

# ALL SAINTS CHURCH WESTON

## ACCESSIBILITY REPORT NOVEMBER 2018

### Including options for addressing the problems

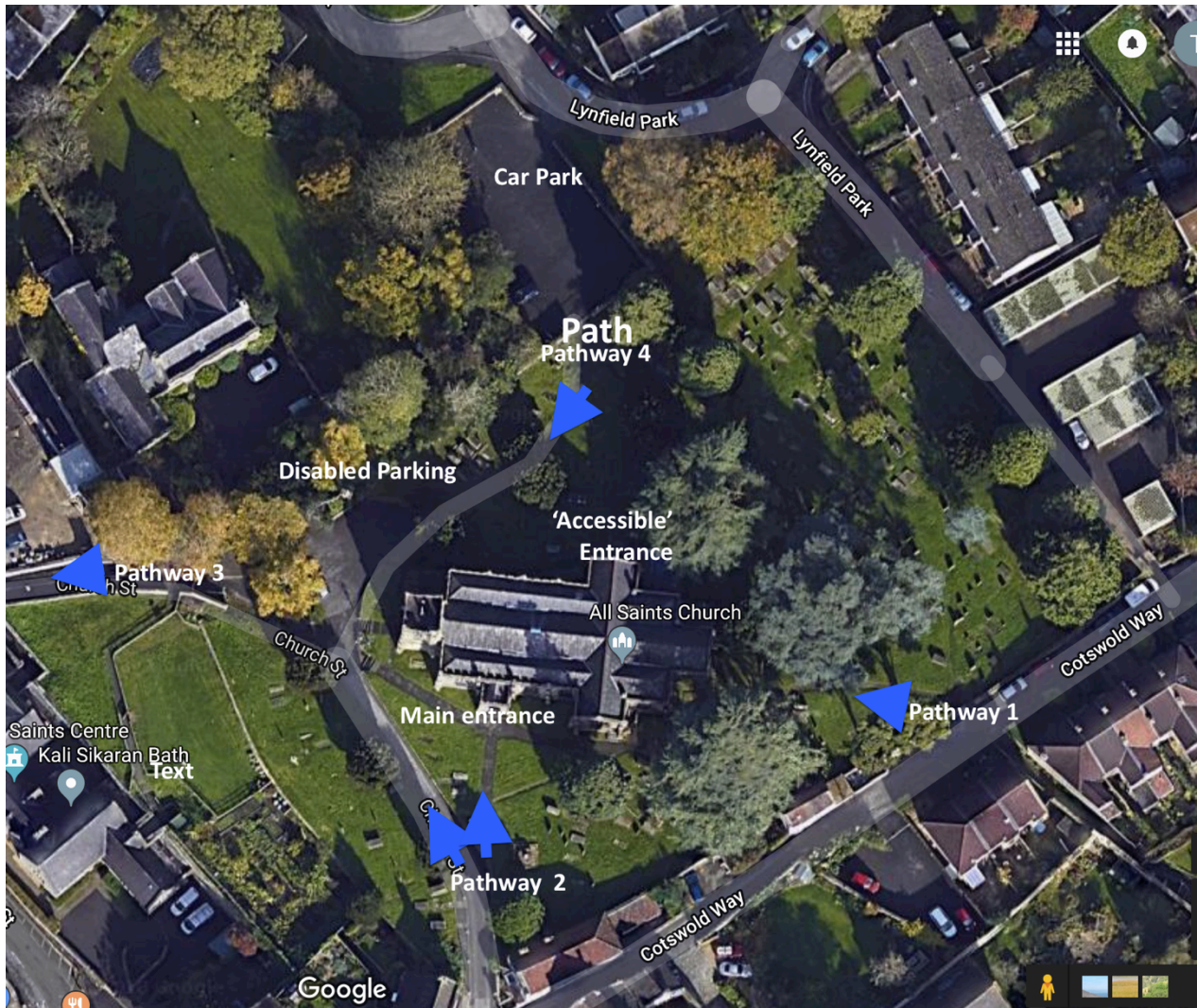
#### INTRODUCTION

1. The law (Equality Act 2010) requires churches to make 'reasonable adjustments' to facilitate equal access to all activity for people with mobility problems, visual difficulties, deafness, learning difficulties and mental health issues.
2. However, the Diocese of Bath & Wells Inclusion Policy goes further, stating that **everyone** should be able to access the building '**independently**'; this means:
  - The availability of accessible seating
  - Free movement around the building for everyone, whether visitors, worshippers, tourists or pilgrims, including those who use mobility aids such as wheelchairs and frames
  - Steps and obstructions should be removed
  - Active participation in services and other events should be possible for everyone eg leading services, speaking and preaching, reading the lesson etc
3. Currently the All Saints Church building and the approaches to it do not meet legal requirements, much less the higher standards recommended by the Diocese. Those who have various disabilities as well as those responsible for small children encounter significant physical problems when coming to All Saints Church.

