

St Lawrence Bovingdon

New Building Development

Statement of Need

1.0 High level summary

- 1 The facilities at St Lawrence Church are totally inadequate for the needs of both the worshipping community and the wider village.
- 2 The financial support of the church has come largely from a faithful but ageing congregation. A thriving younger congregation is being nurtured but we cannot expect to retain them or attract succeeding generations, if we cannot worship together as a church family and provide safe, comfortable and hygienic 21st century facilities.
- 3 The church's current hall, St Lawrence Hall, up Vicarage Lane, is no longer fit for purpose and it is far too far from the church and village centre. Pedestrians are forced to share a narrow single-track road with cars as there is no footway. It is particularly hazardous for the young, disabled and elderly: the road being also used with greater frequency since the completion of the new housing scheme.¹ See drawing 1248 PP 202, and paras. 6.3 – 6.6 of the EAS transport statement.
- 4 The church has no sound-proofed space for separate groups to meet during family services. At family services elsewhere, the normal procedure is for children to divide into separate groups and do age-appropriate activities then join the rest of congregation during the service. We cannot do this in our church.
- 5 So at present the church is forced to have cramped, separate services in a side-aisle for families. Therefore there is no cross-generational social interaction with the rest of the congregation, which is crucial for the vitality of any community.
- 6 There is no fixed provision for disabled access to the church and no disabled toilet facility. There are no office facilities and no decent kitchen. There is one WC accessed from outside and an unsuitable kitchen/storage room.
- 7 There is no adequate provision for storage in the church itself with the effect that clutter detracts from the internal setting of the listed building.
- 8 As a result the potential community use of the church by the village is compromised, and initiatives to encourage the growth of the church congregation are restricted and stunted.

The church, this important heritage asset, needs a vital, engaged congregation, willing to use the building regularly, fund its upkeep and reach out to the community at large, offering decent, accessible facilities. The proposed scheme will enable this vision.

¹ Was Dacorum core strategy Policy CS08 considered in the light of pedestrians using St Lawrence's Hall when the new development was considered?

2.0 Bovingdon and St Lawrence Church

- 1 The large village of Bovingdon lies three miles south-west of Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire, within the Borough of Dacorum. With a population of approx. 5500, Bovingdon is the largest part of the ward of Bovingdon, Flaunden and Chipperfield (population 8819). The Parish Church, St Lawrence, in its 4.5 acre churchyard, lies in a conservation area near the thriving village centre. Bovingdon's population has more than doubled over the last 50 years.
- 2 There is pressure to provide more housing County-wide and the new Emerging Strategy for Growth (2020 – 2030) put up for consultation by Dacorum has identified two potential sites in Bovingdon – each within a mile of the church by foot and totalling 190 dwellings across both sites.
- 3 Bovingdon is a mixed community with many young families. The village does not experience high levels of crime, but vandalism and 'youth nuisance' often draw comment. St Lawrence Church wants to play its full part in the provision of facilities for community use.
- 4 The Church seats approx.. 190 adults when packed and children of 300+ when used by Bovingdon Primary Academy.
- 5 Typical Sunday attendances (regular – peak) are:

8.00am – Communion	:	10 -14
9.30am – Family Praise	:	30 - 60
10.30am – Parish Communion/Morning Prayer	:	40 - 100
10.00am – Family Communion (1 st Sunday)	:	70 - 120

These peak numbers rise on occasions such as Easter and Christmas, or large funerals, weddings or baptisms to 150+.

The five year trend is one of gentle decline as new families joining the church do not fully replace those older members dying or moving away.

- 6 The 2018 Quinquennial Inspection of the fabric of the church highlighted that although the church has been carrying out repairs and maintenance, there are always items that need action and a number of items were flagged as needing immediate or urgent action. The church needs to retain and potentially grow its congregation in order to continue its role in the community and generate income to maintain the church and churchyard.

3.0 Worship, mission, ministry, outreach and community life at St Lawrence

3.1 Families and children

Summary of Key needs:

- 1 **Separate, welcoming, warm, sound- insulated spaces close to the main worship space for concurrent, age-appropriate children's activities and a crèche during services**
- 2 **Open and adaptable room in the church proper for more informal family-friendly services with contemporary music, video and modern lighting, with space for prams and pushchairs**
- 3 **Open and adaptable space in the church proper for school groups - allowing also room for children's performance of music, school plays and concerts**
- 4 **Decent changing facilities and areas to retreat to for feeding.**
- 5 **Hygienic kitchen facilities for snacks and drinks.**
- 6 **Space to enable inter-generational interaction.**

With congregations aged predominantly over 50, growth and outreach to younger age groups is essential. However, the notion of 'church family' is hard to sustain where the 'family' cannot learn, work, worship and take refreshments together.

