

The Mustard Seed Project



Introduction

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Caring for our building

Our congregation has been a good steward of our building, ensuring that people can continue to worship God, enjoy Christian Fellowship and engage with our local community of Crowthorne. St Johns has also been a church which has undergone many changes over the years, from its humble beginnings in the roof of the Rolling Feast, to the reordering of the church and the removal of the rood screen in 1980.

In the 1960s and 1980s we built the Hall and extended it to provide space for community and church activities, a kitchen and toilets.

In the 2010s we replaced the Church roof, installed a new heating system in the Church, completely renovated the organ and installed a new Audio/Visual System. Our Fabric Committee has continued to work tirelessly to maintain the building, and we are all indebted to them for their work.

But we have some major issues which we need to address:

Our Hall is now over 50 years old and is in poor condition. The toilets and kitchen are not fit for purpose, and the windows need replacing.

Our Church boilers are now 14 years old. They broke down last year (2025) and the year before (2024).

The Nave floor is in a bad state of repair and was flagged in our quinquennial report as needing urgent repair.

In addition, we are required by the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that people with mobility issues are not discriminated against. We need to consider what we might do to address this.

What have we done so far?

The Hall, Kitchen and Toilets

The consultation on the Mustard Seed Project conducted in Sep 2025 also showed that there was a strong interest in renovating the kitchen and the toilets so that we might engage missionally with our local community. As a result, the PCC commissioned an architect, John Radice, to draw up a plan for this.

The Nave Floor

The PCC and Fabric Committee have been discussing the repair of the floor since 2017. An estimate for the work was obtained in 2019 and raised again as urgent (to be done within 5 years) in the Quinquennial Report for 2023, but no decision has yet been taken. However, this needs to be addressed. The state of the Nave floor was also mentioned by congregants of St. John's as in need of repair in our Mustard Seed Project consultation in September 2025.

The Heating system

Two years ago (early 2024) we started to plan for the replacement of the gas boilers, particularly in the Church as we knew they would come to the end of their life cycle in the next few years.

Our Mission Action Plan also recognised the long term need to move away from gas heating and to investigate the installation of Net Zero heating.

At the same time, the National Church has encouraged the move to Net Zero with the diocese stating they won't be accepting replacement like-for-like boilers if, and when they break down in churches. This meant we had to investigate another source of heating. Oxford Diocese offered us a grant of £3,000 to enable us to investigate these Net Zero heating options.

We engaged Cook & Cardenas, a firm of Heating Engineers, who provided a feasibility study for a new heating system. This gave us an acceptable solution for the hall, but we were undecided about the best option for the Church.

The Diocese offered a further £12,000 and we used this to investigate two possible options for the Church – radiant heaters and warm air blowers. We eliminated one of these and were left with one remaining option – warm air blowers.

We were not entirely satisfied that this would suit us due to the noise and aesthetic design and so approached the Diocese about spending the grant on an investigation into under floor heating. They agreed and we enlisted the help of John Radice to look at the feasibility of installing underfloor heating. We now have John's report setting out the options and costs. This will be explored within this booklet.

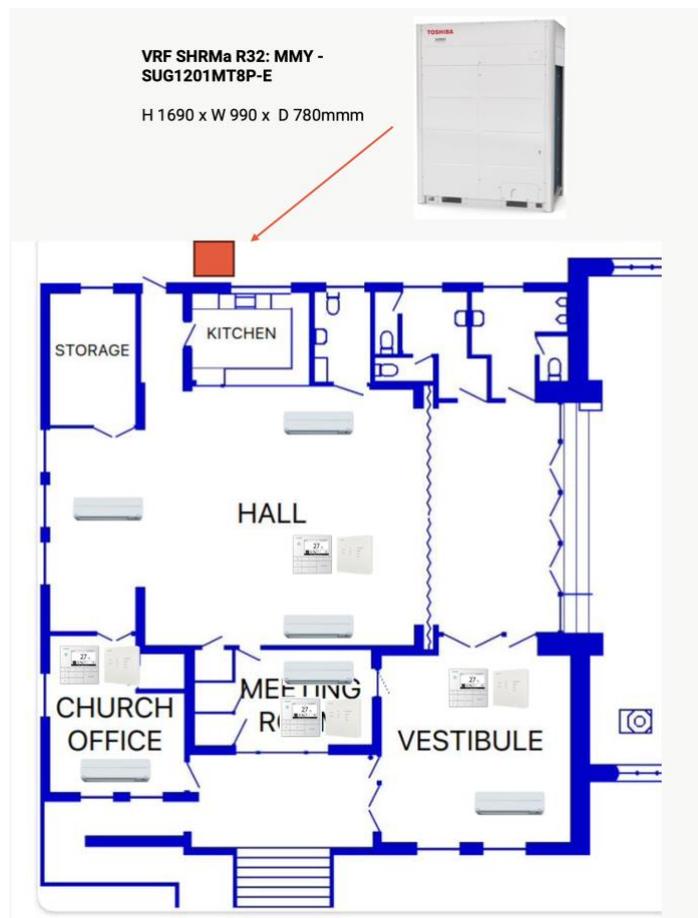
The proposals for work on the hall, heating system and nave floor can be found in the next section.