#### THE CURRENT POSITION REGARDING EXTERNAL ACCESS

4. **Location:** The church building is on a steep hill. Access routes from all directions are steep and narrow. These are things that cannot be changed, but it may be that some adaptation could make improvements for those with difficulties.
5. **Paths to the building** (See aerial view of church and site with pathways shown etc. on page 2)
  - a. **Regulations:** There are regulations about the gradient and width of paths relating to use by people who have visual problems or need to use wheelchairs or other mobility aids.
    - i. **Width of Paths:** The regulations state that access paths should be at least 1.8m wide but a minimum of 1.5m is acceptable if there are passing places every 50m of length of the path and if they are a minimum of 1.8m wide and 2m long. There should be a 100mm raised edge to any path from which there is a drop to the side.
    - ii. **Gradients:** The preferred gradient for a ramp or slope is 5% (1 in 20), but an absolute maximum of 8.3% (1 in 12) can be accepted if there are level landings 1.5 m long every 2m. Changes of direction should only occur at a level landing. At doorways a level landing is required, giving 1.2m level unobstructed space clear of the door swing. Any sideways slope across a path should be no more than 2% (1 in 50).
    - iii. **Steps:** These should be of consistent sizes with rails on both sides.

b. The main (south porch) entrance to the church can be approached from four different directions:



- i. **Pathway 1: Pedestrian path leading from Church Road (Cotswold Way) from the North East:** This pathway across the churchyard has two steps and a fixed bollard at the entrance to the churchyard. The bollard is, no doubt, designed to prevent use by cyclists and motorcyclists, but it also prevents use by people using wheelchairs, walking frames and infant buggies. This path is uneven, although recently improved, and rather narrow. It is restricted to 670mm at one point and is only 700mm usable width for a large part of its length (ie half the width it should be). The gradient is 6.9%, sloping down towards the church building.
- ii. **Pathway 2: Vehicular access 'road' leading from Church Road (Cotswold Way) from the South East:** There is a very steep roadway leading from Church Rd to the Rectory (as well as two other private houses and the disabled parking bays). The direct route to the current main entrance to the church from this roadway means negotiating nine stone steps and some cobblestones. To avoid these steps the road must be followed further up the hill and then by a return to the main entrance.
- iii. **Pathway 3: Pedestrian path (Church Street) from the South West:** There is a very steep pedestrian path from Church St (SW). The path has a rail for most but not all of the steepest part, where the slope is 19.7% (nearly 1 in 5). It is particularly dangerous in wet or icy weather. This brings the user to the west end of the church where there are 6 steps up to the path to the current main entrance in the south porch. If these steps are taken from the west end, there is a

