



MASTERPLAN

CHRISTCHURCH PRIORY

Building on the Past, Securing the Future





CHRISTCHURCH PRIORY MASTERPLAN

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Vicar of Christchurch**

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Foreword by The Reverend Canon Charles Stewart, Vicar of Christchurch

For nearly a thousand years, Christchurch Priory has stood like a beacon on the south coast, on high ground between the confluence of the rivers Avon and Stour near where they run into the Solent. Yet, for all its history, few reading this document will have been to Christchurch Priory. You may not even have been aware of its existence.

If so, you are not alone. Simon Jenkins, in his book *'England's Thousand Best Churches'*, writes: *'Of all the great churches of England, Christchurch Priory is probably the least well known.'* He also describes the Priory as *'sensational'*.

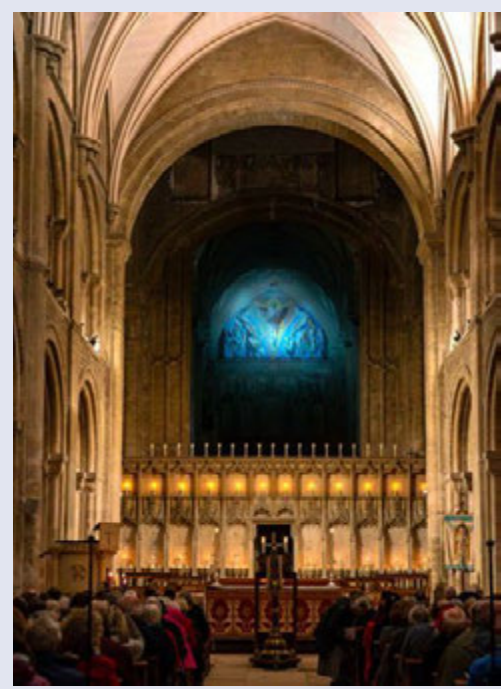
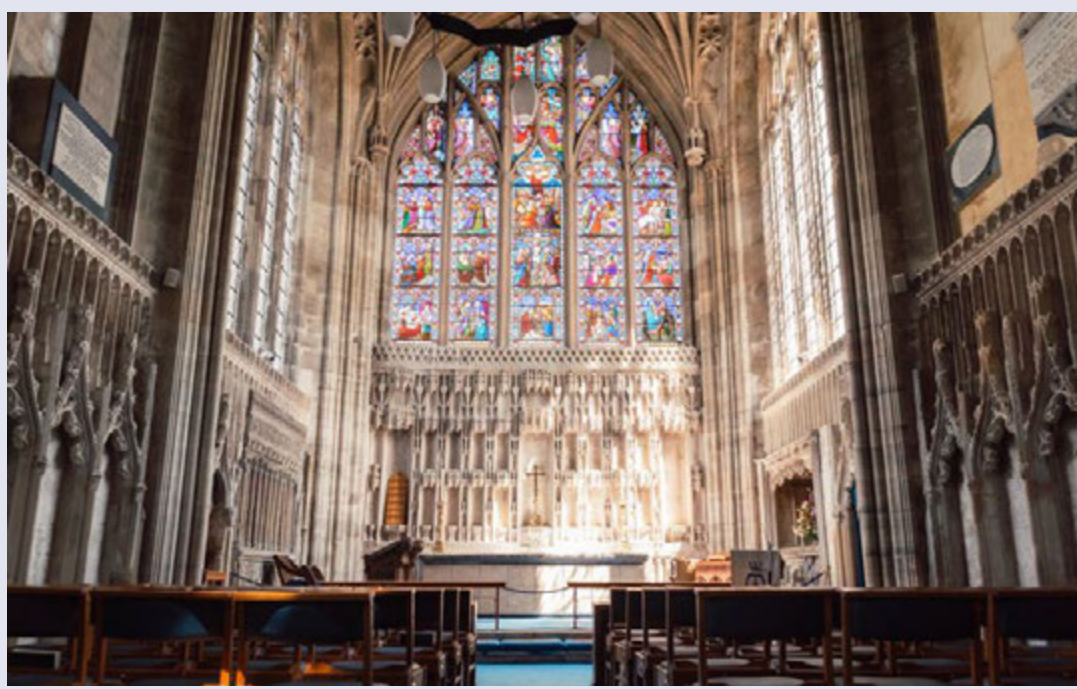
The Priory's long history has seen it welcome kings. Between 1199 and his death in 1216, King John is known to have visited Christchurch often. Three centuries later, King Henry VIII, with Queen Catherine of Aragon and his court, stayed at the Priory twice during his summer 'Progress'.

