

ST JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH WIDFORD

SECURING THE FUTURE

Faculty Application
Project overview and proposals

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Version 03



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Note: Part of the work of the newly established archive at the church will be to refer to the material still being accrued to further the understanding and verification of past assumptions on the history and origins of St John the Baptist Church and the village of Widford.

INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

The document describes how relatively minor internal interventions involving just the western end of the nave, and the tower of the listed Grade II* St John's Church at Widford will result in a much-desired uplift in the way in which the church is perceived and used by the local community, and by all. The proposals are tempered by the availability of resources, and respect the limitations of carrying out works to a Grade II* listed building to which people of today and past generations have developed an affinity and fondness.

The ideas are the outcome of direct contact and discussion with the church's diverse community to talk through the options and pros and cons of what is realistic and sustainable, both now and in the future, and it is the people who make practical use of the church on a regular basis who have effectively set the brief from the outset. We have also consulted cost consultants and a specialist structural engineer and constructors to inform and advise on the practicalities of the various options and approaches. The proposals have also taken account of the comments and suggestions received from the DAC consultees via SPAB, Historic England and HBAP.

The resulting outcome of the needs driven vision is limited to the re-fitting of existing spaces to ease and update some key practical difficulties experienced when the church regularly welcomes local people and the wider community to events. The new Widford Archive space and activities will be a huge asset, focus and ongoing growing resource, and the improvements and updated access arrangements will greatly assist the church's mission and activities in a way that is relevant to peoples' expectations today, and in the future.



1. A talk with refreshments, by Frances Luck in November 2023 on the history of Widford. First of a series of talks.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

1.0 Section One: the church in its rural environment

1.1 The setting of the church and the churchyard

Widford church’s rural setting is considered outstanding by current and former congregations, as well as by the wider community, particularly walkers. The church, including its green copper spire, is a significant historical landmark for miles around. The northern boundary of the closed churchyard with its elevated topological position, creates magnificent views over the River Ash valley. The church and these views attract hundreds of people each year. Visitors simply admire the views from a memorial bench sited on the northern churchyard boundary or follow footpath FP17 down to the River Ash valley with its valuable chalk stream and centuries old water meadows where cattle still graze. The ‘Hertfordshire Way’ is a long-distance walk around Hertfordshire and featured Widford church on its front cover.¹ Over 5000 copies of this walk have been sold in recent years which has considerably increased the footfall through Widford’s church and churchyard. Widford church is also included in stage 3 of the Walsingham Way 178-mile pilgrimage from London Bridge to Walsingham, North Norfolk.

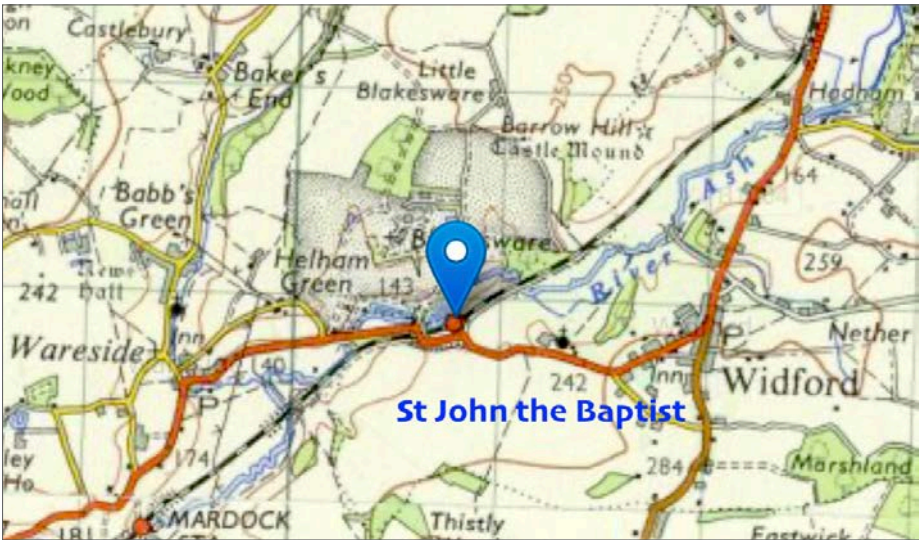
Widford occupies a conservation area, providing the parish as a whole with greater protected status, and increased importance. Additionally, it has two Grade II* listed buildings, St John the Baptist, Widford and a brick wall with a classical gateway that forms the western boundary of the churchyard. East Herts District Council’s 2013 Widford Conservation Plan lists Archaeological sites that include the church, the former Rectory to its east and part of the Widfordbury farm complex. Widfordbury Farmhouse was once a Manor that was given in 1118 to the Cluniac Priory at Bermondsey. The monks would have been responsible for building the church as it currently stands, and contributed to the painting of a fresco of a since passed Lord of the Manor, in the church.² Widfordbury Manor belonged to the monks until the time of Henry VIII and the dissolution of the monasteries. Renamed Widfordbury Farmhouse, this building has also been an important landscape feature alongside the church when viewed from the north across the Ash valley. The Rectory is now a private house. The church is not only an important building, but also landscape feature especially from the park of Blakesware, and the public footpath running through the churchyard.



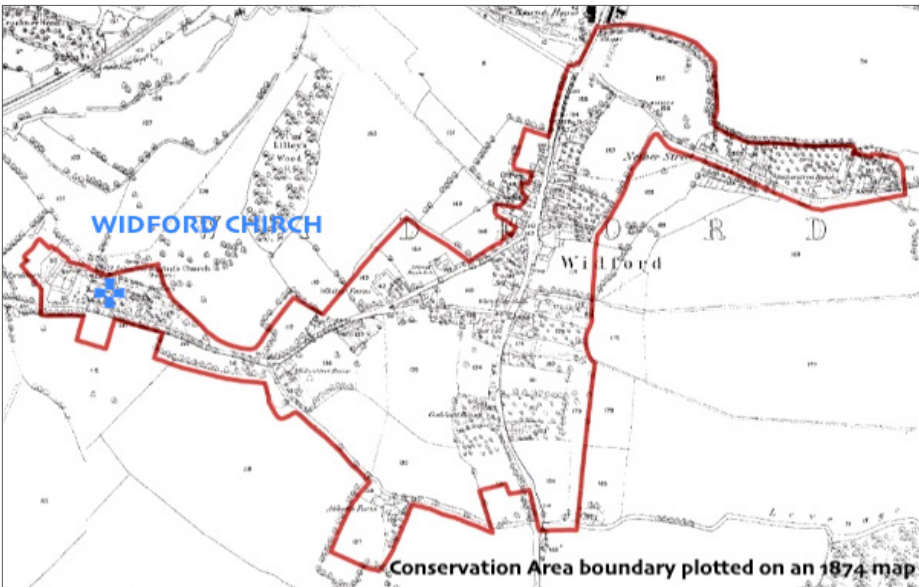
2. Aerial view of Church



3. The Churchyard overlooks the Ash Valley



4 Widford Church and the railway when it followed the River Ash valley



5. Conservation Area boundary plotted on an 1874 map



6. Looking east along the valley of the River Ash

¹ Hertfordshire Way Guidebook - this was the case for the first two editions, however the 25th anniversary addition published in 2017 has a new set of photographs, and Widford church is no longer on the cover
² J Traviss Lockwood, ‘Widford and Widford Church’ (Hertford 1883) pg 5

1.2 The living churchyard

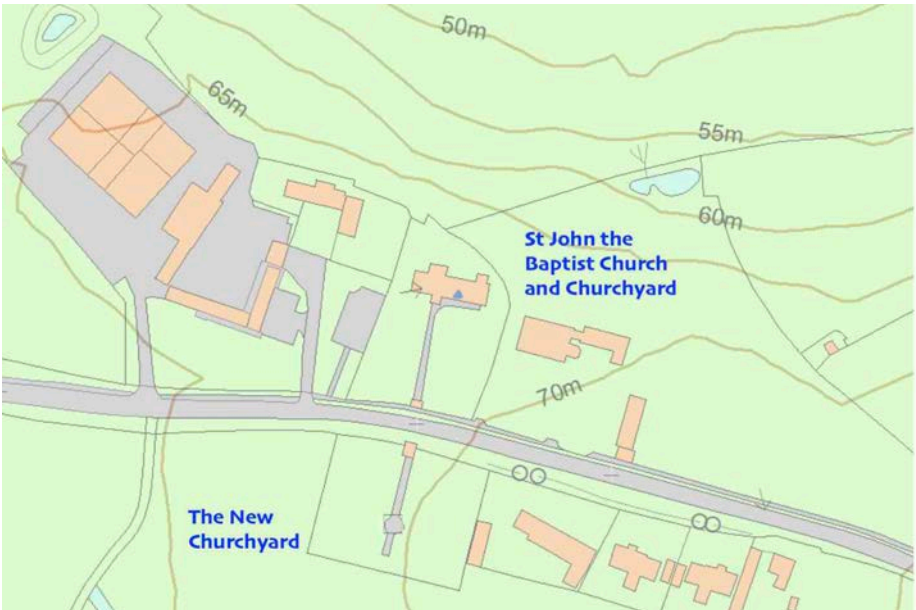
Widford church has two churchyards. The churchyard that surrounds the church was closed for burials in 1903. It is referred to as simply the churchyard and is now the responsibility of Widford's Parish Council to maintain. The 'new' churchyard was opened in 1903 and gifted to the church by a local family, and is situated on the opposite side of the road. The new churchyard is the responsibility of Widford's Parochial Church Council to maintain, and open to anyone within the Parish, whether a member of the congregation or not, the first person recorded as buried here was Julia Patmore in 1905.³

The churchyard is approached through a lychgate built in 1897 to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. Either side of the path that leads to the church porch are gravestones and memorials and an interesting range of tombs. The churchyard is bounded on the south side by a flint wall capped with clay ridge tiles. On the west side is a red brick Tudor wall and gateway built by the Lord of the Widfordbury Manor to give him private access to the churchyard. The wall defining the frontage to the churchyard is 1m in height and constructed of brick and flint with decorative brick detailing, dating from the 19th century.

An important historic tombstone lies in the south-west corner of the churchyard, belonging to Mary Field, (spelt 'Feild on the tombstone). Mary Field was the maternal grandmother to Charles Lamb, the writer and essayist best known for 'The Essays of Elia,' and 'Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare'. The tombstone records Mary Field's death in 1792, and includes an inscription from Lamb's poem referencing Widford, it reads "*To the Memory of Mrs Mary Feild who departed this life July 31st 1792, Aged 79 years. On the green hill top hard by the House of Prayer a modest roof and not distinguished from its neighbour-barn, save by a slender-tapering length of spire.*" The Grandame sleep, Charles Lamb.

1.3 Past associations and the churchyard in use

The churchyard is currently used, weather permitting, after services, on Open Days and other church events, to provide refreshments in this tranquil setting. Many trees provide shade and shelter if needed. The churchyard is neat and well cared for, however recent rewilding in places allows grass and wildflowers to grow and self-seed, which has encouraged greater numbers of insects here, aiding in the needed growth of biodiversity, and supporting the



7. Site Plan

work of the Hertfordshire Nature Recovery Partnership, as well as Section 3.3 of the East Herts Council Climate Change Strategy for 2022-26 on a local level.⁴ Floodlighting in the 'old' churchyard, a gift from former Widford residents, lights up Widford church at night, and is a commemoration of the Millennium, creating a space of safety and haven within the community and local area.

The current proposals to make better use of the building to create more space for facilities and ground level space for more frequent social functions is a continuation of a long standing tradition for Widford, as the account in the Hertford Mercury on 3rd November 1883 is testimony, with the announcement of tea and refreshments to older people and local children.

There was Evensong in the church at a quarter-past six, with a sermon by the Rev. H. J. Carter, M.A., rector of Duxford, Cambs. To-day (Saturday) a tea will be given to the old people in the village, and on Monday the children attending the Sunday School will have their annual treat.

Evidence of Saxon origins

Archaeological excavations were carried out in the churchyard in 2004 when the Parochial Church Council were considering installing a kitchen and toilet adjacent to the vestry. The two 2m wide x 2m deep test pits were found to be full of building debris, probably from earlier buildings.⁵ The archaeologists at the time felt that, particularly in test pit 2 located 5m to the north of test pit 1 which was closer to the tower, that the debris had been used to build up a level platform of additional ground behind the church.



8. Open Day Event September 2023



9. The Church main entrance path from the road

During the archaeological dig three skeletons were discovered, a baby (dated by the clothing remnants to the 1920/30 period), a male skeleton (felt not to be of sufficient interest to merit carbon dating) and one which obviously predated the building of the bell tower in the 14th century, as the feet were cut off by the tower foundations. The skeleton was female and was carbon dated to Saxon England. The archaeological assessment and evaluation was conducted and reported on by the Field Archaeology Unit at Essex County Council. In the churchyard there is a modern stone erected in 2005, inscribed with the words "Disturbed during the archaeological dig in 2004 the remains of a Saxon woman C10 and a man and infant of a later date were re-interred here in 2005"⁶

³ Widford Church online Churchyard database, memorial reads 'In loving memory of Julia Patmore' 1905
⁴ Cllr Graham McAndrew & East Herts Council Environmental Sustainability team, Climate Change Strategy 2022-26, published 2021, pg 22-23, section 3.3, Influencing and encouraging others to do things
⁵ Ben Barker, 'St John the Baptist Church, Widford, near Ware, Hertfordshire Archaeological Assessment and Evaluation' (Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit) Sept 2004
⁶ Widford Conservation Area Appraisal, East Herts Council, 2013, pg 13 6.3 Archaeological Sites

The lychgate to the 'new' churchyard was built in 1920 as a memorial to the men of Widford who died in the 1914-18 War. Relatives of some of these men still live in Widford today. Two notice boards erected on the lychgate walls display the names of all those who gave their lives in World Wars I and II. The new churchyard contains some interesting gravestones including a central cross, the burial place of General Percival who surrendered Singapore during WWII, and that of Robert Brickdale, Commander of the royal Navy, who died in 1992.

1.4 The main elements of the church

The church building overall is of flint and stone construction in the Decorated and Perpendicular style.

(i) The Nave dates from the 13th Century, with earlier Norman mouldings preserved in the wall above the south door. The piscina (basin for washing the communion chalice) marks where the east end of the church would have been prior to the Chancel being added. Nearly opposite the piscina on the north side, a circular stone staircase, leading to the rood loft, was discovered by the Victorians. The circular stone staircase, that has now been filled in, indicates the east end of the nave at that time. The North and South doors in the Nave were hung in about 1286 by craftsmen from Much Hadham, with the ironwork dated to that time.

(ii) The Tower

The church tower was built in the 14th Century (some accounts 15C) with stones brought from Barnack, near Stamford. The spire was added later, built of weather-board construction. However, by 1880 the spire was twisted and leaning dangerously, hence it was re-built 10 feet taller and clad in copper in 1888 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. Historic England describe it as a "slender octagonal copper sheathed spire". A stone spiral staircase leads to the clock chamber and a steep fixed ladder from there, to the bell chamber. It is possible that the stone stair was built to give access to the clock chamber floor when it was the bell-ringers' room.

(iii) The Tower, belfry, and bell-ringers floor

The tower and belfry are referred to in many accounts as being added to the nave and the tower itself attributed as a 15 Century construction. The adoption of a square tower and a rectangular nave as a church plan was common in early, post Saxon churches as a 'turriform' type. (See also the Appendix re the use of squared proportions). It seems likely that the nave was built as a simple pitched roof structure of lower ridge height and as has been mentioned in 1.2, it was said to be a modest and undistinguished form and like any other simple agricultural barnlike structure in the vicinity.



10. The two lychgates to the 'old' and new churchyard on the other side of the road



12. Widford Church tower: an example developed from the medieval parish church with a nave and later a chancel and a western bell tower (turriform)



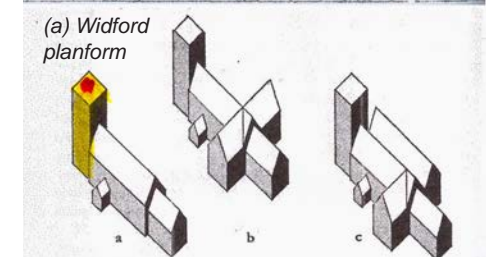
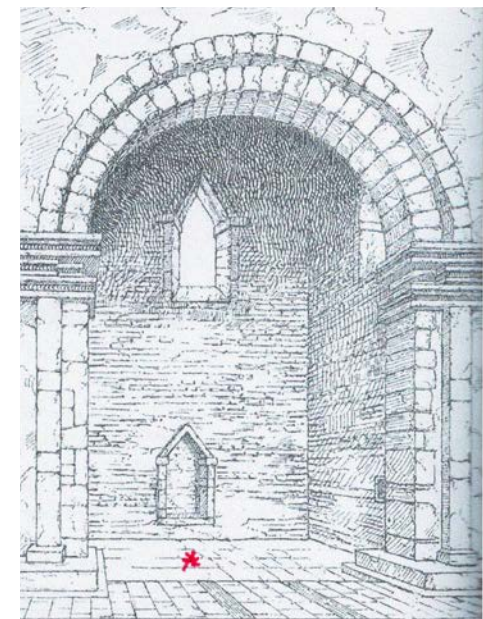
14. The extra long ropes to the bells in the belfry



11. The nave looking east from the tower



13. The current clockhouse floor was most likely the original bell-ringers' floor



15. The early tower of St John the Baptist, Barnack (where the stone for Widford was sourced) in an engraving showing the tower as a linked liturgical space connected by a full arch

(iv) The original 'lower' pitched roofs and the cross beams

By all accounts a lower, shallower pitched roof structure first covered the nave and this could have possibly related to the geometry and relatively 'low' position of the large cross-section cross beams. However, because of their position, the beam alongside the west tower wall conflicts visually, and detrimentally with the arched section of the stone arch between the nave and the tower.

At Widford there is no evidence, so far, of the position and pitch of the original lower roof and we have no evidence to date of any mortice marks that could indicate posts or braces to other roof members supported by the beams. By contrast nearby Hunsdon Church (Listed Grade I) has identical cross beams, an identical tower plan, an almost identical nave, (there is just a 8% difference in the nave length) and also a wagon roof. But the large cross beams are located above the apex of the stone arch to the tower (see photo 18). A roof pitch line evidenced in the plasterwork above the arch demonstrates, by contrast, that Hunsdon's original lower nave roof could have related satisfactorily to the main arch and the original tall ground floor space of the west tower.