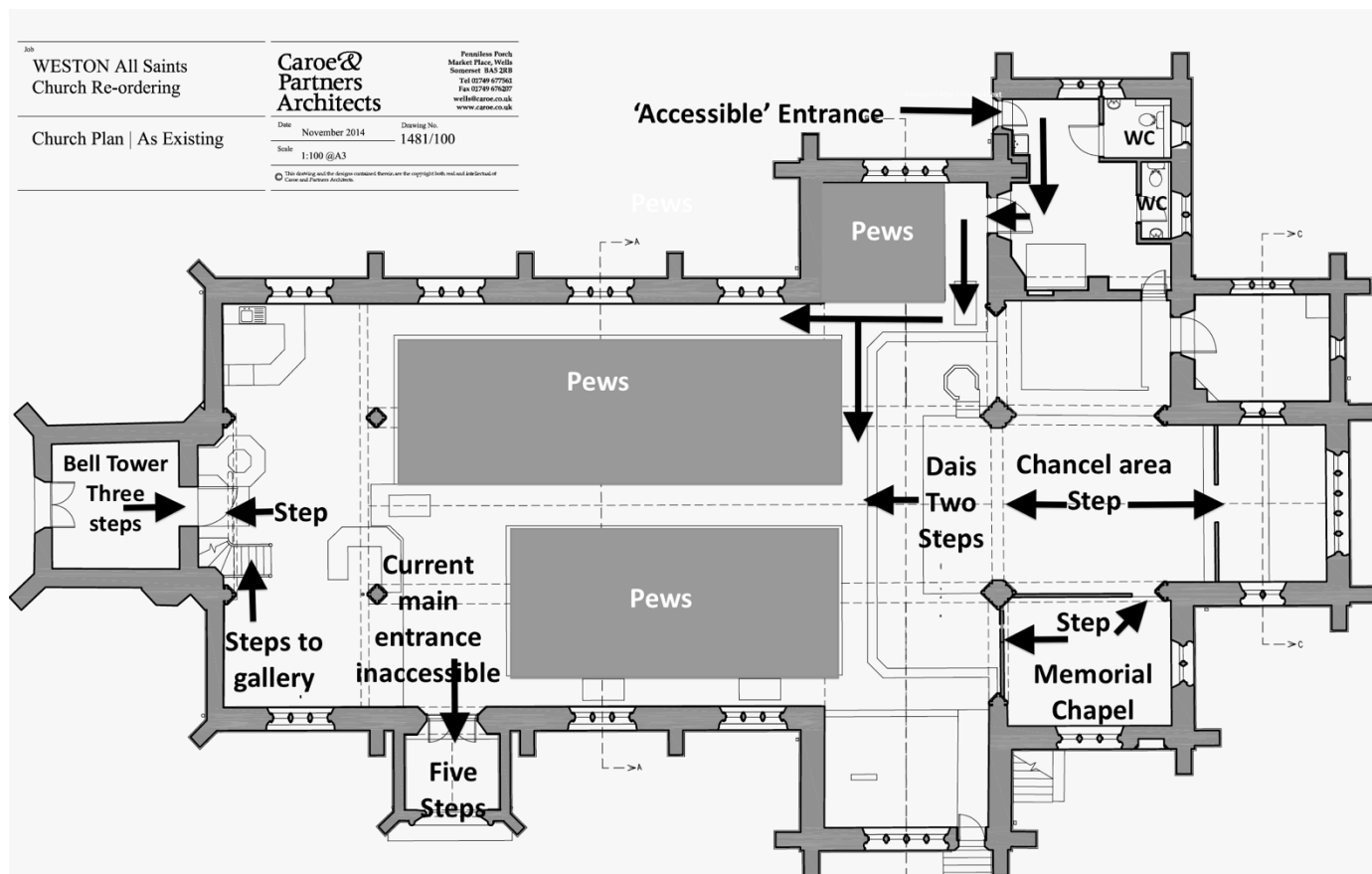
straight path to the south porch, the gradient of which is a maximum of 6.2%. However there is a sideways slope of 7.3%. Alternatively the path to the north, 'accessible' entrance can be taken, but this entrance is far from ideal for other reasons (see later)

