

## **The Open Door Project (Church of St Bartholomew)**

The purpose of the Open Door Project is to

- create a new common entrance so that all attendees (including wheelchair users) can gain unassisted access into the church
- provide toilet facilities suitable for all attendees
- provide an area where small groups can meet away from the body of the church
- provide a small kitchen so that light refreshments can be prepared

Although little has been written about the project over the last year a considerable amount of activity has been going on in the background.

Earlier this year a new project group was formed comprising of the Rector the Revd Jane Turner, Mrs Harriett Rathmell, Mr Malcolm Studholme, Mr David Wolstencroft and myself. The group proceeded to examine all aspects of the project, including its core purpose, the mission of the church, the needs of the local community, and the suitability of the current design to meet these criteria.

St Bartholomew is a Grade II listed building, which has changed little since it was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is a popular place for worship, but it is also a centre for traditional events; for weddings, baptism, or funerals; for festivals and special services (e.g. Remembrance Day, Carols and Lessons, and other occasions) when people who don't normally attend a regular service go to church. It is also an important part of the heritage of the local area.

During the course of an average year around 4,000 different people attend the church of St Bartholomew - almost equivalent to the entire civic population of Thurstaston and Irby. Sometimes the gathering may be small, but at other times the building is full to its capacity.

The current entrance and the lack of toilet facilities present difficulties for attendees of all ages, but particularly the elderly. People now live longer than their 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessors, but the consequence of longer life often mean that an increasing proportion of our local community have mobility problems, visual difficulties and other significant handicaps (only 10% of disabled people

actually use a wheelchair). For many, a visit to the Church of St Bartholomew can be a trial that interferes with their enjoyment of the occasion and/or the building.

However, the Open Door Project is more than a means of providing a new entrance and toilet. It is also about making the building more suitable for other aspects of the mission of the church, and for opening up the building for greater community use. The project group, therefore, felt that the existing plans should be altered to create a larger entrance foyer, which would enable the new extension at the west wall of the church to be used more effectively as a self contained unit with a large meeting space, toilet and kitchen. A special meeting of the PCC which 96% of committee members were able to attend unanimously agreed.

Discussions with the architect were fruitful and resulted in changes to the existing design, which have now been approved by the Local Authority. Importantly our architect has indicated that that even with these changes the cost of the project including expenses will remain within the original target of £150,000.

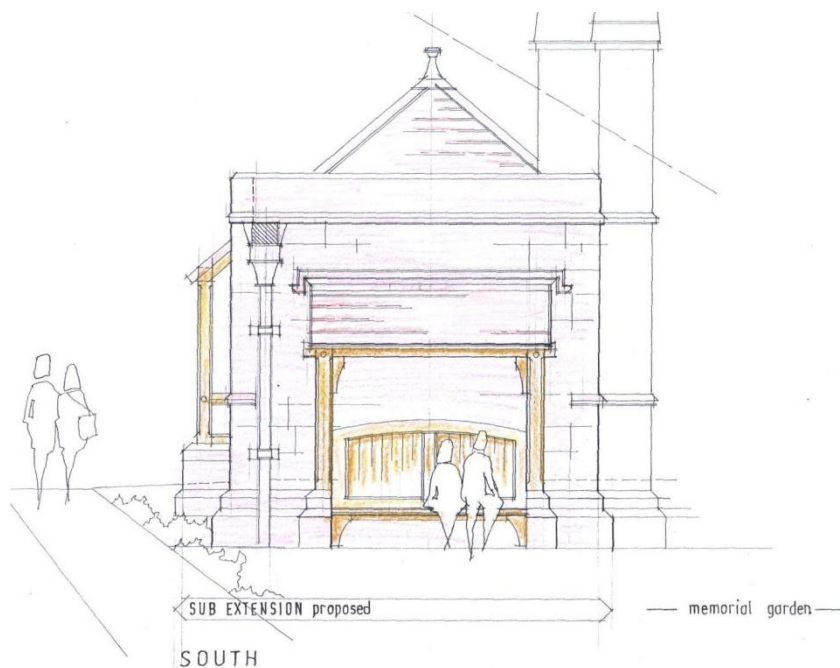
The generosity of members of the church, many local residents, visitors, and "Friends of St Bartholomew's" who live further away, plus the decision of the PCC to allot funds passed to us by the diocese (which represent a proportion of the profit made from the sale of the old Rectory on Telegraph road, Thurstaston after the purchase of the new Rectory in Irby) mean that we have already raised over £80,000 towards the cost of the project. It is now our intention to approach grant funders for a significant proportion of the remaining cost. It is also our aim to start the project works next spring and to complete by late summer.