(v) Significantly in both churches the vertical stone mouldings below the capitals to the springing points of the arch (see 17 & 18) are obscured and 'built over' in the same way on their western face. One can only deduce that the supporting stones of the arch have been built over after the construction of the 15th C arch, i.e. when constructing the thickening of the original tower walls within the tower's planform (see Appendix for further photographs and diagrams).

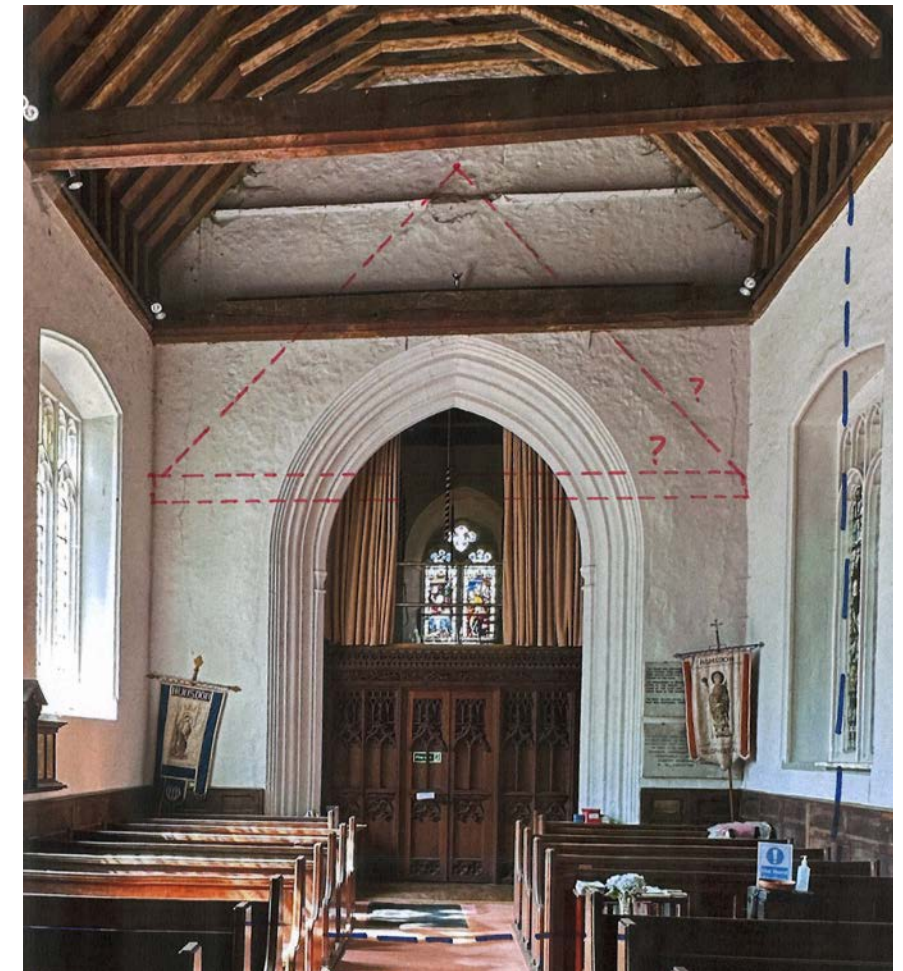
(vi) The Chancel was added in the 13th Century. One of the rare wall paintings, on the north side, has been dated by Professor Tristram as 1299, suggesting the chancel was completed before the end of the 13th Century.

(vii) The windows. Historic England describe the nave as containing "2-light SE window c1350, similar recut on NE, copy at SW of 1871". The west window in the tower, was built at the same time as the tower itself in the 14th Century. The window on the left of the entrance door was added in 1871 in memory of Jessie Augusta, wife of Spencer Robert Lewin, a benefactor to the village. The East window in the Chancel was presented in 1894 by the American descendants of John Eliot.

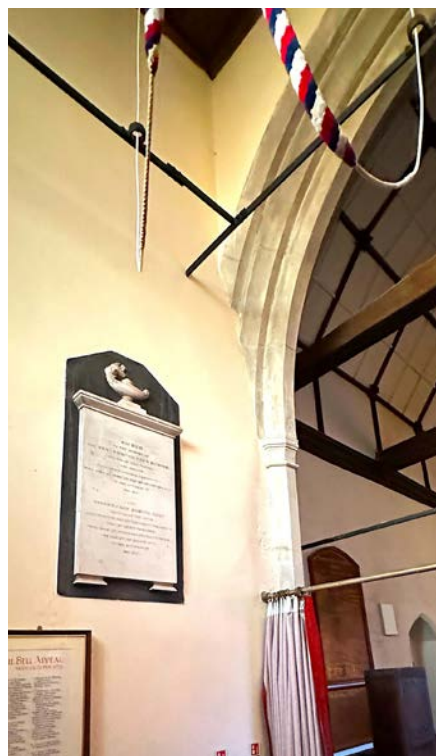
(viii) The porch. Historic England describe the south porch as "timber framed and open gabled", this porch was built on with a number of other elements during the 1868 renovations.



16. The possible 'lower' roof pitch at Widford before the raised heightened wagon roof was erected (see also the roof profile at local Hunsdon Church. All 7 facets of the wagon roof are equal in size at Widford).



18. The roof pitch at Hunsdon and its relationship with the arch (evidenced by the marks in wall plasterwork) - this is the same roof type and tower as Widford.



17. At Widford Church the arch mouldings are obscured by the tower walling and this unfortunate detail is replicated at local Hunsdon Church (see 19).



It is possible that the cross beams were raised at Hunsdon as in the photo to avoid clashing with the arch. Notably the 1st and 7th 'bay' of the Wagon roof are reduced in length as a consequence and are not equal as found at Widford.

19. At Hunsdon Church the same obscuring of arch mouldings is evident on the west tower - which has planform dimensions identical to Widford's tower

(ix) The vestry. The vestry was also added in 1868 by the Victorians. It is built in stone and flint to match the rest of the building and has three windows. Prior to further small renovations in 1879, it also housed one of the remaining pre-Victorian carved clunch capitals.

(x) The organ chamber. Originally a vestry, this room was converted to an organ chamber in 1890, using money fundraised from the community in an attempt to enlarge the church for the growing congregation.

(xi) The boiler house. This was added in the late Victorian era, likely under Rev. Traviss Lockwood.

(xii) The roof. The steep roof was re-constructed in the 19th century with overhanging eaves. Historic England describe the roof as being “7-sided C19 wagon roof with moulded battens and bossed. They continue to say it is a “4-bay roof reusing cambered tie beams with hollow chamfers and soffit mortices for wall-posts and arched braces”. See also the Tower and bell-ringers floor.

1.5 The church interior and the timeline of change

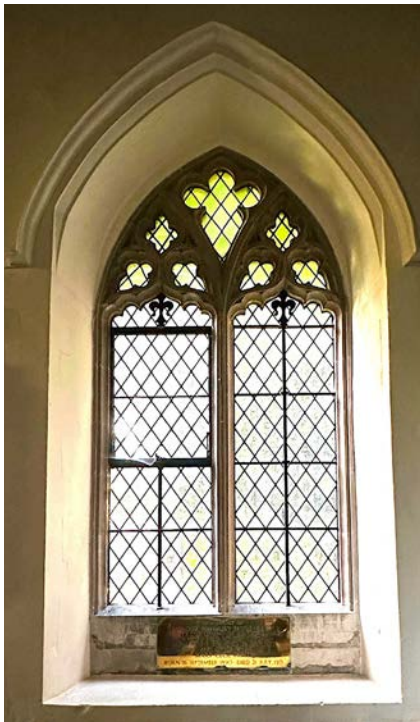
There is no extant marked up church plan that sets out the historic construction dates. The research work that has been carried out in preparation for this submission has revealed the multiplicity of accounts and resources that in due course can be used to verify the historic sequence of building phases. Fittingly, the project, to establish an archive resource at the church will enable a definitive and co-ordinated church history to be compiled. At this juncture the current intervention is localised with the only major structural incursion to the overall fabric being the removal of the cross beam that obscures the main arch to the tower. The current proposed 21st century ‘additions’ are designed to be clearly identifiable. Other changes such as the removal of pews will be referenced in the floor layout and the original location of the beam to be removed will be expressed by leaving a section of the beam expressed flush with the timber wall ‘cornice’.

(i) Pre-recorded 13th century alterations

Despite the lack of record of this building, there are remnants and inferences from the existing aspects which suggest there was a religious building on the site, and footprint of the current church in the 11th century. It was most likely shorter in length, with the nave ending at the current chancel, and did not have a tower.



20. North West window



21. North East window



22. South East window



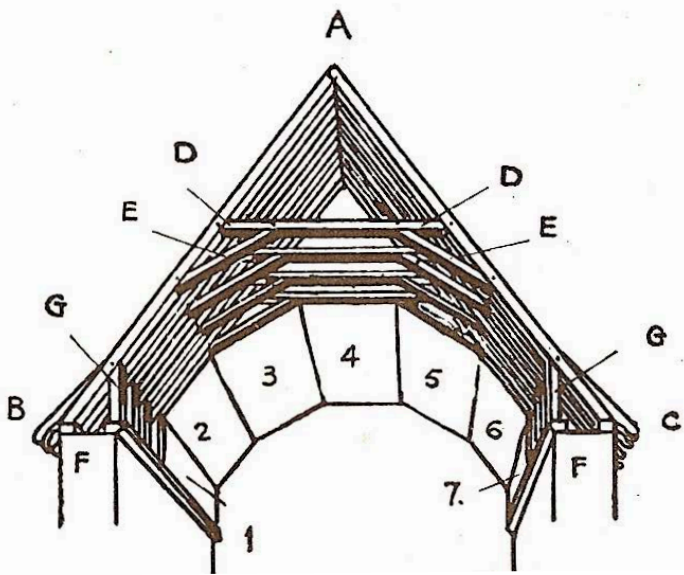
23. South West window



24. The ceiling of the wagon roof and the redundant beam next to the west tower arch

Fig. 1 represents a common type of coupled-rafter roof. AB and AC are rafters. These in early work were fixed at the apex with a halved joint, one half of each being cut away, and a peg driven through the remaining halves. Such rafters alone would tend to spread or fall, so a collar-beam, or collar, (D D) was added, usually high up. This again was strengthened by collar braces, E E. The foot of each rafter, to prevent spreading, was joined directly or indirectly to a wall-beam or wall plate, which for preference was embedded into the wall. An “ashlar piece” or strut (G G) further strengthened the system. If a ceiling were added to such a roof it would, as can be seen, consist of seven sections or faces. Compare this roof with that shown on page 6.

Figures 2 and 3 show other systems of framing.



25. The arrangement of timbers for the typical wagon roofs with the triangulated framing at the eaves to provide bracing to prevent the spreading of walls. It is within this triangular void that the discovery of a clunch capital was reported in a 19th Century account (see 1.5(ii))

(ii) 13th century

The nave was built with two windows on the north and south side that are c1350, both situated towards the east end of the church. The north and south doors were hung c1286. The nave includes a 15th century piscina with a shelf, at the east end. Opposite the piscina, a circular stone staircase, leading to the rood loft, was discovered at the time of the Victorian restorations. This staircase has now been filled in.

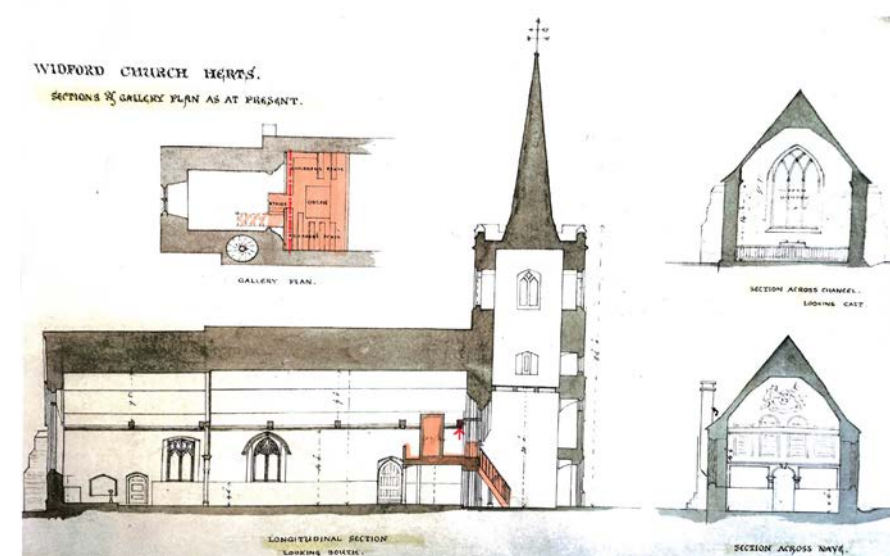
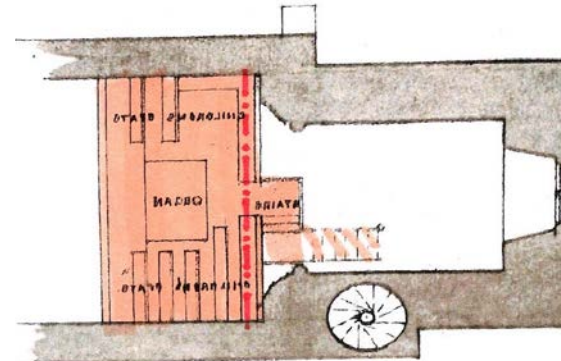
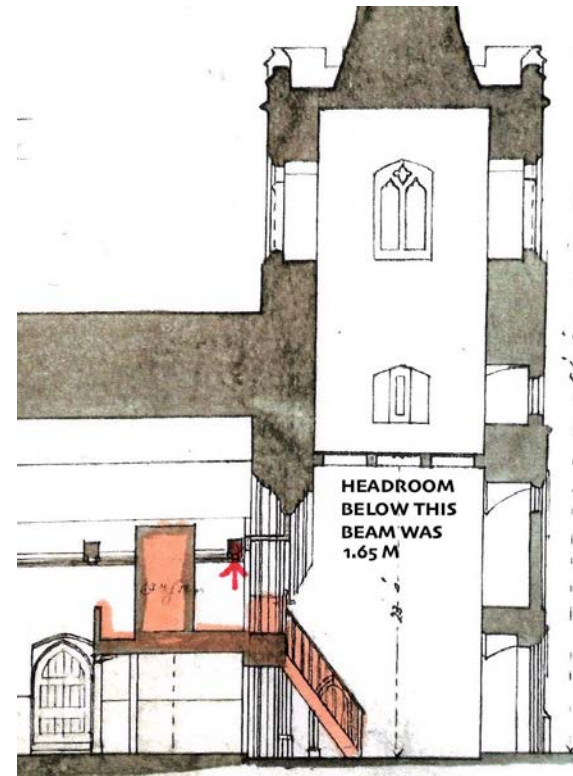
The chancel and sanctuary were added before the end of the 13th century. When the Church was renovated in 1868 a small portion of a very early Norman zigzag moulding was discovered and inserted in the plaster above the south door inside the Church. A 19th century account by Traviss Lockwood recalls *"and I found a most beautifully carved clunch capital, soon after my induction in 1877, which, I am told, is one of several discovered when the gallery, which disfigured the beautiful tower arch, was removed. I am told my predecessor, during whose incumbency he Church was renovated, begged that one of these capitals which were being removed might be preserved, and that it was put away behind the wall-plate of the new vestry, where I accidentally found it. It now forms part of the credence which was erected in 1879. A piscina was discovered in the south wall having a narrow credence; but I do not think with Mr Cussans that its position in the nave necessarily indicates that the Church originally terminated here; it may have belonged to a private chapel. Mr Cussans says, 'It is nearly opposite a circular stone staircase leading to the roof-loft;' and from this infers 'that the present chancel was a subsequent addition;' but if the piscina and roof-loft are co-existent, the chancel is older than he would lead us to suppose; and that the chancel is very old there can be no doubt, when we consider the fact that the subject of the mural painting on the north wall was a common one in the 12th and 13th centuries"*

(iii) 14th century

Tower – 3-stage unbuttressed West tower with battlements and rectangular stair projection on the South, rising to middle stage. T

(iv) 15th century

Tower arch – the lower part of the tower has a wide 15th century arch and a 14th century west door of two molded orders, and 2-light traceried window that sits above the west door. A small, pointed doorway in the tower leads to a stone spiral staircase that leads to a ceiling of heavy chamfered beams with a central square panel. (See also 1.4(iii)).



1868 Drawings that show a significant gallery floor to house the organ and children's pews. The very restricted unworkable head room below the beam (proposed to be removed) was barely 1.5m.

(v) Font – paneled octagonal stone font c1420. The font was moved during the Victorian renovations, from in front of the then undiscovered north door, to in front of the tower arch. A pedestal was then installed and fixed to the floor.

(vi) 16th century – church registers date from 1558 and can be seen in Hertfordshire County Archive.

(vii) 19th century Victorian restorations and additions

Early – mid 19th century – Charles Lamb was associated with the church as he used to visit his grandmother, Mary Field, who worked at Blakesware nearby. Mary Field's grave is in the churchyard, and Widford church is described in Lamb's poem "The Grandame".

(viii) 1867 – The existing and proposed drawings 1868 of the church plan show a gallery that occupied the space between the front of the tower arch and the south door, which used to house the timber organ. Stairs from the tower ground floor accessed the gallery which was planned for the choir.

(ix) 1868 – The original flat plaster ceiling was raised and replaced by the wagon-headed ribbed roof (John Edward Cussons "History of Hertfordshire, 1870). The original six old beams, three of oak and three of walnut, are now only of decorative interest. The additional height of the roof has created outstanding acoustics. (See also 1.4(iii)).

(x) 1871 – The window on the left of the entrance door was added in 1871 in memory of Jessie Augusta, wife of Spencer Robert Lewin, a benefactor to the village.

(xi) 1881-83 – The paintings on the chancel ceiling were completed by 27-year-old Fanny Hadsley Gosselin who lived in Blakesware Mansion.

(xii) 1887 – G E Pritchett (framed plan in vestry) carried out further extensive restorations to the church

(xiii) 1890 – The spire was rebuilt in 1890 of copper and heightened by 10ft.

(xiv) 1890 – The then vestry roof was raised to become an organ chamber by J (or G) Slater BA, of London. The organ was constructed by Eustace Ingra, at a cost of £200.

(xv) 1894 – the East window is a 3-light traceried window, with stained glass attributed to Burlison & Grylls (Pesver (1977 406), presented by the American descendants of John Eliot “Apostle to the Red Indians in North America).

(xvi) 1897 – The Lych Gate to the old churchyard was built to commemorate Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee, possibly funded by a combination of the Hamond family and the community of Widford.