- iv. **Pathway 4: Lynfield Park from the North West, where the car park is situated:** There is a pathway leading from the church car park at the end of Lynfield Park. The gradient is 10% at its steepest point. Where it has been repaired, the usable width is 2280mm. However at the bottom end of this path there are 7.1m of unimproved path, where it is very uneven at the edges and has only 1.5m useable width in the middle. The pathway has recently been resurfaced, so it is much less uneven than it was.
  - v. **Disabled Parking Bays:** At the bottom of this path, on the north west corner of the church building, the path widens out into the area where there are four parking bays for people with mobility impairments are situated at the west of the building.
  - vi. **Pathways leading directly to the church entrances:** There are a number of problems with the pathways leading directly to church entrances:
    - a) From the disabled parking bays, there is a 'ramp' to the paths going around north, west and south sides of the church. These paths lead to the south porch main entrance and the 'accessible' entrance on the north side. The gradient of the ramp to this path is 10.8%.
    - b) The width of the path to the south porch main entrance is variable and narrows to 630mm at one point to the west of the tower. Since this path has been resurfaced, it is raised slightly from the grass at the sides and there is no kerb, so if a walking aid or wheel of a rollator frame, wheelchair or infant buggy went over the edge of the path it would tip over quite readily.
    - c) The path along the north side of the church building leading to the 'accessible' entrance has a gradient of 6% and a width of 1100mm, restricted to 1000mm at one point. There are no passing places. This means that **even our accessible entrance path does not meet the regulations either in terms of width or gradient – never mind the other pathways.** It is possible for this path to be used by people with walking aids or wheelchairs if they have someone to assist them, and if nobody is coming the other way, but the requirement for making independent access is not met. This path is also insufficiently lit at night and goes past the dustbins. It feels very much like a 'second class' entrance.
    - d) A further point of some significance is that wedding photographs are normally taken outside the south porch main entrance. Access to this point by anybody needing to use a wheelchair or walking frame is almost impossible, even with assistance.
6. **Signage around the site:** There is currently no signage from the High St. either to the church building and the parking bays for those with impaired mobility, or to the car park. People often find it difficult to locate the church building. There are no signs on or around the building to indicate either the main entrance or the 'accessible' entrance, and people have been found waiting outside the door to the tower, not knowing how to get into the building.
  7. **Conclusion:** None of the current pathways around the site and leading directly to the church entrances are suitable as regards access.

## THE CURRENT POSITION REGARDING ENTRANCES INTO THE BUILDING

8. **South Porch Main entrance:** This entrance has three steps into the porch. There are rails on both sides but they are too far apart to be used simultaneously. There are two further steps into the church building. The inner doors open outwards straight onto the steps, with no level landing at all. There are no rails. These steps do not conform to building regulations and certainly do not meet accessibility requirements. Since the internal doors have been glazed, fewer people have fallen down the steps.
9. **North 'Accessible' Entrance:** The door at the north 'accessible' entrance opens into a lobby (formerly the choir vestry) where the toilets are situated. The door has level access, once the path has been negotiated, but maximum opening width is only 700mm. Legal requirements are for a clear opening width of 1000mm (or absolute minimum of 800mm) with a clear space of 300mm between the leading edge of the door and the wall (there is none at this doorway). This doorway can only be used by people who need wheelchairs or walking aids, if they have assistance. Those who use motorised buggies cannot get in at all with their buggy. There is normally no reception or welcome provided at this entrance.
10. **South Transept Entrance:** This is not a main entrance and is mainly used by keyholders and musicians. However it is currently classified as a fire exit. Access is via 5 steep and uneven steps and a narrow door.
11. **West Tower Entrance:** This entrance is not in regular use. The Tower has a door in it with a step over the threshold leading into a small area, which is where the bell ropes hang and where the bells are rung. There are a further 3 steps up from the floor of the Tower to the door into the church itself, followed by a further two steps on the other side of the door.
12. **Conclusion:** None of the 4 current entrances into the church are suitable as regards disabled access.

## THE CURRENT POSITION REGARDING ACCESSIBILITY WITHIN THE BUILDING



See Appendix 1 for larger version of this plan.

