



# CHRISTCHURCH PRIORY

Building on the past, for a bigger future

 MASTERPLAN





# CHRISTCHURCH PRIORY MASTERPLAN



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## Foreword by The Reverend Canon Charles Stewart, Vicar of Christchurch

**From time to time in the life of every ancient church and cathedral there comes a time when it is necessary to make a special effort to secure the future not only of the building itself but also to take steps to secure the viability of its ministry and mission in years to come. For Christchurch Priory, one of the great churches of England, such a time has come once more.**

This document presents the Masterplan which has been approved by the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of Christchurch. It contains five projects, each of which is described later in this document.

We believe the projects outlined in this Masterplan will ensure the Priory's ministry and mission can flourish while at the same time bringing significant public benefit to the wider community. For example, restoring the Nave roof will not only ensure the Priory Church is kept dry: it will also provide opportunities to develop craft skills and create apprenticeships, and open up a previously unseen medieval treasure to our visitors and neighbours through an interactive display at ground level. Similarly, creating a new, accessible and inclusive museum space for the Priory's historic artefacts will enable the creation of a new education programme in collaboration with local schools and colleges.







This Masterplan is based on our vision for the Priory's future. It describes the priority areas which are in greatest need of attention in order for that vision to be achieved.

*It is a vision which unites our commitment to serve and care compassionately for the local community, to conserve the Priory's fabric for future generations, to ensure our lighting and heating enable us to meet the Church of England's Net Zero 2030 targets and – providing a sound and sustainable financial foundation for everything we are called to do – to provide new accommodation for an ethical commercial operation that will help sustain the whole.*

By linking projects where economies of scale are possible, it seeks to ensure the optimum use of resources and efficiency of timing and fundraising. We have not set out to do more than we think is achievable; we believe everything here is necessary. Each of these projects has been carefully considered; none has been adopted lightly.

Jesus said, 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10.10). Running through this document, therefore, is the desire to create the conditions whereby Christchurch Priory, together with its sister churches in the benefice, St George's, Jumpers, and St John's, Purewell, may have 'A Future that's Bigger than the Past'\* , not for our own sake, but in order to share with others the abundant life which is God's gift to all his people.

\* 'A Future that's Bigger than the Past': Sam Wells, Canterbury Press, 2019



# Introduction







# 1. Introduction

## i. At the heart of the community

The Priory Church is built on community. A church has stood on this site for over 1300 years, welcoming and ministering not only to those in the parish, but also to visitors and pilgrims. In our own day, visitors from all over the world continue to be drawn to its beauty, history and the peaceful sanctuary provided within its historic Norman walls.

The depth of affection for the Priory in the town and the surrounding area is testament to its service over the centuries. It remains the most obvious landmark and symbol of Christchurch today, as evidenced by the number of local businesses with ‘Priory’ in their name and the regular appearance of Priory images in the logos of local organisations.

*The Priory Church is one of the most notable medieval churches in England and is larger than twenty-one of England’s Cathedrals. It fulfils a number of Cathedral-like roles, including its well-established and valued civic ministry. Recently this was in evidence when many hundreds of townspeople congregated in the Priory for the special Service of Commemoration for the late Queen Elizabeth II.*

Yet the Priory’s fundamental identity is as the parish church of Christchurch, serving the needs of the community and its people. This ‘both/and’ ministry is one of the enduring challenges of a church like Christchurch Priory.

Christchurch Priory is a living church, whose story continues to develop today. The Priory’s story is by no means confined to its history. (See Appendix i: A legacy of faith) We seek to be a church that honours its past even as we look to the future. As we meet the new opportunities and challenges of mission, ministry and compassionate care in the 2020s, we want to be a blessing to the communities we serve.



## ii. How this document is organised

Here we introduce our Masterplan and the vision for the Priory Church which drives it. This vision has been shaped and inspired by our association with the HeartEdge network.

Section 2 introduces HeartEdge and describes the four foundational HeartEdge principles: Commerce, Compassion, Congregation and Culture.

The following section sets out the priority areas for renewal and change to help us achieve our goals and be a greater blessing to the community.

Finally, we provide more detail on the commercial activities and financial aspects of the parish.

