

John Walker's Notes for the Address at Open Meeting

St Thomas' Stanningley; 31/03/2022 at 7.30pm

1. Preamble

St Thomas' is steeped in local history and its Stanningley families have connections through the generations.

The building has unique architectural quality and, together with its churchyard, is an oasis of green in this part of Stanningley.

But, the church members are few in number, are increasingly elderly and the church is used for only for about 1.5 hours most weeks.

Maintenance costs fall on these few

Nobody is talking about redevelopment but clearly maintenance will become an increasing struggle.

We believe that there are many in the Stanningley community who, although they do not "come to church", value it for its setting, quality, its family connection and local heritage.

Many of you present will be in that category and we would like to ask your help – we are not having a collection or seeking donations; we ask for help with routine maintenance, help with fundraising events and social events and help us promote the heritage aspect of the building through Heritage Open Days booked for 10 September.

That's the short answer to our problems but it even then, St Thomas' will not be sustainable into the future.

The answer lies in using the building much more.

It seems to us that there is potential for increased use of this wonderful building in a beautiful setting, by much wider section of the community, for a variety of activities.

We think but we don't know.

How do we find out? Public meetings, surveys, publicity come to mind – **we need your help** on this – for ideas and participation in this PUBLIC CONSULTATION

If there is a demand, what form would it take, concerts, meetings, exhibitions, clubs, keep fit, drop-ins, children's parties – **we need help to find out.**

What changes would have to be made to the building – accessibility to from and within, pews don't fit well with wheelchairs and prams, but they do fit with concerts and talks, but not for exhibitions. **We need help to identify changes**

A fully accessible toilet on site is a must these days – is a kitchenette or kitchen needed and what about an effective heating system and a lick of paint?

We need you help in the definition and design stage.

What will it cost, probably £100k+

Getting this sort of money and quickly is beyond us and we are not asking you to raise it;

We are asking your help in the consultation process I have just described because if there is a community demand, **grants are easier (but not easy) to obtain for churches with extensive, even predominant use for secular activity.** It demonstrates the building's value to the community.

Nearly forgot. We would need permission from the church of England and they would consult with Heritage England – leave that to us; we are confident it would be given, again, value to the community would be a persuader.

2. Sounds simple, but wait

St Thomas' is built on clay soil, with shallow foundations and it has a heavy roof.

If clay gets wet, dries out again, gets wet, dries out etc it shrinks and expands so leads to movement in the foundations.

It then becomes easier for the roof to push out the top of the walls. As the walls move outward at the top the mortar of roof joints crack and the roof leaks; the base of the wall also pinch the gully pots at the bottom and the pots break, so saturating the clay in wet weather.

The tie bars above, together with repairs to the roof and the drains have fixed this so you are quite safe.

But, the chancel wall, behind me, remains weakened and requires strengthening before or at the same time as we re-order (start to re-model the inside of the church).

Again, getting hold of the £75k+ to fix this is not easy without grants and no one will give grants for a place used by only 25 folks for only 1.5 hours a week.

So we come full circle. We need to bring about extensive use of the building by the community. A building once again valued by the community.

3. We have a programme

It is ambitious but doable, with your help.

We begin now, in partnership with you, to consult with the residents of Stanningley, to find out what demand there is, for what and what changes would be needed.

By this time next year, we will have an agreed design and a realistic idea of cost.

In parallel, we apply for grants for get the Chancel Arch fixed, this being more achievable as the community involvement takes place.

By this time next year a contractor will have been appointed to do the strengthening work.

From this time next year, we start to get grants for the reordering and in a position by 2024 to commence work to remodel the interior.

Completion summer/Autumn 2024.

4. You will by now have got my message – we need your help.

Of course, individual volunteer help is always most welcome, but some sort of organisation is needed to play a significant part of a consultation exercise, or to organise a sponsored walk or table top sale.

Much weight is added to a grant application if it can be noted that a project is being developed in partnership with the community.

In similar situations, two churches, to my knowledge, have been supported by a Friends Organisation.

1. The Church of St Edmunds in Sedgefield. In 2000, Friends of St Edmunds was established by members of the community who valued the heritage of the church. It is a registered charity.
2. Closer to home, in 2005, Friends of St Johns, Farsley was set up by those who valued the church, using the St Edmunds model.

In both these cases, Friends have been effective in raising profile and funds, whilst at the same time enjoying regular Friends social events.

At this point can I introduce Jim Humphries who has kindly offered to try to answer any questions on his hand-on experience as a committee member of Friends of St Johns for many years.

A key feature of both Friends organisations is that their objectives are to conserve the fabric and churchyard of their respective churches, and **their constitutions ensure that they are not controlled by the church.**

They are run by a committee elected by members and an annual meeting.

The committee's Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer cannot be a member of the Church Council

Only one ordinary member of the Committee can be a Church Councillor.

They have a written constitution which meets the requirements of the Charity Commission. A copy of the Constitution would be made available to you should you decide in principle to set up a Friends organisation.

5. In summary then

St Thomas and its churchyard has lots of local heritage, family history interest, has lots of potential space for regular use by wide sections of the Stanningley community, and the space is not fully booked – just the opposite

The burden of maintenance falls on a few and it is not sustainable –

There is a real need to make use of the space opportunity offered.

If we demonstrate community participation from the outset in our plans for re-ordering and repair, we will have an enhanced chance of getting grants to meet the substantial cost.

With the help of a Friends of St Thomas organisation,

we can meet the target of getting the strengthening work done within a year,

get the consultation, re-ordering definition and approved by the same time,

and the re-ordered building would be open for business two years from now.

6. I know I'm sticking my neck out but I believe it can be done.

Perhaps it's time now for a break for tea or coffee.

Please ask Richard, Jim or me any questions you may have.

We will then briefly reconvene and take show of hands to see whether there is support for setting of Friends of St Thomas

If you decide to set up, the first step would be to agree a date to meet amongst yourselves to:

Elect an Interim Committee to run things until your first Annual General Meeting,

Agree an Interim Constitution

Appoint Interim Officers; Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer

I would come along to help and also, with your agreement, act as the initial Church Council representative.

You can meet here in the church during next week, except Wednesday morning. I will be happy to send the draft initial constitution and other material to you by email.

7. Postscript

The show of hands indicated support to set up Friends. The first meeting was arranged for Tuesday 5 April at 7.30pm, at St Thomas'

