

1 Statement of Significance

Guidance on completing this form can be found on the ChurchCare website at <http://www.churchcare.co.uk/churches/guidance-advice/statements-of-significance-need>

This document must be accompanied by the Standard Information Form 1A

Section 1: Brief history and description of the church building(s), contents, churchyard and setting

St. Nicolas Church in Great Bookham is a Grade I listed building.

The eleventh century Nave occupies the probable area of the original Saxon church. The Normans extended the Nave to the south around 1140 and north around 1180 when the stonework of the Tower was built. The Chancel was built in 1341 and an area adjacent to the porch around 1380. The South Aisle and Slyfield (Lady) Chapel were built around 1440, when the stone Tower was buttressed and the timber Tower and Spire were built. The Tower door and north facing window in the Nave were created 'in the 17th Century. The North Aisle, Sacristy (Vestry) and Sexton's Shed were built in the 19th Century, the Choir Vestry early in the 20th Century and the Church Room was added in 1979. A Pastoral Centre was added at the North-West corner of the church yard in 1996.

St Nicolas church building set in a two-acre church yard with a Lychgate. The stone church has a wooden tower and spire. The roof of the south aisle is Horsham stone tiles and the rest of the roofs are tiled. The framework supporting the bells and shingle covered spire are massive oak timbers.



Exterior photo of St Nicolas Church

Section 2: The significance of the church (including its contents and churchyard) in terms of:

i) Its special architectural and historical interest

ii) Any significant features of artistic or archaeological interest

The church is Grade I listed building of outstanding architectural and historical importance. The building possesses outstanding fabric from the 11th and 12th centuries, as well as the 14th century chancel and an excellent collection of monuments. The building makes a much valued contribution to the ecclesiastical and secular life of the parish and has a pivotal position in the townscape.

There are two small windows above the arches of the north arcade in the Nave which are possibly part of the original Saxon church. The Howard window, in the south wall of the Nave, was added in 1676 whilst the north facing window was added early in the nineteenth century. The east window in the Chancel contains six panels of fifteenth century glass. It was purchased in 1954 to replace a window damaged in the Second World War. The window in the west end of the South Aisle is Norman but the glass was dedicated in 1875. The east window of the Slyfield Chapel is the work of O'Conner, completed in 1859.

The font has a 12th or early 13th century Bethersden marble font bowl, which sits on a somewhat clumsy 19th century base. The font was moved to its current position when the pulpit, choir stalls and pews were added during the restoration carried out in 1885.

The pews are late 19th century pine that incorporate elements of earlier pews, probably from the 17th and early 18th centuries. The pews stand on a woodblock flooring.

There are two bells; one bears the inscription 'William Eldridge made mee 1575'. Two other bells, which were cracked, were sold in the middle of the nineteenth century. The organ, built by Bishop and Son, of London, was rededicated in 1968.

There is an early fifteenth century rood screen at the entrance to the Slyfield chapel and a parclose screen (c 1500) separating the chapel from the choir. There are two piscinas in the Chancel and Slyfield Chapel and five brasses, the earliest is dated 1443. There are also a number of memorials which are shown on the plan of the church including a tree (17) and dedication stone (21). A more detailed description of the church and its history is given in "St Nicolas Church, Great Bookham - Illustrated Guide".

Section 3: Assessment of the impact of the proposals on the significance defined in Section 2

The proposed new heating system will involve installing radiators on the walls of the Nave, the North and South Aisles, the Slyfield Chapel and the Chancel. These will be sited to avoid items of architectural significance and will be painted to match the walls. They will be linked in the main by surface mounted pipes which will be painted white to match the wall. Some visual impact will be inevitable.

The proposed removal of pews will have an impact on the significance of Victorian modifications to the church. The proposal excludes the existing choir stalls to the Chancel, which are proposed to be retained.

The proposed construction of the new ramp from North Aisle to Choir Vestry includes removal of a stone step and sub base material, which will have minor impact on the significance.

The proposed modification to the font is to the base, which is 19th century. There will be no impact on the Bethersden marble font bowl from the 12th or early 13th century, because the font will be retained and reinstalled on a new base.

The construction of a new ramp to the Chancel, and repositioning the font, both include removal of a small section of existing floor tiling in these areas. This will have a minor impact on the significance.

The benefit of the proposed modifications described above will greatly outweigh the potential harm caused to the setting and historic fabric.



Photo of church interior looking towards Chancel and North Aisle.

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Section 1. General information

Location

St Nicolas' Church is located at the intersection of the High Street in the centre of the village of and occupies a prominent site at the heart of Great Bookham

The church is surrounded by a two-acre churchyard in the centre of the village. It is a centre of worship, a location for festivals and a landmark which is loved by those who worship there and know it as the centre of the village.