Accommodating children attending Sunday school has been a long-standing problem. There are no suitable premises within the village since all involve long and potentially dangerous walks; several have been tried including the school and the Memorial Hall. The least unsatisfactory is St Lawrence Hall but this entailed children being escorted by adult marshals in fluorescent jackets walking along a hazardous, narrow lane without footways.

Due to parent resistance and increased concerns about safety this stopped.

'Family Praise' was started to address this (see right). It offers a 'family friendly' effective outreach to families with small children.

The half hour service uses the cramped space created by the removal of a section of pews in 1988; but it limits numbers and is very cramped.

There is no room for pushchairs and older groups could not participate.





The format was changed to allow three separate simultaneous teaching sessions to take place for 10 minutes during the service: in the north aisle, the SW corner for the older children and choir stalls for the adults.

The scramble to move around disrupts the flow of the service; the total lack of sound proof spaces, seating areas and facilities for craft activities, and the short time available, means it is a very makeshift activity

The current layout of the church does not aid simultaneous cross-generational use of the church. Church communities are among the few these days that span across several generations.

The need is for separate, welcoming spaces with the ability to do craft and other activities including being able to sing and make music. The children could interact with the main service running in the church as required or desired.

A crèche could be accommodated to allow parents to be able to settle their children before the service starts.

A separate extension is needed which can house the children's groups away from the main congregation, together with access to a decent, safe kitchen and WCs etc.

There is no room in the church for this without destroying the internal architecture and dramatically reducing seating accommodation. See 1248 DOS 001.

3.2 Welcome and inclusion.

Summary of Key Needs:

- 1 Welcoming space, warm, comfortable, properly accessible to all.**
- 2 Properly designed and regulation-compliant kitchen to enable serving light meals and buffets.**
- 3 Disabled-access WC and space to manoeuvre around it and other facilities.**
- 4 Space to allow for hospitality for services: Weddings, christenings, funerals and Blessings/ renewal of vows**
- 5 Hygienic kitchen facilities for snacks and drinks separated from cleaning provision.**
- 6 Space for church office for two and on-site presence for welcome.**
- 7 Space for cleaning facilities and modern services plant.**

At present the church is not very inviting and cannot offer any form of hospitality other than the most basic 'ad hoc' provision.

The church, in its attractive setting in the churchyard, could be a real asset both to the village and visitors travelling to life-marking services if it is able to offer hospitality and a room for interaction after services. It should be noted that weddings are no longer confined to churches and a church which cannot even offer basic comfort will become less and less used.

The disabled access is very poor and the Diocesan Advisory Committee was concerned about the aisle widths of the existing layout

Serving refreshments at St Lawrence is challenging and potentially hazardous. Hot water is currently transported in an urn on a trolley or in vacuum jugs. The current kitchen shares space with other uses including cleaning, flower arranging and general storage. The facility is unfit for purpose .

No office exists in either the Church or St Lawrence Hall yet churches have substantial paperwork & statutory records to deal with. At present stationery etc. is stored in a portakabin next to St Lawrence Hall, a third of a kilometre away, and the photocopier is temporarily housed in the Vicarage study.

An on-site office for two people would bring all this together in a secure environment and also provide some security oversight and welcome in the church.

The existing church building cannot accommodate all that is needed.

3.3 Worship and the Parish

Summary of Key Needs:

- 1 **Adaptable, flexible space for accommodating the many styles of modern church worship: both together and in age-appropriate separate spaces for part of the service.**
- 2 **Adaptable and flexible space for accommodating large fund-raising events**
- 3 **A large space for worship to accommodate funerals, weddings, Christmas Easter services and school assemblies.**
- 4 **Good kitchen, WCs and back rooms to accommodate the above.**

Flexible Worship Space

The current church layout is Victorian, when the congregation was expected to be passive and static.

Modern understanding and expectations of church worship are very different, including greater participation, the use of modern technology, music, drama and movement. This is borne out by the growth of congregations in new and converted churches that offer this.



Café Church Shenley

Growing churches are able to offer a mixture of worship styles including seating in traditional rows, 'in the round', or informally around tables as shown above.

They also offer all-age activities including age-appropriate craft and discussion groups going in and out of the main service as appropriate, allowing the whole church family to be together.

This is how St Lawrence likes to worship but the space is challenging and stunts them.



Christchurch Chorleywood.

Note how the congregation is gathered informally to respond to the service as suits them.

