



# **Building for the Future.**

**A Development to Help the  
Church Help the Community.**

**September 2009**





## Building for the Future

Jesus told a story of two builders, one wise and one foolish. The fool built his house upon sand, only to see it washed away in the flood. By contrast the wise man constructed his house upon rock, where it withstood the worst the elements could throw at it.

I live in a house which needed underpinning in 1996 because the foundations were (as I understand it) not dug sufficiently deep. Across my front garden is the St Francis Chapel . a converted stable block and coal store, built, I am told, without foundations.



Is it any wonder, then, that cracks have appeared in the walls? Perhaps not. Time has taken its toll on the chapel, and the *Parochial Church Council* has had to do some hard thinking about its future.

Living in this close-knit community, I suspect that some of you may have heard snippets of information concerning this matter already. Knowing how news sometimes changes as it spreads, I'm sure there are different versions of the news in

circulation. So here's what's going on with the unstable former stable . from the horse's mouth, so to speak. My apologies for the length of this article, but I feel it is better you are fully informed than left to guess too much.

### The Past

As is often the way, two separate but related things came together at one time to influence the church's thinking about the chapel. The first of these were the discussions held at and following our 2007 Mission Day+ relating to the way the church might need to change in order to grow and serve the community more fully and effectively. Tentative steps were made in some areas (e.g. children's work), but it became apparent that some aspects of the church and chapel buildings were hindrances to these developments rather than helps.

Secondly, the widening cracks in the walls of the chapel were causing comments from and concern to some of the church members. Therefore, in early 2008, we commissioned a report to investigate the structure and ascertain how safe it was for public use. The report concluded that, though the building was safe at present, it was only going to get worse with time, and some remedial work would almost certainly need to be done

in the not-too-distant future to prevent the deterioration having too great an impact on our usage of the building. Furthermore, our suspicion was confirmed that the cost of doing all the necessary work to bring the building up to contemporary standards would be comparable to pulling the building down and starting from scratch.

As the report was discussed at the PCC meeting, the contents of our Vision Day discussions quite naturally resurfaced. It became clear that if the chapel were to become unusable, some of our Vision Day hopes would be dashed.

From the earliest days of the building's history as a chapel, the church community has been really pleased to be able to use the former stable for services midweek and on Sundays (especially in the winter), and for children's clubs, lunches and all sorts of meetings. One popular and significant characteristic of the chapel building is its accessibility from the heart of the village, in stark contrast to the church building itself which is a mile away on a difficult bend in the road.

The chapel is also easier and cheaper to heat than the church and the interior fixtures and fittings make it altogether more flexible than its ancient historic counterpart. To lose it would be a grievous blow to the work of the church in the community, and a sad end to the exciting vision born almost 50 years ago under the ministry of Revd Gerald Lane.

The PCC had to face the reality that the building was in need of more than a little tender loving care, and despite the chapel's popularity, it is fair to say that there was also a growing sense amongst PCC members that even if it had been in perfect condition, it was far from ideal for our purposes.

So, it must be said that the building's size and shape are such that the chapel doesn't naturally lend itself to any of the activities mentioned above:

It's not really big enough to accommodate the whole Sunday congregation comfortably, and its dimensions certainly restrict the scope of the children's holiday club weeks.

There are no separate rooms within the chapel if we wanted to have a Sunday School meeting during the Sunday services, and the fact that there is no toilet is a problem. This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century! Furthermore, the absence of any kitchen facility makes any form of catering difficult, which limits the scope of any event we might wish to organise. (The recent visit of Ann Chege from *New Hope Children's Centre* is a case in point!)

So, faced with the possibility of losing our building and having somehow to start again, we began to think of alternatives. We did consider using the Village Hall and the School Hall, but concluded that neither of these facilities would be able to provide the flexibility we would need for both the regular and irregular activities in the current church calendar, let alone

satisfy the future possibilities from our Vision Day discussions. So we went back to thinking about rebuilding premises of our own. But as we did so, we didn't concentrate on how to replace it like-for-like, but rather how

might we provide the village with a more useful facility?+

The discussions were wide-ranging, as I'm sure you will imagine, and our conclusions, in brief, are as follows:

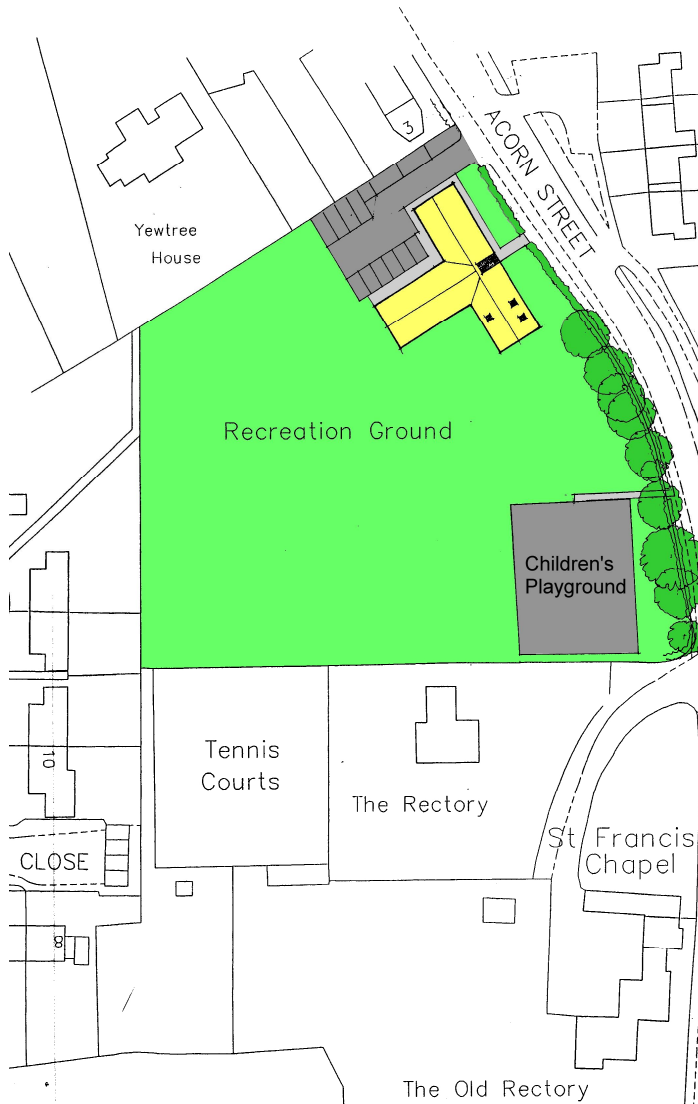
1. The whole community would benefit from a chapel facility *close to the heart of the village* which would be open for people to drop in for a moment's peace amidst the rush and noise of day-to-day life.
2. Furthermore, the church family would benefit from a flexible modern facility (more than just a chapel) for:
  - a. ordinary services of worship,
  - b. Sunday school and other activities for children and young people,
  - c. regular midweek services and other gatherings,
  - d. a variety of special events, and
  - e. the smooth administration of the ministry of the church across the three villages (an office).

As you read this second point, you might be thinking, *this is for the church, not the community.* If you are, it's worth reflecting that *the mission of the church in the community is to support and assist the community wherever possible.* It is our contention that if the church grows and develops it will therefore be better able to support the wider community. With regard to the building, we believe a better facility for the church would promote the growth of the church, to the ultimate benefit of everyone. With all this in mind:

3. The church could, and would, make other parts of the chapel / church centre open for use by residents and other organisations. So, for example, our plans incorporate a large foyer area separate from the quiet of the chapel which could conceivably provide a pleasant place for residents to meet during the day, a community notice-board and an outlet for our FairTrade goods. The separate meeting rooms could be used for a variety of purposes. We would be very keen to ensure the building is well used, but want to emphasise right from the start that *we are not interested in taking business away from the Village Hall.* We see the new facility complementing existing provision and will continue to work closely with everyone concerned (Parish Council, Village Hall Committee and other organisations).

## The Future

Our preliminary investigations with the planning department about reconstructing a new purpose-built church centre on the site of the existing chapel revealed this was not possible for a variety of reasons (e.g. issues of tree preservation, vehicular access and plot size). However, because we believe that the project will be of great value to the community, we pursued another avenue. The site we have now identified for the new building is the northern end of the recreation ground, which is land owned by the church. This map shows what this might look like.



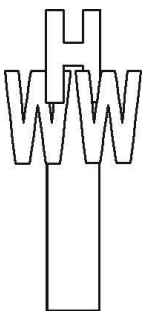
You will see from the map that the chapel / church centre is considerably larger than the current chapel; this is so it can provide for the community's needs. We are extremely grateful to God that a generous donation has been made to the church in order to make this project a reality, and we are truly hopeful that the new building will be welcomed and subsequently well used by the people of the parish.

We are currently in the process of preparing an application for planning permission. If you have any questions or comments about the project, we would like to be able to answer them in person rather than have them or our intentions distorted by the chain of communication that is the planning system. Drawings of the proposed new building can be inspected at the St Francis Chapel. Please contact me or one of the churchwardens to arrange to look at them or to discuss your questions.

In his story about the two builders, Jesus was making a bigger point about the way we live our lives, and calling us all to trust and obey his teaching. The church family is trying to do this, and a new chapel provides a clear channel through which we can effectively love our neighbours in obedience to his call. I very much look forward to seeing this project develop, and to seeing the church serving the community in new ways through this new building.

Mark Dunstan





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*Knowing Christ and Making Him Known*

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