



The Mustard Seed Project

*Creating an Inclusive, Creative, Nurturing & Joyful Space for all to flourish
in their relationship with God, Others & Creation.*

St John's Church has served Crowthorne for more than 150 years as a place of worship, welcome and community. Through the Mustard Seed Project, we are proposing a significant programme of improvements that will preserve our historic church while making it more sustainable, accessible and better equipped to serve future generations.

Following more than two years of technical investigations, professional advice and extensive consultation with our congregation, community groups, local schools and building users, the PCC has agreed a proposal for commissioning building works that responds to the changing needs of both our church family and the wider community.

What is being proposed?

The project brings together several essential improvements into one coordinated programme:

- Transition the church and hall to Net Zero heating, replacing gas boilers with heat pump technology.
- Install 28 solar panels and battery storage to generate clean electricity.
- Renew the nave floor, incorporating underfloor heating and creating level access throughout the church.
- Improve accessibility by removing internal level changes and introducing a new ramp from the Nave into the lady chapel.
- Replace the side pews with flexible seating to create a more adaptable worship and community space.
- Install new sliding glass doors between the narthex and the nave and an acoustic folding screen between the hall and the narthex to improve capacity, safeguarding and simultaneous use of the building.
- Modernise the hall kitchen and toilet facilities.
- Replace ageing single-glazed windows with energy-efficient double glazing.

Why are we doing this?

This is much more than a building project.

The Mustard Seed Project will help St John's fulfil its vision of being a joyful, nurturing, inclusive and creative church where all can flourish. It will do this by:



St. John The Baptist Church, Crowthorne
JOYFUL | INCLUSIVE | NURTURING | CREATIVE



Addressing several long-standing challenges

- Replacing aging gas heating systems that we won't be able to replace like-for-like when they break down.
- Repairing the deteriorating nave floor.
- Protecting and enhancing the heritage of our historic building for future generations.

Supporting the growing number of people using our church building throughout the week by:

- Making the building accessible for everyone, including wheelchair users, families with pushchairs and those with limited mobility;
- Creating a warm, welcoming church that can be used throughout the week for worship, discipleship groups, prayer and pastoral support rather than only for existing services.

Equipping the church to deepen its mission by:

- Providing modern facilities that better support hospitality such as a community café, hospitality packages with baptisms, weddings and funerals, community events and church activities;
- Creating flexible spaces for prayer, worship, concerts, schools, support groups, children's work and community initiatives.

Enabling St. John's to become an example of environmental stewardship and community engagement.

- Supporting the Church of England and the Diocese of Oxford's ambition for churches to reach Net Zero by 2035 by reducing the church's carbon emissions from around 12 tonnes of CO₂ per year to Net Zero

The Mustard Seed Project represents an investment in the future of St John's—preserving our heritage while creating a warmer, more accessible and environmentally sustainable church that will continue serving Crowthorne for generations to come. During our vision day, many people had an image of a tree emerging from the nave of St. John's, with long reaching branches, fruit and birds nesting in it, as a sign and symbol of all those who might find a home here at St. John's. We hope that the above proposals will be a vehicle through which this might happen, and pray that it may be so.

Grace and peace,

Revd Laura Wheatley Downs on behalf of St. John's Mustard Seed Project Team and PCC.



St. John The Baptist Church, Crowthorne
JOYFUL | INCLUSIVE | NURTURING | CREATIVE



FAQs

Is this just a Net Zero project?

Although reducing our carbon emissions is an important part of the project, it is primarily about enabling St John's to fulfil its mission more effectively. The improvements will create a warm, welcoming and flexible building that can be used throughout the week for worship, hospitality, community groups, concerts, schools, children's work and pastoral care.

Will the church still look and feel like St John's?

Yes. Protecting the character and heritage of our Grade II listed church is a key priority. Our project seeks to preserve what makes St John's special while carefully introducing improvements that allow the building to meet today's needs.

Why replace some of the pews?

Only the pews in the side aisles are proposed for removal. This will create flexible space for worship, baptisms, concerts, school visits, children's activities and community events while retaining the church's character and increasing accessibility. Comfortable chairs will provide adaptable seating where required. For large services, we will wheel out further chairs to ensure capacity is maintained. The level floor from the nave to the hall with sliding doors will also create continuity and inclusion which will help support those who are unable to sit in the nave for large services. We wanted to keep the overall aesthetic of a Victorian looking building, and honour how important they are to so many people, which is why we have chosen to keep the central pews.

