

St Margaret's Thorpe Market – options for the future

This document presents some different scenarios for the future of Thorpe Market Church as we recover from the covid-pandemic. This is intended to help you understand what the options are, and to help you give your own views in the survey form. You can fill in a paper version of the survey and put it in the box at the back of the church, or you can complete it online via the church's website or Facebook page.



The future of any organisation is in people, and that is particularly the case for a parish church. People attend events and services, people volunteer to staff those events and services, people take on roles organising and leading those events and services. But it is important that there are people doing all three things!

St Margaret's has usually been pretty good at drawing an audience; but in recent years has depended increasingly on fewer people to staff and organise events, most of whom come in from outside the village. If St Margaret's is going to recover and thrive after the pandemic, it is really important that some new people come forward to help out; if they are Thorpe Market residents, all the better.

Without some new people coming on board, the alternative could be bleak and shouldn't be downplayed. Closing a parish church is a long-winded and uncertain process, and wouldn't be something Thorpe Market could be proud of. So it is important that everyone understands the various options available for the future of St Margaret's. We've included brief case studies of how each option is already working in other places so you can understand what each option would look like at St Margaret's.

Option 1 Revitalising the Parochial Church Council

A PCC is a statutory body, a bit like a parish council for the church. It is a group of people who care for and run the church, both the services that take place in the church and the community and cultural activities.

The PCC at Thorpe Market is currently very small with just 3 members. Recent changes in the rules governing PCC membership mean it is now possible for anyone over the age of 16 to become a member of the PCC. Election of members is by members of the church's electoral role or, for the Churchwardens, by all residents of the village. The next opportunity for elections to the PCC will be at St Margaret's Annual Parish Church Meeting on Friday 28th May at 6.30pm. This meeting will be held in the church, or in the churchyard, depending on the Covid restrictions still in force at that time.

The best case study to show how this option could work is St Margaret's itself, as things were 20 years ago. Back in the 1990s the church was in a situation similar to now, with a small PCC and few activities taking place in the church. Following a consultation with the village in 1998 some keen individuals came forward who saw the potential in the building and embarked on a series of projects to provide better facilities at St Margaret's. Over the early years of the 21st century the PCC fundraised and achieved the following projects:

- a. The roof and rainwater disposal system was replaced and should be good for another century;
- b. The west window was re-leaded (the others having been done in the 1980s);
- c. The two Georgian screens were conserved and the eastern screen was strengthened. Attached choir stalls were removed to provide space for putting up the stage;
- d. A small extension was put on the back of the church to house a vestry and WC, enabling the old vestry to become a kitchen;
- e. The church carpark has been resurfaced and equipped with recycling bins, which bring in a small income for the church;
- f. The church now has a sound system, a large projection screen, piano, electric organ, a set of professional exhibition screens and a demountable stage system for stage performances.



Back in the '90s the team of volunteers at the church was much larger, all with different interests and skills sets to bring to the organisation, and

this was reflected in the wide range of activities that began to happen in the church, including children's groups, a community choir, music recitals, art and craft exhibitions and, of course Snowdrop Sundays. As a result, the church has historically always run a small surplus on its running costs.

Looking to the future, there is more the PCC could do now to make St Margaret's an even better venue for community events, if the PCC once again had the right members on board to help it happen.

For example, more of the floor could be cleared of pews to create open space. A better heating system could be installed to make the space warmer in the winter. The equipment in the kitchen could be improved to assist with serving meals. Or, the church building could remain as it is while better use is made of its current facilities, including the stage, the art stands, and the cinema equipment.

Revitalising the PCC is the simplest and most obvious way of re-awakening St Margaret's after the pandemic is over. If you feel this is the best solution, please select this option on the survey form.

Option 2 - Friends Group or Building Trust

In some villages a separate group of people have come forward to form a Church Friends or Church Action Group. These are people who do not wish to become full members of the PCC, but who want to assist with running the church in various ways, such as:

- Maintenance, cleaning, gardening
- Organising events
- Promoting events
- Staffing events

With a separate group of people taking on these roles, it doesn't matter so much if the PCC remains a small body which is solely

responsible for arranging services and carrying out the PCC's governance role.

There are groups like this operating all over the country, doing very different things in different places – according to the needs of their community. In some places these groups operate as a simple sub-committee, while in other places they are constituted as independent charitable trusts.

Haveringland Church Action Group



Haveringland is a small village near Aylsham. St Peter's church is part of the large Aylsham group of churches. The attendance at regular services had fallen to very small numbers, and the church wasn't used beyond the Sunday services, so the vicar and

PCC approached their local community, looking for ideas.

