

# *'Fling wide the gates'!*

Re-Ordering project for  
St Mary the Virgin Parish Church, Fen Ditton

Summer 2025



# Backstory...



The Church Hall was sold in 2019.

The charitable objects of the Church Hall Trust will be served if...

...the funds generated from the sale are used to re-order the Church to provide space for community use in addition to worship.

# Timeline – so far....

A Re-Ordering Group (accountable to the PCC) was established and held its first formal meeting in **July 2023**.

In **October 2024**, the Re-Ordering Group presented some initial ideas to the Church congregation. These were also shared on a series of display boards for wider reflection, discussion and comment.

In **January 2025**, the PCC invited three architectural practices to respond to the brief we had prepared for 'Fling Wide the Gates'.

In **February 2025**, **Freeland Rees Roberts (FRR)** – a Cambridge-based architectural practice – was commissioned to work with us.

In **June 2025**, we received the findings from FRR's feasibility study – and some initial drawings – which we are now able to share...

## Re-ordering Group:

- Rev Canon Nick Moir (Chair)
- Rev Sharon Byrne
- Jackie and Ray Ambrose
- Mike Daniels
- Susannah Ticciati
- Sophie Hyde
- Christine Doel
- David Yandell

# Our Vision

## Our Vision

*Whilst respecting the integrity and history of a beautiful medieval building, the ambition is to ‘**fling wide the gates**’ and to make the Church building more **open and welcoming**, encouraging **more and different people** to make use of it...*

*It will function as a **vibrant and accessible ‘hub’** for the **parish** in a **spiritual sense** whilst also providing a focal point for the whole **community** across Fen Ditton, East Barnwell and Marleigh more broadly.*

# What do we want to achieve?

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## Primary outcomes:

- a **prayerful space** where everyone (particularly visitors) can explore and deepen their faith and spiritual journey
- a **stronger community** which is both more diverse and more coherent, with the Church at its core – consistent with the changing demography of the parish
- greater **use of the Church building** at the heart of the parish, including as a ‘community space’

## Secondary outcomes:

- improved **environmental performance** of the Church building
- broader base of people who might ‘**share the load**’
- greater **resilience** in relation to Church finances

# What is the project?

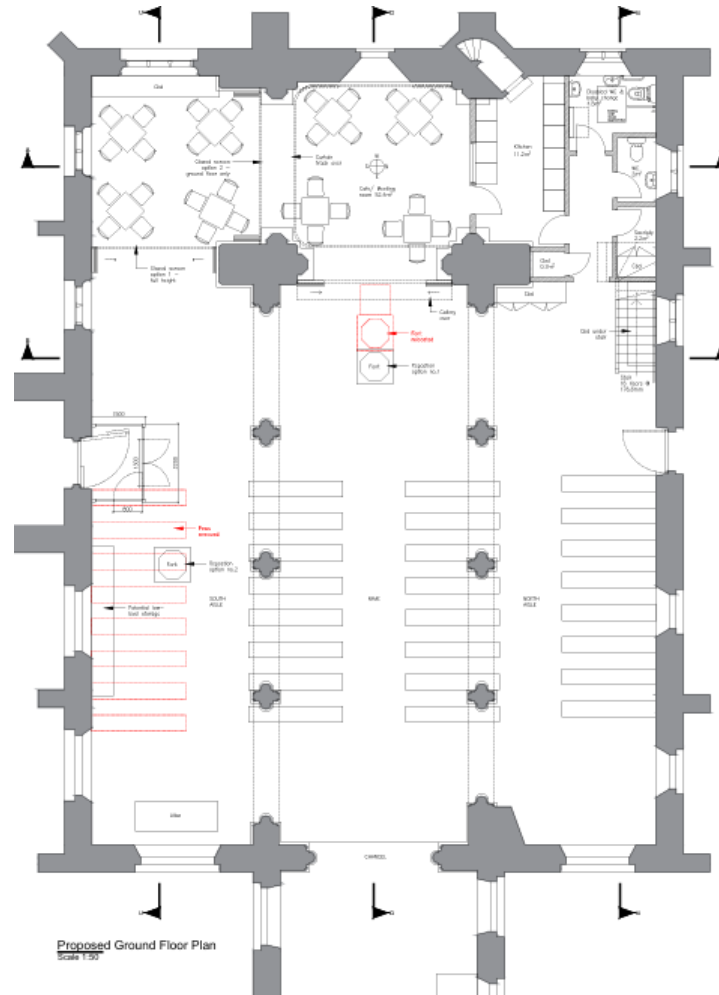
## Refreshment and community space for the parish