- 13. Circulation Space:** (See diagram above showing internal access from north entrance and for larger version see Appendix 1). Regulations require a minimum of 1200mm width of walkways, with passing places, for wheelchair and mobility aid users. External doors are required to be a minimum of 800mm with 300mm clear space to the side of the doorway. Internal doors can be a minimum, of 750mm with 300mm clear space.
- a. From the north ('accessible') entrance, a 90° turn to the right is necessary, followed by another 90° turn to the right through a second door. Immediately through the second door there is another 90° turn to the left into a 970mm walkway; this turns again 90° to the right but the width of the walkway is only 870mm, which is not enough to turn a wheelchair cleanly. People often abandon walking aids at this point because of the lack of space. It is not possible to enter the church building independently in a wheelchair. An assistant usually needs to hitch and jiggle a wheelchair to get it around the corners. The space between the chancel steps and the front pews is only 690mm.
  - b. The north aisle is 890mm, so will accommodate an attendant propelled wheelchair, if it can get around the corners this far. A half pew has been removed half way back, to allow space for a wheelchair to park and an accompanying person to sit, or two wheelchairs on their own. The north aisle has been ramped to the back of the building, where the coffee bar is situated, so that it is possible to access this area with assistance in a wheelchair.
  - c. The area to the left (west) of the main entrance and underneath the balcony is at a higher level than the rest of the nave. For this reason there is a step on both sides of the welcome desk. There are also steps going down to the Tower door at the rear of the church building, beside the font, which itself is on a raised platform, creating a step all the way round it. People frequently miss these steps and fall down them or trip on them because they are the same colour carpet as the rest of the floor and are therefore difficult to see, especially for people with bi-focal or varifocal lenses or other visual difficulties. These steps have now been highlighted with white tape on the nosing, which helps to some extent.
  - d. There is seating in the balcony, which is accessed via a turning staircase. It would be virtually impossible for anyone with mobility problems to access the balcony area.
- 14. Access to the front of the church and the chancel:** In front of the seating is a raised dais area and behind that the chancel area and sanctuary. The raised dais is up two steps; beyond that is the chancel which is up a further step and beyond that the sanctuary area, which is up a further step. Adjacent to the chancel is the Memorial Chapel, which is used as a place for private prayer and counselling. There are two steps up into this chapel. There is no ramped access to the dais, the chancel, the sanctuary or the Memorial Chapel. Holy Communion is now normally taken at the bottom of the dais steps on Sundays, which just about works for those who use a walking stick but not for those using wheelchairs because there is not enough space to manoeuvre a wheelchair at the front, so Communion has to be brought to them where they are sitting. Walking frames are also not usually able to make the turn, as the space is too tight. One member who uses a delta rollator (3-wheeled walking frame) has to fold it and walk with it partially folded (and therefore unstable) in order to move along the front of the pews and take part. The chancel steps are also difficult to see, and people also fall on these (although less frequently as they are used less often). These have not been highlighted as it was felt that this would be too unsightly.

Some services take place in the chancel area. This requires people to climb 3 steps, so it is not available to anybody who needs a wheelchair or walking frame, or who is not able to climb steps.

- 15. Crèche facilities:** Crèche facilities are provided in the vicar's vestry. This is a small, damp and dark room with only 10 m<sup>2</sup> floor space, some of which is taken up by a desk and cupboards. Two armchairs are provided and there is an audio-visual link to the service. There are often far too many small children present to fit in this space. Access to this room is via a passage from the lobby, up two steps and only 630mm wide (insufficient for many modern infant buggies). Parents do not like using this room, especially

if they have more than one small child with them. There is no possibility of getting a double buggy into the room. Often children are taken to the back of the building instead, which is more disruptive to the service, especially to worshippers sitting near the back.

- 16. Toilets:** Two toilets are located in the lobby, opposite the 'accessible' entrance door. They are signposted from the lobby door and referred to in the newsheet, but signage could be improved. The unisex accessible toilet (which is not marked as such) allows space for sideways transfer from a wheelchair (or forwards transfer). It has rails, but they are white against a white background and would be more effective in a contrasting colour (as would the toilet seat). The washbasin is accessible from a wheelchair and has a lever tap. There is no call system, but the door can be unlocked from outside in an emergency. There is only one other toilet. This provision has been found to be insufficient for occasions such as large services, weddings and concerts.
- 17. Provision for people with visual and hearing difficulties**
- a. Large print literature:** Large print copies of the Communion service book are available, and a few large print song books. The notice sheets are available in a large print version, but although the print size has increased in the last year, it is still smaller than the recommended 18-point font size. There is no literature provided in braille, but no evidence of need within the current congregation.
  - b. Hearing loop:** A hearing loop facility is available in the nave area of the church. It does not operate in the chancel, where some smaller services and prayer meetings take place, or in the transepts. There are no signs to indicate the area of operation.
  - c. Lighting:** The lighting is poor, which makes reading more difficult than it needs to be for everybody, but it particularly affects people who have visual impairments.
  - d. Braille signs and physical indicators:** There are no braille signs anywhere and no physical markers in the pathways to indicate steps or other hazards.
- 18. Conclusion:** Access within the building as regards ease of circulation, access to all areas of the church and access to participation in the same way as able-bodied people, is not suitable or compliant.

## OTHER NOTES

19. When the church is open for services, there is always a responsible person on duty, as well as the Welcome team, to assist anybody who gets into difficulty. There is no formal First Aider on duty, but most of the church staff team are first aid trained and there are always some of them in the church during services. There is a first aid box on site. The nearest defibrillator is on the High Street. Fire exits are marked with universal signs (but as previously noted there is no easy access in or out of the building for those with mobility issues). Fire extinguishers are provided in the building and regularly checked. There is no electronic warning system, but fire drills including evacuation of the building are carried out occasionally.

