



*St Matthew's aims to be an Acts 2 Church, valuing Awe, Unity, Generosity, Hospitality and Growth.*

# St Matthew's Church Walsall



## Re-ordering Project 2010

## Submission Document

**Architects: Messrs Arroll & Snell Ltd,**

**Contact: Church Office 626039**

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Reordering Steering Group membership:-

- The Reverend Colin Gibson, Rector;
- Mr Graham Hird, Mr Steve Parker and Mrs Helen Robinson, Church Wardens;
- Mr David Tonks, Church Warden emeritus;
- Mrs Enid Price-Jones, Mrs Judith Ridgway, Mrs Debbie Smith-Hocknull

We are very grateful indeed to the Ven Chris Liley for his input into the reordering process in helping us to articulate our vision and our needs.

To be approved by St Matthew's District Church Council at the Annual General Meeting 24 April 2010

## Statement of Significance

### *Part I - St Matthew's in its urban environment*

St Matthew's is the ancient parish church for the Borough of Walsall. It has a dominating presence in the townscape, thanks to its hilltop situation and splendid spire, and is visible from a distance of many miles. It is by far the oldest building in Walsall with parts thought to date from around 1150AD. It is therefore a highly significant element in the Borough's built heritage. As such it appears on Walsall's road signage and even on Council letterheads as a symbol of the town. It also appears in many historic prints and images of Walsall.

St Matthew's has various strong links with the community. It is the venue for the Civic Service held annually to celebrate the appointment of each year's new mayor. It has three Parish schools, Blue Coat Infants, Juniors and Comprehensive who all use the building regularly: indeed the Comprehensive holds its assemblies here every Friday. Several other schools use St Matthew's for Carol Services. Other organisations such as Scouts, Guides, Rotary, Walsall Choral Society and Walsall Hospice also make it their choice for concerts and special events. Our seating capacity of over 1,000 when the balconies are in use is a factor in this.

St Matthew's is a grade II\* (two star) listed building and contains a number of features of significance including the following:

- a majestic spire dating from 15<sup>th</sup> century and restored 1669, 1779 and 1951
- a set of thirteen bells, considered one of the finest in the region including four from 1553
- an organ of very high quality (built by Samuel Green in 1773)
- a crypt of two chambers, thought to date approximately from 1150, which formed the church of the day
- a beautiful medieval chancel (dating from 1462) with a most unusual arched passageway beneath which allows a thoroughfare to pass under the sanctuary, comparable to that at St.Mary Redcliffe, Bristol (described by Elizabeth I as "the fairest church in all the land!")
- carved medieval misericords set into the choirstalls regarded as the finest church woodcarving in former Staffordshire
- a font dating from 15<sup>th</sup> century carved in limestone with fine 18<sup>th</sup> century marble rim and with the coats of arms of noble families of the region including the Earls of Warwick
- extensive use of cast iron pillars, windows etc following renovations in the early nineteenth century by leading church architect Francis Goodwin when this was at the cutting edge of Industrial Revolution technology
- A spectacular ceiling richly decorated with plasterwork.

From all the above it will readily be apparent that St Matthew's has enormous significance for Walsall historically, architecturally and civically, with important roles in its community life and cultural life, in addition to its *raison d'etre* as a place of worship.

However various factors have combined to undermine that significance. Much housing close to the church has been pulled down. Planning decisions have obstructed historic views of St Matthew's. Direct routes to the church by road have been cut off. The centre of gravity of the Borough has shifted away from Church Hill. Many parts of the building now have a tatty and neglected appearance largely through a lack of funds. The time has now come to restate the significance of St Matthew's through a programme of much needed repairs and improvements.

**Select bibliography:**

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- Pevsner, N. Buildings of England: Staffordshire 1974
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## **Ground Plan**

*A digital survey of the Church and its environs has been commissioned. This will form in due course form the basis of the ground plan to be submitted with this document when it is finalised.*

### ***Part II: The significance of the area affected by the proposal***

Detailed proposals are currently awaited from our architects, who have been instructed to prepare proposals and drawings for our consideration.