There are three main strands:

1. The back of the Church will be re-ordered with enhanced provision for basic hospitality (with a kitchen and two toilets) whilst also providing a vestry, facilities for flower arranging, and all the other requirements of a functioning Church. It will be configured in a way that works flexibly for both small groups and larger gatherings. Core to this will be the construction of a bell ringing gallery and vestry on a new first floor, and an enclosed space on the ground floor.
2. Access to the building will be enhanced – with both an improved path (through the Churchyard) and a new inner porch/draught lobby.
3. The pews will be removed from the south aisle only, creating a flexible space (n.b. all other pews will remain *in situ*)

**In the pages that follow, we present some of Freeland Rees Roberts' drawings and plans. These are taken from the full feasibility study (which was prepared for the PCC and Re-Ordering Group). We attempt to provide some commentary and brief explanations where we think they are needed.**

# Proposed Ground Floor Plan



(Credit: Freeland Rees Roberts)

# Proposed Ground Floor Plan – with notes

**Enclosed space at the west end** – It will be light and bright, demarcated by glass bifold doors (which can be open or shut), and capable of being heated independently. It will accommodate up to 60 people – depending on furniture layout.

**Font** – to be moved – either to its original position (near the front door) or further into the main nave. *[to be discussed]*

**Inner porch / draught lobby** – with glass inner doors allowing the heavy wooden door to be left open and providing a less intimidating entrance to the Church.

**South aisle** – pews to be removed (and replaced by chairs), and some more storage space to be created.

**Storage space** – under the window

**Kitchen** – with fridge, dishwasher, cooker, etc.

**Toilet 1** – with wheelchair access. It will also have a sink/cupboard which can be used for flower arranging purposes.