The revised plans for the extension are shown overleaf

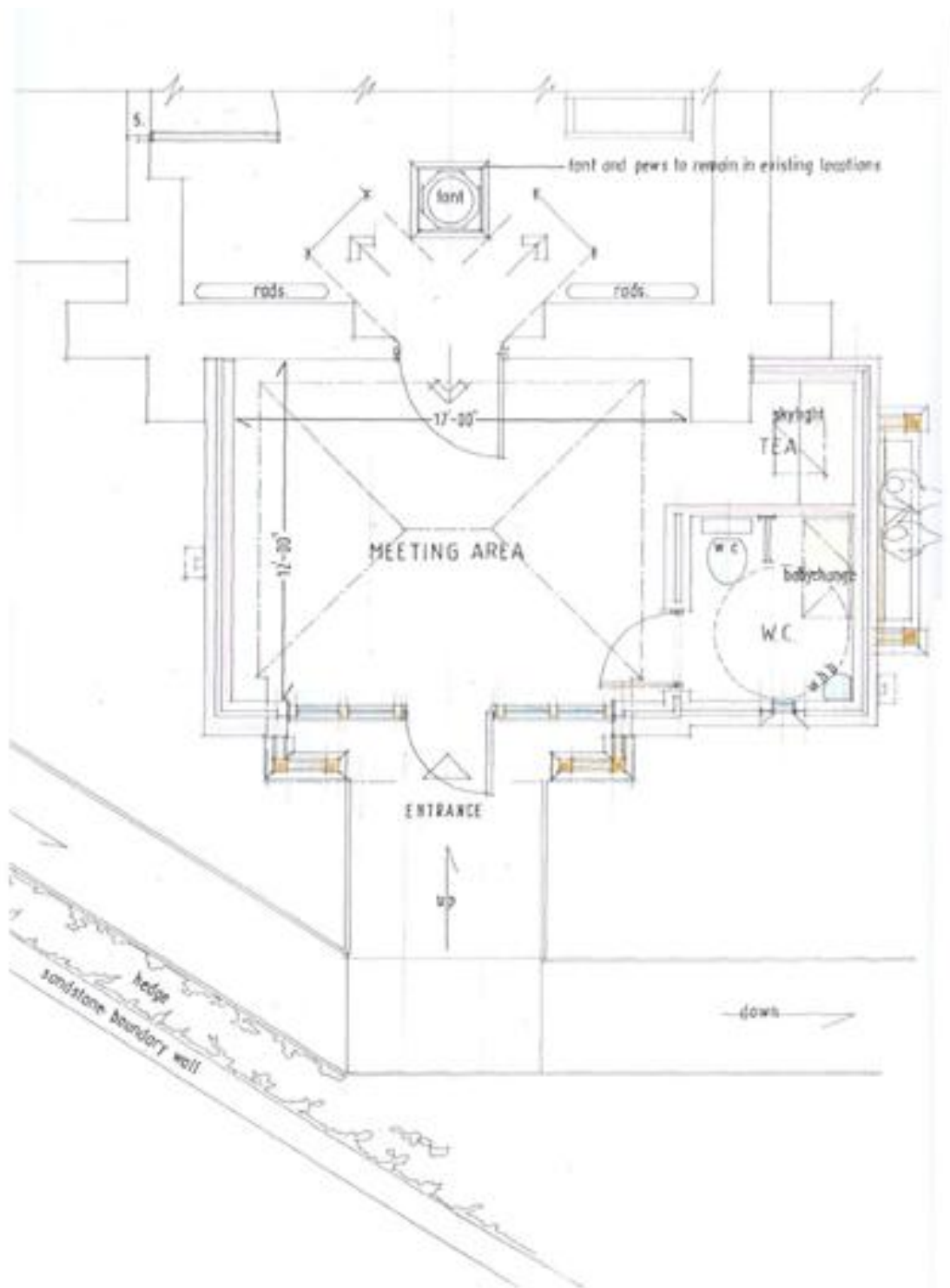
John Roberts  
(Member of the Open Door Project Action Committee)



The entrance itself remains unchanged from the earlier plans but beyond the doors the entrance foyer is now twice as large with the toilet and kitchen area in a new annexed addition extending from the south wall of the extension



The changes to the original design have been achieved in sympathy with the original building and incorporate a resting shelter and seat near to the Garden of Remembrance



The entrance foyer doubles as a meeting room with access to the toilet and kitchen facilities which enables the new extension to be used as a self contained unit for small group meetings