However it is not anticipated that any of the features listed in Part 1 above will be adversely affected by the proposals. These are particularly aimed at enhancing the building through repairs and the replacement of substandard facilities, fittings and materials and not at any radical restructuring.

There is likely to be short term disruption to the life of the church particularly because of the replacement of the floor, but also possibly arising from other repairs. The temporary closure of the church may unfortunately be required. If so we will seek to be hold services in the St Matthew's Centre or possibly in Blue Coat School.

We hope that landscaping of the hill top site as a whole may be possible to make the most of this area as an asset to the community and the Borough.

## Statement of Need

### Section A: General Information

*(Extracted and adapted from the Parish Profile 2009)*

**THE PARISH SETTING :** *(Please indicate : size of population, types of housing, kinds of jobs people do, institutions (eg. hospitals, schools, old people's homes), social mix and any other salient factors. If a team ministry or LEP, please give a general description of it.*

- Walsall is a post-industrial area with roots in a medieval market town. St Matthew's is the ancient Parish Church for the Borough, dating from approx 1150. New parishes were created during the industrial revolution by taking bites out of ours, leaving us with a very odd boundary. Our congregation tends to be drawn from across the Borough as a whole.
- The total population of Walsall is about 200,000 with substantial numbers of Muslims, Sikhs, Afro-Caribbeans and asylum seekers in some districts, including around St Matthew's.
- Walsall contains significant areas of deprivation including sizeable monochrome housing estates. St Matthew's own parish contains pockets of affluence alongside less prosperous areas in a characteristically Black Country cheek-by-jowl way.
- Historically Walsall has been a centre of the leather industry, particularly saddlery. This is in decline these days owing to competition from the Far East but there are still many saddle makers in the Borough.
- We also used to have lots of small castings firms but many of these have been lost due to economic changes.
- There are significant numbers in low-paid and casual jobs or unemployed.
- Walsall Institutions: Walsall has its own Borough Council, 3 MPs, a general hospital, an art gallery with a world-class collection of Epsteins, library, swimming pool, a leather museum, a railway station and bus station, an arboretum, many schools, and a first division football club.
- Parish Institutions: we have three parish schools, Blue Coat Infants, Juniors and Performing Arts Comprehensive, several old people's / residential homes where we carry on a pastoral ministry, the St Matthew's Centre (refurbished 2006) whose use by various community groups is rapidly expanding, the Walsall campus of the University of Wolverhampton, Walsall cricket and rugby clubs and quite a few pubs.
- Walsall Team: St Matthew's is currently part of a team including two other churches, St Luke's and St Martin's. These were originally church plants from St Matthew's run by curates under the direction of St Matthew's vicar. In the 1980s the formation of the Team was intended to grant St Martin's and St Luke's greater independence by giving them their own clergy and quasi-parochial districts. The Team is now in process of being broken up into separate parishes to enable full independence and this should be effected by late 2010.
- The Team Parish population is about 18,000 and St Matthew's district about 6,000.

Please also star one of the broad following categories :

Urban (inner city) : Urban (estate) : **City Centre \***

Suburban : Commuter Village : Rural : Small Town

## **THE CHURCH**

*Ecclesiastical Tradition* : broadly evangelical, charismatic by aspiration more than practice. No robes at all-age services or Church Hill Praise.

*Pattern of Sunday Worship (please indicate times and rites used):*

- 8am BCP Communion
- 10am Common Worship Communion plus Children's Church
  - OR All-age service (roughly one Sunday per month)
- 12 noon BCP communion, 1st and 3rd Sundays
- 3.45pm BCP Evensong, 2nd and 4th Sundays
- 4pm St Matthew's Asian Congregation (meets in St Matthew's Centre)
- 6.30pm Church Hill Praise - no set liturgy

In practice our services attract different people with their contrasting styles and may feel like several churches that happen to use the same building.