It is important to acknowledge that the PCC regards this Masterplan as a flexible, dynamic document which will be updated as circumstances change.

At its heart, however, is something that will never change: our commitment as servants of the living Lord, and open to the guiding of his Spirit, to serve the people of Christchurch and the communities in which we are set.



# Reimagining the future through HeartEdge

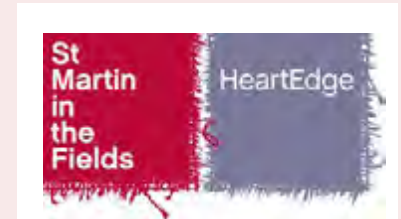




## 2. Reimagining the future through HeartEdge



No description of who we are and what we seek to do would be complete without reference to HeartEdge. HeartEdge is an ecumenical network originally initiated by the congregation of St Martin-in-the-Fields. HeartEdge describes itself as ‘a movement for renewal, fuelled by people and churches sharing their assets, experience, resource and need.’ It brings together people to develop their church and community, through sharing ideas and experience.



*These aims of church renewal and social engagement resonated with the PCC when first they heard them in January 2020. Since then, the HeartEdge principles have helped shape our thinking, planning and prayer. Far from being a mere theological exercise, HeartEdge offers ‘a vision for renewing the local church that is energizing, realistic and practicable for small and large churches alike.’*

HeartEdge is not prescriptive. It is based on four foundational principles, each of which is grounded in robust and stable foundations, theological, pastoral, fiscal and ethical, which individual churches and congregations are invited to adapt to their local circumstances.



These four principles are:

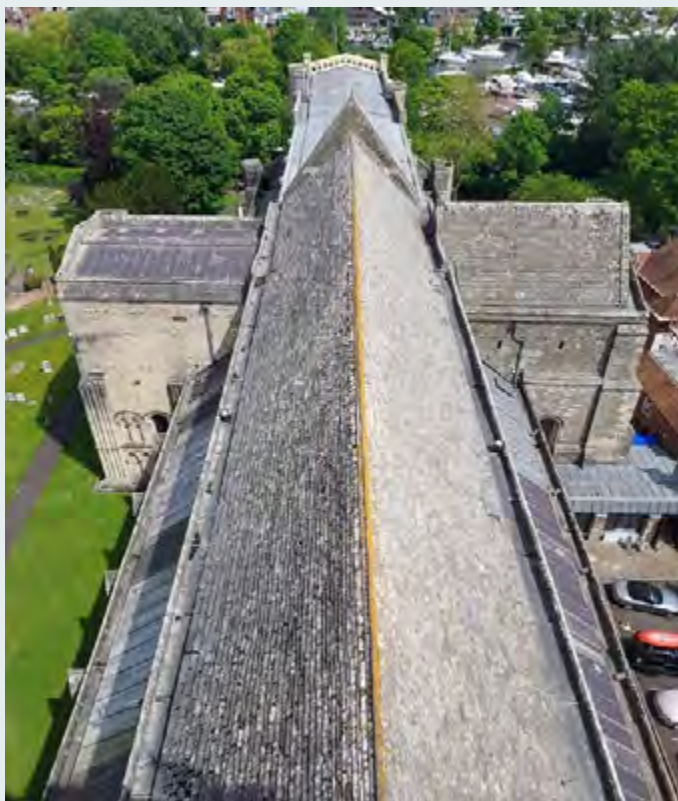
- i. **Commerce:** generating finance through enterprise, thereby raising the funds to sustain and extend mission and ministry; developing commercial activities through the church and its community in ways that demonstrate a wider understanding of the Christian faith; and by allowing our assets (e.g. buildings and facilities) to broaden and appeal to a larger market, ensuring we remain at the centre of our community, valued and considered by all.
- ii. **Compassion:** engaging need and addressing issues of social justice locally; being compassionate with those excluded or in trouble, in ways that enhance community; also recognising that great things can happen when we focus on our assets rather than perceived deficits.
- iii. **Culture:** through music, visual art, and other cultural opportunities, to give space for the imagination, for beauty, self-expression, and re-imagining the Christian narrative for the present day.
- iv. **Congregation:** enabling us to become a community of hope, where people are ‘accepted, understood and welcomed as who they are in a way that evokes a feeling of trust, honesty and greater self-worth’; a congregation that through its fellowship, prayer, discipleship and outward-looking mindset, becomes a blessing to others.

