

St Andrew's Church, West Deeping – Report on Reordering Project

This Report provides a summary of the outcome of the Reordering Project including the installation of a toilet/servery in St Andrew's Church, West Deeping, completed in April 2022. It is written to provide feedback for grant funders, other accountable organisations and the local community in West Deeping. It also offers lessons identified to inform others considering similar projects in future.

In 2016, following a village survey the need was identified for modern facilities in St Andrew's Church, West Deeping. Following consultation, in 2017, the PCC decided on the preferred option for a new toilet/servery within the footprint of the existing Vestry, a new modern boiler, removal of 3 rows of pews to make a multifunctional space and reordering of the tower area. An architect was appointed to draw up a design and a fund raising campaign was initiated. The initial target was to raise £100,000. A Friends Group was formed and a social event in September 2017 highlighted strong local support and encouragement. Currently, West Deeping Friends' Group has more than 120 members, the majority of whom are local residents - 50% of the population of the village.

The generosity of the local community has been amazing. Through one-off donations, monthly contributions and donations from local groups more than £32,000 was raised. This truly remarkable outcome highlights the importance local residents place on maintaining the heritage of our beautiful Grade 1 Listed church building. From 2017-2021, fund-raising events made a further £7,000. The PCC rightly decided that some of these events should be more about community engagement than just fund raising particularly during the pandemic. In the same period, we were extremely grateful for grant awards from West Deeping Education Foundation and West Deeping Parish Charity totalling £14,000.

Following further consultation, in 2018, the specifications and design were agreed and a faculty approved supported by English Heritage, the Victorian Society and Lincoln Diocese. A tender process was completed in 2018 and the PCC selected Clarke Construction Group Ltd as the preferred contractor. The overall estimated cost of the project was £110,000 excluding VAT.

More than 20 grant applications were submitted by West Deeping Friends' Group through the PCC. We were delighted to receive awards totalling £31,750 from Marshalls Charity, Garfield-Weston, All Churches Trust, Headley Trust and Lincolnshire Churches Trust. Preparing grant applications was a time consuming process - in excess of one man-year's effort - with many 'bumps in the road'. Notably, our applications to National Lottery Heritage Fund, Landfill Community Fund (West Deeping qualifies for funding due to the active quarries in the area) and National Churches Trust were unsuccessful. This highlights the intense competition for limited funds from these national organisations and the overly complex application process. We are indebted to the few residents who gave their time to prepare the applications. In addition, many local businesses were approached: Breedon was the only business to make a donation. Many lessons have been identified from this fund-raising effort (see conclusions); most significantly, without the encouragement and generosity of the local community this project would not have been successful.

In late 2019, the PCC decided to commit all its remaining available finances to the project. This enabled the PCC to contract with Clarke Group. With hindsight, this was a wise decision: material costs increased significantly during the pandemic and labour shortages would have delayed the practical work. Clarke honoured the tendered estimate allowing practical work to start at the end of May 2021. Had the PCC delayed the decision to proceed, building permissions and grant awards would have lapsed, and the project would have become unaffordable.

Clarke completed work on schedule in September 2021. There was a small amount of unforeseen additional work notably a leak in the nave roof directly above the new toilet/servery which had to be repaired. The resulting damage to the nave wall is subject to an insurance claim and will hopefully be made good in the next few months. Unarticulated remains were uncovered during trench digging to lay

the drains. The remains were reinterred by our Rector at a churchyard service in early September. There were separate contracting arrangements for connection of the foul drain to the mains. The connection was delayed due to the backlog with council approval for roadworks: the drain was finally connected in late November 2021. Overall, the installation work was completed to a high standard by a contractor who demonstrated good care for our church building.

The total cost of the project was £142,443 of which £23,740 VAT was recovered under the List Places of Worship scheme. This included £98,257 + VAT for Clarke Group, plus invoices totalling £20,455 + VAT for building control, surveys, architect fees, heating consultant fees, archaeologist and foul drain connection.

The PCC commitment to the project has left church finances extremely tight. Few people realise that it costs around £10,000/year to run the church. Half of this amount typically goes in maintenance including our security system, insurance and utility costs. The other half goes in delivering our Christian mission including parish share. There is a misconception that the Church of England is well off. We receive no funds to run the church or deliver this project. Less than 5% of the local community give to the church to support its running costs. Whilst the support of the West Deeping Friends' Group has been so successful their continued support will be essential to sustain the rich heritage of our church for future generations. Otherwise, without this support the PCC will be managing terminal decline.

A celebratory opening event was held in church on 26 September at which a commemorative plaque was unveiled to recognise the support of local residents to deliver modern facilities and a multifunctional space for the benefit of the wider community now and for future generations.

In conclusion, this project has identified the following lessons:

- A supportive local community has been at the heart of this successful campaign to care for the rich heritage of our village church. Without their amazing generosity this project would not have happened.
- There is intense competition for grant funding. Small rural communities such as ours may not be adequately resourced to undertake the significant effort required to raise necessary funds. Grant funding organisations may wish to bear this in mind if there is a desire for rural churches to survive in future. Perhaps, in future, an organisation such as the National Trust could care for our Grade 1 Listed churches in the same way they do for other historic buildings?
- Local business may not prioritise support for local heritage.
- Costs for a project such as this have escalated by more than 20% since the pandemic.
- The project would not have been affordable without the Government backed Listed Places of Worship scheme for recovery of VAT. The scheme has recently been extended to 2025. Authorities should consider further extending this scheme to enable small rural communities to commit to future projects.

Colin Blagrove

For West Deeping PCC

April 2022