*Weekday Services:*

- Wednesday 10am eucharist

*Attendances:*

- 8.00am 20-30, all adults
- 10am 90-100 of whom 5-15 are children
- 12.00 noon 8-12, all adults
- 3.45pm 15-20, all adults
- Asian Cong 30-40 of whom over 50% are children and young people
- 6.30pm 60-80 of whom over half are young people.

Electoral Roll = 245

|                            |                    |                 |    |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|----|
| <i>Occasional Offices:</i> | <i>Number p.a.</i> | <i>Baptisms</i> | 12 |
|                            |                    | <i>Weddings</i> | 12 |
|                            |                    | <i>Funerals</i> | 30 |

*Daily Offices :*

- Morning Prayer Tuesdays and Thursdays, Prayer Hour Saturdays.

*Staff or Team Members :*

- Pastor Fiaz leads the Asian Congregation as an NSM and is also a paid official of the Diocese as Diocesan Asian Minister.
- We are currently without a curate but a new one is expected in summer 2010.
- We also pay a part time administrator, a manager for the St Matthew's Centre and an organist.
- At the time of writing we are advertising for a part-time Family and Children's Minister to develop this key sector further with us.

*Lay involvement:*

- There are three lay readers and a prayer guide. Two of the lay readers are licensed to conduct funerals.
- Lay people carry out much of St Matthew's pastoral ministry. They are organised as a pastoral network. Some are licensed for ministry in local residential homes.
- Church Hill Praise is led by a lay couple.
- Lay people are also involved in baptism and marriage preparation and Alpha Courses.
- Some of our people engage in supporting volunteer teams in hospital and with people with educational needs. Others are on management boards for ministry to the homeless (the Glebe Centre), excluded kids (The Vine) and teen pregnancy work.

*House, Study or Prayer Groups :*

- We have 8 home groups.

*Youth Work :*

- We have great opportunities here through connections with Blue Coat School and with the Queen Mary Grammar Schools' Joint Christian Union. Sadly we have no youth minister at present as we can no longer afford one and I am concerned about the future development of this ministry. Efforts to find alternatives (Pais Team, a trainee youth worker on placement) have fallen through.
- There is however a thriving lay-led 18-30 Cell Group, a very small youth cell for 11-18s and lots of youth participation at Church Hill Praise.

Areas of particular ministry (please star) :

**Schools \* Hospitals \* Industry Prison Youth \***  
**Old People's Homes \* Single Parents Homeless Healing \***  
*Other (specify):* **Town Centre Ministry \***

Of particular note here is our relationship with the three Blue Coat Schools – Infants, Juniors and Comprehensive. All use the building regularly and the Comp in particular do so every week. In addition to services the schools hold other events in church.

*Is congregation (please delete one):* gathered

*Areas of co-operation (e.g. with other Anglicans, Ecumenical).*

- Cluster - Walsall Central Cluster comprises the 3 Team Churches and two other Anglican Churches, St Paul's and St John's. This group covers mutual support for the clergy, pulpit swaps, joint confirmations and courses of study which we run jointly.
- Town Centre Ministry - This comprises 5 churches, ourselves, St Paul's from the Cluster, and the Town Centre Methodist, United Reformed and Roman Catholic Churches. Key areas are Lent lunches with guest speakers, an open air carol service, the act of remembrance at the Cenotaph and an absolutely brilliant procession of witness through the Town Centre every Good Friday.

- Jesus Net - a grouping of free, Pentecostal and non-denominational churches including leaders' days, prayer, and some events such as an annual Party in the Park.

*Any other activities or comments :*

Please see our website **[www.stmatthewswalsall.co.uk](http://www.stmatthewswalsall.co.uk)**

*Is the church normally left open during daylight hours?*

To a limited extent: Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday mornings.

*What other community facilities are available in the local area?*

We are situated very close to the Town Centre with a large number of social, educational, administrative and recreational facilities of all kinds.