In Christchurch we are already engaged in each of these four areas (often referred to as the 4 Cs). Hearing some of the positive stories of how the HeartEdge principles have been implemented elsewhere, suggests that we are on the right track in approaching our involvement in each of the 4 Cs in more intentional, coordinated, and effective ways. We are confident addressing the five areas described in this Masterplan will help us achieve these aims.





# Five areas for change



### 3. Five areas for change

In 2018 and 2021 the PCC held a number of dedicated Away Days to consider the way ahead. Those deliberations, since 2020 securely underpinned by the HeartEdge principles, identified a set of priorities. Since we began this process, the repair to the Nave roof has been added as a pressing need.

The five areas of our church life most in need of repair, adaptation and/or change are:

- I. **Repair and restore the Nave roof**
- II. **Relocate the Priory Museum in a new and accessible space**
- III. **New heating and lighting**
- IV. **Redevelop the North Porch entrance**
- V. **A new Welcome Building, to include the café, shop and other facilities**

#### I. The Nave Roof repairs

##### **Guardians of the past, present and future**

The present Nave roof is one of the largest single stone slate roofs in Dorset and the wider Southwest. Covered in Purbeck slates, the roof has been recovered several times in the last 200 years, but not substantially repaired since the early 20th century. At some point, however, it has been repointed in Portland cement mortar, presumably to prevent water driving up under the slates and into the roof structure below. Serious water penetration in 2021 led to emergency re-pointing of the roof slopes where leaks were found; though these temporary measures are holding up, damage has already been done.

Specifically, there is significant rot in elements of the timber supports to the vault, as well as in elements of the roof structure itself. Currently the roof has no water barriers under the slates.







Below the slate covering, and unseen from ground level, is one of the great glories of Christchurch Priory: the late 14th or early 15th century roof. This structure retains substantial elements of medieval decoration which originally would have been visible from the Nave floor, prior to the installation of the plaster vault in the early 19th century.

*“The survival of the roof with its painted scheme is both an extraordinary and exceptional survival in England, in terms of quality and detail of the carpentry, and the extent and quality of the painted scheme. The survival deserves to be better known and appreciated in the public, professional and academic spheres.”*

*Ross Cook, buildings archaeologist and dendrochronologist*

*“The late medieval painted roof at Christchurch Priory is one of the most spectacular survivals in England.”*

*Dr Andrea Kirkham ACR, FSA, conservator of wall paintings and polychrome decoration*

Our project includes carefully lifting and re-laying the Purbeck slates, (without a secondary felt, as the roof has survived without this for 600 years), essential conservation of the painted decorations, and undertaking repairs of the timber roof structure.

**In the Nave roof some of the Priory Church’s most significant historic fabric is at imminent risk of loss. This is our highest repair and conservation priority.**

The cost of bringing the repair project to tender stage is estimated at £100,000. The preliminary estimate of the total project cost is £1,500,000.

*(See Appendix iii Nave Roof, Preliminary Assessment and Appendix iv Preliminary Inspection of the Painted Nave Roof)*



## II. The Priory Museum

### Sharing our past, and preserving it for our future

Since 1978, the Priory's Museum has been located in the Old School Room, above the Lady Chapel. Known as St Michael's Loft (it is a consecrated chapel dedicated to St Michael) and built in the 15th century, it was the last part of the fabric of the Priory to be completed. It contains outstanding items of national significance including a rare cresset stone for tallow, fashioned from Purbeck marble and dating from the 11th/12th century.

A large percentage of the collection is exclusive to Christchurch Priory's heritage and cannot be found in any other comparable collection. Most of the items in the museum have no real regional parallels. The collection can be categorized under the following key headings:

1. Original artefacts from the Priory's fabric and interior decoration, including a medieval stone carving of Christ crowning the Madonna, a depiction rarely found in English churches.
2. Items representing the ecclesiastical life of the Priory including a beautifully embroidered pink damask cope, featuring a 16th century pattern.
3. Religious relics and souvenirs.
4. Objects pertaining to the Priory's working life, including the thirteenth century seal of Christchurch Priory.
5. Artefacts relating to Christchurch's social history including a very large 19th century tithe map.
6. Material associated with the Christchurch Priory School between the early 1700s - 1869, including early items of uniform embroidered with the school badge, personal items, such as a Victorian purse with twenty sovereigns and some stationery.







