

## Statement of Significance – Major projects

*This document must be accompanied by the Standard Information Form 1A*

### **Section 1: The church in its urban / rural environment.**

#### **1.1 Setting of the Church**

*How does the setting out of the church contribute to its landscape / townscape value and to its significance?*

The original Sowerby Bridge Chapel, more popularly known as Brigg Chapel, built in 1526, had served the population of Sowerby Bridge for almost three centuries until at the end of the 18C the chapel could no longer accommodate the increase in numbers of the congregation. Various extension and improvement schemes were considered but the site was not satisfactory, being close to the River Calder and subject to flooding; therefore in 1803 it was resolved to build a larger church on a more suitable site. Acquisition of the site proved to be complex and protracted, but by April 1819 construction of the new church had commenced, to the designs of the architect John Oates of Halifax. The current Christ Church opened in 1821 and occupies a prominent position in Sowerby Bridge, at the main crossroads of the town on the junction of Wharf Street and Tuel Lane. This site was at the nexus of Victorian business and travel. The first turnpike roads (running from Rochdale to Sowerby Bridge and Halifax, and Salterhebble, Stainland & Sowerby Bridge), the transfer between the Rochdale Canal (1804) and existing Calder & Hebble navigation (taking wool and other products from the Pennines down to the ports on the east coast or towards Manchester & Liverpool on the west) and the Manchester & Leeds railway arriving in 1840 with subsequent branch lines to Halifax/ Bradford and Rishworth and a passenger tram line. Today it is in the centre of the conservation area and just outside the newly designated “Sowerby Bridge High Street Heritage Action Zone” which stops on the opposite side of Tuel Lane. From its graveyard there are still views of all these vital arterial connections. The church is the only building (from the rapid expansion of the town during the Industrial Revolution to its post- industrial decline), remaining wholly true to its original purpose without restoration or renovation/re-purposing. In its hay day the church could seat more than 900 people. It is a treasure-trove of history with memorials in its stained glass, memorials and grave yard being reminders of everything that has now been lost.

The immediate setting for the church is its walled graveyard. Three of the four walls of the graveyard and their gates are separately listed at Grade 2 see Appendix for details of all listings and listing references. The graveyard opened in 1821 but after a report from the Board of Health was closed by order of Secretary to Queen Victoria on 1 March 1857 due to insanitary conditions with the number of bodies buried there. Only one gate is in daily use and the main access to the building is from Wharf Street, via steps and a steep ramp one with a handrail fitted. Level access is possible with prior notice via Church Bank where vehicles may drop less able people outside the East gate, height level with the church. This gate is usually kept locked and access within the graveyard from it until the South side of the church is reached is currently poor with broken and uneven paving/ gravestones which are trip/ slip hazards.

## **1.2 The Living Churchyard**

### *What is the significance of the natural heritage of the site?*

Sowerby Bridge town centre has little green space so the graveyard is one of very few public areas where people can retreat. The closed graveyard is now in the care of Calderdale Council who maintain the graves and walls and provide support with care of the trees and some grass cutting of the open level areas. We have developed a close working relationship with the council's team manager so that weeding between the many Georgian "table top" graves is a joint effort. Once a month we hold a gardening group for anyone to join us, and help grow and harvest the crops, and keep on top of weeding between the graves. We cut back and prune the trees and shrubs, keep paths ice and algae free but the council help us dispose of surplus green waste that we cannot compost and tackle invasive vegetation and tree surgery.

In a survey of flora in 2018 there were 25 different species of wild or naturalised trees and flowers and 10 different species of garden or ornamental plants and shrubs. As part of the Heritage Open Day 2020 featuring "Hidden Nature" we offered a "safe distanced" activity highlighting all things of interest in the graveyard on our website [Christ Church Sowerby Bridge | Our Community \(christchurchsb.org.uk\)](http://christchurchsb.org.uk). We provide two benches for people to sit near flowering pots for contemplation and make sure seed and water is available for birds. Usually these are feral pigeons, jackdaws and blackbirds but occasionally ducks or geese from the riverside.

In 2015 we created two vegetable beds for Community use. One deep for runner beans / root veg and one shallow for herbs /salad crops. Between these events church members plant and water as the weather requires. In 2018 we used our home grown leeks as the base for soup at a "Messy Harvest" event. In other years runner beans, rocket & blackberries have all given good harvests.