The result of this consultation was a new group, who called themselves the *Haveringland Church Action Group*. This is a group of people with a variety of skills and enthusiasm, who have come together to put St Peter's back at the heart of their local community.

The Church Action Group now arranges a series of events through the year, focussing on locally significant themes, including:



- “Forties in the Fields” is an annual event exploring links to Swannington Airfield in WWII.
- A summer walk around the footpaths in the parish
- A *Cake and Rake* day, undertaking nature conservation works in the churchyard
- A *Heritage Open Days* event each September

Haveringland Church Action Group is an informal group of people who manage event and maintenance of the church and churchyard. They operate as a sub-committee of the Parochial Church Council and therefore do not need to register as a charity, and do not have to take on formal trustee responsibilities.

The PCC continues to arrange services, but instead of regular traditional Sunday morning services, they concentrate on occasional “festival” services of more interest to the wider community, such as Remembrance, Christmas Carols, Harvest Festival and Mothering Sunday. <https://haveringland.wordpress.com/st-peters-church-haveringland/haveringland-church-action-group/>

Village Hall at St John's Stadhampton



Back in 2008 the community at Stadhampton in Oxfordshire wanted to explore ways of improving their community facilities. Having explored a number of options, it was agreed with the PCC that the parish church would

become the dual-purpose “Village Hall at St John’s”.

Like Haveringland, the Village Hall Committee at Stadhampton also operates as a sub-committee of the PCC. In this case they have carried out significant works to the church building, including taking out the pews, installing new heating, WCs and kitchen facilities.

Since the church/hall re-opened, a number of new groups have formed in the village to use the facilities, including:

- A new weekly Parents and Toddler Group
- A new monthly Lunch Club for Older People
- Three new weekly Pilates Classes
- Two new Youth Groups (for different age groups)
- A new monthly Film Club
- A new monthly Book Club
- The monthly Parish Council meetings have also moved into the new hall

<http://www.stadhampton.org/community/stadhampton-parish-council-15080/village-hall/>

Pub Swainswick

The vicar's husband at this church near Bath is a big fan of craft ales. So much so that he set-up a monthly "pub" in the church. This is held with the blessing of the PCC, but is staffed by a rota of volunteers drawn from the local community – a beer-focused friends group if you like!

Pub Swainswick has always been primarily a social event, and not seeking to make a large profit. It supports the local microbrewery and has built up a long mailing list of occasional attendees, who come together for the annual "Beerfest" fundraiser.



Since the start of the pub, c £9,500 has been raised for the church through the pubs and Beer Festivals. The PCC has kept this money ring-fenced to spend on opening up the church for community use and has recently used it to part fund the removal of some of the nave pews which will make the space much bigger and more flexible for a variety of

There are many other examples of effective church friends groups all over the country. If you feel this is the best solution for St Margaret's, please select this option on the survey form. uses. <https://www.swainswickchurch.org.uk/whats-on/>



St Kyneburgha Building Preservation Trust

This Trust is an independent secular body which works in partnership with the Parochial Church Council (PCC). Whilst the PCC has to work very hard to raise funds for the running of the parish, the St. Kyneburgha Building Preservation Trust (“The Trust”), is quite separate from the PCC, but ensures that the building and surrounds are enhanced and well maintained. There are currently seven Trustees who have a legal

responsibility to ensure that the Trust tackles appropriate projects and that the money is spent wisely.

The Trust and its Committee:

- Raises money
- Decides which projects to fund
- Manages projects
- Offers historical context and education

Alongside the trust, the PCC continues to arrange regular Sunday and other services.

<http://www.castorchurchtrust.co.uk/>

In some places where the church has fallen out of use for services, the building has been officially closed and a Trust has taken over total responsibility for the building.

St John the Baptist Plumpton Heritage Trust



When the church at Plumpton was closed in 1995, the Diocese of Peterborough advertised the building to be converted into a house. Instead, a group of local people formed the St John the Baptist Plumpton

Heritage Trust, which now owns the building.

The building is very small and not suited to hosting large events. Instead, the trustees arrange for four services in the church each year, at Easter, Harvest, Christmas and the church's patronal festival. They invite visiting choirs to come and sing at these services and get a good turnout. The trustees raise all the money they need to maintain the building from these four services.

Other church trusts

We should also mention other bodies, like the Norfolk Churches Trust, the Norwich Diocesan Churches Trust and the Churches Conservation Trust. These are larger organisations that look after many redundant church buildings. However, due to high demand and funding constraints it is very unlikely that one of these larger bodies would take on managing St Margaret's. If there is to be a trust with oversight of the church building, it would have to be one organised and staffed locally.