*“The Christchurch Priory collection has clear learning potential and could readily support National Curriculum based learning. It enriches our understanding of political, religious and social and military history between the medieval period and the present day and could be used effectively to reach new audiences. It has the inherent capacity to support profile raising and tourism visits for the Priory.” Christchurch Priory Collection Significance Matrix & Statement Vicky de Wit 2018*

Two major problems with St Michael’s Loft, the present site of the Museum, mean that the Priory’s heritage must be displayed in a new location. First, St Michael’s Loft can only be reached via two stone spiral staircases to the North (stair up) and South (stair down) at the far east end of the Priory church. A one-way system is in operation as the staircases are narrow and steep (over 70 steps each side). Sadly, this renders the museum inaccessible to anyone with mobility issues.

The other key reason for moving the Museum is because the lack of heating and high humidity levels in St Michael’s Loft have caused significant deterioration in the Christchurch Parish Tithe map (one of only three copies in existence) and also prevent us opening the museum during the winter months. These unsuitable conditions and the lack of adequate security facilities prevent us from displaying other objects and artifacts which are of national interest.

The existing museum is normally open from Easter to the end of October. Evidence from the second half of 2022, when 250 children and 922 adults visited the museum over a four month period with average opening times of eight hours per week, shows the level of demand and interest that a re-sited museum might generate.

We want to make the Priory’s historical heritage accessible to as many people as possible, and to make educational programmes with local schools a core part of our activity. To make this happen, the Museum must be moved from the current site to a ground-floor position. This could be in Priory House, once the café and shop have moved to the new building, or potentially in the new welcome building itself. It may also be possible to create the new Museum in the North Triforium, provided permission is given to install a lift.



### III. Heating and Lighting

#### Compassion for creation

Replacing our heating and lighting is a top priority for the PCC, with good reason. Both systems are outdated, seriously inefficient and uneconomic to run; both have a high carbon footprint and militate against our ability to meet our obligation to become carbon neutral by 2030, as the Church of England requires of us. From the perspective of both creation care and stewardship, therefore, we believe this is the right time to make this change.

Earlier in 2022 a Building Services Condition Study, undertaken by Chris Reading Associates Ltd, reported that some items of the heating system, including all five boilers, are now obsolete. In November 2022, significant problems with the heating system led to further investigation, as a result of which the Priory's boiler room ventilation system has been condemned.

In addition, the heat emitters in the Priory – notably the convector-style heaters – are thought to advance the deterioration of the church's fabric and are considered unsuitable for a Grade 1 listed building like the Priory.

The Priory's lighting scheme is no longer fit for purpose. It fails to provide adequate illumination in certain areas, does nothing to enhance the Priory's glorious architecture, and militates against the creative use of light for special services, concerts and other public and community events. In part this is the legacy of a piece-meal approach over many years, which has also resulted in control of the lighting being uncoordinated.





In order to protect the fabric of this Grade I listed building, safeguard the sensitive objects and artifacts contained in it, provide the modern, unified lighting system required to let this beautiful building fulfill its purpose of providing a welcome to all, and to work towards achieving carbon neutrality, it is proposed that the following are needed:

1. **Completely replace the heating installation in the Priory Church. This includes new boilers capable of conversion, as well as replacing all fan convactor radiators. At present we are actively considering which heating method may be most appropriate for the Priory in future, e.g. bore holes within the grounds, or air source heat pumps.**
2. **Install a new lighting scheme, specifically designed for this building.**
3. **Before replacing the heating and lighting, we shall need to renew completely the electrical installation throughout the Priory. In addition to providing an integrated electrical system for the first time, and addressing some safety issues in the existing electrics, this will also provide a secure basis for the new heating and lighting and avoid the need to keep on replacing elements piece-meal into the future.**  
*NB In addition, we need to explore electricity generation through wind power and through photovoltaic cells on the Great Quire and Lady Chapel Roofs. This would allow us to be able to generate a significant amount of power to run the systems, further reducing our carbon footprint and reducing running costs.*
4. **Recognising how much people in the community appreciate the floodlighting of the Priory Church, we shall want to discern the most environmentally-friendly method of floodlighting.**