**Toilet 2**

**Sacristy** – with space for photocopier/safe.

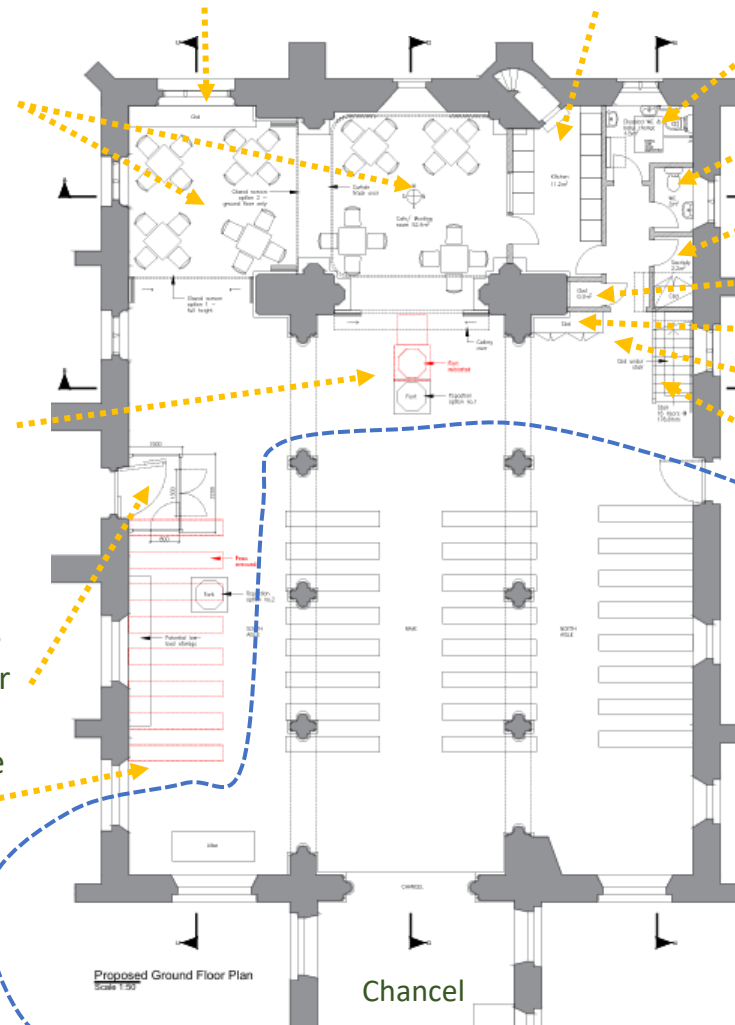
**PA console**

**Storage** – for choir robes.

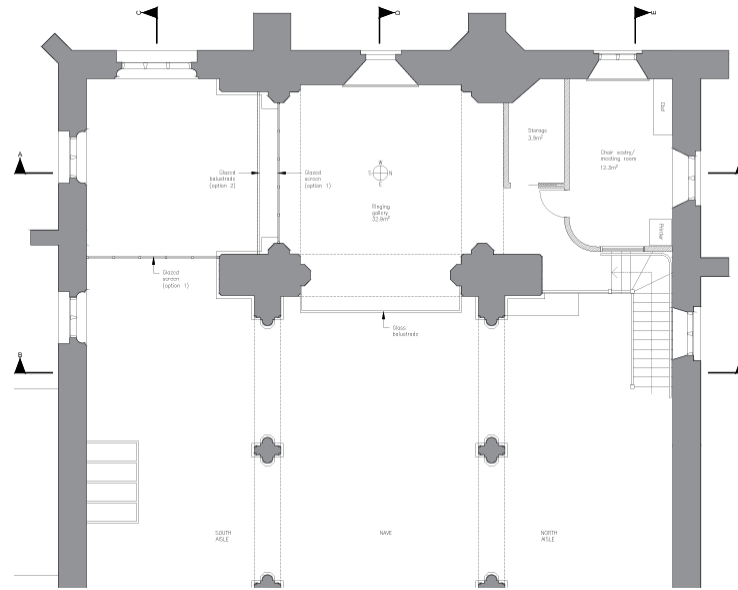
**'De-cluttered' area**

**Stairs** – to first floor, with under-stairs storage.

*Areas in the Church that will be unchanged – chancel, north aisle, central aisle, north door, etc.*