(xvii) 20th century

1912 – The Clock was built in 1912 by J. Smith of Derby, and erected in the same year to commemorate the accession to the throne of King George V. The numbering on the clock-face is unusual, in Arabic rather than in Roman numbers. The face itself is concave shaped and dished inwards to provide protection from high winds.

1939 – Electric lighting installed

1950 – Electric organ installed replacing the hand-operated bellows.

1956 – Peter Hansen Bay, architect, appointed to carry out modifications and alterations to the Church. The wooden Victorian pulpit was removed, the chancel widened, and modern lighting installed.

(xviii) 21st century restorations

2004 – archaeological dig behind church in churchyard found a number of small items and three partial remains.

2009 – weathervane was refurbished and re-gilded

2015 – tower clock repainted

2015/6 – tower restoration

2022 – vestry renovations

1.6 The contents of the church – internal fittings artefacts and features

Font – The octagonal white stone font dates from the 14th Century except for its pedestal which has been renewed and fixed during the later Victorian alterations. There is a carving of the head of a lion and of a nun. The oak cover was designed by David Dewey of



The font with added incongruous concrete base to be removed



The Widford Bell-ringers currently have to pull on very long ropes

Widford and was presented by the late Sir Roger and Lady Parker to commemorate the Millennium.

Widford Bells – The Widford bells are renowned as one of the finest peal of bells in Hertfordshire. They form a ring of six in the approximate key of G. Prior to 1869, the tower contained only 4 bells. The 5th and 6th bell were added in 1869 and 1890 respectively. In 1985 the bells were re-hung; the original tenor was melted down and re-cast as a new treble. The 5th bell is inscribed ‘SANCTE KATHERINE ORA PRO NOBIS’ (St. Katherine, pray for us); the 2nd bell is inscribed ‘Now thank we all our God’.

Widford Handbells – There are 18 handbells which are over 100 years old. These are rung by the handbells team of ringers at church events and the Christmas Carols by Candlelight service.

Hand operated bell-ringing facility – Apparently defunct, this was recently located as of note during investigations for the new bell-ringers floor.

It is a small installation to be found in the south west corner of the west belfry tower at ground floor level. Contained within a wooden enclosure are six ropes, at waist height, with guides that



A total of six bells in the belfry are renowned for their sound



The belfry tower has been strengthened in the past



Access has to be built into the new bell-ringers floor for maintenance

connect to small hammers in the main bell chamber and when pulled. They strike each of the six bells independently.

Clock – The clock was made by J. Smith of Derby and installed in the tower in 1912 to commemorate the coronation of King George V in 1911. The numbering on the clock-face is unusual, in Arabic rather than in Roman numbers. Early engravings show a sundial in the same location as the clock on the southern face of the tower.

Church Organ – The Organ was built by Eustace Ingram senior and installed in 1890. Although electric lighting was installed in 1939, the electric organ blower that replaced hand-operated bellows, was not fitted until 1950. Mitchell Farquharson, born in Widford at the turn of the century, became an organ scholar and started playing the organ from the age of 14. He went on to study music at King’s College London, and was an Organ Scholar at Chichester Cathedral. He is now Head of Organ Studies at a Surrey Independent school and principal organist at Godalming Minister. He has given a number of organ recitals at Widford church, and is booked to perform another recital in the Autumn of 2024.

Chalice – The silver chalice has an unusual design on the cup. It is dated c. 1562 and is on loan to St Albans Cathedral where it is currently being displayed.

Communion Table – The communion table is an English oak communion table. It stands on an oak plinth. The designer is not known but it dates to c. 1860.

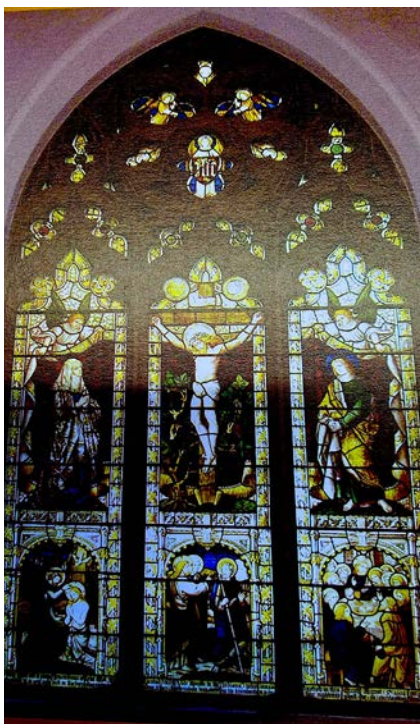
Lectern – The lectern is brass and constructed by Caustin Bros Ltd of London.

Stained Glass Windows – the stained-glass window on the south side of the Chancel depicts Biblical characters. The stained-glass window on the north side of the Chancel depicts the Epiphany. (See page 8).

East Window – The East Window depicts the Crucifixion of Christ, and is a memorial to John Eliot, the ‘Apostle to the Algonquin Indians’. It was gifted to Widford Parish by his American descendants. It was dedicated on 21st May 1894 in front of a large congregation including the then American Ambassador. In August 1995, 30 visitors from Roxbury Latin School visited from the USA, to join the Widford congregation for a service to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the founding of their school by John Eliot in August 1645. This is the oldest school in continuous existence in North America and



The Widford Handbell Ensemble perform regularly in the church



East window



The 1912 church clock mechanism that is located on the first floor of the tower, formerly the bell ringing floor



A set of 3 hand chimes with ropes at St Andrews church - St John the Baptist, Widford, has a set of 6 in the tower that will be restored to use

holds an Honorary Grant of Arms bestowed by Queen Elizabeth II in August 1992, because the Roxbury Latin School existed for the first 138 years under the Crown of England. Following the 350 years Anniversary Celebrations in Widford, the Parochial Church Council have remained in contact with the school.

Ledger stones – These three heavily worn stones of varying sizes, one possibly over a double grave, in the floor of the west, belfry tower, are traditionally made in black marble and often incorporate inlaid brass inscriptions. No brasses remain at Widford but burial records being investigated suggest associations with past prominent local people and Widford Church. Current research suggests that they relate to 16th century burials. It is not uncommon for the square western towers attached to simple, nave churches to fulfill a memorial function. The poor state is partly due their location on the west door entry route, and partly as a result of the regular use of the floor by the bell-ringers. It is possible that the grave chambers beneath the floor are up to 3m depth and that some of the fracture’s in the surface of the largest slab are due to it being lifted to add an additional deceased person.

References

The most common sources for Sections 1.5-1.6 are:
Historic England Official Listing first listed Jan 1967, Parish Church of St John the Baptist (Church of England), list entry number 1101926
Roddy Hill-Smith, ‘Notes on Widford Church’, (held by the PCC as a historical information booklet)
Bunty Smith, ‘Portrait of Widford: a pictorial history of a typical small village in Hertfordshire (1880-1990)’, (B&B Associates, Hertfordshire, 1989)
J Traviss Lockwood, ‘Widford and Widford Church’, (Hertford 1883).



A west tower ledger stone obscured by a concrete step that has become a trio hazard



The documented possible double grave ledger stone on axis with the West Door and aisle

1.7 The church and its potential – significance for mission – a new lease of life

A lot of thought has been given to how the church can continue the pursuit of its vision and it was concluded that to ensure that the church was viable and able to attract people in sufficient numbers to its cause and events, it was necessary to tackle some key issues, such as accessibility for all, basic facilities such as an ambulant toilet, a refreshment point, adequate space to accommodate gatherings and to respond to new ideas for new and complementary activities such as the housing of the Widford archive.

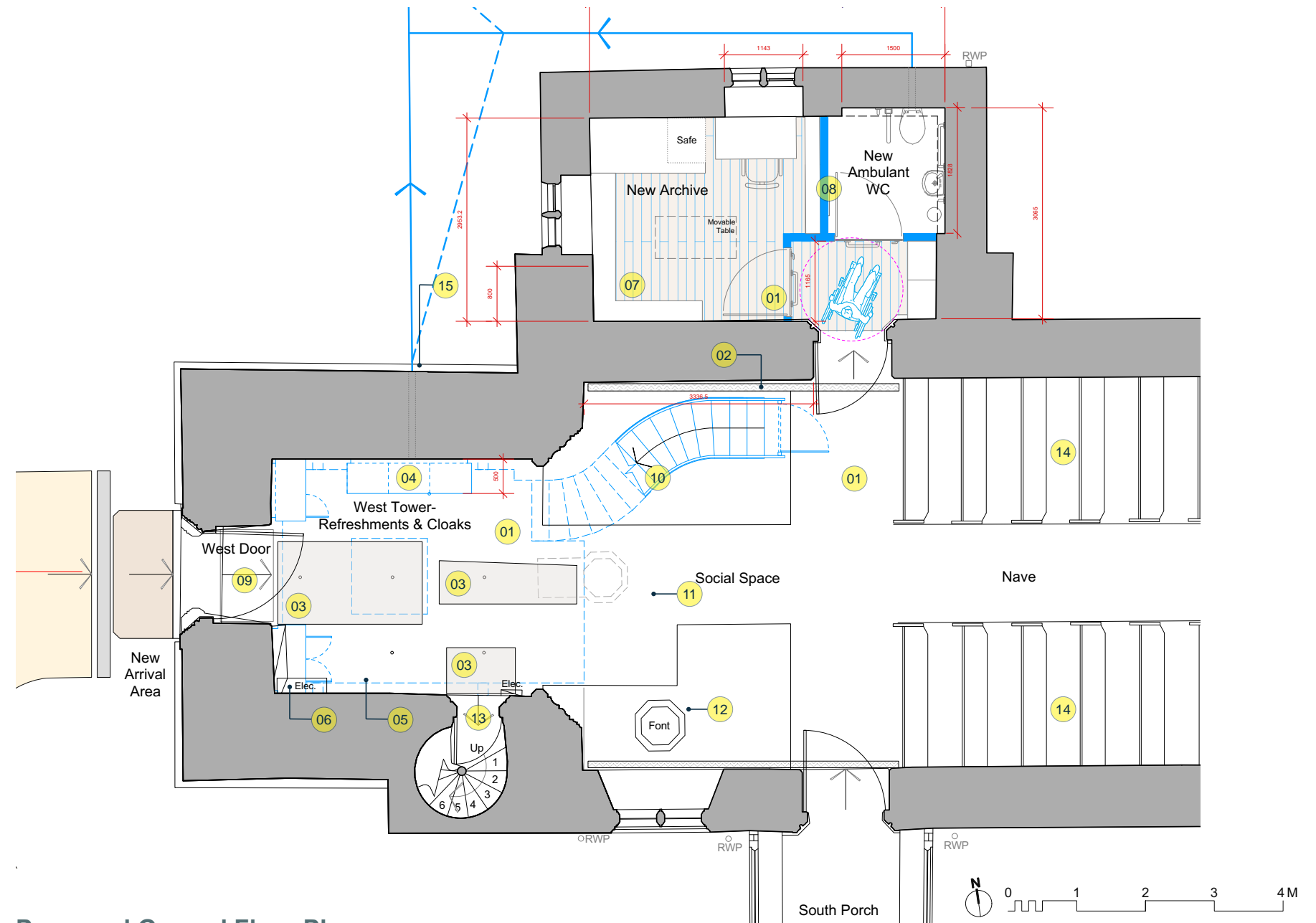
The church is of high importance to the local community. The PCC's vision is that Widford church could grow into a valuable anchor for the community, but to do this the church building will need modernisation, updating and investment. Like many rural churches, the decline in church congregation numbers coupled with rising running costs, means that outside income streams are now more essential than ever to safeguard the church's position in the community for future generations.

The objective is to continue serving our church community, but at the same time reach out to groups and individuals who ordinarily never venture into a church, and in particular groups who are interested in local and church history, especially historical groups.

2.0 Section Two: the parts of the church that will be affected by the proposal – a limited intervention that will benefit the whole church

2.1 The parts of the church that will be affected by the proposals

- 1. New floor:** a restored or new tile floor finish will be re-instated where existing pews are to be removed.
- 2. Edging and demarcation:** original obsolete perimeter cast iron Victorian heating pipe gratings will be retained and the demarcation of the line of pews and aisle appropriately referenced.
- 3. Existing worn ledger stones** will be referenced to an explanatory panel on the side walls and benefit from additional lighting from the ceiling over.
- 4. Lockable timber servery:** fully enclosed comprising refrigerator, dishwasher, microwave, over-sink water heater, (fed from existing water supply in south porch), enclosed wall cupboard storage. A one-piece stainless steel work top with an integrated sink in a unit 1.8m wide x 0.5m depth, 1.8m high, made in high quality joinery as an independent 'furniture' fixture.
- 5. Cloakroom cupboard:** fully enclosed 0.9m wide x 0.4m x 2m high, and lockable to match servery design.



Proposed Ground Floor Plan

- 6. The hand operated bell chimes** restored relocated on the gallery floor and given adequate space with electrical fuse board relocated.
- 7. New archive room** designed to be accessible and on the same level as the new west nave social space, with purposed designed shelving and lockable steel storage units to full height with doors - and with a lockable security door.
- 8. New ambulant WC**
- 9. West door made draft proof** and fitted with an insulating curtain and a flush mattwell.
- 10. New 800mm wide curved staircase** to give access to new first floor bell-ringers gallery. Lockable ground level gate to control access.
- 11. The outline of the new bell-ringers gallery** over the nave is shown dotted.
- 12. Font moved** and located where desired and to allow direct access from the west door.
- 13. Door and opening to existing stone staircase** to the belfry and clock floor are to be retained, unchanged but made accessible by removing heating pipes.
- 14. Heated electric pew seating** to be switchable to respond to demand.
- 15. New drainage connection** will be made via a new 100mm dia aperture cored through an existing 1250mm wall to bring a supply from the south porch to the servery and WC.

NB: a properly commissioned core sample of the tower walls may assist in the dating of the tower wall construction. As built, the dimensional evidence strongly suggests that the west, north and south walls of the belfry were added to internally by 430 mm *after* the construction of the 15th century main arch. They include a sundial stone originally intended for a south facing external wall. This was possibly removed when part of the south wall was demolished to build the spiral stair.

The visibly evident loss of the vertical mouldings and base to each side of the *western* face of the arch suggests also that a complete section of the original tower south wall may have been demolished in order to re-construct a new 1600mm x 1600mm section to form the additional attached turret that incorporate a new stone spiral staircase. This was likely to have been originally commissioned to give access to a bell-ringers floor. It is a very heavily structured floor. However this floor now houses the 1912 clock mechanism which replaced the sundial on the southern elevation and the automated bell-ringing mechanism. Thus for some time the bell-ringers have been forced to retreat to the ground floor and use the very long ropes requiring a guide frame that is visible today.

2.2 The importance of the parts affected

Flooring: timber (pine) and 19th century quarry tiles have been added and altered on a piecemeal basis and unfortunately these are built in trip hazards and have relatively low significance except as a marker of where the pews define the central aisle. We will be respecting this in the new or restored flooring.

Timber cross beam - this has some significance along with the other five across the nave. However there is no documentary evidence to date describing how they related to the lower pitched roof construction and the flat ceiling that accounts refer to. In addition, its location 'across' the arch has a detrimental effect on the 15th century stone arch entrance into the tower. There is evidence in other instances where an arch and tower relationship was a clear intention to connect rectangular nave spaces to square west towers that were often used for ceremonial functions. Frequently this occurred when the church had a relationship with adjacent manorial land. By virtue of the ledger stones in the tower, ancient maps, and burial records, Widford west tower was an important part of the church.

There are other examples of cross beam wagon roofs such as that found at Grade I Hunsdon Church (1.6km nearby) where the nave and belfry tower are practically identical in planform to St John the

Baptist at Widford but the Hunsdon tie beams are located above the keystone of the stone arch. At Widford, notably, the repeating tie beams are lower and do not repeat to the full length of the nave and there is no final beam parallel to the easternmost, chancel wall and east window. The absence of any beam here could be because it never existed i.e. the beams pre-date the construction of the chancel, or, if it did exist, it was removed to make the east window more visible when it was added in 1894?

Subject to any overriding evidence that may be discovered after dendrochronological analysis, the sacrificing of the westernmost beam to reveal and express the upper part of the 15th century stone arch is considered to have both architectural merits, and many benefits to the church in use. It will reveal the intent of the arch as a mediating architectural element linking the high nave roof space to the double height belfry tower, now proposed with a new gallery floor. It will also strengthen and establish the relationship between the arch and the full height roof volume of the wagon roof. The impressive arch, belfry gallery space and faceted wagon roof when read as an ensemble will also subtly unify the new social space being created at this end of the nave, and at the same time it will reinforce the identity and space around the relocated font, centred on the south widow. The beam's absence will also make the gallery more usable by providing new uninterrupted sight lines to and from the gallery for people either observing the church interior when looking 'into' the wagon roof and 'down' the nave, or for those people in the new nave level social space when observing performances or readings presented from the gallery. It will also make the gallery level space more suitable for performers, thus and increasing the scope for presenting from that level.

Ledger stones - These will be protected and illuminated to reveal their historic association with the church, tower and Widford.

The Font – The relocation of the font will mean that the central aisle can be used for easier direct processional access (e.g. weddings and funerals).

It will also allow for the removal of a proven and unsightly concrete trip hazard step, and reveal the full profile of the ledger stone on which it has been placed.

NB: the font was in front of the vestry door until that was discovered during 19th century improvements).

3.0 Section Three: the impact of the proposals

3.1 The impact of the proposals

The completed project will:

- With minimal intrusion into the listed fabric, it will significantly open up and reveal the space both visually and in use terms.
- Create a more spacious welcoming well-lit space for people to gather, below the high wagon roof ceiling whose scale they can appreciate because with the beam removed it is able to relate to the stone arch that 'announces' the entry into the tall tower space beyond.
- The gallery, as a simple plain structure with a minimal clear glass balustrade will make evident the very highly regarded bell-ringing function as a visible feature and attribute.
- It will provide a better relationship between the bell-ringers and the bells and ropes with shortened ropes closer to the original floor.
- It will create a more accessible space with an ambulant toilet, a servery for light refreshments, a visitors cloaks cupboard, a new archive room with material for exhibitions and working.
- A new level and adequate 1.5m wide wheelchair route into the west door leading from the main southern entrance churchyard footpath from the lychgate.
- De-clutter the space: this will also enhance the acoustic performance for the nave space to enhance its value as a venue for musical and performance events (accompanied by the very fine organ).

Make better use of the vestry space by rationalising its contents and creating the Widford Archive.