## **1.3 Social History**

### *What is the historic and present use of the church and churchyard by the congregation and wider community? How does this contribute to its significance?*

There has always been a focus on education and emphasis on working with schools since the earliest days of the church. The Rev James Franks was curate at Halifax and from 1802 Brigg Chapel vicar in Sowerby Bridge. In 1803 he started efforts to build a new Church, and in 1808, he established the Beech School in his own house. Thereafter he founded the first purpose-built school in Sowerby Bridge in 1828 in a property called Croft. It was used as a Sunday School and as a day school. There were 2 rooms, one for boys and one for girls: the equal treatment was progressive & unusual for the day. By 1833, it had become too small. The Greenup Family who gave land for the building of the new church donated land for a new school with Rev Franks also contributing to the new Sowerby Bridge National School. Of the five Trustees we know of 4 were active members of the Christ Church congregation. The new school accommodated 224 boys and 226 girls many of whom were from several local mills. By 1893 the school moved again to a larger site and became the Ellison Memorial School (named after the former vicar of Christ Church: Rev John Ellison). This school included the Mechanics Institute for working men and also a separate infant and secondary school. This institute had already staged an exhibition of arts and sciences in 1839 which attracted 29,000 visitors. The wealthy business men in

Christ Church continued to become leading figures in the town's political and social spheres E.g. William Wood was a cotton spinner and secretary of the Mechanics Institute in 1874. He was a member of the Sowerby Bridge Local Board / and its Chairman for 3 terms in 1884- 1886, and 1893/1894], a member, then Chairman, of the Public Library Committee as well as being a warden of Christ Church. This civic engagement continued throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century when heavy engineering prospered in the area with the firm of Pollit and Wigzell Ltd, who's founding members Thomas and Eustace have memorials in the church and graveyard. Rev Canon Charles Llewellyn Ivens was vicar for over 30 years and was renowned for his Friday Bible Class for young men and special men's services where he preached to a packed church. There is a 1908 presentation montage of 49 individual member's photographs. In 1916 50% of its members were serving in the trenches. After World War 2 the town's industries waned and in the 1974 boundary changes Sowerby Bridge ceased to have its own parish council and was merged into Halifax.

Christ Church today continues to be closely involved with our own Christ Church CE VA Junior school: several members are on the governing body or have worked or volunteered there. The school and church are also building closer links to its feeder infant school Tuel Lane, and successor high school Sowerby Bridge Trinity Academy and with Bolton Brow primary school which is also in the parish. We have had Bishop Development Funding to create school visits linked to the relevant KS curricula, and also offer schools the use of the building for performance space. We continue to offer activities for young people through an active Girlguiding unit for Rainbows, Brownies and Guides based in the school hall and continue with Junior church. Our Boys Brigade Company operated until 2018. Since the Boxing Day floods in 2015 we have been recognized by Calderdale Council as an Emergency Response Hub. We participate with our local traders, charities and clubs such as Rotary in supporting new civic structures of a SB Development Board, SB COVID 19 response group and the most recently formed Sowerby Bridge cultural consortium.

#### **1.4 The church building in general**

##### *Provide a description of the church.*

Christ Church celebrates its bicentenary in 2021. This is a large church which occupies a prominent position at the junction of Wharf Street and Tuel Lane to the east of the town centre. Externally the walls are of ashlar sandstone of a very good quality; for a building of this age there is only minimal erosion of the stone face. The roofs over the nave, chancel and organ chamber are covered with grey Welsh slates laid in diminishing courses with stone ridges. The roofs to the porches are covered with lead as was originally the roof to the tower. In 2014 this was replaced with stainless steel and the roof to the toilets is covered with stainless steel. Rainwater pipes are of cast iron. All in a Perpendicular style.

Internally the nave roof is of a large span, of hammer beam trusses dating from 1894, with cusped head sections supported on attached columns. There are North, South and Central aisles dividing the wooden fixed pews and steps up to the chancel with choir stalls and a uniquely volunteer restored organ. There is an unusual horseshoe gallery with panelled front supported on cast iron and timber columns. A glazed screen has been fitted below the gallery across the length of the west bay to create a community room and further screens have been erected in the north west and south west corners of the nave to create a choir vestry and clergy vestry. The gallery itself is

rather neglected following work in 1983 to remove dry rot from the benches at its apex together with much of the wood in the tower and belfry. After this the stone interior was left exposed and only the chancel has been re-plastered following the roof restoration. The entire west end was subsequently turned into a community space housing a domestic kitchen and a small Narthex now used as a meeting room and above another small meeting room. There remains a spiral stair within the tower to the Sound chamber, Clock chamber with an automated clock, operating 4 dials on each face of the tower, and Bell chamber which houses the electronic bell speakers.

