

ST PAUL'S CHURCH BARROW

CHURCH HALL UPDATE



October 2021 | An update for local residents & church members as we evaluate the future of the Church Hall



LOOKING BACK WITH THANKFULNESS; MOVING FORWARD WITH WISDOM...

We know that throughout our community, the St Paul's Church Hall, often known as 'the old School', has been highly valued as a community space since it was first opened in 1879.

For 140 years it has served different purposes: as a worship space, a school, and as a place where community gatherings and clubs have met.

Many people fondly remember events and functions in recent decades, and some can even remember being part of school lessons in the building!

Of course, we live in a changing world, and we are currently considering how best to move forward with the Church Hall site, given some of the challenges it faces. We'd value your consideration and input, and hope this keeps you informed.

The Story of the Hall

You may or may not know that the current Church Hall, on Hawcoat Lane & Wheatclose Road, isn't the *first* School/Church Hall built in the parish. In 1843, when Barrow was first developing, a schoolroom was built on Abbey Road near Ilkley Road, just beyond the current site of St Paul's Church, to serve Hawcoat & Newbarns villages. This was also used for worship services on Sunday afternoons, before being demolished to widen the main road into Barrow in 1877.

In that same year plans were made for a new School Hall to be built on Hawcoat Lane, using some of sandstone from the original hall. And so in 1879 the new Hall was opened as a school and meeting room, some eight years after St Paul's Church had been built & dedicated.

Further extensions were made to the Hall in 1887, when the main room and two porches were added. The bell room was divided by a partition in 1949, providing an office for the headteacher. The building suffered structural damage in air raids of 1941, and had to be temporarily closed. It continued as the site of St Paul's School until 1957, when the new school was opened.



Moving Forward...

Thanks for taking the time to read this report and update. For most of its **140 years**, the Church Hall has served an important and meaningful purpose in the life of the church and wider community. But we are now at a **critical decision point** regarding its future.

Whilst this Hall has existed for a lot longer than the 34-year lifetime of the previous 'school hall', we are mindful that buildings do not last forever. **Community needs and ministry opportunities do change, just as they have done previously.** We now have to discern how to move forward with the Hall site.

We estimate that to **make the whole Church Hall site 'fit for purpose' would require investment in the region of £200k.** To give a comparison, St Paul's Church has recently been operating with an annual income of around £60-70k, and most years we are close to breaking even or have a slight deficit. To justify this level of spending would **require a clear plan for the Hall to be an asset to the wider community and for the ministry and mission of St Paul's Church.**

We feel the following three options are laid before us, and would value your thoughts:

1. **Commit to keeping & restoring the Hall site through self-funding.** Realistically we'd prioritise work over time. Depending on funds, parts of the site may remain out of action.
2. **Commit to keeping & restoring the Hall site largely through grant-based funding.** This will require a funding team but also a clear vision for the Hall as a community asset. Grants are likely to be match-funded, so would require financial commitment from the church.
3. **Make the decision to explore selling the Hall site.** If a potential buyer emerges and it is appropriate to proceed, then we need to wisely steward the site income to help us further the work of the church in serving our community. This could include funding a salaried role, undertaking needed repairs of the church site, and potentially developing the church site.

Options 1 or 2 need a strong case for how a 'fit for purpose' Hall would genuinely support the work of our church and community going forward. Option 3 would, in time, need a clear vision for how sale proceeds would support the work of our church in serving the community going forward.

What do you think? As those entrusted with responsibly stewarding the Hall as a resource and site, the St Paul's Parochial Church Council value the consideration of the local community and church congregation as we 'look back with thankfulness and move forward with wisdom'.



Open Meeting:

We would like to invite all community members and church members to an open meeting on **Monday 1st November, 7pm**, in the **St Paul's Church Lounge**. This will be an opportunity to hear opinions and to gather ideas in light of the current challenges.

The St Paul's PCC will then seek to make a considered decision on a way forward in their subsequent meeting.

Thank you for reading.