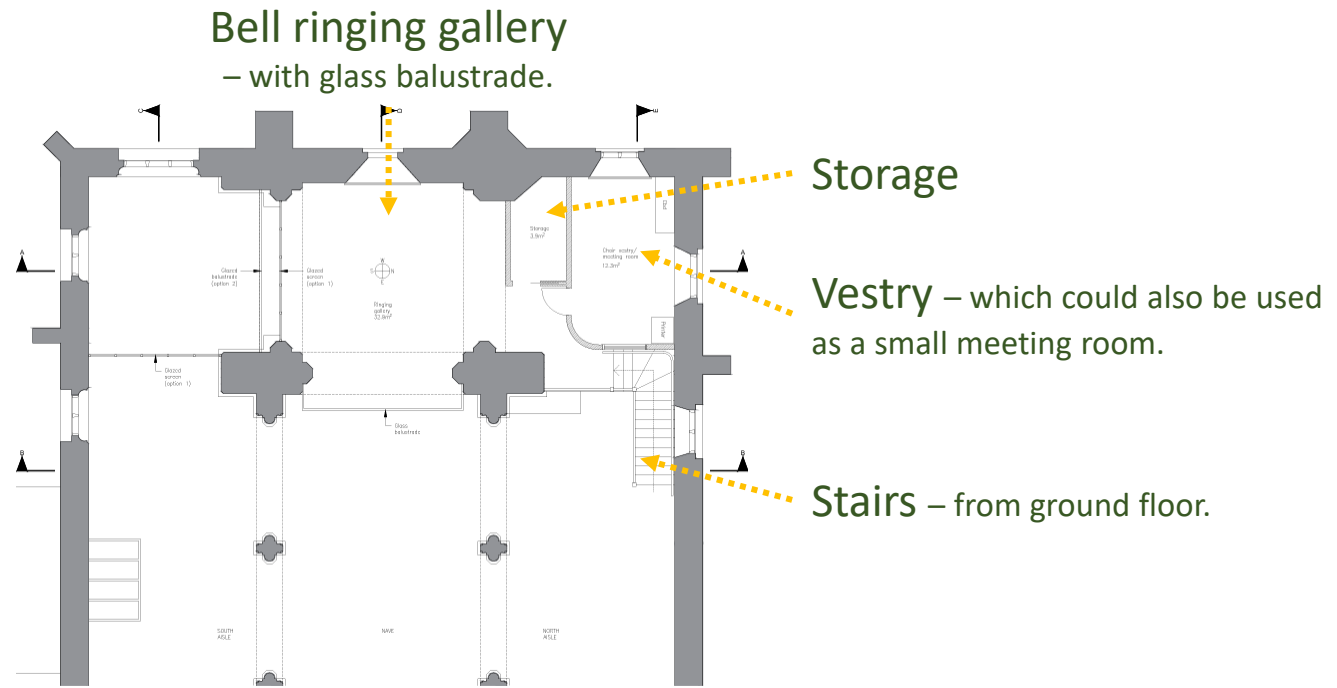


# Proposed First Floor Plan



(Credit: Freeland Rees Roberts)

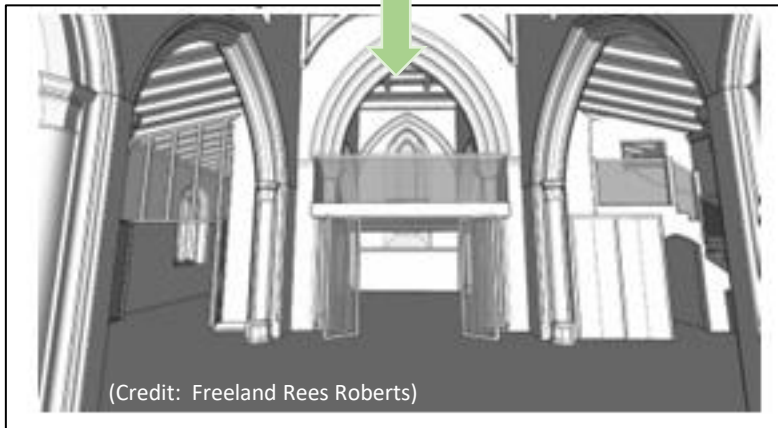
# Proposed First Floor Plan – with notes



(Credit: Freeland Rees Roberts)

# What it might look like (1/2)

1: View from the nave looking to the west (i.e. to the back of the Church) – with the new bell ringing gallery on the first floor.



2: View from the front door looking to the north west – with the stairs to the new first floor.



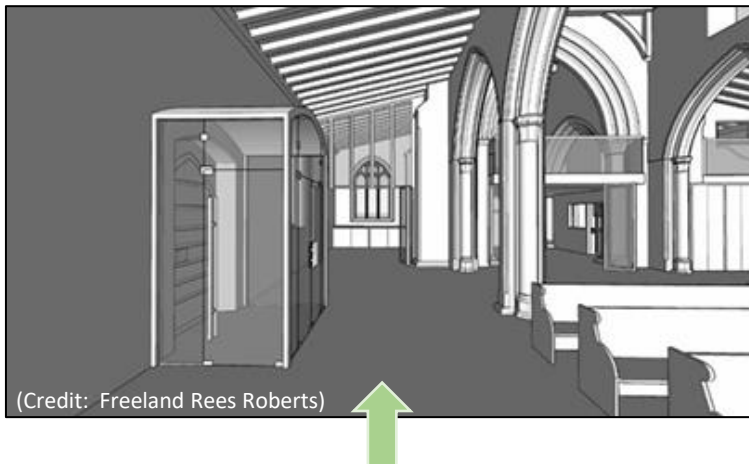
3: View from the south west (current coffee area) towards the new kitchen (with the new bell ringing gallery on the first floor). This area can be completely enclosed (and heated) or entirely open – and it will be well connected to the rest of the Church.