Heating the Hall

The proposal for the Hall is an Air-to-Air Heat Pump. This would be mounted outside the Kitchen and power six warm air blowers, three in the hall, one in the office, one in the meeting room and one in the vestibule. We would be able to set the times and temperature remotely over Wi-Fi for the heating in each room. There would be an electric water heater in the kitchen and small electric radiators in the toilets.

In addition, we would install 28 solar panels on the roof of the hall, and a battery storage bank to smooth out supply and demand.

The hall windows would be replaced with high quality double glazing.



Benefits of the new hall heating

The new system in the hall would be entirely powered by electricity, and we would generate a lot of that ourselves through the addition of solar panels and battery storage.

The system can be used for cooling in the summer and heating in the winter.

Double glazing will reduce the energy consumption of the hall by 35% compared with the present.

The heating in each room will be independent, so we will save money and resources when the heating is required for a single room e.g. the hall, and not the office. The new fan heaters run at a much slower speed than the current system. They will generate heat immediately and will be much quieter than our existing fan heaters.

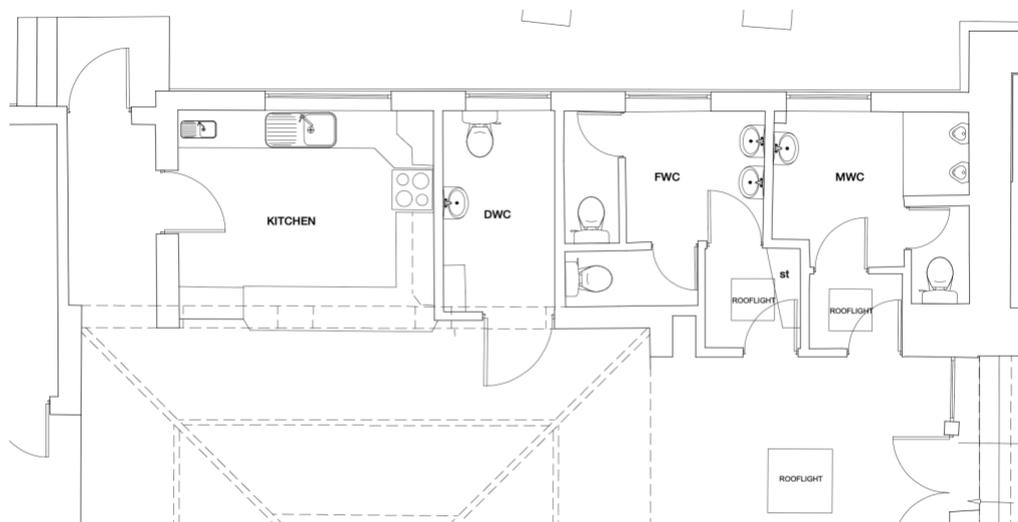
This heating would also mean that we could use the hall more often, as current cost of electricity is a consideration for us, and that users hard of hearing would find it a more accessible space.

Proposal for the Kitchen and Toilets

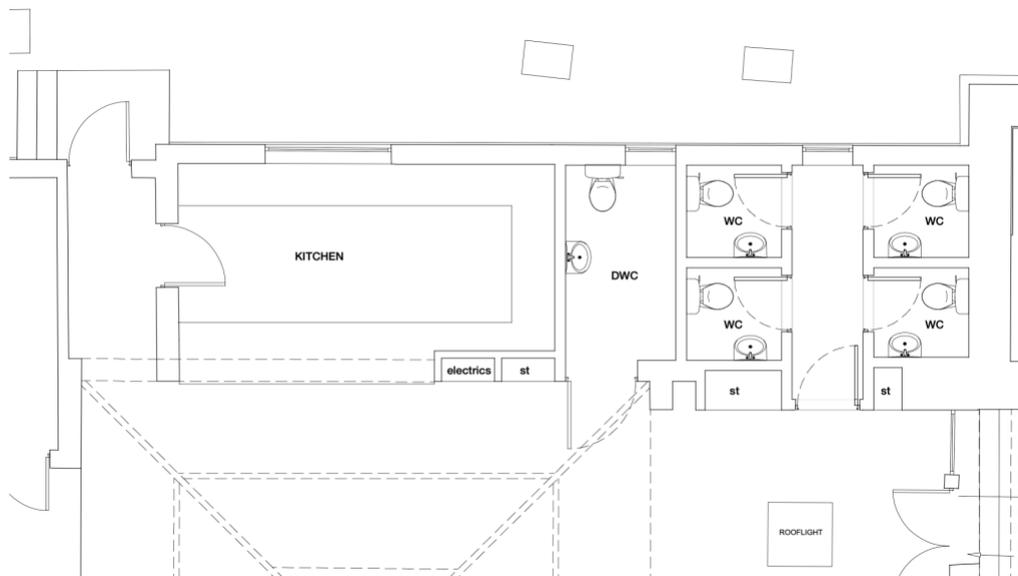
John Radice, our architect, has drawn up an initial design for the modernised toilets and kitchen.

