel that this isn't for you, you might consider taking on some other voluntary role that would release others to make those applications. With more offers of professional and volunteer help from within our own community, it is likely the anticipated total of the project could be reduced.

There are many, varied (and possibly unknown) opportunities: If you would like to explore them, or have further questions then please do not hesitate to talk to anybody on the Building Oversight Group below:

Michelle Bullard, Stephen Cole (Chair), Patricia Ford, Neil Logan Green, Veronica Howe, Andrew Pickthorn, Fr Nigel, David Sharples, Katharine Turner