The village, whose population is about 11,375 or 4,840 households (census 2011) has some light industry, small offices and several dozen shops. Many residents commute to London or work within about a thirty mile radius of the village.

Use

In 'normal' times the church is actively used by the congregation and wider community. The regular worship on Sundays at 8.00 am Holy Communion, 10.00 am Holy Communion (Sung), except the first Sunday of the month when there are Morning Prayer at 10.00 am. Also on the third Sunday of the month there is Sung Evensong at 6.30 pm. On Wednesdays there is Tots Alive at 2.00 pm, and Said Holy Communion on Thursdays at 10 am. The Church has active work among children and families. The church electoral roll is 250 (in October 2020). About 170 people worship, each week of whom around 150 take communion.

The church is also used for baptisms, weddings, funerals, memorial services (biannually), flower and music festivals and other celebrations. Bookham Choral Society and Dorking Chamber Orchestra both regularly give concerts in the church. Many other local organisations including the local schools (Primary, Infant and Junior), youth organisations and local charities (e.g. Rainbow Trust) organise services around Christmas.

Section 2. What do you need?

Adequate heating

The current ancient heating system struggles to heat the church to 16° C even during a mild winter and only achieves that if the heating is on for a considerable period in advance of the service.

Accessibility

There is currently no step-free access from the church to the Kitchen and Toilet facilities. The route goes through the Choir Vestry and there is a step to navigate. The church requires a level access to the Toilet and Kitchen facilities.

There is currently no level access from the church to Chancel or to the Slyfield Chapel (which used as a second communion distribution station during the 10 o'clock Sunday service). There is a step to navigate in both cases. The church requires a level access to the Chancel (from where there is level access to the Slyfield Chapel).

A flexible space

The pews restrict the use of the church for various alternative occasions. If the church was an open space without pews, chairs could be placed in different arrangements for example towards each other or in a circular arrangement. There is also a need for the church to be used for different community events.

Storage for kneelers

There are hundreds of kneelers in the church, which are currently placed on the pews. These were embroidered by members of the congregation as a millennium project. The church requires a storage area for the kneelers.

Location of font and donation box

The font and donation box are located in central positions. When the pews are removed these should be repositioned in more appropriate locations. Also the font has a clumsy 19th century base.



Photo of step to Chancel.

Section 3. The proposals

The proposal includes:

- the installation of a gas fired boiler in the Sexton's shed serving wall-mounted radiators in the church together with low-level electric radiators under the choir pews and in the Tower.
- removal of existing timber pews to Nave and Aisles.
- repairs to the existing woodblock flooring and tile flooring to Nave and Aisles.
- extension to the Chancel platform as timber construction and timber floor boarding.
- removal of existing flooring and sub base to area of new ramp to Choir Vestry.
- construction of a new ramp with bronze railing to Choir Vestry in limecrete construction.
- repositioning existing memorial slab to new ramp to Choir Vestry.
- construction of a new ramp with bronze railing to Chancel platform in timber construction and timber board flooring.
- repositioning of existing font with a new bespoke bronze base and foundation.
- repositioning of existing donation box to Tower Lobby.
- new purpose made kneeler display in oak.
- redecoration of walls and ceilings to Nave, North and South Aisle, Chancel and Sanctuary.
- provision of 200 Howe 40/4 chairs which would normally be left in the church. In addition 30 extra E101 chairs would be bought to match the existing chairs.



Photo of North Aisle looking west.

Section 4. Why do you need it and why do you need it now?

St Nicolas Church is the largest building at the heart of a thriving village. In order for the church to be able to offer a wider range of church activities and to continue to host a range of community events and to provide the standard of facilities that people today expect there is a need to:

- improve the flexibility of the building
- improve accessibility
- provide adequate heating throughout the winter months.

The current building has very limited space at the front which restricts the format of worship services and the suitability of the building for concerts and other performances. The fixed pews mean that only one layout possible for worship services and community activities and the church is difficult to use for other events such as craft and similar activities for children. The earlier removal of pews to the North Aisle has demonstrated how useful this open space is for various events. The church now requires a larger flexible open space that can be used for various activities, both for worship and community events.

The removal of the remaining pews would make the church much more suitable for community uses. We hope it will be used for concerts, exhibitions and lectures, to be both a service to the local community and to help support the building financially, securing it for the future.

It should also be noted that our church halls are both very small and cannot accommodate the whole church at once. We would hope to use the flexible space that this proposal would create for social events and meetings that the whole church family could attend together, and especially for our children's and families work, including our version of messy church.