We would have 4 individual toilets, each with a wash basin, plus a new disabled toilet. The kitchen would be enlarged with a longer servery.

The storage cupboards, currently inside the ladies' toilet, would be accessible from the hall.



EXISTING PART PLAN



Heating the Church

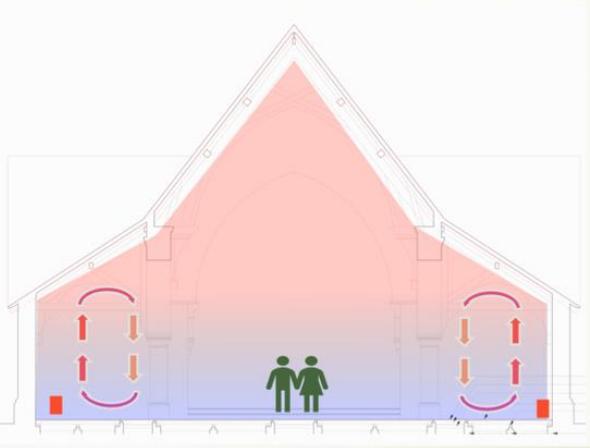
We have investigated many options for the church but have come down to a choice of two – warm air heating or underfloor heating.

Here is a comparison of the personal experience with the two types of heating.

Warm air heating

AIR-TO-AIR (A2A) HEAT PUMPS: CONVECTIVE COMFORT THROUGH AIR MOVEMENT

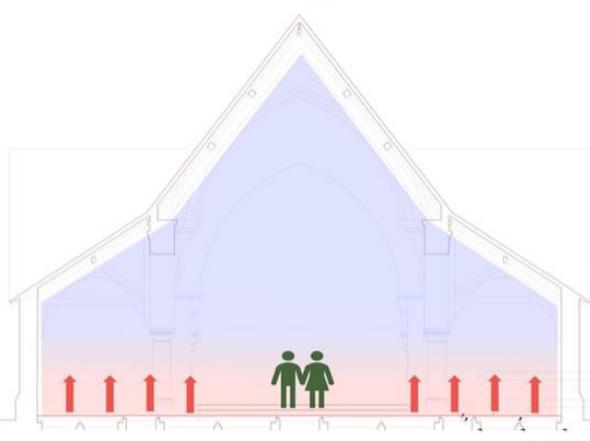
- Air-to-air units warm the space by circulating warm air.
- The effect is quick; the air warms within 30–45 minutes, though the floor and walls remain cooler, leaving a slight radiant chill near masonry surfaces.
- Warmer air temperatures are required to heat the space vs underfloor heating. A2A comfort relies on gentle air movement.
- Modern fan-coil units are quiet, but warmth fades soon after the system stops.
- This makes A2A ideal for short or irregular events where rapid heating and minimal pre-heat are priorities.



Underfloor heating

UNDERFLOOR HEATING (UFH): RADIANT COMFORT FROM THE FLOOR

- Warm water circulating through pipes within the new floor turns the surface into a gentle radiant panel.
- Heat rises evenly, warming the air, pews and lower walls so occupants feel warm even at modest air temperatures.
- Because the system works radiantly rather than by air movement, draughts are minimal and the temperature is uniform across the Nave.
- Occupants are less likely to feel a "cold spot"
- The fabric holds heat for several hours,
- UFH creates a calm, silent environment that suits regular use or days with multiple services.



Costed Options

Our architect has costed five options. All of those include the hall system as described on page 6. When taking into consideration the urgent need for a new heating system, and work on the nave floor, the two cheapest options are as follows:

Option 1: Repair the Nave floor.

Install 8 warm air blowers around the Church. Install independent warm air heaters in the Choir Vestry, Vicar's Vestry and Flower Vestry.

Cost: £664,000

Option 3B: Raise the floor of the Nave to be level with the Hall and the Sanctuary.

