

## **Wivenhoe's response to the Transformation Project Survey**

In November another phase of the transformation of St Mary's Church was completed, making it a yet more inviting building capable of fulfilling a greater role in Wivenhoe. The considerable number of people who came into the building since then have experienced the new environmentally friendly LED spotlights, uplighters, downlighters, and the means to control all of them to create different lighting effects to fit the occasion. This latest phase of the Transformation Project has received funding from Friends of St Mary's (FOSM) who have been fund-raising for Church improvements since they were established by Jane Cole in 1993.

It was wonderful to be able to put the spotlights on to Anthony Roberts whilst he recited Dickens's Christmas Carol word-perfectly just before Christmas, to have all the lights on for the Christmas Market and just low lighting for Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. St Mary's was particularly well used during this month of December. On Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 331 people (132 children & 199 adults) attended the Christingle Service whilst 133 people came to the Midnight Service on Christmas Eve. Other services in December were also well-attended.

The Appeal team launched a Wivenhoe-wide Survey last August to better understand how much support there is for the Transformation Project. Some 285 people responded to the Survey, most electronically. Over half of these people had been to St Mary's for a church service; nearly two-thirds had attended a christening, wedding or a funeral, and 75% had been to a social function such as the June or December Market. Only 26 people who responded had little reason to visit the Church.

I think it is fair to conclude that St Mary's is better used than many people realise. Certainly the survey said that 83% of people agreed that adding an Annexe with a Community Room was either a good or a very good thing. 86% of respondents agreed that with better facilities, St Mary's could do more for the people of Wivenhoe.

When asked about the pews and the use of the Nave area, only 52 people out of 285 people said they were against the taking out the pews and replacing them with chairs to provide more flexible seating arrangements, and only 24 people strongly disagreed. This is not surprising. Rev Erwin Lammens and I have been aware of several people who have made their views plain to us. I have also been conscious of those people who were initially against this proposal but who have come to see the opportunities it offers for wider use. The Church is the largest building in Wivenhoe and could be used by more people. I don't want to see it used like a community centre or a village hall. First and foremost it is a church and its primary purpose must always be worship. However, to my mind that purpose does not conflict with some other activities. I think everyone has got used to the idea of markets, quiz nights, meals and concerts also being held in St Mary's. They have been happening in there for a long time. As one person said in the survey: 'I like pews because that's what I grew up with, but [I] can see the benefits of changing.' Many other churches have all benefited from replacing their fixed pews and seen their buildings being used by more people in consequence.

It is important to remember that in looking to replace the pews with chairs, it is not the pews in the Chancel which we are talking about. That part of the Church, including the more historic pews in that part, will remain. The pews in this part of the Church can seat 70 – 80 people. It is a large space.

In the Survey, many people supported the idea of St Mary's being used for more activities, particularly for art, drama and music but also any other things too, including for children. There was a lot of support for the Community Room and for better toilets too.

So the PCC has now taken a historic step of agreeing to replace the pews. It is not just the pews, for it means the floor in the Church has to be replaced too, and the PCC has voted to replace the carpeted floor with a wooden one.

What next?

St Mary's now has to apply for what is called a Faculty. Any change to a church building, however small, requires the approval of a Diocesan committee in Chelmsford comprising architects and others familiar with church buildings. This committee has got used to seeing applications for changes from St

Mary's as the new lighting, sound system and new heating (all Transformation improvements). These have all required scrutiny and the approval of the Diocese. A Faculty is required for the pews with detailed statements in support of the application. A separate one is required for the Annexe. A small team from St Mary's has been working with the architects on the latter application for some time. Whilst planning consent was obtained from CBC in 2017, a lot of conditions about the detail of the Annexe needed to be agreed to ensure that the final appearance, use of materials and quality of the new building will be in keeping with the rest of the church building. This has required a lot more work including drawings.

So, progress, albeit slow progress. This has given us a chance to investigate grant-making charities and there are lots. What I am conscious of is the need to demonstrate local support for the Project. The best way to demonstrate that support is to give or pledge some money to St Mary's Church Wivenhoe using the following bank account details sort code 20-22-67 a/c no. 60439320 and, ideally, each month by a standing order. It doesn't matter how much, whatever you can afford - £5 or £10 each month will make a great deal of difference. It is the principle which matters. A lot of people have subscribed to the Appeal with nearly £30,000 raised already. If you would like more information about the Transformation Project and the Appeal, visit our website [www.stmaryswivenhoe.org](http://www.stmaryswivenhoe.org) or pick up a leaflet in Church or contact me. Thank you.

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