Upgrading the heating and lighting systems will enable a significantly broader range of events to take place in the Priory, which will enhance the quality of our outreach and community engagement. Some forms of cultural expression, which depend on lighting effects, will become possible for the first time; we believe this will appeal to different interest groups within our community and cater to their interests.

*(See Appendix v Building Services Condition Study Report)*



## IV. The North Porch

### Welcoming the stranger

Most people enter the Priory through the North Porch, whether for services, visits, concerts or other events. Sadly, this gateway into the church does not assist us in welcoming others as they cross the threshold.

Indeed, for those who have little or no experience of entering churches, the North Porch of the Priory, with its preponderance of dark wood, may be perceived as unwelcoming, daunting and even frightening.

In particular, the current North Porch entrance does not make it easy for the vulnerable, the disabled or the excluded – in other words, the people that Jesus associated with – to be welcomed as Christ’s guests. Nor does the present layout makes it easy for wheelchair users or parents with a pram to navigate through the space in safety and comfort. We have to do better.

We intend to instal a redesigned North Porch to embody and facilitate the unconditional welcome that we want everyone to experience when they come to the Priory, for whatever reason. The alterations include a new entrance, improved access for the disabled, new lighting design, modern and flexible information displays and – crucially – a new welcome desk.





## V. A New Welcome Building

### A heart for hospitality

The Priory is a much-loved building in our community and already plays host to all sorts of events, activities and special services, attracting large numbers of local residents and visitors throughout the year. We are acutely aware, nevertheless, that the church and Priory House in their current form place limits on any significant expansion of our engagement with our local community and prevent us from providing services and facilities that they would find attractive. In short, we are not able to be the blessing for our community that we would like to be.

*If we are to make real headway with our vision of creating a place of fellowship and encounter for all, which our community can truly experience as its own, we need not only a much larger facility than at present, but also to locate it in a new building that has its own character and can be accessed independently, while still relating closely to the Priory Church.*

The site now being commended for the new build includes the area to the Southwest of the Priory's West end (for those who know the area, it would be on the site, and south of, the former shop). Representatives of Historic England South-West have given initial support for this siting. It is believed this area is not archaeologically sensitive or problematic. One key advantage of placing the new building here is that it would be visible, both from the town centre and from the Quay. It would have good views over the land and down to the river. An attractive building situated here should draw people in.

The building needs to make a difference primarily to people in the community and visitors, and critically to those that do not associate 'church' as a place of welcome or joy or respect. A wide range of social engagement will also be possible on this site.





The new building is to include:

- A shop area, independent of other areas, of 40 square metres in area with additional storage space. The shop must be easily visible from points of public vantage.
- A café, able to accommodate at least 75 covers in a single space, with a kitchen and a servery. The café must be easily accessible from the north and south side of the Priory, and flow into the Priory grounds.
- A separate space capable of seating a further 35 people that can also be incorporated to form a single larger space.
- Good toilet facilities, including accessible facilities.
- A direct link into the Priory Church and to Priory House via a covered cloister walk.
- The new building must be integrated into the wider landscape and be married to the new cloister.
- Where reasonable, it must incorporate energy generation.

One of the important benefits of the new building is that it would enable us to offer a much greater choice and variety of food and drink and provide the flexible space we need to offer a variety of hospitality functions such as conferences, wedding receptions, and informal post-church service fellowship times.

Importantly, creating this new building would also release space on the ground floor of Priory House for other community uses. At present, one of those rooms is often booked by community groups, such as U3A. In future, we would be able to expand considerably our offer to local groups.

Creating a northern cloister walk would link the new welcome building to Priory House with minimal intervention on the historic fabric of the church (a tribute to the past, and in line with the HeartEdge principle of Culture).