Anyone visiting Christchurch Priory today will see one of the most notable mediaeval churches in England. It owes its beginnings to Ranulph Flambard, the notorious Chaplain of William II, who started work in the early 1090s to replace the Saxon Priory with a Norman building. Flambard may have been a rogue, but he was a wonderful builder of churches.

The next key date in the Priory's story was 1150, when the Augustinian order took it over, with the backing of Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester and brother of King Stephen. Between then and 1539, when the Priory was dissolved in the reign of Henry VIII, building work must have been almost continuous.

This may be why the Priory contains fine examples of every style of mediaeval church architecture: the crypts, thought to be Saxon; the Norman Nave; Early English in the North Porch; Decorated style in the South Nave Aisle; Perpendicular in the Lady Chapel, Tower and Great Quire; to the Renaissance style of the Salisbury Chantry. This is very rare indeed.

From time to time in the life of every ancient church there comes a time when a special effort is needed to secure the future both of the building itself and also the viability of its mission and ministry in years to come. For Christchurch Priory, such a time is now.



This document presents the Masterplan which has been approved by the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of Christchurch. It outlines seven projects, each of which will ensure the Priory can flourish while at the same time bringing significant public benefit to the wider community and providing a better offering to our visitors.

This Masterplan is based on our vision for the Priory's future. It describes the priority areas which are in greatest need of attention for that vision to be achieved.

This vision unites our commitment to serve and care compassionately for the local community, to conserve the Priory's fabric for future generations, to ensure greater accessibility to the Priory's heritage and story, to ensure our lighting and heating enable us to meet the Church of England's Net Zero 2030 targets, and to create new accommodation for a Heritage Hub and for an ethical commercial operation that will provide a sound and sustainable financial foundation for everything we are called to do.



We have set out to do what we think is achievable. Each of these projects has been carefully considered; none has been adopted lightly. We believe everything here is necessary.

Jesus said, 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10.10). Running through this document, therefore, is the desire to create the conditions whereby Christchurch Priory, together with its sister churches, St George's, Jumpers, and St John's, Purewell, may have 'A Future that's Bigger than the Past'*, not for our own sake, but in order to share with others the abundant life which is God's gift to all his people.



* 'A Future that's Bigger than the Past': Sam Wells, Canterbury Press, 2019





Introduction

1. Introduction

I. At the heart of the community

Christchurch Priory is built on community. A church has stood on this site for over 1300 years, welcoming and ministering not only to those in the parish, but also to visitors and pilgrims.

Today, around 70,000 visitors annually from all over the world continue to be drawn to its beauty, history and the peaceful sanctuary within its walls. They also contribute significantly to the economy of the town of Christchurch.

The depth of affection for the Priory in the town and the surrounding area is testament to its service over the centuries. It remains the most obvious landmark and symbol of Christchurch today.

The Priory is one of the most notable medieval churches in England and is larger than twenty-one of England's Cathedrals. It fulfils a number of Cathedral-like roles, including its well-established and valued civic ministry. In 2022 this was evidenced when many hundreds of townspeople congregated in the Priory for the special Service of Commemoration for the late Queen Elizabeth II.



Yet the Priory's fundamental identity is as the parish church of Christchurch, serving the needs of the community and its people. It is a living church, whose story continues to develop. We seek to be a church that honours its past even as we look to the future. As we meet the new opportunities and challenges of mission, ministry and compassionate care in the coming decades, we want to be a blessing to the communities we serve.



II. How this document is organised

In this chapter we introduce our Masterplan and the vision for the Priory Church which drives it. This vision has been shaped and inspired by our association with the HeartEdge network.

Chapter 2 introduces HeartEdge and describes the four foundational HeartEdge principles: Commerce, Compassion, Congregation and Culture.