## SUMMARY

20. **Currently the building is not meeting the legal requirements** for making all activity accessible for all people. People needing to use motorised buggies cannot enter the building at all. Independent access into the building is not available to those who use walking frames or wheelchairs, and those who have an assistant must use what feels like a second class or tradesman's entrance. Those using wheeled walking aids, walking frames or wheelchairs are not able to move freely around the church and have no way of accessing the platform area, the chancel, the memorial chapel, or the vestry / creche. This means that they are not able to participate in any leading of services, preaching, music or drama activities which take place in this area. If a visiting clergy person needed to use a walking frame or wheelchair, it would cause serious difficulty. The creche facilities are completely inadequate. In historic buildings, the law requires that

'reasonable adjustments' (which are not defined) be made. However, as noted above, the diocese has more stringent guidance. If any building work is carried out, there is a requirement to address the issues of equality and accessibility.

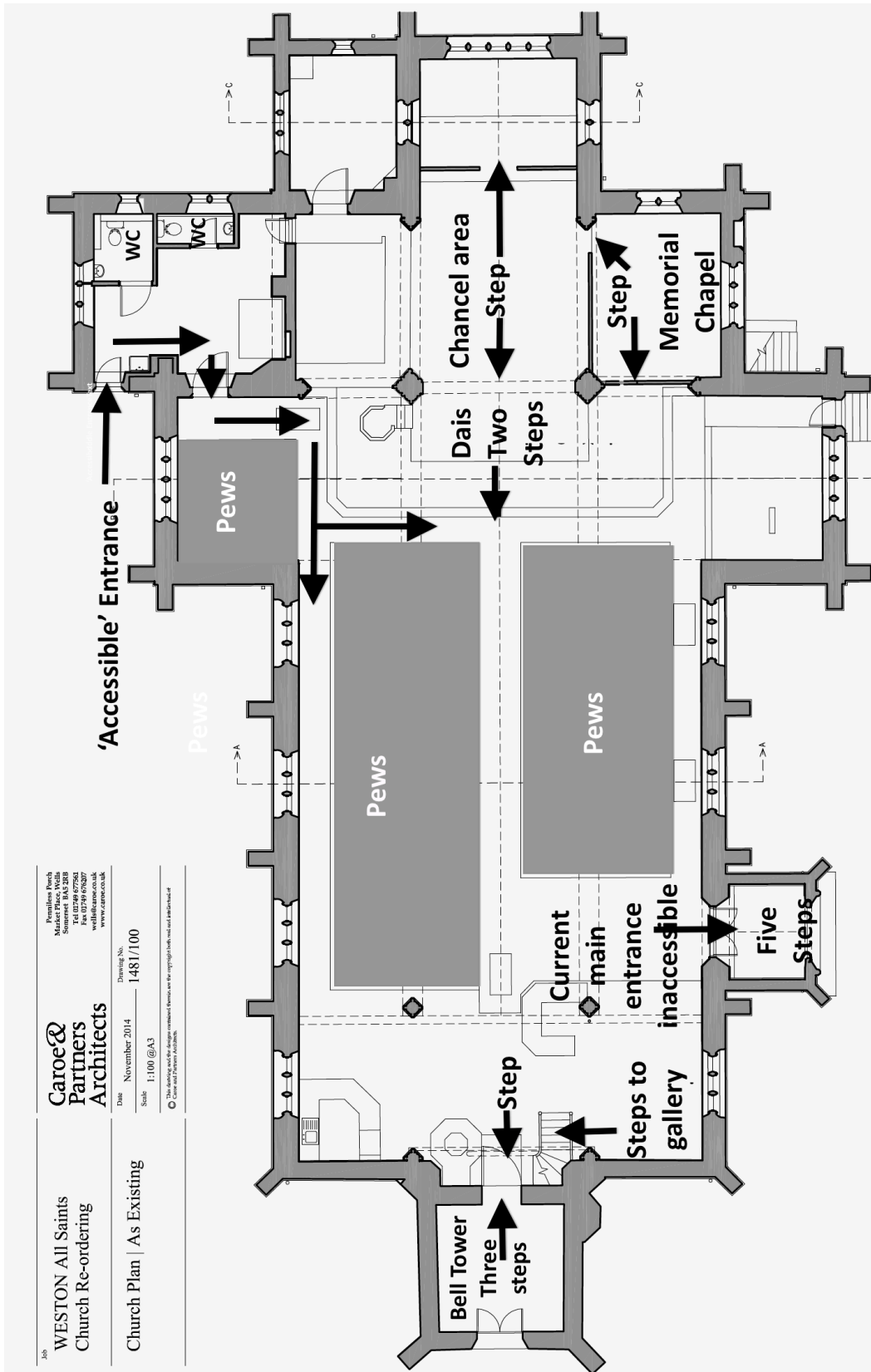
## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