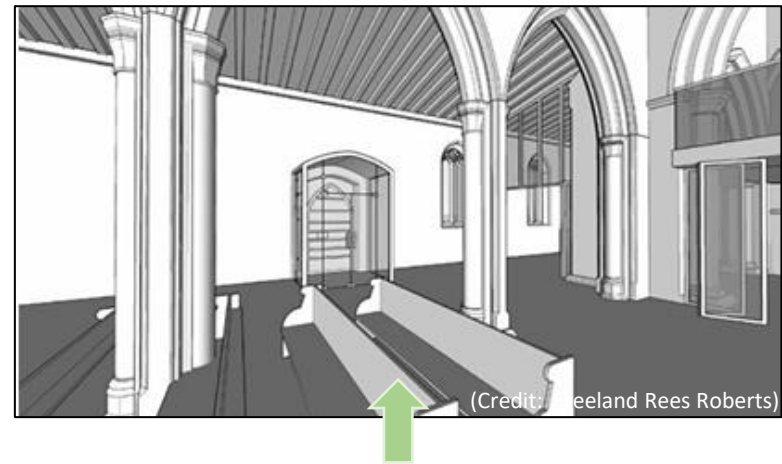
# What it might look like (2/2)



4: View from the north aisle – showing the new stairs and also the archway (which will lead to the toilets on the right and the kitchen on the left).

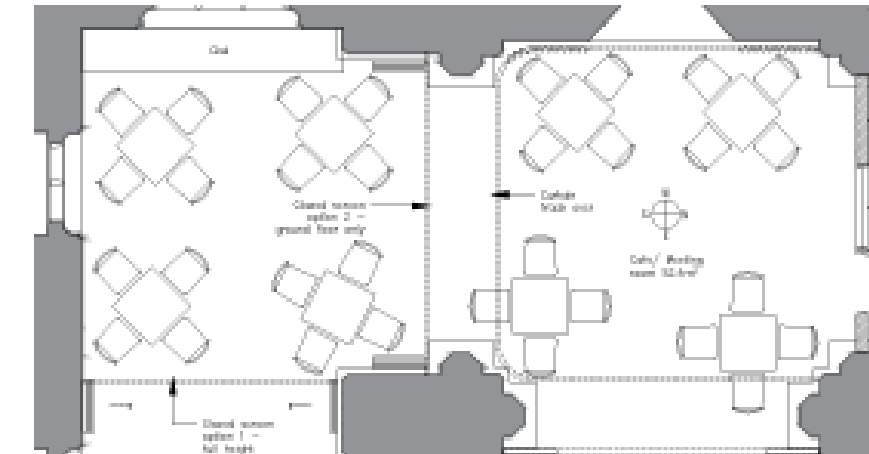


5: New inner porch/draught lobby – from the south aisle.



6: New inner porch/draught lobby – from the north aisle (also showing the ringing gallery on the first floor).

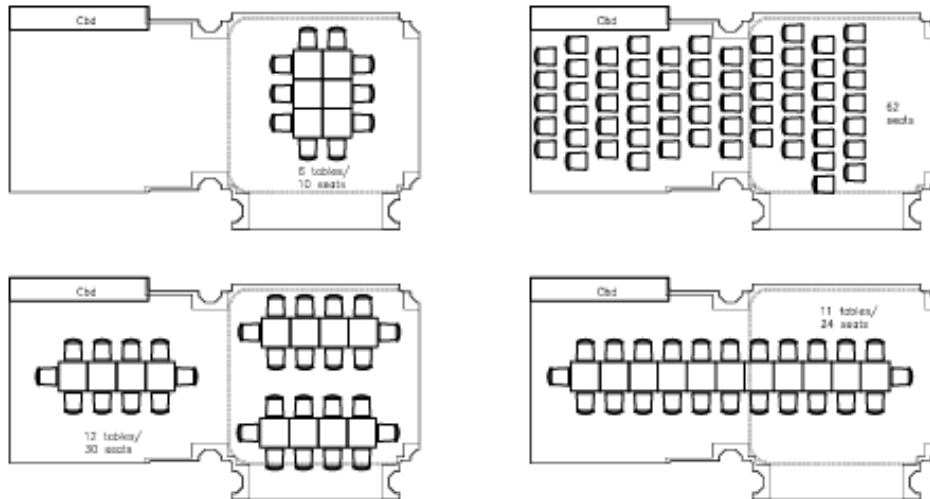
# Uses of the new 'enclosed space'



The new 'enclosed space' at the west end of the Church (under the bell ringing gallery and extending to the south side of the Church) could potentially accommodate up to 62 people (sitting in rows).