*Does the parish have a church hall or other buildings? Give details of size, facilities, distance from church and state of repair.*

Our former Parish Hall was refurbished as the St Matthew's Centre in 2006 and comprises a substantial conference room on the upper floor, a dedicated youth centre on the lower floor, a suite of offices, and professional catering facilities. It is located about 100 metres from St Matthew's and, following refurbishment, is in a very good state of repair

*When was the last Quinquennial Inspection Report? Are there any major outstanding issues that were highlighted in the QIR?*

The last Quinquennial Inspection Report was received in February 2010. There are many significant issues of repair highlighted in the report which are going to be very costly to deal with. It is a key component of the proposals to address them all, whilst carrying out certain necessary works of improvement as part of the same integrated project.

Major issues include:

- specialist repairs to cast iron glazing
- expansion and contraction of the clerestory windows have caused structural problems which will be extremely expensive to correct
- the sheer volume of work required: no less than 101 repairs and recommendations are listed

A copy of the Report can be made available on request

*Explain briefly how the project will be financed. i.e. grants, existing funds, bequest, fundraising.*

We already have some money ringfenced for repairs and for the church fabric. However this will only cover a modest percentage of the very significant costs of the repairs in particular. We are investigating the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage and the Historic Churches Preservation Trust among others. In particular we have enlisted the support of Walsall Church Links, who have a very good track record of fundraising for this type of project.

*Have there been changes in the parish or community that are relevant to how the needs of the parish have changed or which have prompted the proposals now? i.e. a new vicar, introduction of music group, new development in the village bringing new families, worsening situation with church hall, a bequest to spend?*

This question does not really address what we are doing or why we are doing it. We are not trying to respond to the local needs by adapting the church building for use as a community centre: firstly St Matthew's is not really suitable for this and secondly we already have excellent community facilities in our recently refurbished St Matthew's Centre.

What we aim to do is to carry out some very necessary repairs and at the same time make a number of improvements. The aim of the improvements is to comply with the Disability Acts and to make the building safer, more comfortable, more flexible, more environmentally friendly with lower energy usage, and more welcoming.

In doing so we intend our church building to embody St Matthew's values which we have summarized in terms of aiming to be an Acts 2 Church; that is, that we value awe, unity, generosity, hospitality and growth. Please see the section about our values and how we believe they should be reflected in the building on page 16.



## **Section B: The Need**

### **1. Repairs**

- All repairs identified in the most recent Quinquennial Inspection Report must be completed in full.
- The Church should be put in good order to last the next 25 years.

### **2. Access**

- Health and Safety issues must be addressed, including the stairs to the balcony and the unsafe floor.
- We must be fully compliant with current disability legislation including provision of toilets for the disabled.
- Current raised flooring areas prevent access by wheelchair and pushchair users. The floor must be re-formed on one level.

### **3. Facilities**

- There is no need to duplicate facilities currently provided in abundance by our recently converted Centre.
- Facilities for welcome and fellowship, including adequate provision for refreshments, must be introduced.
- We want our ministry to families and children to grow and must make sure our facilities are appropriate. The Children's Chapel / creche is tired and needs a revamp.
- Accessible toilets with baby-changing facilities are essential

### **4. Energy Usage etc**

- We have recently been forced to update the heating system by the complete breakdown of previous system. However we should take the opportunity afforded by the project to consider further refinements and energy-saving options.
- Improvements to lighting and ICT systems should also be considered in the scheme

### **5. Civic / Community Venue**

- Many parts of the Church look shabby and uncared for and work against the impression of a holy space and a place of welcome.
- Attractive, comfortable and coordinated seating arrangements are essential.
- Sight lines should be improved where possible.
- The entrance area is chaotic and unwelcoming and needs revision.
- A level floor is required to realise the potential for different seating layouts and liturgical variation.