Chapter 3 sets out the priority areas for renewal and change to help us achieve our goals and be a greater blessing to the community.

Chapter 4 provides some detail on the commercial activities we are already undertaking.

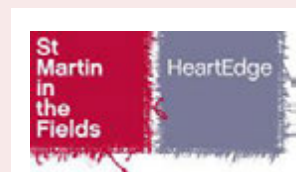
The PCC regards this Masterplan as a flexible, dynamic document which will be updated as circumstances change. At its heart, however, is something that will never change: our commitment as servants of the living Lord, and open to the guiding of his Spirit, to serve the people of Christchurch and the communities in which we are set.



Reimagining the future through HeartEdge

2. Reimagining the future through HeartEdge

No description of who we are and what we seek to do would be complete without reference to HeartEdge. HeartEdge is an ecumenical network originally initiated by the congregation of St Martin-in-the-Fields.



HeartEdge describes itself as ‘a movement for renewal, fuelled by people and churches sharing their assets, experience, resource and need.’ It brings together people to develop their church and community, through sharing ideas and experience.

These aims of church renewal and social engagement resonated with the PCC when first they heard them in January 2020. Since then, the HeartEdge principles have helped shape our thinking, planning and prayer. Far from being a mere theological exercise, HeartEdge offers ‘a vision for renewing the local church that is energizing, realistic and practicable for small and large churches alike.’

HeartEdge is not prescriptive. It is based on four foundational principles, each of which is grounded in robust and stable foundations, theological, pastoral, fiscal and ethical, which individual churches and congregations are invited to adapt to their local circumstances.





These four principles are:

- i. **Commerce:** generating finance through enterprise, thereby raising the funds to sustain and extend mission and ministry; developing commercial activities through the church and its community in ways that demonstrate a wider understanding of the Christian faith; and by allowing our assets (e.g. buildings and facilities) to broaden and appeal to a larger market, ensuring we remain at the centre of our community, valued and considered by all.
- ii. **Compassion:** engaging need and addressing issues of social justice locally; being compassionate with those excluded or in trouble, in ways that enhance community; also recognising that great things can happen when we focus on our assets rather than perceived deficits.
- iii. **Culture:** through music, visual art, and other cultural opportunities, to give space for the imagination, for beauty, self-expression, and re-imagining the Christian narrative for the present day.
- iv. **Congregation:** enabling us to become a community of hope, where people are ‘accepted, understood and welcomed as who they are in a way that evokes a feeling of trust, honesty and greater self-worth’; a congregation that through its fellowship, prayer, discipleship and outward-looking mindset, becomes a blessing to others.

In Christchurch we are already engaged in each of these four areas (often referred to as the 4 Cs). Hearing some of the positive stories of how the HeartEdge principles have been implemented elsewhere, suggests that we are on the right track in approaching our involvement in each of the 4 Cs in more intentional, coordinated, and effective ways. We are confident addressing the five areas described in this Masterplan will help us achieve these aims.

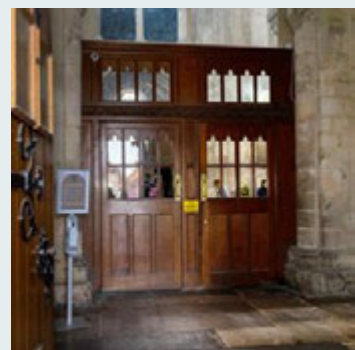
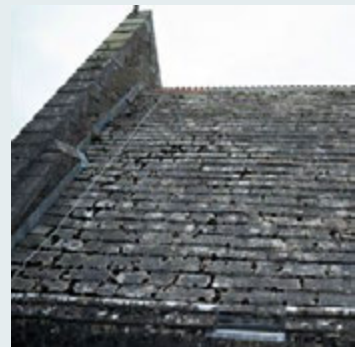