Coupled with removing the current car park to another location, this linking space would recreate a sense of the mediaeval cloister and afford views of and access to the monastic lawns and beyond. It could be used for the serving of interval drinks when concerts are being held in the church, open air meetings, as a spill-over from the café or other uses such as a small gallery for local artwork.

Finally, in addition to providing the commercial basis necessary for the expansion of activities and services we believe we have been called to do, the new building is also potentially a major contribution to high quality public architecture in Christchurch.





# Commerce and Finance







## 4. Commerce and Finance: enterprise in service of our mission

**We already undertake a number of commercial activities, which generate income to serve and support our mission and ministry.**

These commercial enterprises, whose ethos is shaped by our sense of social responsibility (e.g. being a responsible employer, recruiting staff who might otherwise struggle to find work, etc.), include:

### I. Hospitality

The Priory's Café and Gift Shop are run through Christchurch Priory Enterprises Ltd (CPEL), a Limited Company; they are currently located in Priory House. Profits generated by the Café and Shop are allocated solely to support our mission, and already make a valuable contribution, while helping develop a community hub. They are run by a small core of paid staff supported by volunteers.

In July 2021, CPEL invested in new outdoor furniture to add to the seating capacity already available indoors in the café. This modest investment resulted in a substantial increase in turnover over the summer months.

Since then the PCC has made a substantial investment in Priory House to expand and modernise the Café and Shop and to upgrade the toilet facilities. This has doubled the number of covers for the indoor area of the café all year round and has greatly improved the offer for visitors and congregation alike.



## II. Operational Commerce

In addition to the Café and Shop, a number of other assets and premises also generate income:

### ■ Halls/Outbuildings/Room Hire:

We lease two halls/outbuildings to local nursery schools on long-term hire agreements. Room 8 in Priory House is also hired out to some local organisations for meetings, classes and gatherings. Although this does generate some income, we believe our room hire policy also has the benefit of providing affordable spaces for community groups.

### ■ Public Car Park and Surrounding Land:

These are currently leased to the BCP Council on a long-term agreement. The income from this lease is welcome.

### ■ Donations from Visitors:

We now have several wireless donation points around the Priory to make it easier for visitors and congregation members to make a donation. These are well used.

### ■ Museum and Tours:

As mentioned above, the current location of the Museum, with its poor accessibility, limits the number of visitors who can see it. Within those constraints, however it has been doing well. We also offer regular tours of areas in the Priory Church not normally open to the public, for which a charge is made. There is scope for extending the number and types of tours on offer.

### ■ Music and the Arts:

The Priory is a stunning venue for live music: indeed, it is the principal concert venue in Christchurch and the surrounding area. The evening concerts generate revenue from hire fees and from the sale of interval drinks.







- **The Priory is blessed with the finest organ in this part of the South coast.** Each term we host a series of weekly Thursday organ recitals. This well-established programme attracts organists from around the country and overseas. The retiring collection taken after each recital goes to support our music programme.

- **Unused Clergy Housing and Priory House Flat:** Two houses owned by the parish and a flat at the top of Priory House are currently rented out through a commercial letting agency.

- **Priory House Car Park:** Parking charges are collected through an honesty box system. Unfortunately, the honesty box is frequently abused by some users.

- **Congregational Events:** Regular congregational events, such as the Summer and Christmas Fayres, generate income while also fostering community spirit. Both these events feature craft stalls which allow local artisans and craftspeople to sell their work: another example of community engagement.



# Epilogue by Canon Charles Stewart Vicar of Christchurch

## The Way Ahead

Thank you for reading this Masterplan document. I hope you will be inspired, as we are, with the combined potential of these projects to secure the PCC's aspirations for the future of Christchurch Priory and its multi-layered service of the wider community.

We believe that investing in these five major projects will help us fulfil this vision and map out the way ahead for this parish: preserving its heritage and presenting its story in more accessible ways; presenting opportunities for education and contributing to the local economy; developing our commercial enterprises to provide the necessary financial foundation for everything we seek to do.

We know we cannot do this alone. I hope that you may be inspired to partner with us in seeking to secure the Priory's future at the heart of Christchurch.

*Charles Stewart*







## Acknowledgements

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## Appendices

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# The Parish of Christchurch

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