Ms. Jackie Dower, Mr. Derek Pearce & Rev. Robin Ham
on behalf of the St Paul's Church PCC

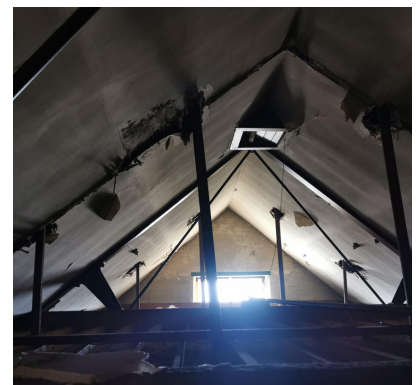
Current Condition of the Hall

Based on a recent report by the St Paul's Church PCC Fabric & Buildings Committee, September 2021

The Hall has not been open for use since lockdown in March 2020, due to a number of emerging challenges. Some of these are explained in this summary of a Site Visit from September 2021:

- The collapsed Gentlemen's Toilet ceiling has been fixed but still needs plastering.
- In the 'Scout Hall' (the half of the site furthest from Hawcoat Lane), various parts of the ceiling have collapsed and the roof leaks. A new floor would be needed, preferably asphalt. The connected Store Room also has a collapsed ceiling & part of the roof is missing. The toilet area/wash room needs a complete refit, floor & plastering. We have received a verbal quote of just under £50,000 for the issues mentioned in the 'Scout Hall'.
- The skylight in the main kitchen has been fixed, but the surrounding ceiling needs replacing.
- The roof above the cloakroom and Ladies' toilet needs new lead flashing. Although this was repaired a few years ago, it is now letting in rain again. We have been informed that though costly, this may not solve the problem and it could be the brickwork itself.
- Part of the main Church Hall ceiling (half of the site closest to Hawcoat Lane) has now collapsed due to the main room lime & horsehair lining falling through. Because some of the slates had also moved, rain has come in and it looks as if other parts of the hall ceiling are close to falling in too. The slates have been repositioned, but others may still move. We have been informed it is therefore not safe to use the Hall, even if the roof was fixed.
- In the 'Pink Room', adjacent to the Church Hall, there was a crack in the fibreglass valley, again causing rain to get in. This has been repaired again, but there is some damage to the wall above the door.
- The other 'Side Room' needs new windows. Its connected store room couldn't be inspected.
- The Chair Store is in good order.
- The back entrance has lots of damp, but no significant damage. It needs a new back/outside door.
- Around the outside, new fascias, guttering and downspouts are also needed and have been quoted at £2,700. The sandstone is also crumbling away at ground level and needs re-pointing all around.
- We have sought to get quotes for the main roof itself, although this has been difficult with many companies very busy. One quote was for £37,500 for the front half of the roof and £38,400 for the rear of the roof, although this could be reduced if we used tiles, not slate. This does not include the 'Scout Hall' roof, which may contain asbestos and probably needs replacing too.
- Emergency lighting would need to be fitting, along with a fire alarm.
- Existing toilet facilities are not accessible for disabled users, so would need updating.

All in all, a rough estimate at getting the whole Hall site 'fit for purpose' would be in the region of £200,000.



The top four photos show the roof, taken from above the ceiling. The bottom two photos show the main hall ceiling & fallen elements.

Summary of Recent Work

In the last decade or so, financial investment *has* been made in the Church Hall (as much of our financial means has allowed) in order to keep it usable and safe:

- New central heating boilers and water heater in the kitchen
- Automatic taps and water heaters installed for hand washing in the wash rooms
- New windows and front door
- New front facias and new triangular gable-end done
- Re-tarmac of the car park
- On-going repairs of roof slates
- Replacing the ceiling in the chair store

Despite the current challenges, significant work has gone into the site over the last few decades. Some of this have been funded by St Paul's Church PCC, and some has been funded by generous donations from individuals.

Current Userbase

- Since lockdown we have found that most of our previous regular Hall users have either closed, or have decided to use another venue and so removed their belongings from our storage. In particular:
 - Barrow Ramblers' Society are now renting the Abbey Room in St Paul's Church.
 - The Scout Group no longer meets.
 - The Guide Group has joined with another group elsewhere.
 - Two societies/clubs have moved to rent another venue in the area.
 - The Luncheon Club has not met since the start of COVID-19.
- We also recognise that the standard of hireable venues used for one-off functions or regular bookings has got better. In the vicinity there are now many premises offering a competitive price and good quality features. These include: Hawcoat Park Sports Club; Furness Cricket Club; Hawcoat Community Centre (by Dane Ghyll); St Matthew's Halls; Fairfield Lane Masonic Hall. Therefore, **even if we were able to repair the Church Hall to a 'fit for purpose' standard, we may not be able to rely on the rental income stream that it previously generated.**
- It is important to also highlight that **the relatively recent extension/reordering of St Paul's Church has meant that the church building itself is now being used much more** for social and outreach events/courses run by the church. The church building has flexibility, a good kitchen, and is seen as a friendly and welcoming space. In other words, **if we are going to invest in the Church Hall, it needs to be evident why it will be more useful and strategic as a venue than the church site itself.**