### **6. Landscaping**

- The Church should be an integral and focal part of the landscape of the whole of Church Hill, including the Memorial Garden, St Matthew's Centre and lawned areas.
- Views of the Church and connections with the Borough have been compromised by poor planning decisions and poor maintenance of trees. This must be addressed urgently if we are to fulfil our role as the ancient Borough Church for Walsall.

## **Section C: Difficulties in meeting the Need**

### **1. Repairs**

- All will recognise that it is absolutely essential that the Church be kept in good repair.

### **2. Access**

- We have had a number of accidents resulting from the condition and layout of the floor. The stair to the balcony is unsafe and deteriorating and is used by hundreds of schoolchildren every week.
- We do have separate ladies and gents toilets but no toilet suitable for disabled users and no baby changing facilities.
- The present floor layout hinders access by wheelchair and pushchair users.

### **3. Facilities**

- The welcoming area of the church gives is visually muddled and lacks appropriate facilities.
- The refreshments area is shabby and its furnishings are substandard.
- The crèche area (Children's Chapel) is also substandard.
- Accessible toilets with baby-changing facilities are essential

### **4. Energy Usage etc**

- The building remained cold in the recent severe winter and people stayed away as a result. We need to look at reducing heat loss and spreading warmth more evenly.
- Improvements to lighting and ICT systems should also be considered in the scheme

### **5. Civic / Community Venue**

- Plasterwork is crumbling in a number of places, some of them very visible to the congregation.
- Our present seats are uncomfortable and of very poor quality.
- In such a large church it is hard to follow what is going on visually, especially when children are involved.
- The entrance area is not up to the standard expected of a good quality public venue.
- The floor is divided into several sections by lowered aisles between raised seating areas. This imposes a classroom style seating arrangement which restricts the possibilities we could otherwise offer.

### **6. Landscaping**

- St Matthew's is hindered in its role as Borough Church by a poor quality surrounding landscape featuring undergrowth which encourages crime and vandalism, poorly maintained trees which obscure important views, crumbling boundary walls, badly surfaced roads and paths and inadequate parking.

## **Section D: The Proposal**

### **A: Summary of proposals**

Detailed proposals are awaited from our architects, Messrs Arroll and Snell. In summary the architects have been asked to include the following:

- The completion of all major repairs listed in the Quinquennial Inspection Report.
- The addressing of health and safety issues including the stair access to the balcony and the provision of a flat floor.
- The revised floor will allow us better to accommodate liturgical variations we want to explore further, particularly but not exclusively at Church Hill Praise, including communion in the round, messy church and cafe church, and also performing arts projects by Blue Coat schools and other groups.
- Compliance with the Disability Act including the revision of toilet facilities and the provision of access throughout the lower floor of the building
- A warmer, more energy efficient and better lit building that costs less to run.
- The replacement of substandard furnishings and fittings with comfortable seating, a warm and friendly welcome area and a good quality refreshment area.

### **B: The Process**

These issues have been discussed and the above ideas formulated in a series of consultations with the Church Council and Church members chaired by the Venerable Chris Liley, Archdeacon of Lichfield. Groups were formed to consider our needs in each of areas 1 to 5 in section B (the statement of need). The Church Council has given full support to this process. The congregation have also been informed and asked for comments, and there will be further consultation with them and with the public when the architects proposals are received.

## Section E. Support and practicalities

The project does not provide facilities for a large variety of community groups etc since very full provision has been made for their purposes at the St Matthew's Centre nearby. It will not be necessary to run the church as a business. We are very interested instead in promoting St Matthew's as the Borough Church with a key role in Walsall's civic and cultural life.

There are some users who already use the building regularly for civic and cultural occasions. These include:

- Blue Coat Comprehensive School – assembly every Friday, prizegiving and other special events, communion classes for different year groups
- Blue Coat Infant and Junior Schools – services at least once a term
- Blue Coat Sunday
- Other schools – visits to the Church for Religious Education and cultural projects several times a year and for Carol services: Queen Mary's Grammar School prizegiving service
- Walsall Council – the Mayor's civic service once a year
- District Scouts – St George's Day parade once a year
- Walsall Hospice – *Light up a Life* service
- Weddings – about 15 a year
- Walsall Choral Society – several concerts a year
- Walsall Rotary Club – concerts for charity.
- Festival style events including theatre, gigs, heritage tours, exhibitions and the like.