What about the sound quality in the church?

One of the things that is so special about St. John's is that it is used for a variety of sung worship, music and concerts. We hope that the changes will enable us to do more than this. To preserve the acoustic of the church, will have acoustic modelling and testing take place so that we can be informed on what fabrics, flooring, chairs etc. might be best to enable the quality of sound to remain, and be enhanced.

How will we see if everything is level?

The altar itself will remain on a wooden plinth, making it the focal point of our worship and so all can see it. The removal of the side pews will enhance vision at the sides of the nave as chairs can be turned inwards and placed either side of the pillars. For concerts we will be purchasing light weight, movable staging so that we can still enjoy the choirs we come to see.

Have you chosen the tiles, chairs, doors, or interiors yet?

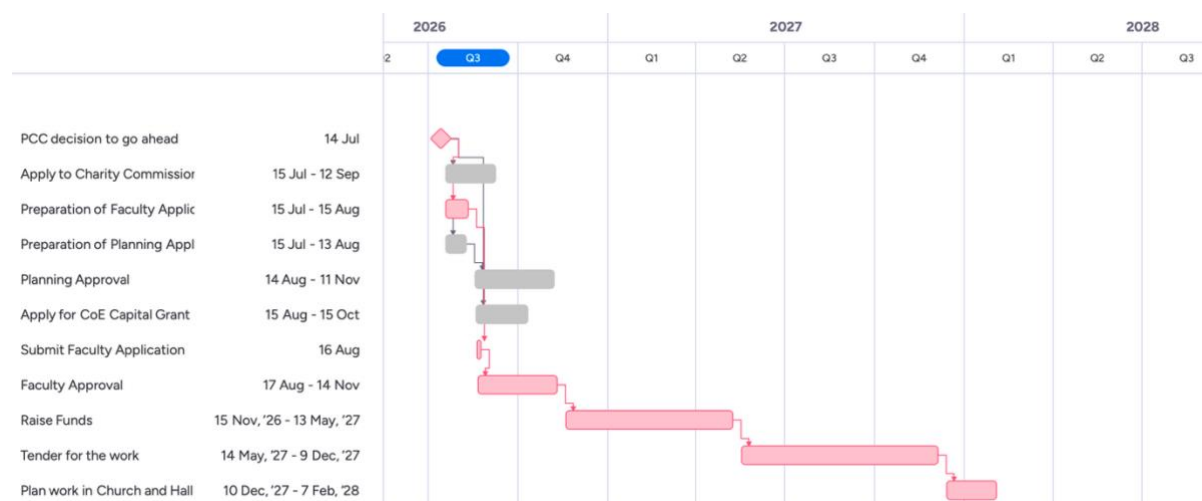
No. We are currently at the stage of submitting a statement of need and significance to the Diocesan Architectural Committee (DAC) along with general architectural designs. We will look at the details of what will be done once we have had our acoustic testing and consulted with experts in the field. We will also be consulting with you. There will be opportunities to try out chairs, look at tiles and have your say when we approach this stage of the project.

How long will this take?



St. John The Baptist Church, Crowthorne
JOYFUL | INCLUSIVE | NURTURING | CREATIVE

If all goes well, we would be looking to start the building works in Spring 2028 after Easter. Here is an indicative timescale.



What will happen to the services and activities in the church whilst the building works are taking place?

Our current intention is to phase the work wherever possible so that worship and community activities can continue here at St. John's. This would involve using different parts of the building at different stages. However, this will be dependent on what the contractors and other experts suggest, and the length of time the work will be going on for. There may also be opportunities to use buildings of organisations we are already in close partnership with. We know this is an aspect of the project that holds anxiety for people, and we will ensure that we will give clear, consistent communication about this process, what will happen, how and when as it unfolds.

What happens next?

The proposals will continue through the necessary diocesan and planning processes.

As the project develops there will be further opportunities to ask questions, hear updates, view plans, be consulted, support fundraising and pray for the project.