3.2 How a minimally invasive approach can enhance the appreciation of the whole

When considering alterations and adaptations to historic buildings it is important to explore and consider all the options and ideas, and then to make as identifiable interventions, designed, not only to be visible but also in such a way as to be reversible or even removable. This approach has underpinned the approach taken at Widford.

STATEMENT OF NEEDS

4.0 Background

The parish of Widford is in East Hertfordshire District. St John The Baptist church, Widford, is part of St Albans Diocese and forms part of a Benefice with the churches of Hunsdon and Wareside.

Widford has a population of 656 people according to the 2021 Census. Between 2011 and 2021 the population rose 2.1% per year. 55% of the population is between 18 and 64 years, 25.9% is over 65 years and 18.9% is 0-17 years. Widford has a mixed population of young families, single/widowed individuals and elderly people being supported to stay in their own homes.

The church is currently used for services twice a month and typically there are 10-20 adults over the age of 40 at each service. The services are combined with the congregation at Wareside church. The church is used weekly for bell-ringing practice. The church is also used for weddings, funerals, special services and fund-raising events throughout the year.

The church is kept open daily for visitors. A welcome book records some of the visitors from the UK as well as overseas visitors often from the USA, who wish to view the East window and its connections to John Eliot who was baptised in Widford in 1604. Pilgrims on the London – Walsingham Pilgrimage also visit Widford church on their route to get a pilgrimage stamp. A local army of 30 plus volunteers who are not regular church-goers, take care of the opening and locking of the church, cleaning and the flower arrangements.

4.1 Project aims an accessible community anchor a secure future, welcoming a wider range of users

A secure future: The PCC has a responsibility to ensure the future financial viability of Widford church. Congregation numbers have fallen considerably over the past 20 years. The majority of the congregation is over 70 years old. Going forward, for the PCC to pay for the church and churchyard upkeep, as well as the parish share, other regular income streams need to be found.

A community anchor: The PCC wish to modernize part of the church building so that the church can become a community anchor. By welcoming new people and different interest groups into the church, the PCC will be fulfilling its Christian mission and outreach goals, as well as preserving Widford church's Christian heritage into the next century and beyond.

Updating facilities: The PCC needs to modernize part of the interior of the church building to create better facilities.

A new path that is discreetly lit (with solar lights) is needed to provide safer access into the church via two existing doors – the South and West door. A level path will not only be safer for the regular congregation and bell-ringers, many of whom are pensioners, but also it will provide a safer access to people with health impairments, or parents with toddlers in pushchairs.

Welcoming a wider range of visitors and users

The bell-ringers currently access the church weekly between 7.30pm and 9.00pm via the West door. The current grassy path leading to the West door is uneven and unlit. A new path will give the bell-ringers as well as visiting teams of bell-ringers, safer access throughout the year. It will also give residents from Ash View Nursing Home in Widford, many of whom are in wheelchairs, easier access to the church. Ash View Nursing Home has had strong links with the community for the past 50 years at least. Many Widford residents spend their last months/years there. Widford primary school, the church and the Widford Hand Bell group all regularly visit the care home to entertain residents and retain the village links.

New facilities/WCs/refreshments

Additional facilities are needed such as disabled toilet facilities and a kitchen/servery to provide refreshments and basic levels of hospitality. The PCC wishes to organize musical concerts and recitals to take advantage of the excellent acoustics the building offers. Some of these events could last 2-3 hours in total, including an interval. At the moment this not possible.

A new first home for the village archive

To encourage more people into church as well as collaborate further with the community of Widford, the PCC wishes to offer a permanent loan arrangement for the village Archive that is currently being stored in boxes in somebody's loft. The vestry which was renovated in 2022, has ideal conditions for housing archive material.

More responsive heating

The PCC needs to upgrade the church's heating system from oil to electricity, to become a more sustainable church, reduce the church's carbon footprint, and be considered for an Eco Church Award.

4.2 How we will meet the need and realise the vision

The need to realise the proposals as soon as possible

The PCC needs to remove 8 pews at the back of the nave to create a safe reception and welcoming space and to be able to move around this area more freely. This additional space will also create an area where sometimes messy activities can be arranged for children during a service.

In order to accommodate a kitchen, level access, and storage on the ground floor in the tower, the PCC needs to install a new first floor in the tower, accessible via a staircase from the back of the nave, so that bell-ringers can be re-located and able to ring the bells freely. Additional space in the tower will be needed to house items in the vestry cupboards that need to be relocated.

4.3 The urgency to put the ideas in place as soon as possible

Hosting community and neighbourhood events

In the last 2 years Widford PCC has held many more fundraising events both inside the church building, and in the churchyard. These events include an Open Day, talks on the history of the church, musical recitals and community lunches. The church's current facilities are very limited. There is a good electricity supply but the heating system is decades old and is under review as part of this project. The only other current facilities other than electricity are an outside tap providing drinking water, a second hand portaloo in the churchyard. The numbers of people who have been attending events is increasing and it is difficult to offer refreshments because whilst there is a kettle/urn to serve hot drinks after church services, the PCC cannot cater for larger numbers without safer facilities. PCC members currently bring from their own homes, cutlery, crockery and glasses, as well as any food and drinks needed for an event. These items are both heavy and cumbersome. The ability to provide refreshments without multiple car journeys and lifting of heavy boxes, is needed urgently if the PCC is going to continue to arrange events to be held at the church. Therefore a designated kitchen/servery is needed.

A properly equipped and serviced church

A toilet accessible to semi-ambulant people and those in wheelchairs is needed if the PCC is arranging events in the church that last longer than an hour. The church congregation is aging, and at events the PCC has arranged to date, the people attending are generally over 50 years old. Some younger families with

small children have also been attending which is encouraging. The PCC has a portaloos which is not used a great deal because it is second hand, there is no electricity and it is outside, so typically local people will go home to use their toilet. However, the portaloos will be kept so that if there is an event such as a wedding or funeral, with large numbers of people, both toilets can be used.

Access for all ages and levels of mobility

At the moment, the South door is used all the time to access the church, as a gravel path that is in need of repair, leads directly to this door. There are 3 steps down into the church, which, for people in either wheelchairs, pushchairs or prams, means that either there is a need for heavy lifting, or else heavy ramps stored in the vestry, need to be put in place in the porch. A level entrance into the church to enable people of all ages and levels of ability to access the church, is urgently needed, whether for church services or events. The extension of this path round to the West door will provide an additional entrance/exit to the church and avoid ramps from the vestry needing to be put down. An additional entrance/exit will also make it safer when large numbers of people are entering or exiting the church building after events, church services, or bell-ringing.

Expanding and growing the archive of church knowledge and local history

Storage is urgently needed for the Widford Archive which is currently being stored in a Widford resident's loft. There is great interest in the archive and the PCC feels that it would be doing a great service to the village to be able to offer this collection of documents and artefacts, a home on a loan basis. If it is housed in the church, this will encourage people into the church who want to look at specific or general documents and it will enable the children from Widford school greater access to the history of many of their ancestors.

New facts and aspects of the church's history have come to light during the preparation of these project proposals.

4.4 The needs are evidenced by the enthusiastic responses from a diverse enthusiastic community

Overflow seating/standing for church events: the new space created at the back of the nave once the 8 pews have been removed, needs to be kept as free as possible and not be used as regular additional seating otherwise there will not be the welcome area and easier/safer access both in and out of the church that is so important to the PCC's needs. Some additional seating in the

new gallery will be needed by arrangement, for one off events and performances by musicians etc.

New gallery – uses and needs

The needs and uses will vary according to the event being organised. Two of the large pews in the main body of the nave need to be put on casters so that additional seating can be easily provided to face the gallery and serve the new social space.

- Bell-ringers will use the gallery weekly and at special services.
- Handbell ringers practice weekly at certain times of the year and perform in church at least quarterly. Their music will be projected much further from this elevated position.
- Musicians and choral groups – we are aiming to provide a monthly music recital. Solo performers or small ensembles such as a violin quartet, will benefit from having a bespoke space from which to perform that is acoustically superior to performing in the chancel.
- Monthly café groups such as a bereavement group.
- A more private space that is away from the church floor will be necessary when there is the need for more privacy.
- Church meetings – PCC meetings can also take place in the new gallery so that PCC members can take full advantage of the raised elevation giving views from this floor over the nave.

Removal of the timber cross beam: this will shortly become the subject of a dendrochronological investigation to reveal the age of the timber. However, regardless of the beam's age, the PCC concludes after much thought and advice from the architect, that its removal is necessary to fulfil the project's main purpose which is to create additional unencumbered space, and access to it, as the church enters a new phase of its life and role in the community. The present and future needs and opportunity for the church to create openness and clarity therefore outweigh value of retaining this tie beam.

This beam we believe is structurally redundant and retaining it will hinder and obstruct the view out of the gallery for anybody either seated or standing, and likewise it will affect the visibility of anybody performing in the gallery for those seated in the current nave.

For any musicians or speakers performing from this gallery, whether standing or seated, the acoustics will be compromised by the close proximity of the beam to their voices or instruments. Standing musicians will not be fully visible either if the beam remains in place.

Elevation of the tower arch's status and significance: it is difficult to understand why the tie beam has survived so close to the tower arch as it obstructs its form and therefore the full appreciation of the magnificent stone arch and the space of the tower beyond. By removing this beam, we wish to enhance the arch's significance which will become greater because its simple elegance and construction will be more clearly visible from every part of the church. The new access and exit via the West door will also result in many more people walking through the tower arch and gaining this increased appreciation.

Re-use of materials: the tie beam has been present in Widford church for as long as the dendrochronological investigation establishes. As an act of appreciation for the beam's history, the PCC would like to respond to the suggestion made by SPAB to re-use its timber to create floor joists in the new gallery floor. These joists could be laid in a similar 'noughts and crosses' pattern (9 squares) to that supporting the clock chamber floor in the tower (immediately above the proposed new gallery). These joists can be left exposed on the underside of the gallery floor so that they are visible from the tower floor and their significance can be clearly documented nearby. The tie beam would therefore be given a new function/purpose, and retained within the church. With the archive forming part of the PCC's project to keep the church relevant and important to the local community, as well as the church congregation, this new beginning and purpose for the tie beam will serve as an interesting and new 'milestone' and necessary event in the church's history.

New gallery floor hatch: a hatch is necessary in the design of the new gallery floor so that in the event of the bells needing any maintenance, they can be lowered through the hatch to the tower floor. The hatch will be designed to have a clear structural glass panel so that when the gallery isn't being used, the clear panel will allow light through to the tower floor. Similarly, anybody standing underneath the clear hatch panel will be able to look up and still see the clock chamber floor in the tower (which we believe was the original bell-ringers floor).

On specific interests:

The bell-ringing fraternity and ringing floor: the current bell tower captain was consulted regarding ringing on a new higher level floor in the tower, with access to this from a new staircase in the nave. After consulting the bell-ringing team, the tower captain reported that it will be easier to ring from a higher level as the bell ropes will be shorter. The captain also advised that it is very cold

ringing from the ground level tower floor, and access to via the church path is not always easy or lit, so the proposal allows for draught proofing the existing door into the tower to reduce heat loss and energy costs, in addition to a lit and level path to both the church's entrance doors.

A past Tower Captain's legacy contribution: the previous tower captain, Christopher Taylor-Young who worshipped in the church for more than five decades, sadly died in December 2023. As well as bell-ringing, he also had a great interest in finding a more suitable home for the Widford Archive. Several years ago Christopher offered to pay for a designated area to be created in the village hall for an archive facility, but the Parish Council did not encourage or accept this generous offer. Christopher eventually withdrew his offer. However the PCC's ideas for this project were discussed with Christopher at length, including housing the Widford Archive as well as any church archive documents, and installing a new gallery to free up the tower floor to accommodate a kitchen and storage area. Christopher wholeheartedly concluded that this is excellent way to prepare the church for future events and future generations.

The Friends of Widford Church and the Archive have been consulted as they organise events which showcase the Widford Archive. With the internal changes planned for the church, future events that showcase the archive can also take place at the church.

The current keeper of the Archive has been fully involved. This lady is now in her 80s and is very happy and relieved to think that the church could become the next caretaker of the Archive collection.

The Parish Council was approached some years ago to see if some space in the village hall could be created to house the Widford Archive, but this was not possible. The parish council chairman is very supportive of the archive being stored in the church and has offered to help source local authority grants that could help finance this project.

Widford School and Hunsdon JMI School have been consulted. The Head Teacher of both schools thinks it will be extremely beneficial for present and future students to have greater access to the Archive whilst at the same time becoming more comfortable using their local church and learning about its rich and extensive history.

Helen Giles, Museum Consultant and Widford Resident has been involved and consulted from the outset. Helen is currently voluntarily digitising the archive and giving it a greater presence by publishing articles in the parish magazine that have come from the archive. Helen is excited at the prospect of beginning work on cataloguing the archive, possibly with help from a few volunteers, in the church vestry, and being able to organise the archive in designated cupboards to make future access and referencing simpler.

Responses to the project as a whole:

The Parish Council agree that more modern, updated and compliant facilities within the church building will benefit the church into the longer term.

Friends of Widford Church feel that modernising Widford church's facilities is long overdue and very necessary for the future of the church.

The PCC, over recent years, have voiced their increasing concerns about the isolation of people living in Widford due to the relentless closure of facilities and social events over just one generation, that were once held annually. The regrettable losses include the village stores and post office, both pubs, the Over 60's Club, the Gardening Club, Kingdom Kids (an after-school club for children), Women of Widford (a craft club) the W.I., annual school fete and the pantomime.

The PCC believe that the church can provide a new community anchor that Widford village desperately needs.

One PCC member, who is a fourth generation Widford family member, perceptively writes: *"a shop is not just somewhere to pick up a daily newspaper, it is somewhere to say hello or see another living person, sometimes for the only time that day. A pub is not just somewhere to have a drink, it is somewhere to share happy news with another person or talk about one's daily struggles in life."*

The church's ongoing projects and mission involves PCC members in conversations with many residents who are lonely, and these are not just bereaved/elderly residents. Recently a new single lady moved into the village, she didn't know anybody, and she spent the first few years feeling very isolated, with little going on in the village to enable her to make new friends... but she was encouraged to come to church, and to the church's fundraising events, which she did, and she has made friends since then.

The PCC's Social Committee are very much in favour of equipped, modern facilities within the church building so that they don't have to bring in their own crockery etc, from home. And they wholeheartedly support the idea of the designated space planned at the back of the nave where the pews will be removed, to provide much greater scope for arranging welcoming facilities, community events and a space to move around more freely.

St Albans Diocese DAC has been consulted for advice and kept in the picture. An initial meeting took place on 21st February 2024 with several members of the DAC together with several members of the PCC and the PCC's architect. The project proposals and the various options and approaches were discussed at length and the preferred approach agreed in principle.

4.5 Addressing environmental sustainability issues

Dispensing with oil, and exploring solar power

The church's oil boiler has been on its last legs for some time now. Instead of buying a replacement oil boiler, electric heating has been chosen for the church's future heating requirements, therefore demonstrating our wishes to reduce the energy consumption in the church.

Insulating the west door will also reduce the current heat loss from this ancient door.

For energy and safety reasons low voltage lighting will be installed to replace any energy inefficient and high temperature tungsten fittings affected by the proposals.

4.6 A design strategy and approach that is minimally intrusive and sympathetic

When considering alterations and adaptations to historic building it is important to explore and consider all the options and ideas, and then to make as identifiable interventions, designed, not only to be visible but also in such a way as to be reversible or even removable. This approach has underpinned the approach taken at Widford.

DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

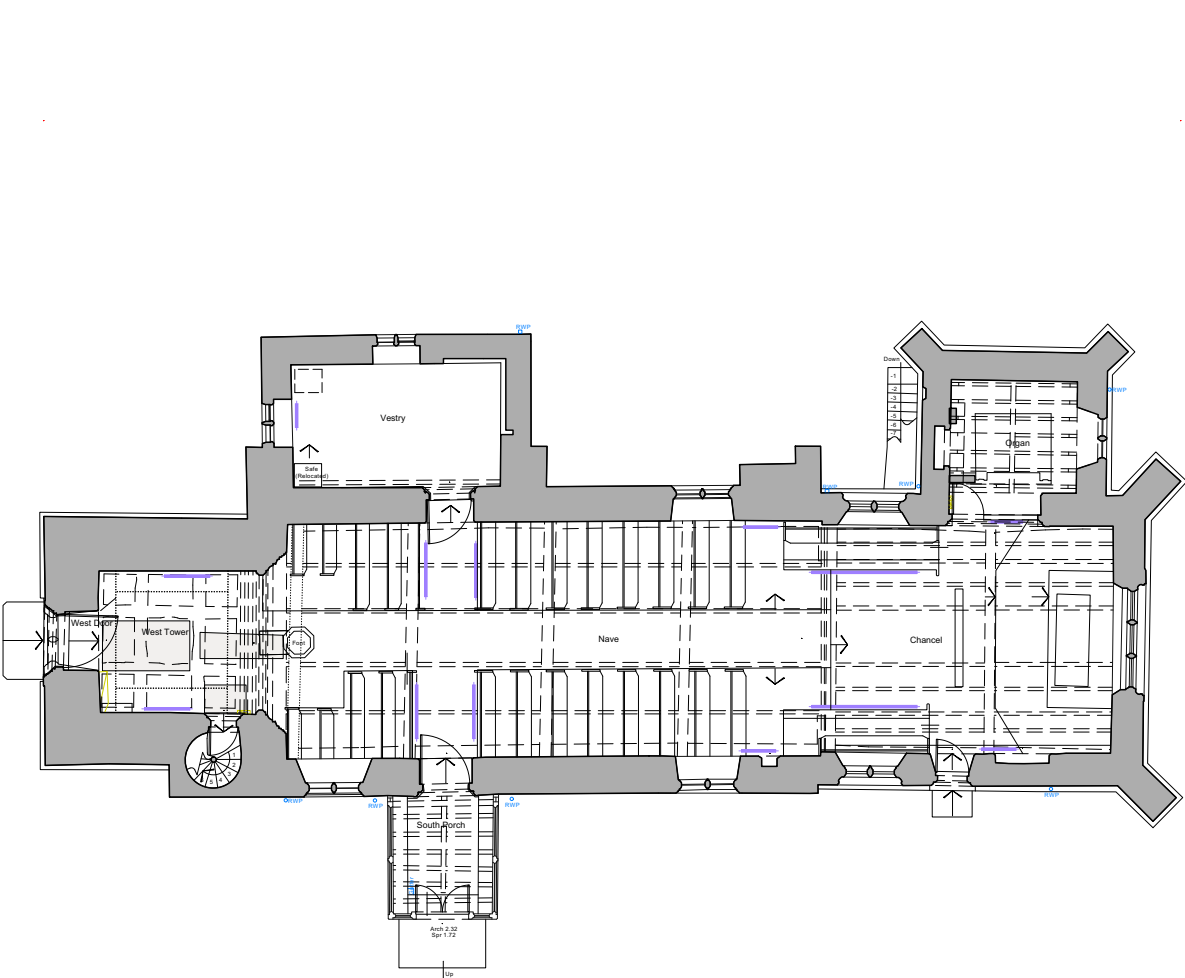
5.0 The church as it is now - Existing Site Plan