We would like our church to be an impressive, attractive, comfortable and safe venue for all these users.

The project will have a major impact for good on the maintenance of the building through the implementation of repairs. The proposals are not intended to generate income on any large scale but will reduce costs through greater energy efficiency.

A key practicality is the likelihood that St Matthew's will have to close during the works. Although some works could proceed with the building open or at least partly open, others, such as replacing the floor, will make this impossible. The organ will need to be sealed up for the duration of all repairs to prevent damage by the ingress of dust.

We will therefore need to be careful about the timing of the works. It will not be possible to celebrate weddings and prospective couples will need to be informed of this. Funerals will have to be accommodated in nearby churches. Some Sunday services will take place in the St Matthew's Centre, larger ones may need to use Blue Coat School, and existing Sunday users will have to be asked to make other arrangements. A portable font will be needed for baptisms in these locations.

We have to be realistic that some church members may decide to leave during these inconveniences. We will need to make a splash when we reopen after the work to put ourselves back on the map.

## **Section F: Significance and Impact**

None of the proposals will affect the items listed in the Statement of Significance (page 3) in any way other than to put them in good repair and enhance their setting, which is at present badly let down by shoddy furnishings, wear and tear, and a generally dilapidated appearance.

It is hoped that a comprehensive scheme of repairs will put the building in good order for some time to come. At present we are firefighting as problems arise simply because of the scale and cost of the difficulties. We hope to get into an era in which maintenance can be planned and budgeted for.

## **St Matthew's Values and how we want to reflect them in our building**

St Matthew's aims to be an Acts 2 Church,  
valuing Awe, Unity, Generosity, Hospitality and Growth.

*Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

(Acts chapter 2 verses 43-47, NRSV)

**Awe:** We are fortunate in possessing a building which carries with it a powerful sense of awe through its commanding hill top location, lofty and spacious interior, and air of venerable antiquity. We believe the reordering should play to these strengths. However they are compromised by a generally down at heel impression created by some poor quality fixtures, by areas of peeling plaster, discoloured stonework, wear and tear and other dilapidations, and by the gradual disappearance of the building behind unmaintained trees. We want to address these issues as a priority.

We include a number of different worship styles in the life of St Matthew's, from very formal services following the Book of Common Prayer through to Church Hill Praise which makes use of images, dance and drama and band-led music. Our space needs to be flexible enough to work with a variety of expressions of worship.

**Unity:** The Church is a place of fellowship as well as worship. As such it needs to provide spaces for people to meet and mingle. Seating should be comfortable and flexible enough to enable meeting in the round. Lighting and heating systems should give an impression of warmth and comfort.

**Generosity:** It will take a great deal of generosity to pay for this lot!

**Hospitality:** Here we are thinking particularly of how welcoming, or otherwise, our building is for visitors and newcomers. Our entrance and welcome area is chaotic and needs a rethink. Guests should be able to discern our values and vision from clear, well set out notice boards. Facilities need to be hygienic and pleasant to the standard that would be expected in a prestigious secular venue. We are still not compliant with the Disability Act and this makes the building positively unwelcoming to people with certain needs. Children particularly should have first class accommodation for their activities. Our cafe area as it stands is an afterthought that makes use of poor quality furnishings. An urgent upgrade is required.

**Growth:** Although buildings cannot create growth by themselves they can help or hinder it by the structure they impose on human interactions, the ambience they communicate, and the values they symbolise including those of holiness and transcendence. We very much hope that, with a suitable scheme, people will both be attracted to St Matthew's and will find that, once here, they wish to stay.