21. Some re-ordering of the building as well as changes to the access routes and entrances are essential in order for All Saints to comply with the legal requirements and the Diocesan guidance relating to adequate provision for those people who have mobility problems, visual problems and other difficulties.
22. **Issues needing urgent attention include:**
  - a. Provision of a fully accessible entrance, preferably the same entrance for everybody.
  - b. Provision of wider spaces for moving around within the church particularly for those needing to use mobility aids.
  - c. Provision of access to the chancel for those with mobility problems and those with visual problems.
  - d. Making the church building as level as possible in order to make as many areas as possible accessible to everybody.
  - e. Provision of more adequate creche facilities.
  - f. Better surfacing, levelling, widening and lighting of outside paths.
  - g. Making steps more visible.
23. **Other issues for serious consideration are:**
  1. Improving the internal lighting.
  2. Improving the hearing loop provision and providing signs to indicate its area of operation.
  3. Providing more toilets.
  4. Improving the 'large print' provision.
  5. Improving outside signage from the High Street and around the building.
  6. Improving our understanding of and welcome for those with dementia and mental health issues.

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November 2018

**APPENDIX 1:**

**ACCESS INTO AND AROUND THE MAIN PART OF THE CHURCH BUILDING FROM THE 'ACCESSIBLE' ENTRANCE**





## APPENDIX TWO:

### OPTIONS (INCLUDING DISCOUNTED OPTIONS) FOR MAKING THE CHURCH COMPLIANT AND HOSPITABLE IN TERMS OF ACCESSIBILITY.

1. Over the past 5 years, All Saints Church has been exploring different options for adapting an essentially nineteenth century building into a twenty-first century building which meets the current and likely future expectations and requirements. One of the most important drivers of this project has been improving the accessibility of the building not just for the membership of 300+ adults but also for the wider community of Weston (population 7,000) and beyond.
2. As a listed building, located on a hill side and one which is designed very much for nineteenth century usage and expectations, this poses considerable challenges to the contemporary congregation. The rest of this appendix sets out some of the options that have been explored and subsequently rejected as well as the options that are currently favoured and which form part of the planning application.

### ACCESS TO THE CHURCH

#### The Entrance

3. **An accessible entrance via the South Porch?** As the main report explains, the current main entrance is via the South Porch. In order to provide a main entrance that everybody would be able to use, as required by equality law, the possibility of building a ramp to the south porch entrance has been considered. However, a ramp that met accessibility requirements would need rails and kerbs as well as an alternative flight of steps and passing places, and to meet gradient regulations it would have to extend all along the south side of the church to the west, and around the tower, making the tower door inoperable. This would be quite unsightly on the south and west sides of the church, and visible from the main road. It would be very unlikely to meet with approval of the planning department. Furthermore it is not possible to make a level platform in the porch of regulation size without compromising the outer doors, which open inwards. The South Porch is also the farthest away from the car park and the current disabled parking bays.
4. **An accessible entrance via the West Door?** The Tower is the only remaining part of the medieval church. Once inside the Tower, there are three steps up to a narrow door that leads into the church itself. There is no way this can be ramped or the door made wide enough. Creating an accessible external door would be impossible without significantly altering the appearance of the Tower and West view of the church. Almost certainly such alterations even if they could be made to work practically would not gain planning permission.
5. **An accessible entrance along the north side of the church?** An early option explored by the church was to build a double height extension along the north side of the church with the main entrance (fully accessible) being located at the north-west corner of the church, close to the disabled parking bays and about 100 metres from the car park. Following a pre-planning inquiry to the local authority, officers stated that such an extension would be close to causing significant harm. The plans were revised and the double height extension was dropped. However an accessible new (but more modest) entrance was proposed at the northwest corner of the church. In a second pre-planning inquiry, local authority officers also voiced serious objections to this.
6. **An entrance via the north transept:** Entering the church via the north transept would bring people straight into the main body of the church. It is relatively close to the disabled parking bays. However, it is highly likely that any such entrance would be rejected by the planners. A new entrance would interfere with the north window and would harm very obviously the exterior vista of the church.
7. **An accessible entrance in the northeast corner of the church?** The only remaining option for a fully accessible entrance which could be used by the majority of people, is to locate it roughly where the existing