The fixed pews also restrict the ability to accommodate wheelchair users in the Nave. They cannot be accommodated in the aisles as these are relatively narrow and wheelchairs would pose a hazard in an evacuation scenario: the only options are in front of the front pew and in the cross aisle. Both are far from ideal.

The number of steps restricts access for wheelchair users and pose a significant hazard for those who are less steady on their feet. A number of falls have occurred, although thankfully there have been no serious injuries. The steps affect access from the Nave to Choir Vestry, Church Room and the toilets as well as access to the communion rails. Improved accessibility is a high priority.

The working group (set up to develop the reordering under the Building for the Future Project) had been considering a range of options including wooden chairs; steel framed chairs; padded chairs; non-padded chairs. The Covid-19 Pandemic has changed the thinking considerably and it is considered that a hard chair is now essential for cleaning reasons. In January 2018, the congregation were consulted about the Project and 4 hard chairs were provided for consideration (see photograph below, which also shows the number of votes cast for each chair).

The clear favourite was the Howe 40/4 chair (so named because forty chairs can be stacked in a space four feet high) and widely chosen by churches and cathedrals when replacing pews. The Howe 40/4 chair, although some of the more costly ones, are probably the most comfortable and best made ones. They have also stood the test of time well in many churches and cathedrals. It is proposed that this is the chair that would be used to replace the pews and that 200 chairs of this type would be purchased to be usually left in the church, with a book holder provided for every other chair in the central area of the church. To provide a maximum seating capacity of 300, as currently, a further 30 E101 chairs of the type normally used to supplement capacity when required (steel framed with black plastic back and seat) would be purchased. This would give a total of 100 of this type of chair. These chairs would be kept on trollies in the church room and would only be brought into church when required.

Chairs



Chair A - 11

Chair B – 64 (Howe 40/4)

Chair C – 20

Chair D - 40

Photo of voting process for chairs at the church.

The existing heating system is archaic. It has of a very old iron heat exchanger in a chamber beneath the floor of the church. It was originally coal fired and has been modified to accept a gas pressure jet burner. A fan blows air around the heat exchanger and hot air is then distributed around the church via a series of ducts and gratings in the floor.

The system is both inefficient and incapable of heating the church to a reasonable temperature even during mild winters. Efforts to improve its performance have failed. The only option to achieve reasonable temperatures during cold weather is to replace the system.

The proposed modifications are necessary to allow reasonable standards of accessibility and comfort to be provided going forward and to allow growth in the quality and variety of both worship and community activities to the benefit of both the church and the local community.

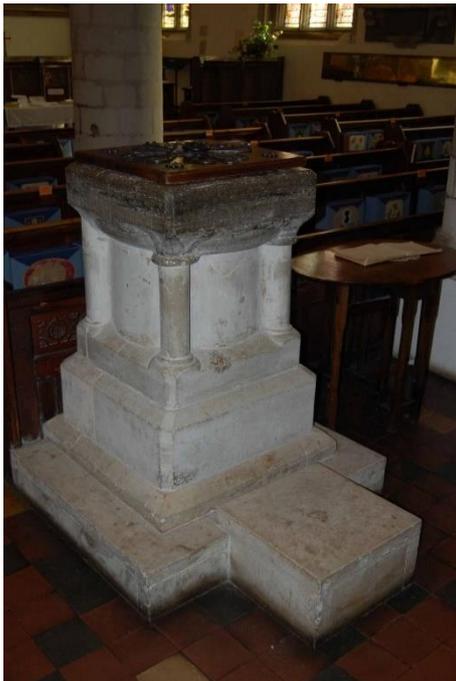


Photo of font and collection box.

Section 5. Justification

The proposed modifications are driven by the need to improve accessibility and to allow reasonable temperatures to be maintained all year round. They will also provide a more flexible space to develop worship and other church activities as well as serving the wider community.

The renewal of the heating system is a basic necessity to allow a comfortable environment to be provided. It will also improve efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The removal of pews and repositioning the font and donation box would provide an open flexible space which would enable the church to be used for various events, both worship and secular. It will also allow wheelchair users to be accommodated in the Nave alongside other people rather than being limited to marginal locations. The construction of two ramps would provide level access to the Chancel, and step-free access to the basic necessary facilities located in the Church Room.

The church building holds a pivotal place in the village and the proposed changes would open new opportunities, which meet the needs of the local community. The benefit of the proposed modifications will greatly outweigh the potential harm caused to the setting and historic fabric.



Photo of door from North Aisle to Choir Vestry.