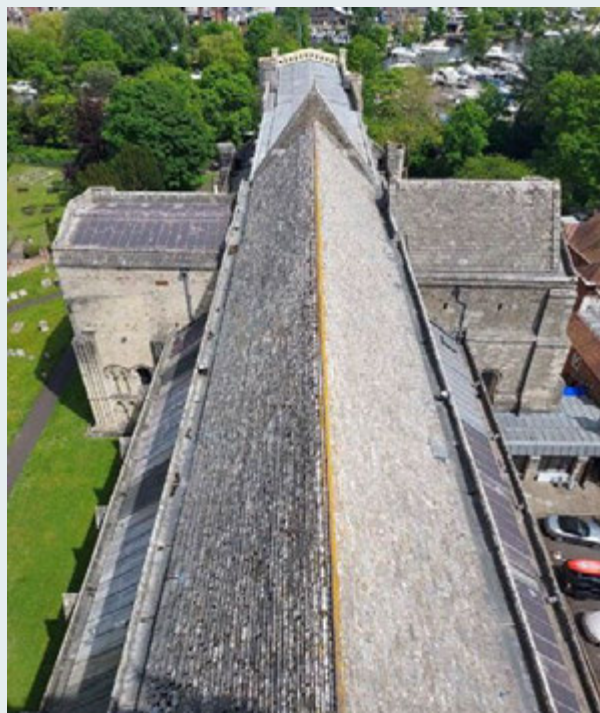
Seven areas for change

3. Seven areas for change

The process that led to this Masterplan document goes back several years. The PCC's careful deliberations, underpinned since 2020 by the principles of HeartEdge, have led to the seven priorities featured here.

- I. **Repair and restore the Nave Roof**
- II. **Welcome Building and Heritage Centre**
- III. **Redevelop the North Porch entrance**
- IV. **Conservation of the South elevation of the Priory**
- V. **New Heating**
- VI. **New Lighting**
- VII. **Repair and Conservation of the Nave Floor Stonework**





I. Nave Roof repairs

The Nave roof is one of the largest single stone slate roofs in the Southwest.

Covered in Purbeck slates, the roof has been recovered several times in the last 200 years, but not substantially repaired since the early 20th century. Serious water penetration in 2021 led to emergency re-pointing of the roof slopes where leaks were found; though these temporary measures are holding up, damage has already been done.

Specifically, there is significant rot in elements of the timber supports to the vault, as well as in elements of the roof structure itself. Currently the roof has no water barriers under the slates.

Below the slate covering, and unseen from ground level, is one of the great glories of Christchurch Priory: the late 14th/early 15th century roof. This structure retains substantial elements of medieval decoration which originally would have been visible from the Nave floor, prior to the installation of the plaster vault in the early 19th century.

“The survival of the roof with its painted scheme is both an extraordinary and exceptional survival in England, in terms of quality and detail of the carpentry, and the extent and quality of the painted scheme. The survival deserves to be better known and appreciated in the public, professional and academic spheres.”

Ross Cook, buildings archaeologist and dendrochronologist

“The late medieval painted roof at Christchurch Priory is one of the most spectacular survivals in England.”

Dr Andrea Kirkham ACR, FSA, conservator of wall paintings and polychrome decoration

Our project includes carefully lifting and re-laying the Purbeck slates, essential conservation of the painted decorations, and undertaking repairs of the timber roof structure.

In the Nave roof some of the Priory Church’s most significant historic fabric is at imminent risk of loss. This is our highest repair and conservation priority.



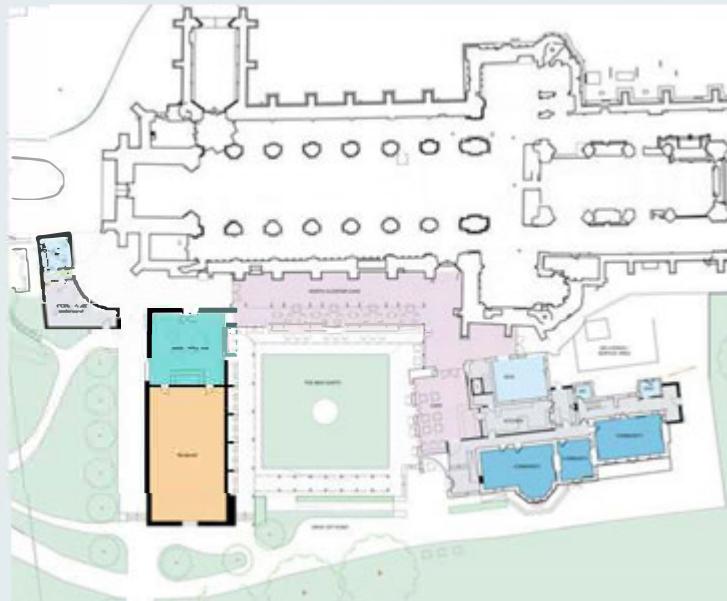
II. Welcome Building and Heritage Hub

At the heart of our vision for the Priory's future is the new Welcome Building and Heritage Hub.