Install underfloor heating across the whole of the Nave and Lady Chapel. For the Chancel, Organ Loft, Flower Vestry, Choir Vestry and Vicar's Vestry, existing radiators will be retained or upgraded to operate at a lower temperature. The vestries will have conventional radiators and electric radiant heaters for supplementary heating. Some existing radiators will be moved to heat the Sanctuary. There will be a new ceramic floor in the Nave and Lady Chapel.

Cost: £707,000

Notes:

Please note that these costs assume £40,000 for the solar panels and £25,000 for the double glazing in the hall. The cost of the Kitchen and Toilet modernisation has not yet been included.

Running Costs

With the warm air system, running costs would depend on usage, as the heaters would be used on demand. With the solar panels in operation, the net cost of electricity could be as low as £1,000 per annum, depending on use. This projection would increase with increased usage of the church and hall.

The underfloor heating would be on for four hours each day. This means the Church would seem warmer for most of the time. The estimated net running cost of this system is £3,000 per annum.

The current energy cost is around £5,000.

We would reduce carbon emissions from 12 tonnes per year, to zero.

Other considerations

Visibility

We have about eight concerts each year. Most of these have an orchestra and/or a choir that needs to be seen. Currently the Sanctuary is around 35cms higher than the Nave and this provides some height for performers to be seen by the congregation.

If we install a new level floor, we will need to purchase new light weight staging which can be easily wheeled in from the storage cupboard in the hall and assembled as required. This will provide an equivalent height.

Communion at the Altar

We have stopped using the Altar rail for communion as it presents accessibility issues for such. If we raised the floor, then we would be able to consider returning to the Altar rail for communion.

Replacement of the furniture

Much of the Church and Hall furniture is quite old and the tables are cumbersome and heavy. With the renovation project, we might wish to consider replacing some or all of the Lady Chapel chairs, the red tables, the low brown tables and the white folding tables.

Acoustics

If we do opt for a new ceramic floor, we may need to consider undertaking an acoustic investigation to ensure that our excellent acoustics are not adversely affected.

Summary of potential costs

The Church has provided £25,769 to this project so far. The source of these funds is as follows:

Net Zero Grant from the Diocese	£15,000
R&R fund	£9,212
Funding from the General Fund	£1,557

The above amounts have all been approved by the PCC.

Estimates of possible further project costs

Description	Cost (£k)
Option 1 for heating the Church and Hall	£664k
Option 3B for heating the Church and Hall	£707k
Kitchen and Toilets	£70k?
Staging	£8k?
Replacement of the furniture	£30k?

We are awaiting an estimate from the architect for the building work for the Kitchen and Toilets. The staging estimate is taken from a website. The furniture estimate is an estimate based on looking at several websites.

What Next?

Findings from the September 2025 consultation period

During our consultation period in September 2025, there was a real heart to keep the church as a sacred space, remaining sensitive to its Victorian architecture and history.

This is a special and unique part of what makes St John's. But what also emerged from our consultation was that St John's is more than a building. It is a place of worship which fully recognises that the people are the church; the welcome, community, friendliness and support were all things that kept coming up.

This is a real positive, as it means that as we think about redeveloping the church and hall spaces, it is also important that we think about the positive future impact it will have on the people of the church, and the community that use it.

When asked what St John's could offer to the local community, the ideas given by the congregation, users of St. John's and the local schools reflected our desire to be creative and nurture others, particularly in our offering of generous hospitality. Students at Crowthorne CofE Primary wanted a soft play or a café for after school with 'really good hot chocolate and chocolate brownies'.

Other suggestions from our congregations included: a community café with cooking classes, a community larder and a community garden. A repair café, and a community art space were also suggested. There was a desire to work with people on the margins of society. The lonely, the poor, the isolated. Support for new parents and carers, and place for mental health support. Many people identified a need for more targeted youth and families work with several suggesting a youth group and youth worker.

Discerning the future use of the Nave

Most of the suggestions given to us were directed toward the hall space. However, as noted by one respondent, the lack of flexibility within the church also currently limits what we can offer. Therefore, when thinking about our next steps with the Mustard Seed project, it's important that we also discern how best to use the Nave.

How could the use of our Nave support the aims of St John's Crowthorne?¹

Our vision day on the **8th March** will help us to think about what God might be leading us to think about in relation to this question. Further information on this can be found via our weekly email, Revd Laura, Revd Jen, or Ken Perrett, After this vision day, Revd Laura and the Green Team will be holding a series of surgeries to talk through any further practical questions, encouragements or concerns people might have.

¹ Our Church Vision: To be inspired by our faith in Jesus and to be a joyful, nurturing, inclusive and creative community where all can flourish in their relationship with God, themselves, others and creation through worship, caring for others and our planet, practising generous hospitality and engaging in partnership.

Need more information?

If you would like more information about the project, including a face-to-face chat at one of our surgeries, do send an email to:

TheMustardSeedProject@stjohnscrowthorne.co.uk