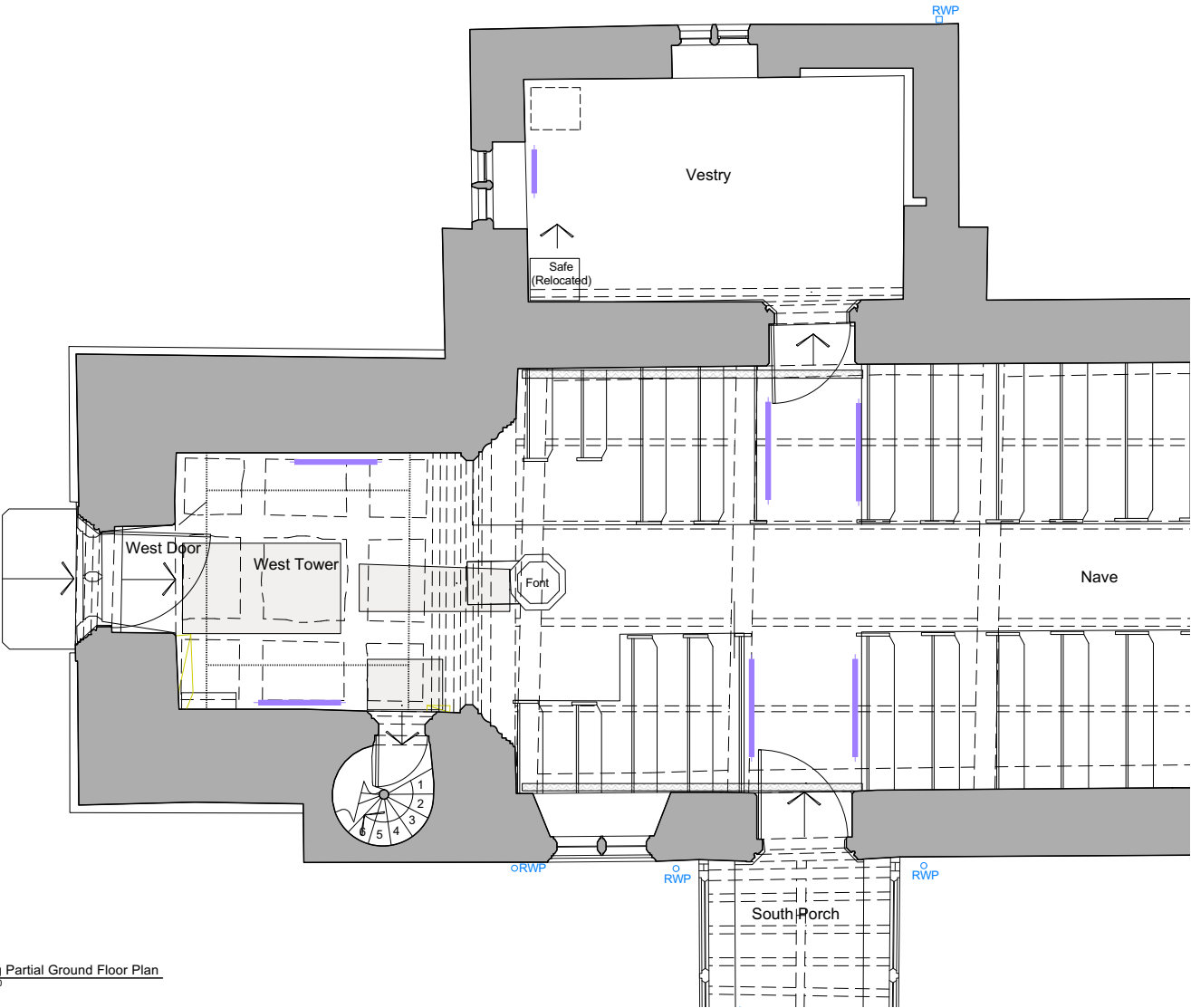
Site Plan

DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

5.0 The church as it is now - Existing Ground Floor Plans



1 Existing Full Ground Floor Plan
Scale: 1:100

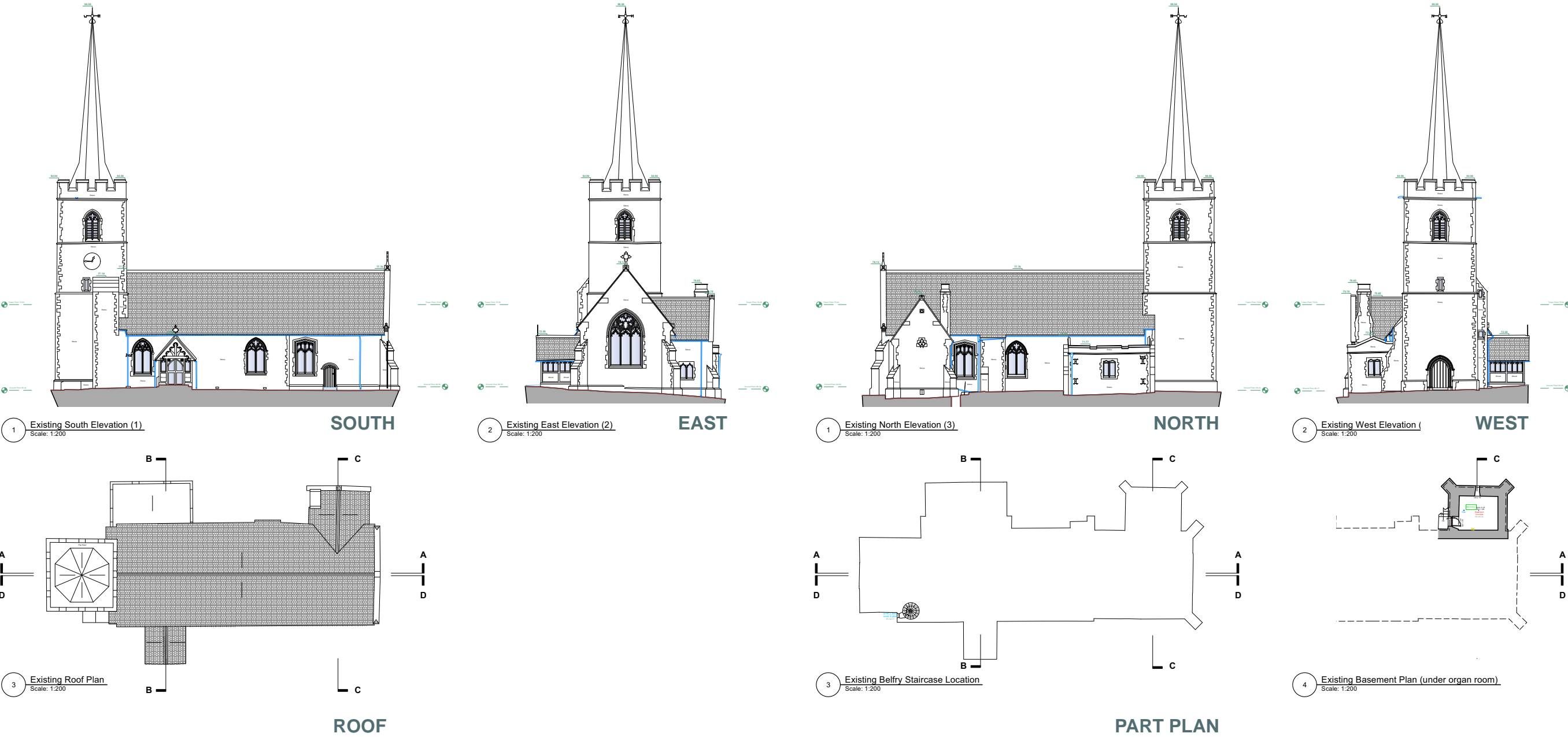


1 Existing Partial Ground Floor Plan
Scale: 1:50

Plans - Ground Floor

DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

5.0 The church as it is now - Existing Elevations



Elevations

DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

5.0 The church as it is now - Existing Sections



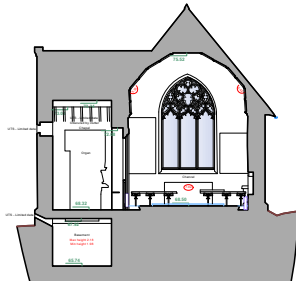
1 Existing Section A-A
Scale: 1:200



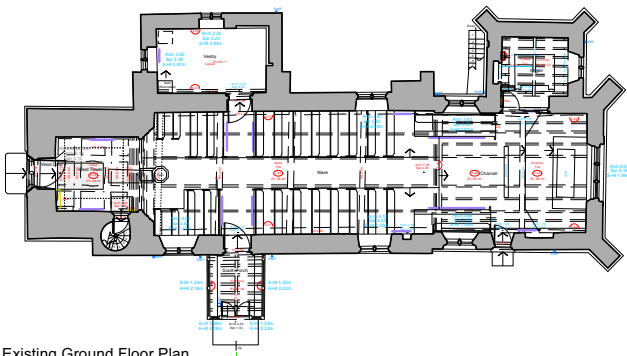
2 Existing Section B-B
Scale: 1:200



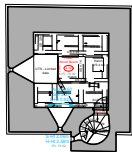
1 Existing Section D-D
Scale: 1:200



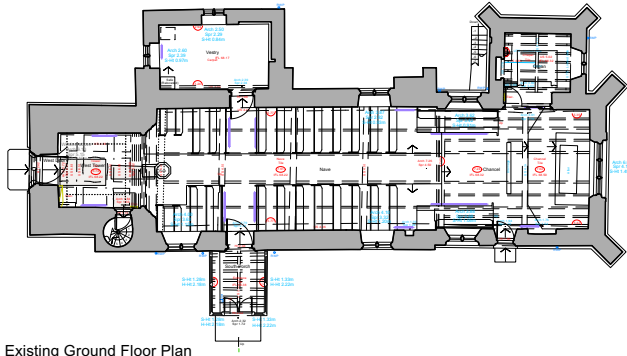
2 Existing Section C-C
Scale: 1:200



3 Existing Ground Floor Plan
Scale: 1:200



4 Existing Belfry Floor Plan
Scale: 1:200



3 Existing Ground Floor Plan
Scale: 1:200



4 Existing Belfry Floor Plan
Scale: 1:200

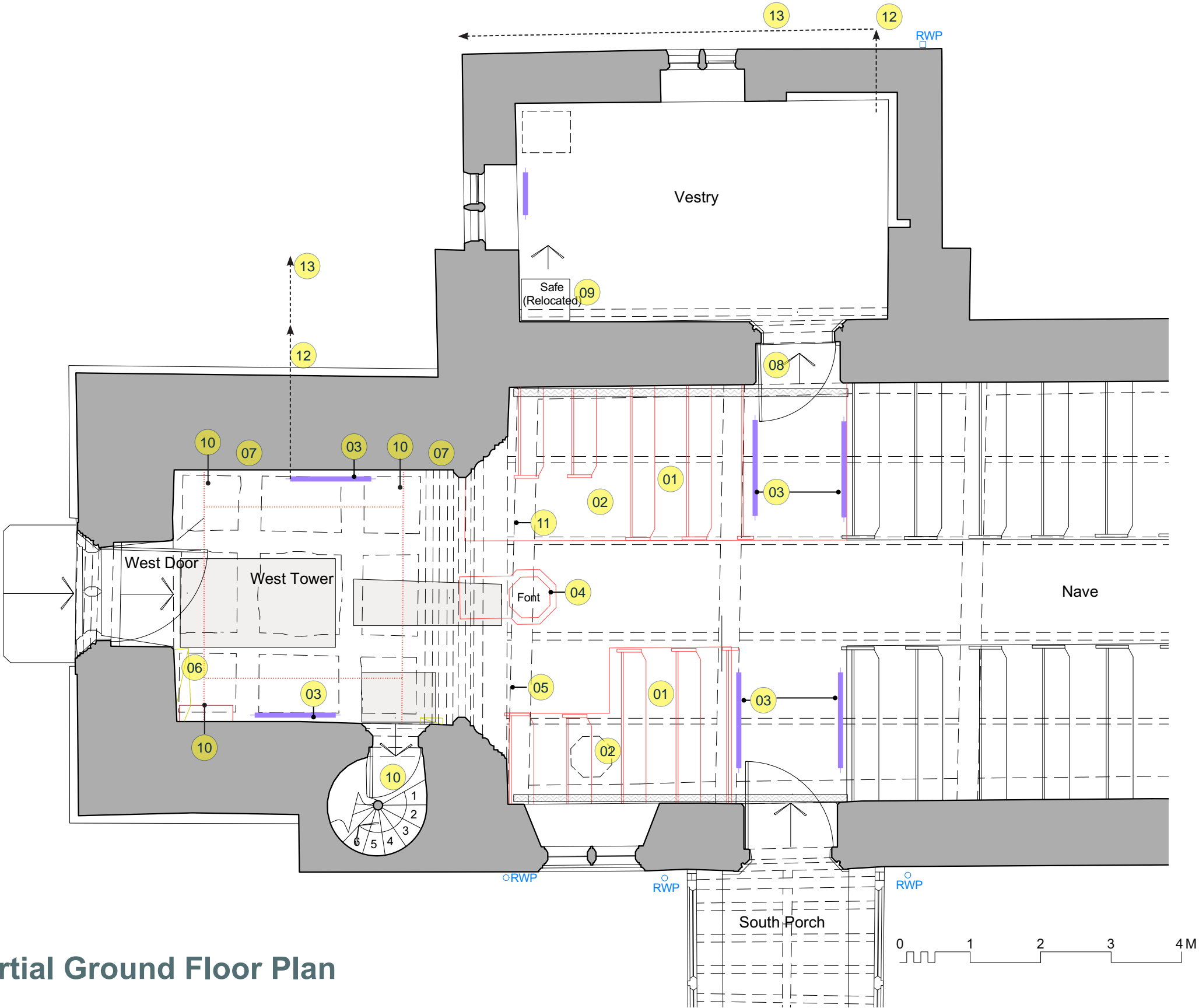
Sections

DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

6.0 The planned interventions - Preparatory Works

Key

- 01 **Pews** - 8no to be removed
- 02 **Raised Flooring under pews** - to be removed
- 03 **Radiators** - to be removed (also 4 to be removed in the chancel)
- 04 **Font** - to be moved and concrete step trip hazard removed and replaced with demountable timber step if required
- 05 Investigate flooring under raised timber (assumed likely to be tiling)
- 06 **Electrical Intake and Fuse Box** - to be rationalised and enclosed
- 07 **Existing Memorial Wall Plaques** - to be relocated.
- 08 **Door threshold** - to be lowered 30mm and new trim added to door
- 09 **Safe** - to be relocated
- 10 **4no 100mm dia pockets cored into existing walls** - to take supports for new gallery floor
- 11 **Tie-Bar** - to be removed (non structural)
- 12 **Wall cored (100mm dia)** - to take waste pipe
- 13 **Shallow trench** - to take waste pipes to Klargester



Partial Ground Floor Plan

DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

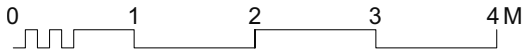
6.0 The planned interventions - Preparatory Works



Key

- 01 **Pews** - 8no to be removed, and 2no to be retained and made reversible
- 02 **Raised Flooring under pews** - to be removed
- 03 **Radiators** - to be removed (8no including those in the chancel)
- 04 **Font** - to be moved and concrete step trip hazard removed and replaced with demountable timber step if required
- 05 **Timber Cross beam** - to be retained and removed if approved to facilitate more intensive use of the new gallery space
- 06 **Electrical Intake and Fuse Box** - to be rationalised (out of view on section)
- 07 **Existing Memorial Wall Plaques** - to be relocated
- 08 **Door threshold** - to be lowered 30mm and new trim added to door
- 09 **Light fittings** - to be removed
- 10 **Core 100mm dia pockets into existing walls** - to take supports for new gallery floor
- 11 **Tie-Bar** - to be removed
- 12 **Existing door** - made draught-proof
- 13 **Drainage grating** - create new 300mm trench

Section AA



DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

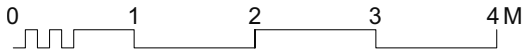
6.0 The planned interventions - Preparatory Works

Key

- 01 **Pews** - 8no to be removed, and 2no to be retained and made reversible
- 02 **Raised Flooring under pews** - to be removed
- 03 **Radiators** - to be removed (6no)
- 04 **Font** - to be moved and concrete step trip hazard removed and replaced with demountable timber step if required
- 05 **Timber Cross beam** - to be retained and removed if approved to facilitate more intensive use of the new gallery space
- 06 **Electrical Intake and Fuse Box** - to be rationalised
- 07 **Existing Memorial Wall Plaques** - to be relocated
- 08 **Door threshold** - to be lowered 30mm and new trim added to door accordingly
- 09 **Safe** - to be relocated
- 10 **Core 100mm dia pockets into existing walls** - to take supports for new gallery floor (not visible in this section)
- 11 **Tie-Bar** - to be removed
- 12 **Water supply** extended
- 13 **Shallow trench** for bedded drain with shingle covering and loosely laid stone covers
- 14 **120mm core for WC** connection



Section BB



DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

6.0 The planned interventions - Preparatory Works



- Key**
- 01 **Pews** - 8no to be removed, and 2no to be retained and made reversible
 - 02 **Raised Flooring under pews** - to be removed
 - 03 **Radiators** - to be removed (6no)
 - 04 **Font** - to be relocated and concrete step trip hazard removed and replaced with demountable timber step if required
 - 05 **Timber Cross beam** - to be retained and removed if approved to facilitate more intensive use of the new gallery space
 - 06 **Electrical Intake and Fuse Box** - to be rationalised
 - 07 **Existing Wall Plaques** - to be relocated (not visible on section)
 - 08 **Door threshold** - to be draught-proofed
 - 09 **Safe** - to be relocated
 - 10 **Core 100mm dia pockets into existing walls** - to take supports for new gallery floor
 - 11 **Tie-Bar** - to be removed
 - 12 **Bell rope guide framework** to be removed
 - 13 **Hand chime bell ropes** to be relocated on the new gallery level floor or on the clock-house floor (still under discussion)