This building will enable us to make the Priory's history and heritage much more accessible to visitors, encourage community participation through developed educational schemes and other visits, offer much-needed space for local social activities, as well as care for and enhance the environment around the Priory. Crucially, through its commercial ventures, the Heritage Hub and new hospitality provision will ensure the parish's financial sustainability and help fund necessary conservation in the future.

The concept design – provisionally called the Cloister Garth project – restores a sense of the mediaeval cloister, which was lost at the Reformation. The plans provide for: an expanded catering facility with at least 75 covers; a new shop; accessible toilet facilities; and, crucially, the new Heritage Hub (see overleaf). All these elements will be as close to carbon neutral as possible.

In addition, a major landscaping project in the grounds around the Priory will open up a new walkway. This will enable visitors and citizens to walk freely between Christchurch High Street and the Quay, and make the new facilities accessible from both the north and south approaches to the Priory.





Relocation of Priory Museum – the Heritage Hub

Central to this is the plan to move the Priory's museum to its new ground floor site. Its present location in St Michael's Loft, above the Lady Chapel, can only be reached via a narrow winding staircase of over 70 steps. The Priory's collection includes items of national importance, much of which is of particular reference to Christchurch's heritage which cannot be found elsewhere.

Relocating these artefacts to the Heritage Hub will make the Priory's history and heritage more accessible, encourage community participation through educational programmes, and develop new interactive displays on the Nave roof paintings, South Transept Crypt paintings, and digitised historical parish registers.

Reconfiguration of Priory House, Ground Floor

Creating the new Welcome Building and Heritage Hub will also allow us to reconfigure the ground floor of Priory House, the Georgian building behind the Priory Church. Relocating the existing Tea Rooms and Shop will release a number of rooms for use by local community groups, charities, businesses, and individuals, as well as parish use. Such a facility is greatly needed in the town.





III. Redevelop the North Porch Entrance

The main entrance to the Priory is via the North Porch, which dates from the 13th century and is in the richest Early Gothic style.

It is one of the glories of the Priory Church. Once inside the outer doorway, however, the visitor finds an oppressively dark space. Furthermore, the current North Porch entrance does not make it easy for the vulnerable, the disabled or parents with a pram to navigate through the space in safety and comfort. We have to do better.

While maintaining the integrity of the architecture, we want to introduce a new inner entrance, to provide significantly improved access, new lighting, flexible information displays and – crucially – a new welcome desk. This will allow us to improve greatly our offering to visitors.

IV. Conservation of the South Elevation of the Priory

The external conservation of the Priory Church began over twenty years ago. Since then, six phases of the conservation have been undertaken.

The PCC wants to complete this major long-term project as part of the Masterplan. Our architect has confirmed that this final phase of the external conservation will be much less extensive than most of the previous stages.

V. New Heating

Replacing the Priory's heating is a PCC priority. The current heating system is outdated, seriously inefficient and very expensive to run.

Its high carbon footprint militates against our ability to meet our obligation to become carbon neutral by 2030. At present we are seeking further advice from a heating consultant as to the most appropriate, eco-friendly, efficient and cost-effective method of heating the Priory in the future.



VI. New Lighting

The Priory's lighting, like its heating, is unfit for purpose, inefficient and very expensive to run.

Following a competitive process, the PCC has accepted a lighting design which will enable us to benefit from the latest technology in the field and give us greatly enhanced opportunities to light the building sensitively, both for liturgical use and for the many concerts and public events held in the Priory during the year.



VII. Repair and conservation of the Nave floor stonework

The central Nave aisle is the route taken by most people as they walk through the building.