The experience of the last 18 months has also demonstrated a need to have a large, flexible space to maintain safe distancing in future global-spread pandemics.



The image above is of Holy Cross, Felsted, Essex arranged for pandemic distancing. However, when the church was operating pre-Covid, its website showed lively images of flexible worship in the same space.

There is no room in St Lawrence to accommodate what is needed, (see 1248 DOS 001).

Which is why an extension is needed.

3.4 Space for the Community

Summary of Key needs (see also 3.3)

- 1 Adaptable and flexible space for accommodating large community events such as suppers, fund-raisers, concerts, dances, fairs**
- 2 Adaptable and smaller spaces for community groups and outreach with better pedestrian access to the village and increased parking.**
- 3 Good kitchen, WCs and back rooms to accommodate the above.**

St Lawrence Church is the largest potential community space in the village and offers good parking and attractive surroundings close to the heart of the village. It is appreciated in the village but it could offer so much more for the community.

The church is already kept open for individual visits and contemplation during daylight hours. It already hosts Bovingdon Primary Academy for its Harvest, Christmas and Easter concerts and services. It can accommodate much larger audiences than either the school or the Memorial Hall

Before the pandemic it hosted Summer Fetes, a Christmas Market, a Flower Festival and an Art Festival, which attracted many people from the village in addition to the church congregation.

The church has good acoustics and has hosted concerts including a Chamber Orchestra, a small Opera group and two Music Festivals featuring jazz, folk and rock music alongside classical.

But all these events are compromised by the lack of flexible space, a good kitchen, WCs, post-event refreshment space, pre-performance changing and warm-up space. The last concert organised had drinks served outside. This is not a winter or bad-weather option. Disabled people must also find the lack of proper access and suitable WC facilities humiliating and limiting (refer to Section 3.2)

The DAC visit report observed that removing the pews "...would be a more logical, sustainable and economic use of the existing footprint. It would offer the opportunity to bring the church back into focus for the village...the pews were an intrusion into the architectural intention of the light building...Both the accommodation in the extension and the church building should be considered a coherent and inter-related project".

There is no well-equipped and discrete space for smaller meetings. The church could offer an attractive space in an attractive churchyard, for parent & toddler groups, small exercise classes and counselling, coffee mornings or afternoon teas for older people (with a decent loo attached). This would replace the space at St Lawrence Hall.

With more modern, enlarged and flexible facilities, the range and capacity of potential future events could be greatly expanded, and visitors made more welcome.



Christmas Market: stalls perched on wooden boards on top of pews resulting in crowded central aisle with unusable space in pews. Flexible space would allow more participation and easier circulation.

Opera rehearsal: improvised stage, limited performance space (even with pulpit moved to NE corner), accompanist perched over heating grille.



Concert: sightlines obscured, playing space cramped and pews roped off to give space for the soloist. A flexible space would have allowed curved seating around the players etc.

3.5 Previous schemes

Various building schemes have been put forward over (at least) the past 30 years Including at least two extension schemes in the last couple of decades and separate internal re-orderings

The last was in 2010: a detailed plan was developed for a much larger community hall, to be built to the northern side of the church and parallel to the north aisle, with a direct link to the church building through the churchyard. This plan was not supported by EH or the planning authorities in pre-application discussions and was abandoned in 2012.

In contrast with the previous schemes and after an in-depth exploration of alternative designs and consultations, the DAC has advised that the parish should now submit a planning application.

3.6 St Lawrence Hall

(refer to separate statement for the Memorial Hall)

St Lawrence has never had a traditional church hall, but has made use of the very limited facility called 'St Lawrence Hall'.

This is 300 metres from the Church in Vicarage Lane, a narrow, busy unlit lane without footways. The Hall has a very restricted car park.

Hall users and local residents experience difficulties with traffic congestion and road safety. The access is dangerous. Refer also to the Transport Statement & statement on the Memorial Hall regarding footways.

The hall offers a single meeting space accommodating up to 60 people. There are two toilets (one for disabled), a kitchen and limited storage facilities in an adjoining portakabin.

Pre-Covid, it was let to 5 regular weekly users and to other occasional hirers and used for some church meetings. It has been a drain on the church's finances. Average income and costs over the past 5 years are:

Letting Income:	£3,900
Cleaning and utilities:	-£3,700
Maintenance:	-£2,500
Annual Deficit:	-£2,700

It is not attractive to those seeking a modern, comfortable venue with good facilities.

4.00 Support and practicalities

1. Statement of Community Involvement

Following presentation of initial plans to the PCC (Church Council) in 2016 it was decided to carry out a survey among church attenders over the Christmas period, a time when many local people come to church in addition to the regular congregation.