Section DD

DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

7.0 The Proposals - Proposed Site Plan

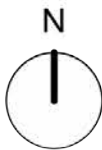


Proposed Self-binding Permeable Gravel Path to create compliant, but informal path into west door



Key

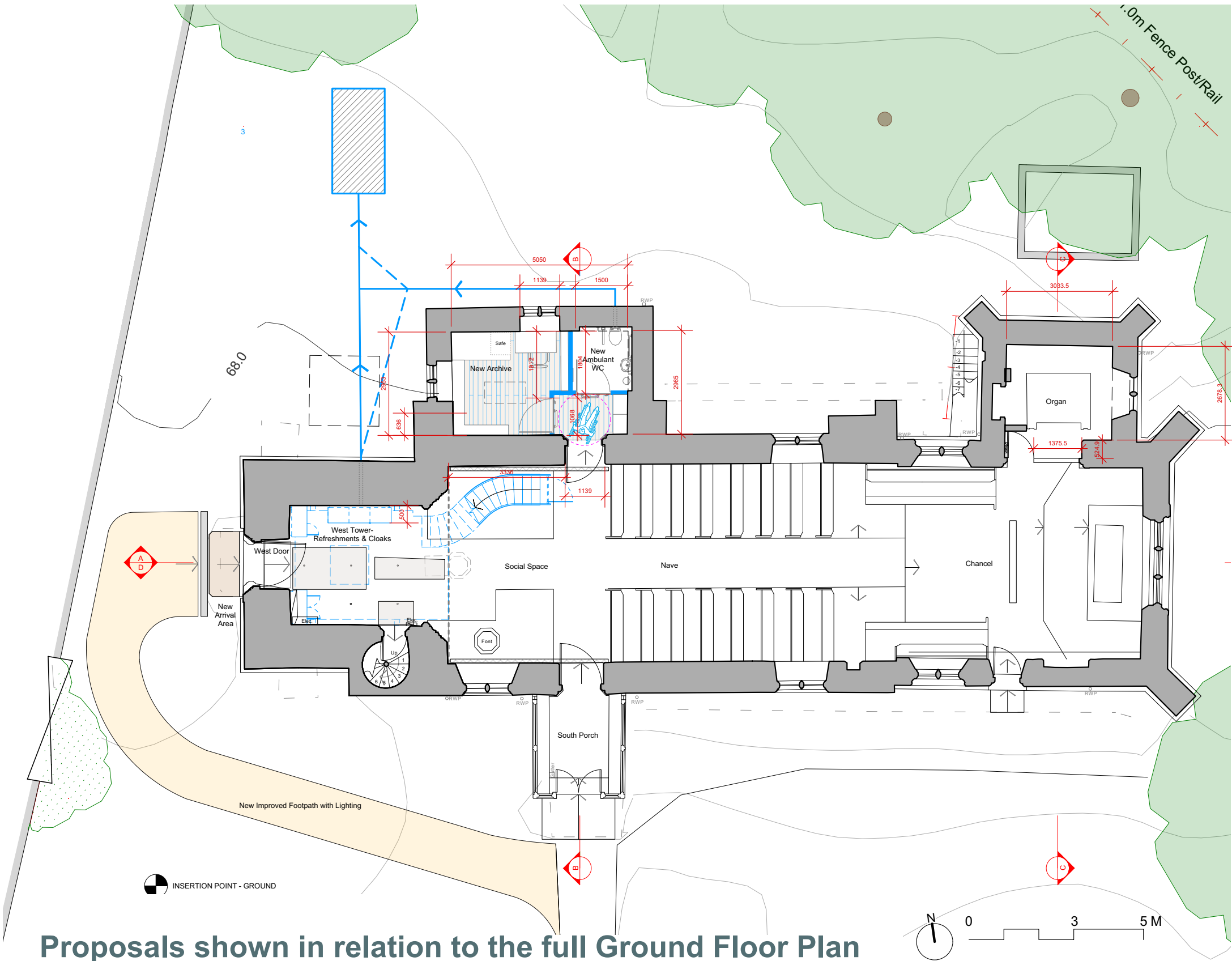
- 01 Existing path widened to 1.5m with a gradient into west door suitable for wheelchairs
- 02 New surface water drainage gulley
- 03 Klargestar in area of churchyard already excavated
- 04 Informal planting to define entrance/exit route
- 05 Existing gravel path to be upgraded to improve accessibility for all



0 5 10 M

DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

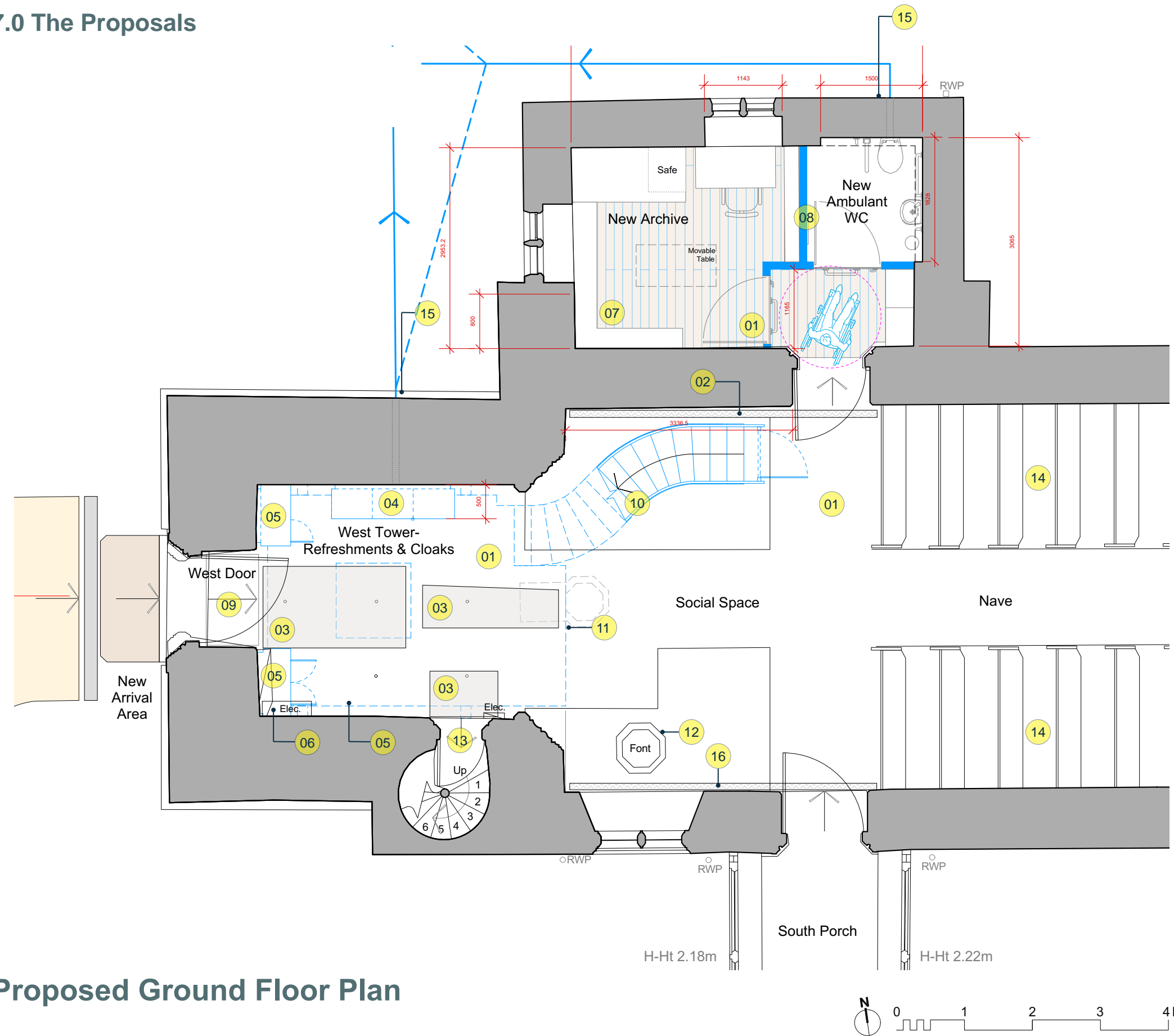
7.0 The Proposals



Proposals shown in relation to the full Ground Floor Plan

DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

7.0 The Proposals



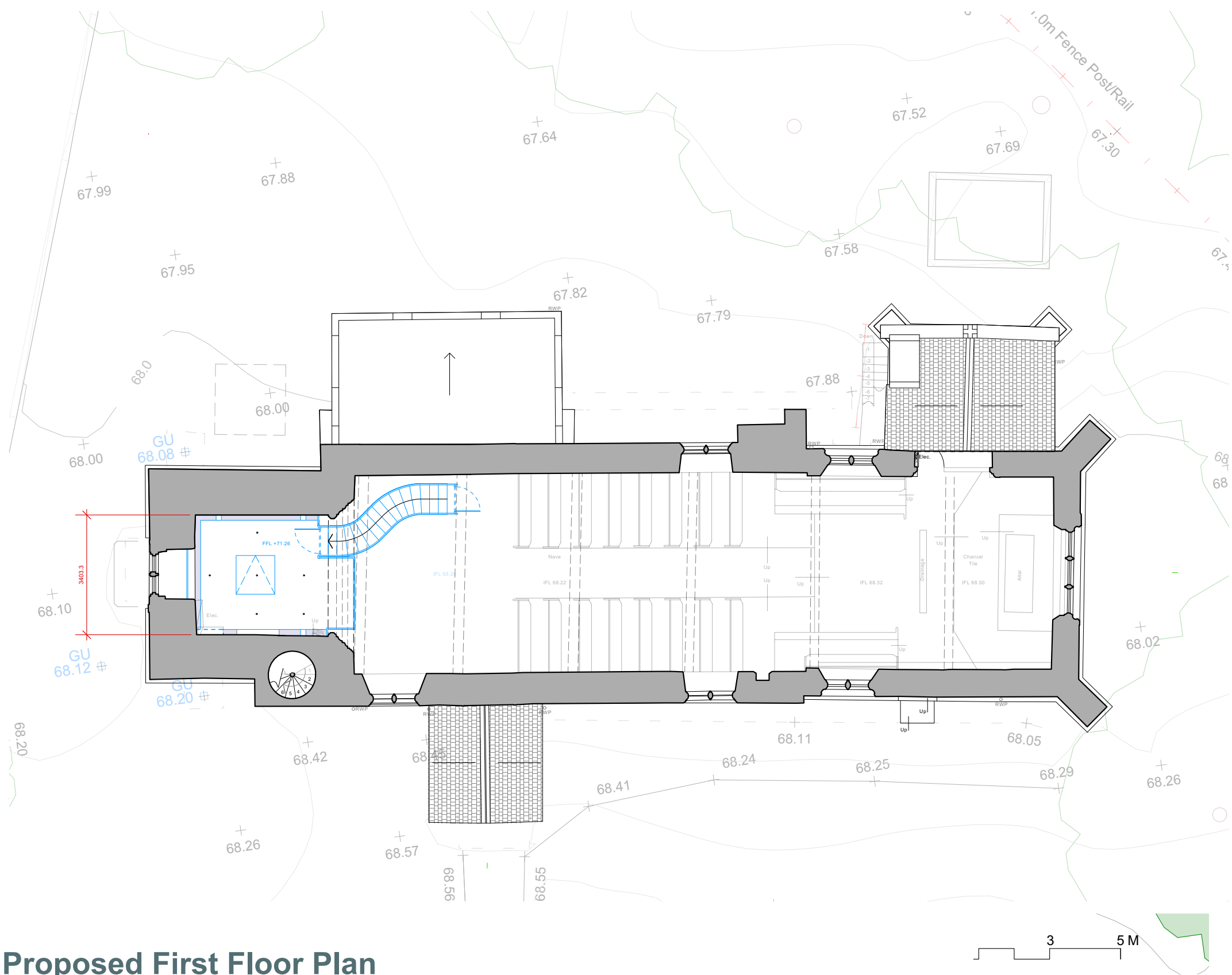
Proposed Ground Floor Plan

Key

- 01 **New floor** – investigate likely tiled flooring under timber boarding and restore or replace. In new archive room fix tongue & groove hardwood flooring to make level with aisle and new nave social space
- 02 **Edging and Demarcation** – Original obsolete perimeter cast iron Victorian heating pipe gratings retained, and line of pews and aisle expressed or retained when sub-floor investigated
- 03 **Concealed overhead lighting** to accompany an information panel on the side wall with the history of the memorials.
- 04 **Lockable Timber Servery** – A fully enclosed unit comprising refrigerator, dishwasher, microwave, under-sink water heater (fed from the existing water supply in south porch), and enclosed corner cupboard. One-piece stainless steel work top with an integrated sink. Unit dimensions 1.8m wide x 0.5m depth, 1.8m high, made in high quality joinery as an independent 'furniture' fixture.
- 05 **Cupboard** – To be fully enclosed 0.75m wide x 0.5m x 2m high, and lockable to match servery design.
- 06 **Hand Operated Bell Sounder** – To be restored on gallery floor or on the clock-house floor
- 07 **New Archive Room** - Accessible new space and with level access from Nave. New purpose-built full-height metal fire resistant storage units, shelving and table as well as a lockable security door.
- 08 **New Ambulant WC** with 0.5 x 1.1 x 2.3m high cloaks storage cupboard
- 09 **West Door to be made draught-proof** – And to be fitted with an insulating curtain and a recessed doormat well.
- 10 **New 0.8m clear width steel and timber staircase** – To give access to new first floor bell-ringers gallery with lockable ground level gate to control access.
- 11 **Outline of Bell-ringers' Gallery Over**
- 12 **Font to be relocated** – Remove permanent concrete step in favour of a lightweight removable timber or steel step. Font to be relocated to new position to allow direct access from the west door. NB: if during times when the font is not regularly used a corner location becomes desirable a moveable font may be considered.
- 13 **Door and Opening to Existing Stone Staircase** – Accessing the belfry and clock floor retained unchanged and made easier.
- 14 **Heated Electric Pew Seating** – On individual switches so they can be turned on to suit user demand.
- 15 **New Drainage Connection** – Via a new 100mm diameter aperture cored through an existing 1250mm wall.
- 16 **New water supply pipe and connection.**

DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

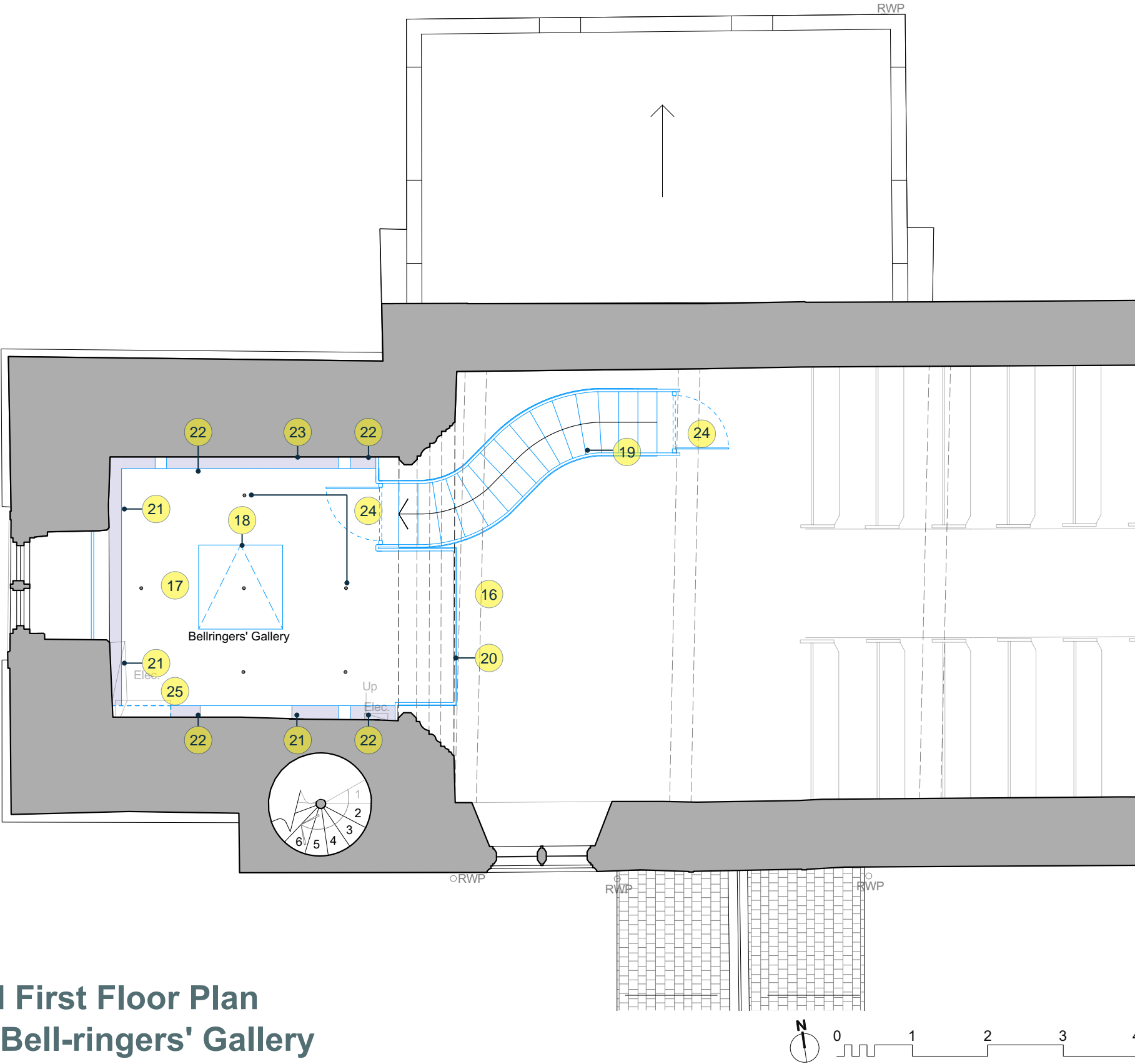
7.0 The Proposals



Proposed First Floor Plan

DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

7.0 The Proposals



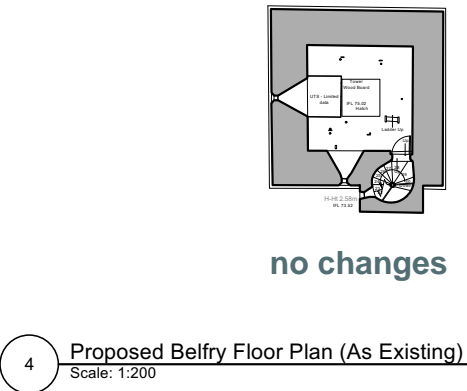
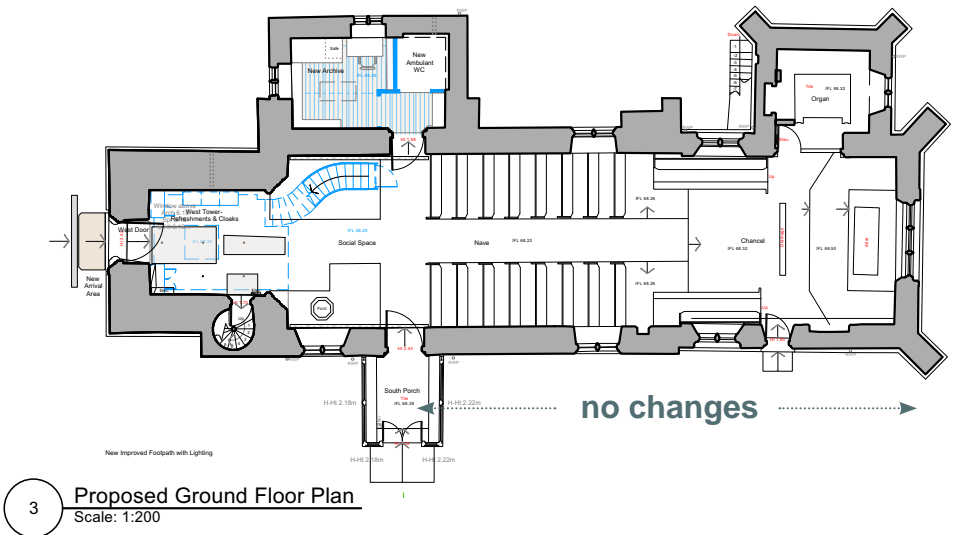
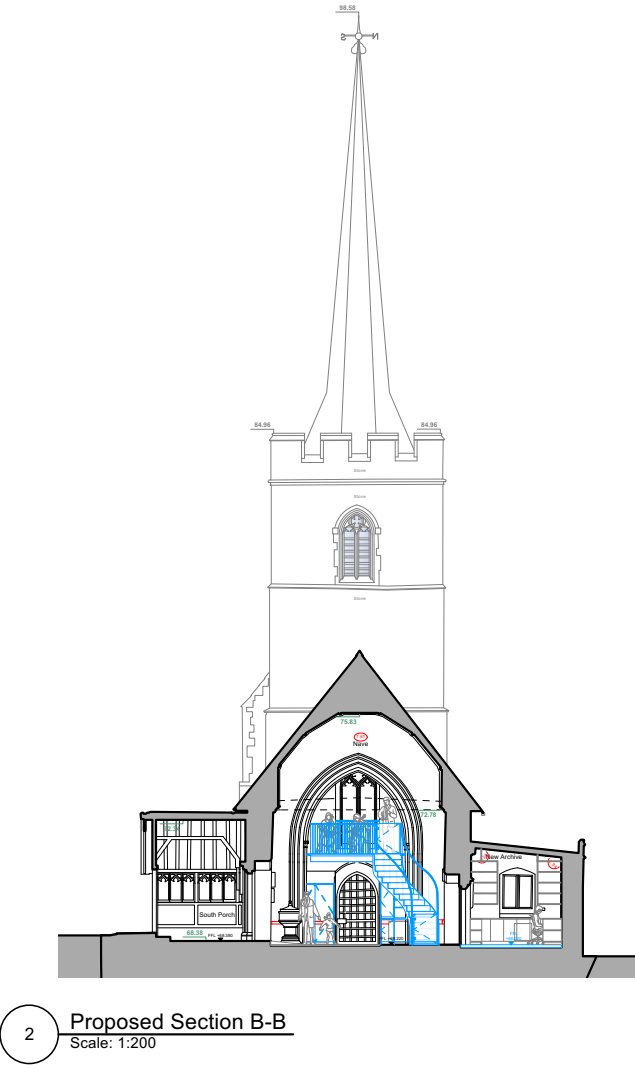
Key

- 16 **Metal tie beam** shown removed and timber beam possibly removed
- 17 **New Steel Framed Bell-ringers' Gallery** and timber floor finish
- 18 **Access Hatch for Bell Maintenance** to incorporate structural glass floor to give a view of the structure of the original bell-ringers floor above (now used as the clockhouse floor)
- 19 **New 0.8m clear width staircase** – steel strings and balustrade and timber treads
- 20 **Vertical stainless steel vertical railing balustrade 1.10m high**
- 21 **Structural glass** perimeter infill and flush flooring to wall
- 22 **Steel supports 'cored' into walls**
- 23 **Existing plaques to be relocated (4no)**
- 24 **Access control gate**
- 25 **Provision for guide ropes** – for hand chimes to main bells (to be on gallery or clock-house floor)

Proposed First Floor Plan
The New Bell-ringers' Gallery

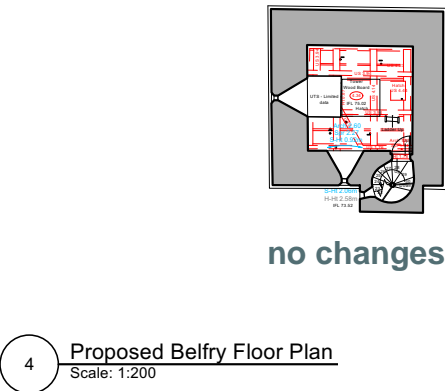
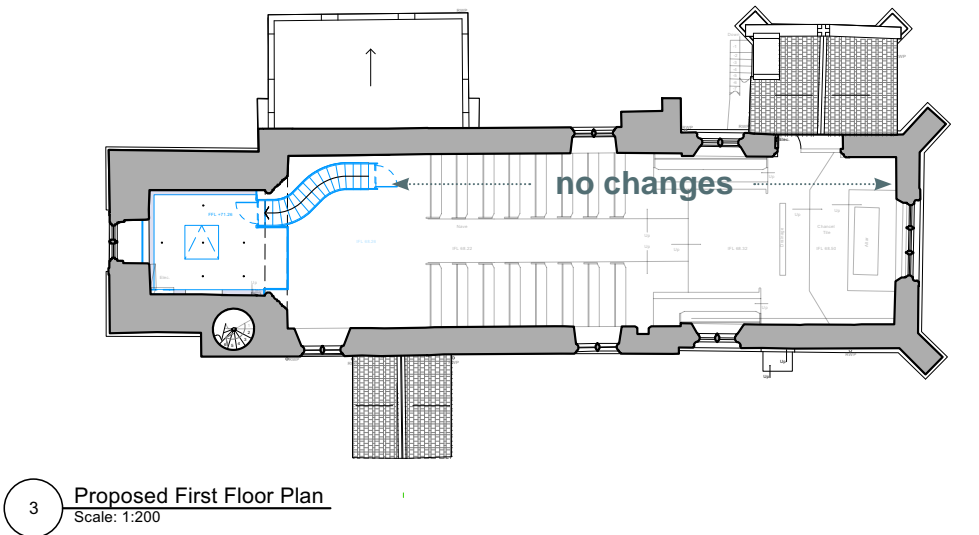
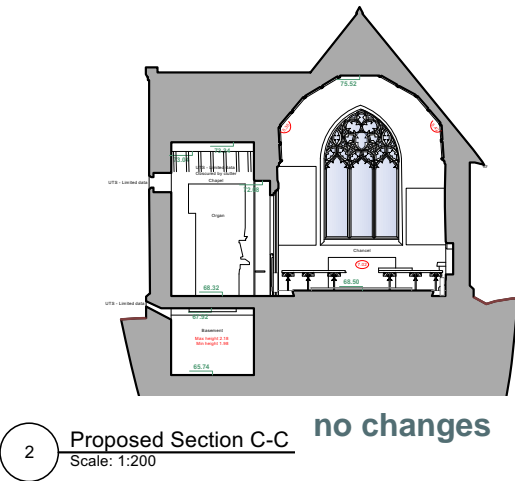
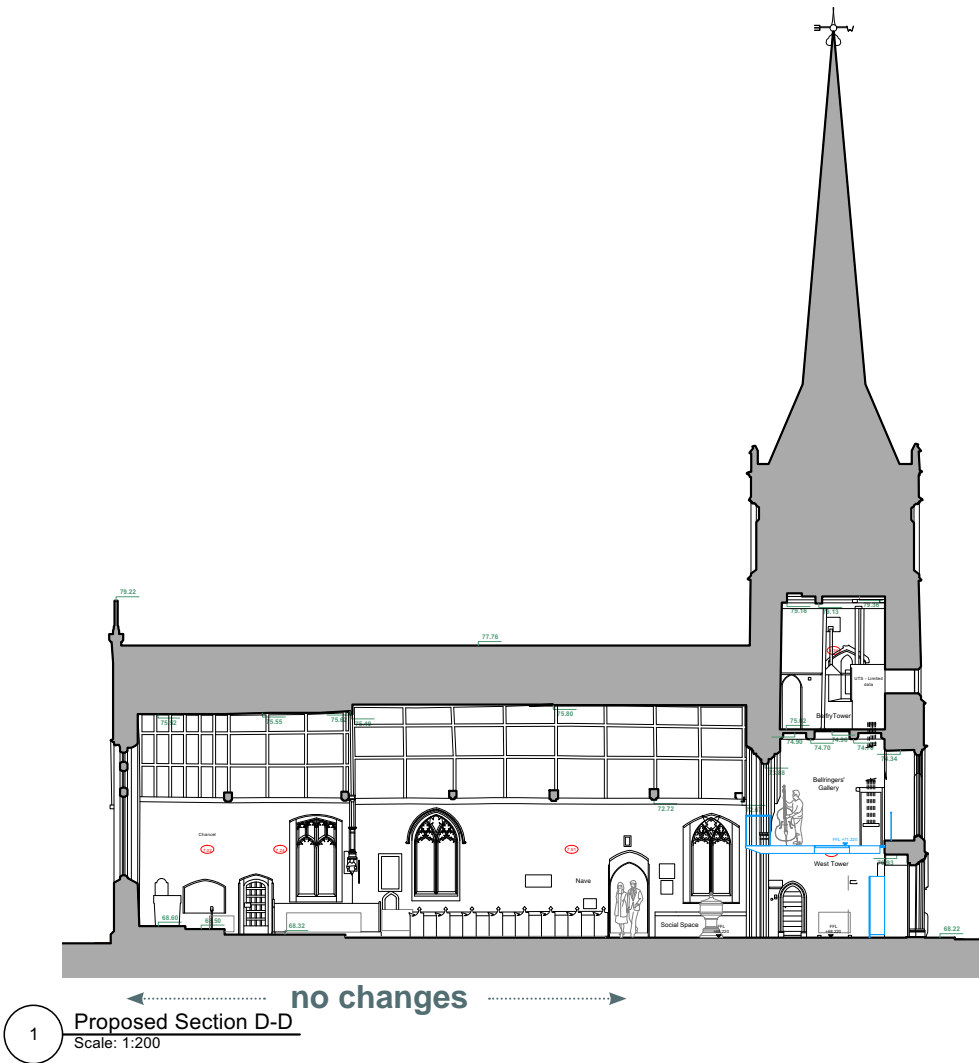
DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

7.0 The Proposals - Sections looking North and West



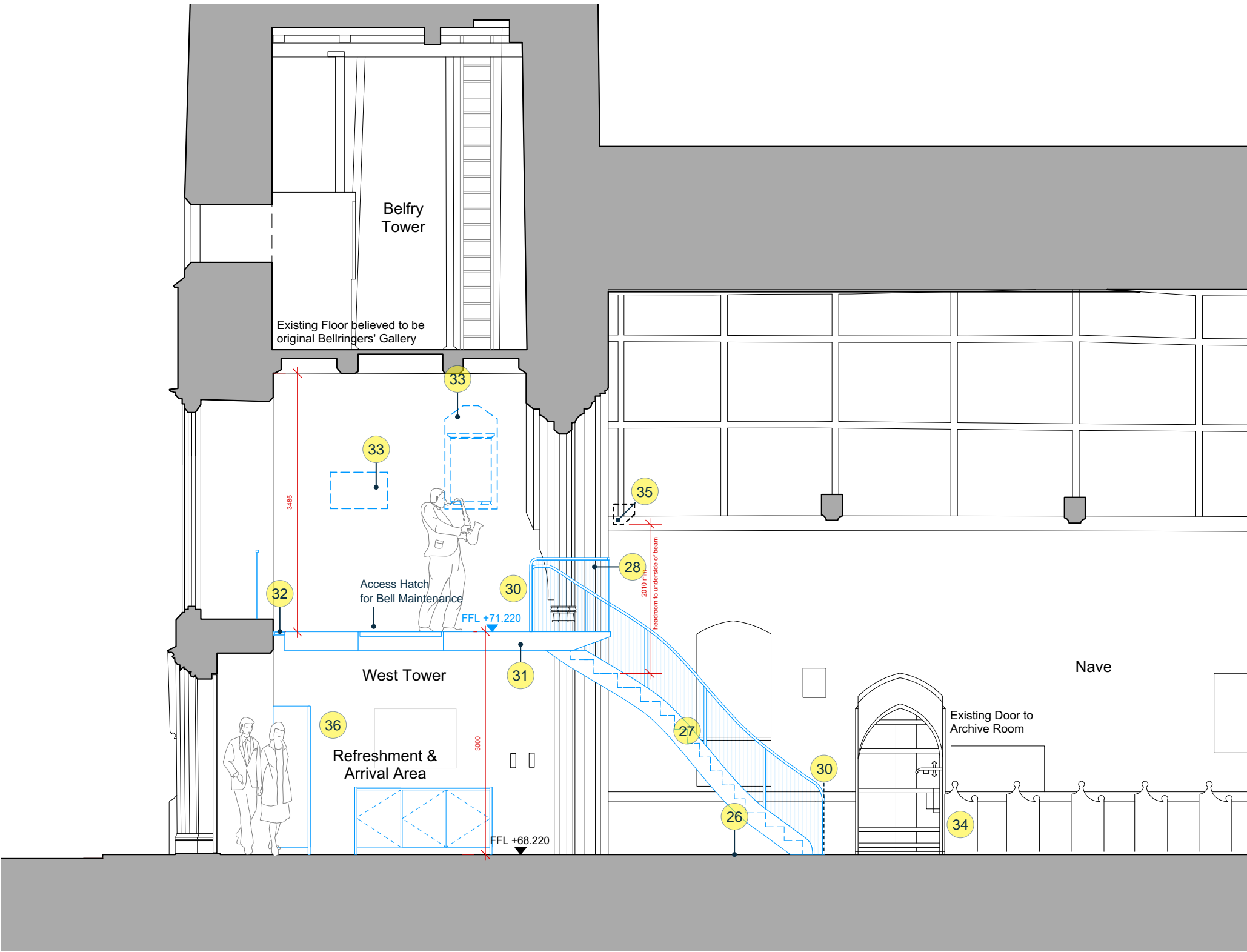
DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

7.0 The Proposals - Sections looking South and East



DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

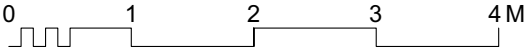
7.0 The Proposals



Key

- 26 Restored or replaced tile flooring
- 27 Steel Staircase with timber treads
- 28 Stainless steel vertical 'wires' balustrade 1.10m high
- 29 New steel framed Bell-ringers' Gallery, plaster ceiling and timber floor
- 30 Access control gate
- 31 Plaster Ceiling
- 32 Flush Glass Infill
- 33 Existing Memorial Plaques – shown in new position (to be agreed)
- 34 This line of pews made reversible
- 35 Beam retained or removed
- 36 New servery

Proposed Section AA
The New Bell-ringers' Gallery



DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

7.0 The Proposals



Key

- 35 Occasional Temporary Ramp (existing)
- 36 New Steel Framed and Timber Bell-ringers' Gallery
- 37 Balustrade 1.10m high
- 38 New 0.8m clear width staircase – steel with timber treads and vertical steel balustrade
- 39 Rationalised and enclosed Electricity and Fuse Cupboard 450mm deep
- 40 Font relocated and locked in position
- 41 Archive Room – with Bespoke Metal Fire Resistant Storage Cupboards
- 42 Full height 450mm deep cupboard
- 43 Archive Room has two existing windows
- 44 New Level Access to Archive Room – Floor to be raised to be flush with rest of the church nave and aisle to make it wheelchair accessible.
- 45 West door made draught-proof
- 46 Safe location

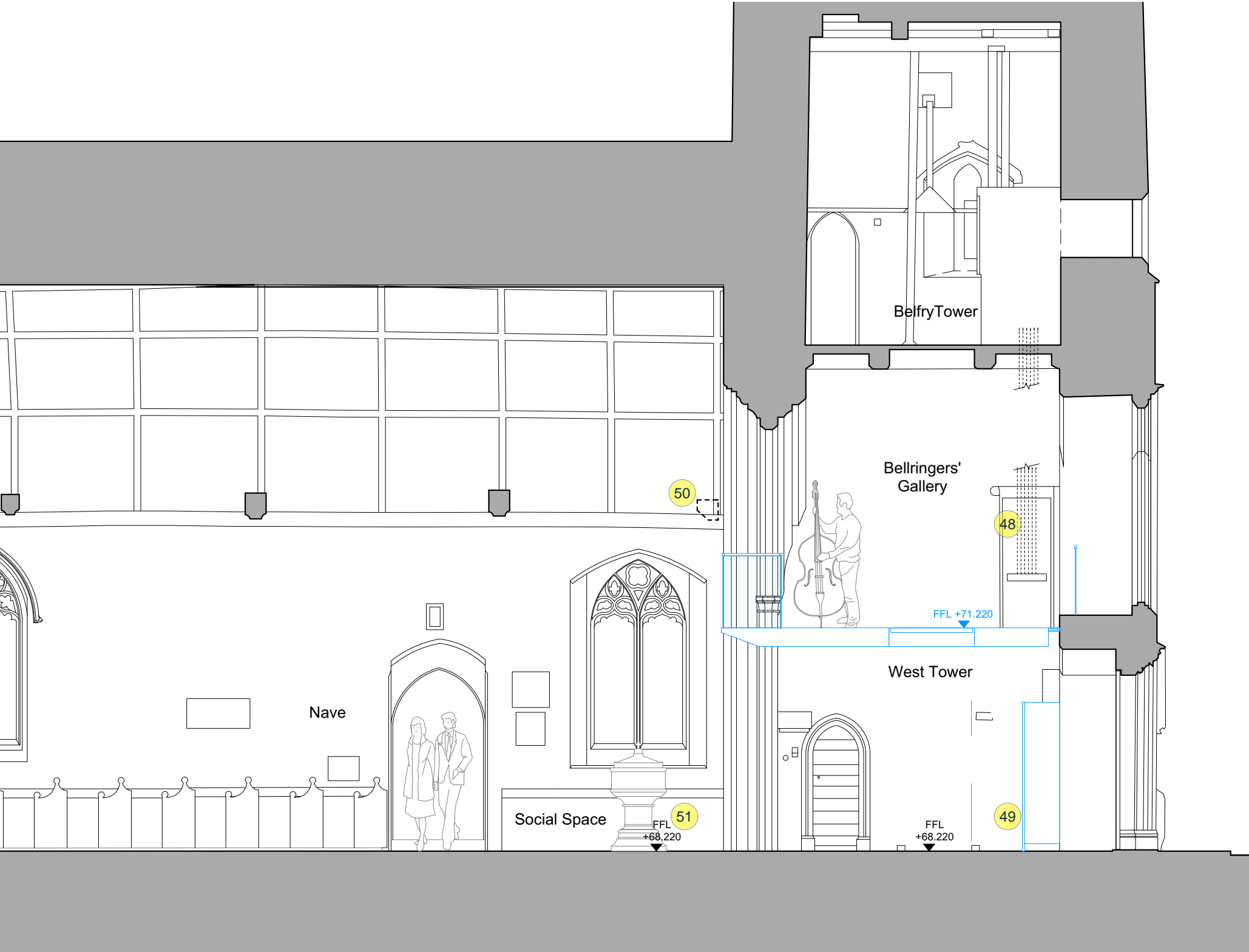
Proposed Section BB
The New Bell-ringers' Gallery Looking West

DRAWINGS & ILLUSTRATIONS: THE PROPOSALS

7.0 The Proposals

Key

- 48 Hand chime ropes installation move to new position (on gallery or clock-house floor)
- 49 Lockable cloaks cupboard
- 50 Retained beam or removed if approved to facilitate greater use of the new gallery space
- 51 Alternative font position



Proposed Section CC
The New Bell-ringers' Gallery

APPENDIX A

“Careful examination and detailed measurements can sometimes produce surprising results”

‘Parish Churches’ by Hugh Braun – published by Faber 1970

Some preliminary notes, observations and analysis and ongoing investigations into the construction sequence and dating of the Nave and West Tower structures at St John The Baptist Church, Widford, (Listed Grade II*), and St John The Baptist Church Hunsdon (Listed Grade I).