The stonework of the aisle is in a poor state of repair. It poses a trip hazard which is why the project now needs to be completed in full, conserving stone slabs wherever possible. While undertaking the repairs, we intend to lay new ducting under the floor, for future use.





Commerce and Finance

4. Commerce and Finance

This campaign does not exist in a vacuum. It is rooted in the daily reality of working to fund what we believe God is calling us to do. Contrary to popular belief, the parish receives no funding either from the Church of England or from the UK Government.

In order to generate income to serve and support our mission, outreach and care for the Priory fabric, we already undertake a number of commercial and cultural activities. These enterprises, whose ethos is shaped by our sense of social responsibility, are run through Christchurch Priory Enterprises Ltd (CPEL). Most visible of these are the existing Café and Shop, located on the ground floor of Priory House. The parish made a considerable investment in reconfiguring this area in 2022, doubling the number of indoor covers. Toilet facilities were also upgraded.

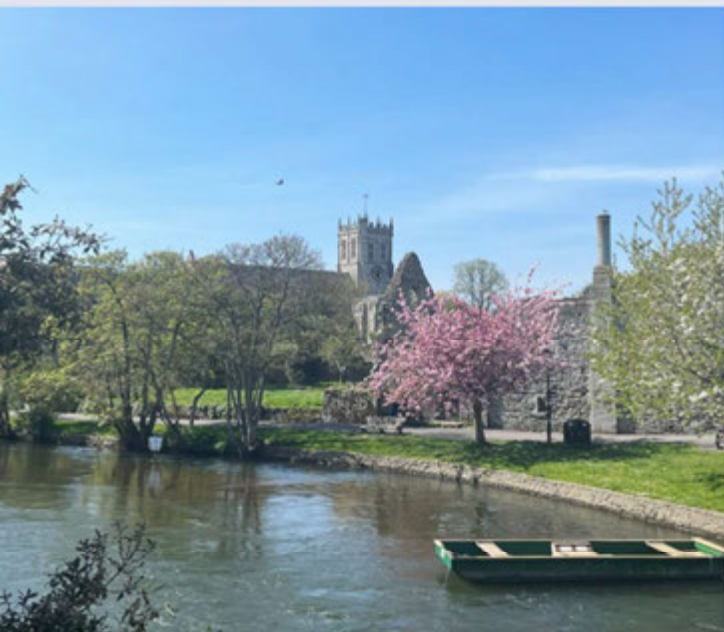
The Priory is also the principal concert venue in Christchurch and the surrounding area. We host a number of evening concerts every year, many featuring local choral societies and musicians. Each term we hold a series of weekly lunchtime Organ Recitals. These events are usually well attended

We benefit from visitor donations, facilitated through several wireless donation points around the Priory. We offer a number of specialist tours, for which a charge is made. The parish also holds Summer and Christmas Fairs annually; both feature craft stalls, supporting local artisans and craftspeople.

In addition, we have been working to generate income from other assets: the lease of two halls to local nursery schools; letting rooms in Priory house to local organisations; rent on two residential properties; and rent from the local council for the lease of a Public Car Park and surrounding land.

Despite these and other endeavours, even after factoring in the congregations' planned giving, our income is not sufficient to cover the costs of our mission and outreach, and maintain the fabric of this Grade 1 listed building. This is one of the prime motivating factors for this campaign: we need the income which the new Welcome Building and Heritage Centre will provide.





Epilogue by Canon Charles Stewart

The Way Ahead

Thank you for reading this Masterplan document. I hope you will be inspired, as we are, with the combined potential of these projects to secure the PCC's aspirations for the future of Christchurch Priory and its multi-layered service of the wider community.

We believe that investing in these seven major projects will help us fulfil this vision and map out the way ahead for this parish: preserving its heritage and presenting its story in more accessible ways; presenting opportunities for education and contributing to the local economy; developing our commercial enterprises to provide the necessary financial foundation for everything we seek to do.

We know we cannot do this alone. I hope that you may be inspired to partner with us in seeking to secure the Priory's future at the heart of Christchurch and its communities.

Charles Stewart

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Photo credits:

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The Parish of Christchurch

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