A church buildings trust has a more formal and independent role in the management of the church than a friends group, but also has to

be registered as a separate charity and has to find people willing to serve as trustees. If you feel this is the best solution for St Margaret's, please select this option on the survey form.

Other Options

If no-one can be found to care for the church at Thorpe Market, its future is handed over to the Diocese of Norwich and the Church Commissioners. We have tried to be as honest and objective as possible in describing this option – we will stick to the facts.

When a church is no longer required for worship use, it is closed and assessed for “re-purposing”, or more specifically in our context, for conversion to a private dwelling, since there are few other uses which would be financially viable in a village location.

Over the past few decades there are many examples of rural church buildings which have been converted into housing, but also some examples where the cost of conversion has been too high, making the church unsaleable and leading to dereliction and eventual demolition, even of a listed building.

When a church is sold for a new use, its churchyard is normally assessed for closure at the same time, and will often be sold with the church to provide private ancillary space, leaving the parish council responsible for providing new burial space.

St Mary the Virgin Pattiswick

This former church in Essex, which is listed at Grade II* like Thorpe Market Church, fell out of use in the 1990s. At that time no trust was able to take it on and therefore the Diocese of Chelmsford and the Church Commissioners sought alternative uses for the building. In a rural setting the only viable option was a residential conversion



St Andrew Mickfield

A screenshot of a real estate listing for St Andrew Mickfield church in Suffolk. The listing is titled "Mickfield, Stowmarket, Suffolk (Sold) Guide Price: £400,000" and describes it as a "Partially converted former Church, 3 Bedroom(s), 1 Bathroom(s)". The main image shows the exterior of the church, a stone building with a tall tower and a red-tiled roof. Below the main image is a row of smaller thumbnail images showing the interior of the converted church, including a living room, a dining room, and a kitchen.

The Grade I listed church at Mickfield in Suffolk fell into disuse in the 1970s. Around the time of the Millennium, the Anglia Church Trust acquired the building with the hope of restoring it to worship use, but in the end the church was sold to be a house.

St Mary Magdalene Guyhirn

This Grade II listed church was closed in 2009. Despite planning permission being granted for its conversion to housing, and repeated attempts to sell it for conversion on the open market, it has failed to find a buyer because the cost of conversion is too great - and now demolition appears to be the most likely future for this building.



These are our basic options for what might happen to St Margaret's, Thorpe Market post-Covid:

- 1. Revitalize the existing local parochial church council**
- 2. A Friends or Action Group is formed to help maintain and use the building in partnership with the PCC**
- 3. The church is closed and re-purposed (if possible)**

We look forward to hearing people's views. We would encourage you to fill in the survey form, but if you wish to make individual responses via email, please do so to: martin.castle@me.com

So...what's involved in being involved?

What it costs to run the church – about £8k a year

The condition of the building – generally very good, no major repairs needed

What's the commitment? – whatever people can offer. Many hands make light work.

What skills are needed? – a range of skills are needed, and that's why a range of people are needed; these skills aren't often found in one person:

- Someone who's good at paperwork – there isn't a lot of paperwork, but someone needs to keep on top of responding to enquiries, occasional form filling for the diocese, keeping minutes and other records.
- Someone who likes social media and modern communications – keeping in touch with people via the mailing list or via the church's followers on facebook, and keeping the website updated.
- Someone who's good at figures – the church accounts aren't complex, but someone needs to keep a simple book of the church's payments and receipts, and also do the paying in at the bank.
- Someone who's good with organising – getting the best out of a group of volunteers needs organisation, someone who can arrange rotas and make sure people know what they need to do; that makes life easier for everyone.
- Someone who can clear a drain or change a bulb – managing an old building needs some basic practical skills.

Snowdrop Sundays usually raise about half the running costs for the year, but won't happen again unless we can find people to organise and run it. The rest of the church's income mainly comes from other events, the recycling bins and book sales.

The church's facilities offer a blank canvas for a variety of events:

- Village cinema (CCLI licence)
- Theatrical performance
- Musical performance
- Meeting and rehearsal space
- Social events
- Markets and fairs
- Beer festival
- Work space
- Your ideas?

People with ideas are really important, but so are people with the skills and focus to make those ideas come to life...

Thank you for taking the time to review the options for the future of Thorpe Market Church. Please now take a few minutes more to fill in our survey so your views can be heard. See

www.thorpemarket.org.uk or www.facebook.com/Thorpe-Market-Church-1829348734033845