1.1 Survey: December 2016

The survey did not ask direct questions such as 'do you want an extension?' or 'should we remove the pews?' but rather sought to determine the strength of feeling about various improvements to the church and its activities which might enhance the visitor's experience.

95 people responded, of whom 71 were Bovingdon residents. The following improvements were rated 'very important' or 'quite important' by 65% or more of respondents:

Disabled access	90%
Better toilets	78%
Improved heating	78%
Flexible space for	71%
Concerts/events	
Comfortable seating	69%
Modern facilities for	66%
Meetings	

1.2 Public meeting: March 2017

The plans were presented at two meetings: the first, aimed mainly at the church congregation, in February and then an open public meeting in March. Both were attended by approximately 60 people (a few attended both).

Although there was no formal vote taken at either meeting it was clear that the majority were in favour, or had no objection to, the extension, whereas a vocal minority was opposed to the removal of pews contained in the internal reordering proposal.

1.3 Updates

A summary of the proposals was published in the church magazine 'Outlook' in March 2017, which was distributed to every house in the parish. Further updates have been given in subsequent editions of 'Bovingdon News', published by the Parish Council and distributed around the village twice each year.

1.4 Consultations

An informal consultation has been held with the Chair of the Parish Council and a brief presentation of the proposals was given to the Mayor of Dacorum who visited in 2018.

One letter has been received raising concerns about the extension, from a family whose son is buried close to the proposed site. **One letter has been received objecting to the removal of pews.**

2. St Lawrence Hall

(also refer to section 3.6 above)

2.1 Costs

Average Income and Costs over the last 5 years are:

Letting Income:	£3,900
Cleaning and utilities:	-£3,700
Maintenance:	-£2,500
Annual Deficit:	-£2,700

The Hall is thus a financial drain on Church funds.

The extension would benefit from both higher letting income and lower costs which would eliminate this deficit.

2.2 Future plans

The parish does not want to keep the current hall.

It is an essential part of the plan to coalesce all the church functions on one site.

If planning permission for the church extension is granted, St Lawrence PCC (which owns the Hall) will seek to apply for change of use for the Hall site so that it may be sold for redevelopment.

This in turn would release significant funds towards the cost of the new extension.

Appendix: The Use of the Church and Hall in accommodating the regular activities of the church and how these could be expanded

Refer also to Architect's drawings 1248 PP 026, 027, 028, 029 and 030

Time and Frequency	Current Activity in Church	New Activity in Extension	Notes
Sunday 8.00am	Communion		Chancel Used
First Sunday in month 10.00am	Family Communion (75-100 people) Pew seating Limited Refreshments	Creche & Sunday school groups. Refreshments in well equipped space.	Reordering provides space for all age activities (e.g. drama, sketches, junior choir, small group discussion)
Other Sundays 9.30am	Family Praise – Parents and 0-4yr	Sunday School Groups 5-7yr, 8-11yr, 12yr+	Extension provides separate spaces for groups
Sunday 10.00-10.30am	Limited Refreshments	Refreshments, post-service activities	Activities can continue while 10.30 service starts
Sunday 10.30am	Adult Service - Parish Communion Or Morning Prayer	Refreshments in well equipped space.	Not possible currently: will be with the scheme
Sunday 12.00am	Baptism	Baptism Party Gathering	Not possible currently: will be with the scheme
Sundays 5.30pm: special services	Informal worship e.g. Come and Praise	Refreshments	Reordering provides music group platform and flexible seating
Sunday Evening		Youth Group	Scheme provides place to meet.
Weekdays	Funeral Service (12-20 per year)	Funeral Teas (up to 50 people)	Scheme provides facilities for travelling visitors
Weekdays	Weddings (4-8) per year)	Wedding Gathering (up to 50 people)	Scheme provides facilities for travelling visitors.
Weekdays	School events – Assemblies (3-4 per year) Visits (3-4 per year)	More WCs and facility for disabled children. Class discussion after visit.	300+ children
	Weekday & week-end afternoon and evenings Choir Practice Concerts (4-5 per year) Summer Fete Christmas Fair Community Fund Raising Events Flower Display	Church council & Study Group meetings Baptism preparation Changing and warm up Facilities (concert performers). More room for all the community events also allowing disabled people to participate with greater ease. Harvest Supper preparation Community groups: art, exercise, dance	Extension and Reordering provides staging and seating; a defined refreshment serving area; Unrestricted circulation around the building; Disabled access and toilets Harvest supper/dance and larger community groups can meet in the church