The church is in sound condition following a series of repairs using various grants dating from 2006. These include: completely re-roof of the nave, chancel and tower; to restore the stained glass windows in the chancel and along the South Aisle; and to install emergency lighting and a new responsive lighting system to make the building safe for use in the evening and better fit for worship and performances. It is now well cared for and commendable efforts are made to maintain a good standard of upkeep.

### **1.5 The church building in detail**

*Assess the significance of either each historical phase of the building or of each area within it. For example, north aisle, south chancel elevation, Norman tower*

The west tower dates from 1821 and is of three stages, with offset diagonal buttresses which rise to embattled parapets and pinnacles. To the west elevation of the lower stage is a flat headed window of three lights and above, within the first stage, a two light window with tracery and a pointed arch under a hood mould. To the second stage are single light windows with pointed arches and hood moulds, to all elevations other than the east. To the third stage are clock faces below three light louvered openings with tracery and pointed arches under hood moulds.

The nave dates from 1821 and is of six tall bays with plinth, offset buttresses which rise to pinnacles, with embattled parapets between. Windows to each bay are tall, of three lights, transomed, with tracery, pointed arches under hood moulds with grotesque head-stops. To the west bay on the south elevation is the main entrance, with pointed arch roll moulded doorway, with shields in spandrels and flanked by pinnaced columns, and a three light window above.

The chancel dates from 1873-4 and is of two bays, narrower than those to the nave, with chamfered plinths and offset buttresses which rise to pinnacles with embattled parapets between. Windows to the north and south are similar to those of the nave but of two lights. To the east elevation are three tall lancets with plain pointed arches. To the south, adjacent to the east elevation of the nave, are entrance steps to the boiler room. The organ chamber was built in 1873-4 together with the chancel, having offset buttresses, doorway with pointed arch to the east elevation and a three light window to the north.

To the north and south of the tower are two storey porches dating between 1894 and 1895, each with embattled parapets, an entrance doorway with pointed arch, single light windows with flat heads and tracery, and to the south porch at ground floor level a window of two lights with flat head and tracery. Within each porch is a stair to the gallery. To the north of the north west porch is a single storey former vestry dating from 1889, now converted to provide toilet accommodation, having embattled parapets, and to the east elevation a window of three lights with flat head and hood mould; a former door opening to the west elevation has been built up. All in a Perpendicular style.

## **1.6 Contents of the Church**

*Provide a description of its contents and their significance. It is reasonable to group these if there is a contemporary scheme which is significant as such, for example one could say a complete scheme of 18<sup>th</sup>-century furnishings, of high significance.*

The church contents mainly date from its early years such as its basic heating system under metal grates, tiled floor, pitch pine pews in the nave and tiered benches in the gallery. Its dominant decorative feature is a series of stained glass windows featuring on the South side the four evangelists and John the Baptist; the North side St Paul and a series of scenes showcasing mission to the sick, the bereaved and for children. The three lancet windows in the chancel window depict Nativity, Crucifixion and Ascension. There is a plain pointed arch to chancel which has a tessellated floor and elaborate Gothic style stone reredos. The octagonal font of 1895 has panels decorated and with apostles' symbols and supported by central shaft with outer colonnettes on a square base. More recent additions are a wooden chancel screen (1935) and a polychromatic marble war memorial (1921). There are many of the original pitch pine pews with book drawers remaining after various areas of the seating have been removed to improve access and facilities over the years. One such was to enable a movable altar to be introduced at the crossing. Another in the North aisle was to create an area for the crèche and a space for private prayer wherein is the original wooden altar table from Brig Chapel inscribed 1526 (loaned from a local family) together with a painting of the old chapel.

## **1.7 Significance for mission**

What are the strengths of the building as it is for worship and mission? What potential for adapted and new uses does the church and its setting already have with little or no change?