accessible entrance is. This is about 30 metres from the disabled parking bays. It is on nearer to the car park than the south entrance, although it cannot be accessed by a direct pathway (see later as to reasons why not). If the new main accessible entrance is to be roughly where it is now, there will have to be external and internal adaptations.

### **Pathways leading to new main entrance**

8. There is a pathway leading around the church to the northeast disabled entrance (see page 3 paragraph vi c). It has a gradient of 6% and a width of 1100mm, restricted to 1000mm at one point. There are no passing places. It also hugs the building so that there are two 90° turns to be negotiated. Even if widened, it is not very suitable.
9. The preferred option is to build a 2.4 metre wide straight pathway leading directly to the new main entrance, coming off the existing pathway running down the hill from the car park. This does mean disturbing some stone memorials. Our original new pathway would have entailed the removal of 3 Grade 2 memorials. In order to avoid that, we have changed the route of the path so that now only one Grade memorial needs to be relocated a less than five metres from its current position. In extremis, someone with severe mobility problems could be let down virtually at the entrance to the church
10. The possibility of building a new direct pathway from the car park to the new entrance has also been explored but discounted for a number of reasons, namely:
  - a. The gradient of a new direct pathway would be too steep and would meet the disability criteria for steepness of gradient and so another pathway would have to be built alongside or in place of.
  - b. The new pathway would zigzag covering a large area. It would entail more walking. It would be objected to by planners because of its visual impact and it would entail the removal of many more stone memorials. Two pathways (one direct and one zigzag would compound these problems).
11. Therefore the proposal is to widen the existing pathway leading from the car park. This would enable vehicles to use the pathway so that if necessary the disabled bays could become more of a drop-off station rather than a parking bay and a one-way system of travel set up. A widened path would also make it easier for emergency vehicles (as well as hearses and wedding cars).

### **Vehicle Access for Those with Mobility Problems**

12. The 4 disabled parking bays adjacent to the entrance to the Rectory Wall will remain. Assuming the new pathway is accepted by the planners, the walk to the new main entrance is approximately 40 metres. If it should be the case that more than 4 disabled parking bays are required, then it may be possible to use the space in front of the disabled bays as a drop off space. Cars could then continue up the newly widened pathway into the car park or possibly park in the private space in the Rectory forecourt.

### **Pathways around the site**

13. As noted on Page 2, there are four circulation pathways around the site. In the case of three of these, the gradient exceeds the maximum permitted gradient of 1:12. Various options have been looked at to try to address this issue. In particular a zigzag pathway leading from the car park going across the churchyard (see paragraph 10 above in the appendix); and another zigzag pathway leading from the disabled parking bays going to the first floor of the Church Centre and also the level part of Church St. Both these pathways have been discounted on the grounds that planning permission would be difficult to obtain and the cost involved.

- 14.** One improvement is being proposed in respect of the steep pathway leading up from the first floor of the Church Centre and the level part of Church St. This is to create a series of steps covering up to 50% of the width pathway up Church Street. Whilst this would not improve matters for wheelchair users (or buggies) it would mean that those who can walk would have a more secure path of moving up and down Church St.

#### **Internal Improvements**

- 15.** Internally the following improvements are proposed:

- a. A single level floor throughout the nave area, removing the steps at the rear of church
- b. A shallow ramp leading from the floor of the nave up into the chancel area, which will also give level access to the memorial chapel
- c. Removal of pews and replacement with chairs, thus making it possible to create appropriate width aisles and turning places; some chairs will have arms to assist those who need help sitting down or standing up
- d. Installation of new fully accessible WC (as well as additional WC's)
- e. Retention of induction hearing loop
- f. Appropriate signage and other aids for those with visual impairments