The planform and dimensions of the West Towers of both churches are identical. Their nave dimensions almost the same but both are based on a double square planform.

Based on a comparison of the digital survey of Widford Church and a ‘scale- bar’ photocopy plan of Hunsdon Church it is evident that the nave and the tower parts of both churches have the same planform. The nave at Hunsdon is slightly wider than Widford’s, by 1.2m (roughly 4 feet) but their nave lengths and their tower dimensions are identical dimensions, as below.

Of particular interest is the fact that the western towers to both churches have the same wall thicknesses, planform and spiral staircase dimensions, *and the same obscured moulding detail to the contiguous arch - arguably a defect.*

This leads one to the speculation that the towers to both churches, including the attached double height stone arch, may have been built at the same, or at a similar date, and possibly constructed by the same local workforce.

WIDFORD CHURCH

Nave: internal - 14.8m x 5.8m wide
Nave: wall width - 850mm

Tower

North, south, and west wall width - 1.35m
 Tower external dimension 6.1m
 Tower internal width, 3.53m (North/south)
 Tower internal width, 3.76m (East/west)
 Dimension from the external face of the west tower to the back face of the arch 5.2m

HUNSDON CHURCH

Nave: internal - 14.6m x 7m wide
Nave: wall width - 850mm

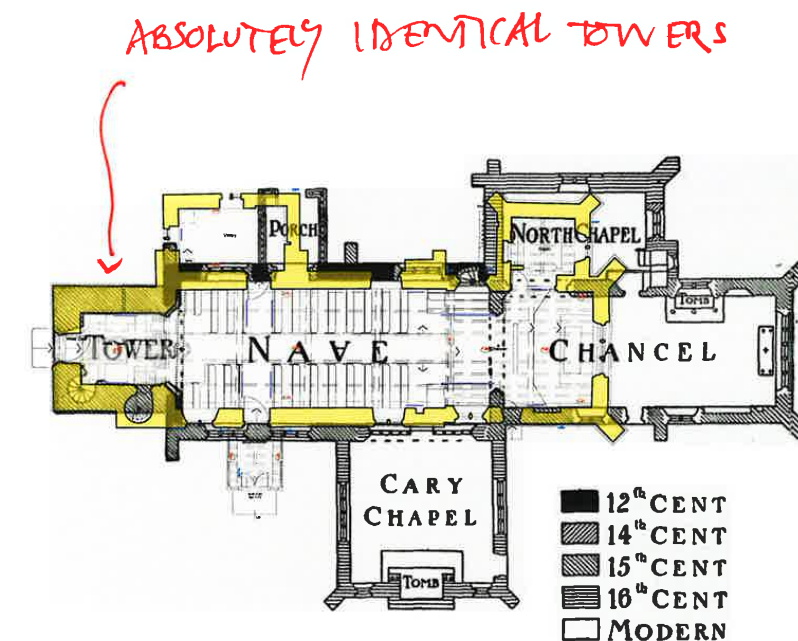
Tower

North, south, and west wall width - 1.35
 Tower external dimension 6.1m
 Tower internal width, 3.53m (North/south)
 Tower internal width, 3.73m (East/west)
 Dimension from the external face of the west tower to the back face of the arch 5.2m

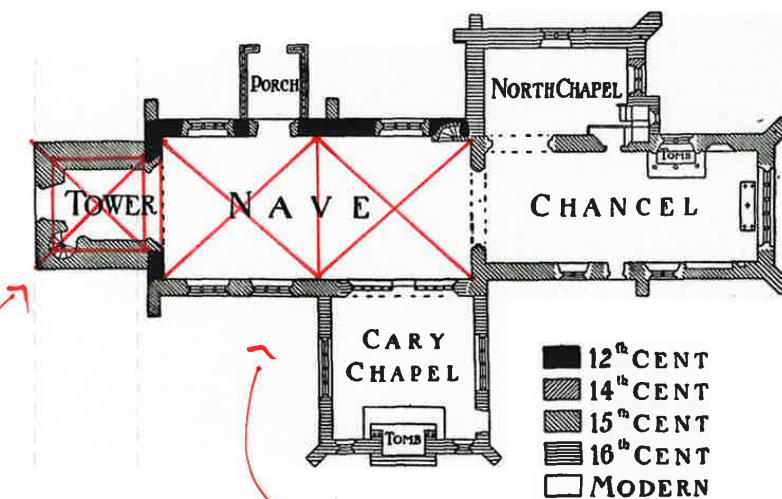
PS: At Widford the location of the bricked up (19th C) stair in the north wall of the nave is identical to the position of an extant stair at Hunsdon.

WIDFORD & HUNSDON

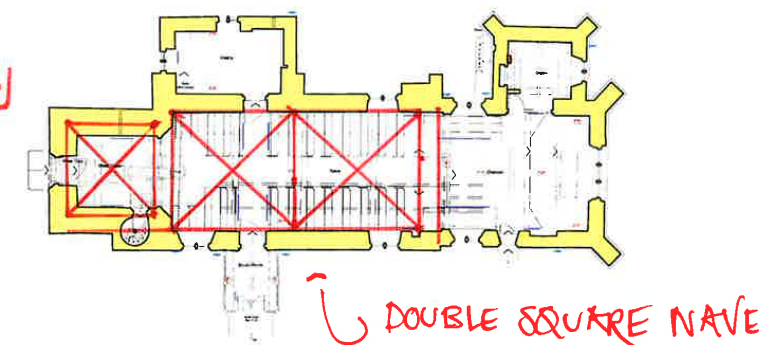
- IDENTICAL SQUARE PLAN TOWERS
- BOTH ORIGINAL NAVES BASED ON A DOUBLE SQUARE
- HUNSDON VERY SLIGHTLY BIGGER BUT TOWERS ARE IDENTICAL.



HUNSDON CHURCH



WIDFORD CHURCH



At Widford the dimensional evidence from the digital survey, and the built form, strongly suggest that the east, west, and south walls of the west tower belfry were added to internally by some 430 mm after the construction of the 15th century main arch. A dimensional anomaly in the layout of the heavy cross beams at first floor level also suggests that they were set out originally on a tri-partite grid based on the division of a west tower planform with internal dimensions that at one time were 430 mm greater internally on three of its sides, and this would also have allowed the arch and its plinth to be built and expressed at ground floor level. This strongly suggest that the current first floor was in fact constructed or strengthened as a bell-ringers floor, and that the mass of the towers walls was increased to accommodate the additional lateral loading of the bells, e.g. to cope with the augmenting of the peal from a single, to two, four and then six bells. If the first floor and the spiral stair was constructed to act as a bell ringers floor, the proposed new ringing gallery goes some way to restore the relationship between bell-ringers and the bells, and it will result in more manageable and usual rope lengths.

The stone spiral staircase to the first floor

The tower walls could have been constructed at the same time but if it was a two stage process an analysis of the dimensions also suggests that a complete section of the original tower's south wall was demolished in order to re-construct a new 1600mm x 1600mm section to form the additional attached turret that also incorporates a new stone spiral staircase giving access to a first floor, most likely for bell-ringers. This very heavily structured floor now houses the mechanism to the clock (1912) (which replaced the sundial on the southern tower elevation) and also the automated bell-ringing mechanism. Thus for some time the bell-ringers have operated from the ground floor using longer than optimum ropes requiring an intermediate metal guide frame that is visible today.

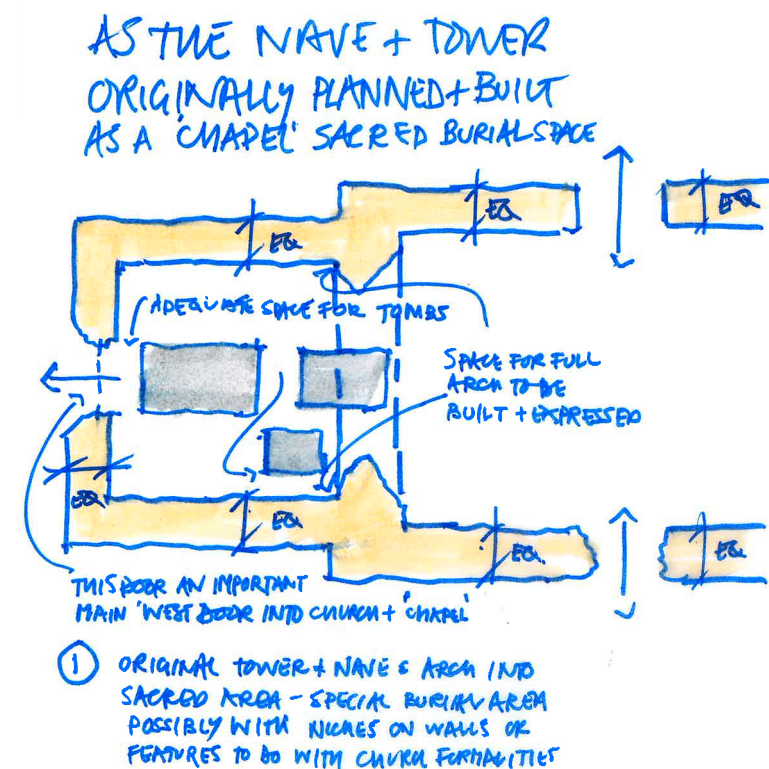
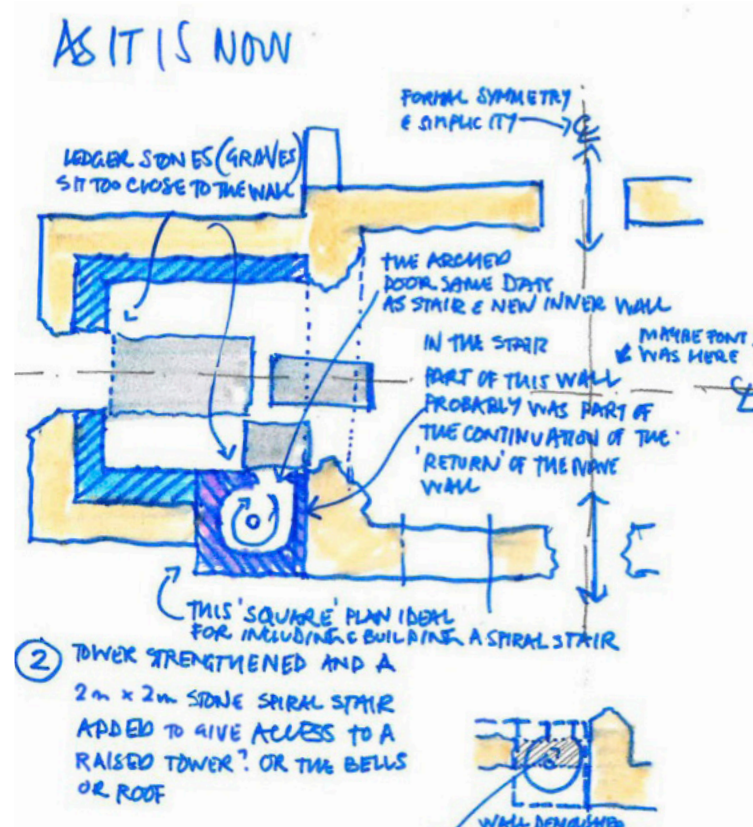
The construction of the stone spiral staircase also requires an additional wall thickness that results in building over the stone mouldings and base of the main western arch.



To build this stone arch in sections would have required additional width in the tower. Conclusion: at some point 400-450mm has been added to the tower internally resulting in the 1280mm width currently.



The plaster line up to the arch and capital obscures the mouldings (both at Widford and Hunsdon Church)



APPENDIX B



The arch and re-instatement of a bell-ringers' floor in the west tower at Widford is an opportunity to reveal the currently obscured 15th century stone arch and to make evident its relationship with the tall space of the belfry tower and the full height of the nave and its Wagon Roof



Further exploratory views showing the detrimental effect on the architectural relationship between the nave and the belfry tower arch

Photos of the working model showing the detrimental impact on the 15th century arch of the timber cross beam which is the subject of dendrochronological dating commissioned by Historic England. The view is looking west towards the proposed reinstatement of a bell-ringers floor in the west tower at St John the Baptist Church, Widford Listed Grade II*.



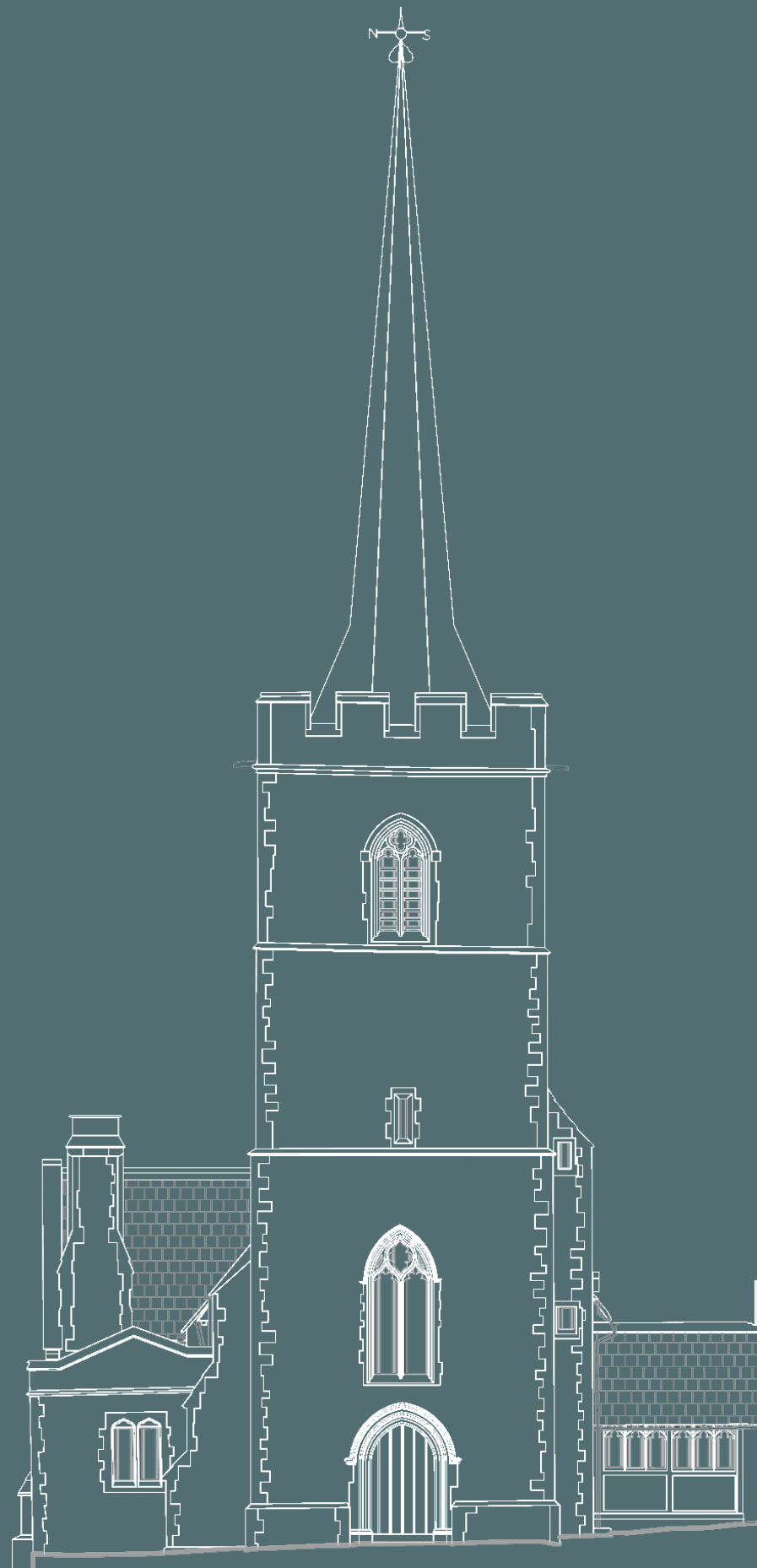
Additional views



The bell-ringers gallery

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