The building is a key landmark in Sowerby Bridge. A physical reminder that God is in the heart of the town and our starting point for mission is that we pray for every street, organisation and facet of life in the town daily on a rolling basis each month. The building's interior is rich in history and in telling the Christian faith and values within its architecture. The current setting has had some modernisation with toilets, a kitchen and some small meeting spaces. The main worship space has great potential for use as a cultural space for performance particularly music and the spoken word with good acoustics and a magnificent pipe organ. It is an auditorium and in complete contrast to the other churches in the town with spectacle and awe, compared to a more austere simplicity, and a modern domestic layout. To maximise our potential we need to continue improving our interior to meet modern standards of comfort and services, having improved lighting, provided Wi-Fi and streaming services, we now wish to upgrade the sound system and our audio hearing loop. Ideally we need to improve access for those less able (particularly to navigate the graveyard) and the changes of level in the interior) perhaps widening some points to give access for modern wheelchairs. Ideally individual seats rather than just fixed

pews in part of the nave would give us greater flexibility to encourage more participation in a variety of activity rather than just listening. It is this lack of space for activity which requires our young people's groups to hold their regular meeting in the school hall where there is no natural connection to the church family. It is telling that that the monthly church parade service has been discontinued with young adults. The only regular bookings we have are for our Mothers Union and the local Trefoil Guild.

To communicate what's happening to those people who never enter the building we use our social media sites particularly Facebook to witness using Cof E seasonal material and promote mission. We also publicise our own events, those for local charities and any community messages on our prominent community noticeboard overlooking the main crossroads.

## **Section 2 : The significance of the area affected by the proposal.**

### **2.1 Identify the parts of the church and/or churchyard which will be directly or indirectly affected by your proposal.**

The only area affected by this proposal is the apex of the horseshoe gallery suspended at the west end of the nave. What for years was visible from the chancel as an unsightly "gap" reminding us of the ravages of dry rot, has with the permission of a TMRO been made complete with the three rows of chairs. We wish to retain these 110 chairs, which are currently in use to achieve social distancing, into the future as they restore the "completeness" of the horseshoe of seats within the limits of modern health & safety.

### **2.2 Set out the significance of these particular parts.**

The gallery is currently little used but is an unusual and potentially very useful feature as we seek to make the building better used by the community we serve. We have begun to engage with our local academy Sowerby Bridge since it became part of Trinity MAT. In 2018 its pupils visited as part of our Remembrance exhibition and then the whole school visited at Christmas 2019 in two separate congregations to experience a nativity play. At both of these "performances" we needed to seat some pupils and teachers in the gallery. Many people do not realise that the church is so spacious, as one side is completely hidden against the hill. Once they come in and see its potential and scope they feel more at home to visit again. During Lockdown we have installed a pan, zoom, tilt camera in the gallery which can record or live stream events during COVID restrictions. Family members not permitted to attend in person for funerals or baptisms can now watch and feel included in the service. We would hope that as more people gain experience of our events they will want to actually visit when allowed to do so. Once the gallery is made a more inviting place it will enhance the whole ambience in the church, enabling more people to participate in community events and bring the whole community together.

## **Section 3: Assessment of the impact of the proposals**

### **3.1 Describe and assess the impact of your proposal on these parts, and on the whole.**

The chairs are free standing and will not need fixing to the main fabric in any way. They will require no physical fixing or change at all whether on installation or at renewal / removal. They are sufficiently different to contrast with and not to detract as a “pastiche” of the existing fixed benches

These chairs will restore the “wrap around” nature of the original seating and bridge the very obvious gap, so restoring an intimacy to the whole space. Currently using the benches seem “adversarial” as they are opposing sides and at the moment those celebrating, or speaking/ performing from the chancel steps can only focus and project to a vacant back wall rather than their audience.

The chairs will increase our capacity. Critically whilst social distancing measure are needed due to COVID -19 they will allow us to seat almost all of our regular members. Without them we are only able to safely seat around up to 20 households when usually the nave pews currently give us a capacity of 270. In the future we hope to both grow our worshipping family and have the building used more by our community. We will be able to welcome more people to events and if ticketed increase the income generated to help the building become economically self-funding for its maintenance costs.

### **3.2 Explain how you intend, where possible, to mitigate the impact of the proposed works on the significance of the parts affected and the whole.**

We believe that our proposed works will only have a beneficial impact on the gallery and the worship area as a whole.

We have consulted with the Vice Chair & Director of our local choral society and he is confident that the chairs are positioned far and (crucially) high enough away from the chancel that the fabric element will not affect the acoustics of the building. The fabric seats will be hardly visible to people in the nave.

### **Sources consulted**

Quinquennial Architect – Richard Crooks Partnership Ltd;  
Nigel Castledine – Vice Chair and Director of Halifax Choral Society