Sometimes we might want to sit around tables – which will mean fewer people.

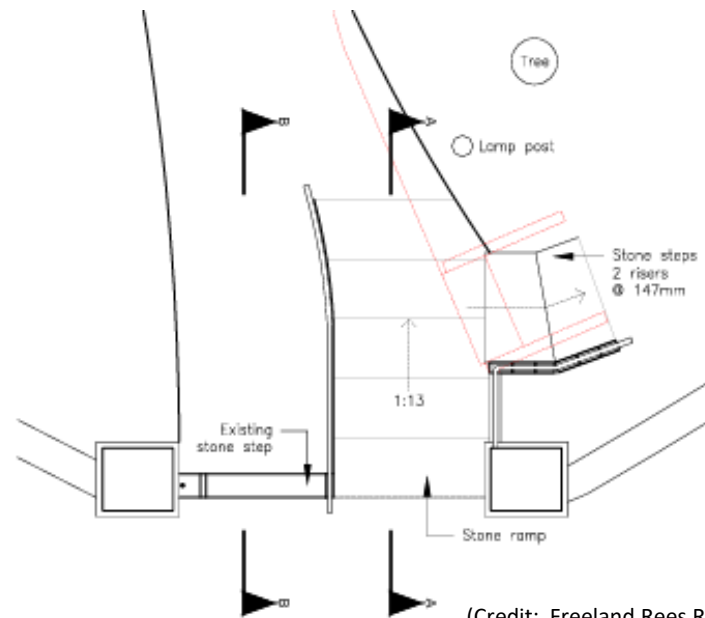
The key point is that it should be a genuinely flexible space that ought to be capable of being used in different ways by different groups. It will also have access to a kitchen (and two toilets).



(Credit: Freeland Rees Roberts)

# The path

The current path has a step which is considerably deeper on the left than the right (as the road slopes). This is quite dangerous, especially in the dark...



The proposal is to create a 'step-free' ramp on the right hand side, leaving stepped access on the left (close to the big trees). A handrail will separate the two.

# The other major issue: Heating

We are still thinking hard about options for heating – balancing long term and short term considerations.

In theory, solar panels and heat pumps would be good, BUT:

- the roof will need to be replaced in a few years, and that may be the moment to install solar panels
- the way in which we will use the enclosed space (i.e. occasionally) may not sit straightforwardly with the attributes of heat pumps (which lend themselves to continuous use)
- the solution for the enclosed space needs to be considered alongside heating plans for the rest of the Church.

# Next steps and future timeline....

We want to use **summer 2025** for conversation and consultation – with the congregation, wider potential users across the parish, and (informally) with the relevant authorities (in particular the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC)).

We will also get quotes for the glazing work (which we consider to be a high cost element of the scheme).

In **autumn 2025**, we hope to:

- make formal applications to the DAC and also to the Local Planning Authority (South Cambridgeshire District Council) for the external works
- explore options for funding applications
- advance our thinking with regard to heating.

We hope to start the construction process in **winter/spring 2026**.

Our architect believes the project could be delivered in about six months (so if all goes well it could be complete by **summer/autumn 2026**).

# Your feedback

We would welcome any comments on the proposed scheme over July and August, 2025. The questions opposite are important – but we would value any and all feedback.

Please talk to anyone in the Re-Ordering Group...

...or send any written comments to Nick.

[nick.moir@3parishes.org](mailto:nick.moir@3parishes.org)

- What do you like about the plans?
- Would they meet the needs of potential community users?
- Would they work for churchwardens, flower arrangers, bellringers, choir, cleaners, clergy...?
- How could the plans be improved?
- There are options in relation to the location of the font... what is your preference?
- Are we right to consider replacing pews with chairs in the south aisle?
- Will the plans help to deliver our overall vision?



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