

Feasibility Study

Proposed Internal Reordering of St Mary's Church, Pontyates, Bro Gwendraeth LMA - To Enable Community Use Throughout the Week

1. Introduction

This feasibility document outlines a proposed internal remodelling of St Mary's Church to enable greater and more sustainable use of the building by the church and wider community throughout the week. The proposals seek to balance the building's primary role as a place of Christian worship with a renewed capacity to serve the local community through flexible, accessible, and welcoming space.

The works focus on internal reordering only and do not involve changes to the external fabric of the building.

2. Vision and Purpose

The vision of this project is to transform the church interior into a flexible, inclusive, and adaptable space that supports:

- Regular worship and sacramental life
- Community activities and social engagement
- Outreach to those who may not otherwise enter a church
- Long-term sustainability of the building

By removing fixed and restrictive elements and addressing accessibility limitations, the church will become a shared space that is open, hospitable, and usable throughout the week.

3. Existing Building and Constraints

3.1 Current Layout

The current interior layout is characterised by:

- Fixed pews occupying the nave
- A defunct and non-operational organ
- A stepped aisle creating uneven floor levels
- Choir stalls and raised chancel forming a clear separation between nave and sanctuary

While historically appropriate, these features significantly limit:

- Flexibility of use
- Accessibility for those with mobility needs
- Capacity for community events and activities

3.2 Accessibility Issues

- Changes in floor levels present barriers for wheelchair users and those with limited mobility
- Fixed seating restricts circulation and reconfiguration
- The building does not currently meet modern accessibility expectations for public use

4. Proposed Works

4.1 Removal of Pews

All fixed pews will be removed from the nave. This will:

- Create a flexible open-plan space
- Allow for a variety of seating arrangements
- Enable use for worship, meetings, events, exhibitions, and community gatherings

- Some pews will be fitted with lockable castors at the base, allowing them to be easily moved and secured in place. This flexibility will make it possible to create smaller, more defined areas within the larger open-plan space.
- Loose, stackable seating will be introduced as appropriate.

4.2 Removal of Defunct Organ

The existing organ is no longer functional and is not in regular use. Its removal will:

- Free up valuable internal space
- Reduce ongoing maintenance costs
- Allow for alternative musical provision more suited to flexible use

Any historical significance has been investigated with organ companies and there is no interest due to the number of organs coming on the market and the organ being very 'ordinary'.

4.3 Raising the Aisle Level

The central aisle will be raised to:

- Eliminate uneven floor levels
- Improve accessibility and safety
- Create a consistent floor surface across the nave

This will significantly enhance inclusivity and allow unrestricted movement throughout the space.

4.4 Chancel Reordering and Sanctuary Creation

The chancel will be raised to define a sanctuary area within the otherwise open-plan church. Choir stalls will be removed, allowing the sanctuary to:

- Remain clearly identifiable and useable as a sacred space
- Be visually connected to the nave

- Support worship while remaining adaptable

This approach respects liturgical tradition while allowing greater openness and engagement.

5. Heritage and Liturgical Considerations

The proposals aim to respect the church's historic and spiritual character while ensuring its continued relevance and viability.

- No external alterations are proposed
- Key architectural features will be retained and enhanced
- The sanctuary will remain a distinct and dignified focus for worship

Consultation with the DAC, and architect will form a key part of the next stage.

6. Community Impact and Benefits

The reordering will enable the church to:

- Host community groups, support services, and social activities
- Offer space for concerts, talks, exhibitions, and educational use
- Serve as a warm, accessible, and welcoming venue during the week
- Strengthen the church's mission and presence in the local area

Pastoral Care and Community Wellbeing

The proposed reordering will enable the church to respond more effectively to pastoral and community needs within a dispersed rural setting. Improved accessibility and flexible space will allow the building to be used for pastoral support, community gatherings, and activities that address isolation and vulnerability. As one of the few remaining shared public spaces, the church has an important role in sustaining wellbeing, connection, and hope, and these proposals will strengthen its capacity to serve the local

community in line with the mission priorities of the Diocese of St Davids.

This aligns with the church's calling to serve the whole community and to be a place of hospitality and encounter.

7. Sustainability and Long-Term Viability

Increased weekday use will:

- Improve financial sustainability through wider use of the building
- Reduce underuse of a valuable community asset
- Support long-term maintenance and care of the church

The proposed flexibility allows the building to respond to future needs without further major alterations.

8. Conclusion

The proposed internal remodelling of St Mary's Church represents a thoughtful and proportionate response to the challenges of accessibility, flexibility, and sustainability. By removing fixed and redundant elements and reimagining the internal layout, the church will remain faithful to its primary purpose while becoming a vibrant hub for worship and community life.

This feasibility study demonstrates that the proposals are both practical and achievable, and that they offer significant benefits to the church, the community, and the long-term future of the building.