

At their meeting in May 2023, the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of St Nicholas church, Hereford decided to begin the process of closing the church for public worship in the Church of England. This leaflet answers the most common questions people have about the decision and its implications.

Why is this happening?

The PCC's decision was not made lightly; it comes as the result of much prayerful and careful discussion. Over many years, there have been numerous attempts to develop the viability of the church, but these efforts have sadly not borne the hoped-for outcomes. Through a series of meetings and open church discussions, the PCC has taken stock of a range of challenges around the sustainability of the church and its dwindling resources in its current context. They have realistically explored their options before deciding to take this course of action (see overleaf for a summary).

What is the process for closing a church?

After the PCC notifies the Diocese of its decision, the Diocese carries out informal consultations with a group of 'interested parties' – these are people closely linked to the church, such as the Bishop, the Patron, Local Authority, the PCCs in a group or team ministry and the clergy. Assuming there are no unresolved objections arising out of this, the case is referred to the Church Commissioners for formal public consultation. After this, a legal document called a 'Pastoral Scheme' outlining the closure is sent to the Bishop to sign and seal. The whole process is governed by law, and more information can be found on the Church Commissioners website www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/what_happens_when_a_church_building_closes-pamphlet_2019_version.pdf:

What will happen to the church?

The future use of the church (and its contents) will be worked out after the closure process is complete. Any future use must be 'suitable' and 'appropriate' for a former place of worship. For example, many closed churches find a new lease of life as offices, homes, event spaces or other community facilities. After the closure takes effect, the responsibility for the church is transferred from the PCC to the Diocese, and they work with the Church Commissioners on the process of establishing a new use. In practise, they would also work with the PCC to secure something suitable. This is especially the case with St Nicholas, as the PCC will still own the neighbouring St Nicholas House as well as the churchyards, both of which could become part of any future new use.

Who makes the final decision?

The final decision to close a church in the Church of England rests with the Bishop of the Diocese, who can only make this decision after the proper legal processes of consultation outlined above have been completed. The final decision on a future use is made by the Church Commissioners after a series of similar consultation processes.

When will the closure happen?

The timescales for the closure and the subsequent process for securing a new use vary depending on the circumstances of each church. The closure processes could take 12-18 months, and the new use processes could take longer again. During this time, the PCC will need to support the congregation alongside stewarding its remaining finances to keep the building in a reasonable state of repair.

How can people stay informed or have a say?

At different points, there will be opportunities for people to express views about the closure and to offer and explore ideas for a suitable future use. This will involve holding public meetings in the church. These opportunities, as well as general updates about the process, will be published on the West Hereford Team website at www.westherefordteam.org.uk and will also be displayed as notices on the church notice boards at St Nicholas and across the team churches. In the meantime, people can contact stnicholashereford@gmail.com with any comments or questions.

Please pray with us during this time of transition

We praise you, Lord, for your love and care to all who have served and worshipped you at St Nicholas over the years. Accept our praise and thanksgiving for the past. Renew our strength and courage to serve you now in the present and direct all our ways in the days and months ahead. To your honour and glory, the One who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Amen.

Paths from the Crossroads: The options considered by St Nicholas in March 2023

Path one - Carry on as we are		Path two - Go for Growth		Path 3 - Move on	
<p>What might that look like? Continue to welcome new people if they come to services. Deal with repairs on an emergency-only basis and fundraise or use remaining reserves to pay for running costs until they run out completely (approx. 24-36 months).</p>	<p>Advantages Familiarity. Line of least 'effort' when people are already tired. Comfort of not having the upheaval of major change. Supports the very elderly to feel that the church will 'see them out'.</p>	<p>What might that look like? Grow within - to be sustainable we'd need a congregation of 50-75 giving adults within two years. Developing Sunday pattern of worship as well midweek opportunities aimed at for discipleship and proactively engage new and younger generations. Of re receive a graft from another church.</p>	<p>Advantages It would make the church sustainable into the future. We could afford more than just emergency repairs. We would see new life and new people, coming to church, growing in faith. Greater diversity of people and opportunities for worship and fellowship.</p>	<p>What that might look like The church would be closed and released for another suitable use. The house would remain under the PCC and could be included in any new use project. Some people may move on to different churches, others may wish to continue meeting for worship or prayer informally at another location.</p>	<p>Advantages Releases the declining congregation from burden of maintaining building and 'filling pews'. Core congregation could retain a sense of fellowship even after if church building is no longer the place of meeting, and allows the relationships with the School and William Grange time to continue and be nurtured. Allows time to celebrate and 'end well'.</p>
<p>Disadvantages Church reserves will run out in 2-3 years at current rate of deficit. Building will continue to deteriorate. Not sustainable. The PCC would need to review this decision annually.</p>	<p>If the PCC choose this path, what will our next conversations need to be about?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will we do when the money runs out? • How will we pay for repairs? • When will we review this decision? 	<p>Disadvantages Huge pressure on congregation to achieve in 2 years, what would need at least 7-10 years to develop. It would involve adapting quickly to wide-ranging and significant change. Need to plan in advance an approach and goals and hold progress reviews and be accountable. Asks even more of an already tired group of people (people are already wanting to step down from roles).</p>	<p>If the PCC choose this path, what will our next conversations need to be about?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When can we meet in the next two weeks to talk further about the resources we need to help us on this journey? • What ministries and roles are people ready to step into? • Are we prepared for everything being up for grabs? 	<p>Disadvantages It might feel uncertain to start with. It would involve some adjustment and 'letting go' (but not to the extent of Path Two). There will be sadness for the church to close. The PCC would still retain responsibility for the churchyard and house until they are either incorporated into a new use or absorbed into another parish through pastoral reorganisation.</p>	<p>If the PCC choose this path, what will our next conversations need to be about?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How and when do we articulate this decision to the congregation? • What can we put in place to help people transition well? • How and how do we begin having conversations about future use?