

BECOMING ST HELENS MINSTER.

A roadmap to our future vision.

Prepared November 2022



ST HELENS
PARISH CHURCH

AN EMERGING VISION FOR ST HELENS MINSTER

St Helens is a large town with a strong cultural identity, loads of potential and in a great position in the North West of England. The town centre is in the early stages of an ambitious programme of regeneration (sthelensstowncentre.co.uk) and the church's central location is at the heart of the imagined 'new' town centre.

As the civic church, St Helens Parish Church already has an active ministry with the council and town wide events. Through our positive working relationship with Mission in the Economy (www.mite.org.uk), we also have a strong relationship with the local businesses in the town centre, the market, the shops, the arts and voluntary sector as well as St Helens Chamber.

As St Helens Minister, a vision is emerging of how we can build on these links and strengthen the mission and ministry here as the Church in the centre of St Helens.

What is an Urban Minster?

There are a number of Urban Minsters in large towns around the country such as Hull, Halifax and Taunton. Unlike historic Minsters such as Beverley Minster, these are often large Parish Churches with a civic and historic role in the town and borough which have been redesignated after a time of prayer, reflection and consultation. Being a Minster allows them to focus their missional attention and priority on the meeting point between church, commerce and community. Minster Churches act as a mother church for a town or area, a resource centre, almost a mini cathedral. At their heart is a group of people who continue to gather for worship in the building, but the building develops a greater significance and purpose as a resource for the whole town.

The Minster is the 'go to place' for help, for care, for commiseration, for celebration. It is the centre of the community where the people of the town feel they are welcome, wanted and included. The church is the people, but a Minster is the building.

The Minster vision was captured by St Helens Deanery (the collected Church of England churches in the borough) in 2019. The vision was that the St Helens Parish Church building would be a focal point in the town; a 'city on a hill'; with people coming to it, but also streams of living waters flowing from it to bless the town, to infiltrate into the dark, to pour fresh hope and life into the places where it reaches. It is from this vision and these conversations that this vision document about St Helens Minster has emerged.



As St Helens Minster, what could this place be? What part can we play in influencing the prosperity of the town centre and by being visibly open can we be a beacon of hope in the town centre?

In 2020, with everything having stopped at the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic, St Helens Parish Church was given the opportunity to re-imagine what ministry could look like in the town centre. As St Helens Minster, what could this place be? What part can we play in influencing the prosperity of the town centre and by being visibly open can we be a beacon of hope in the town centre?

ST HELENS PARISH CHURCH: WHAT IS IN OUR HANDS?

A WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, we have returned with one Sunday gathering at 10.30am on Sunday mornings with a diverse pattern of worship through the month that includes traditional services of Holy Communion and Cafe-style gatherings with music, craft, games and food.

Although numbers have dropped post-pandemic (as is common across most churches) those who are here together are loyal, hardworking, dedicated and faithful and the Lord is adding to our numbers! We have reasons to be cheerful about what He is doing amongst us. We have a number of new members of our community from all across the world, and it is a joy to minister with such a varied group of people.

Our vision statement for our worshipping community that gathers on Sunday mornings is 'God's family at the heart of St Helens'. This Family will remain central to the mission and ministry of St Helens Minster. The Minster will first and foremost be a place of prayer and worship, and a spiritual home for those who wish to gather to learn more about Jesus Christ.



A PLACE OF PRAYER

The Minster, as a place of prayer, will have a rhythm of worship throughout the week which is already beginning to take shape with Morning Prayer being said Monday and Wednesday at 9.30am and Holy Communion on Mondays and Wednesdays at 12noon. There are also several groups through the week which offer the opportunity to explore faith, to ask questions and develop understanding.

The church building is open for people to come in, to visit, to pray, to enjoy the peace. Currently this is normally possible Monday to Wednesday. Occasionally there are prayer stations and people available to pray with people. Whenever the doors are open there are people around who will pray with others.



A pattern of additional worship services are beginning to be developed during the year which mark moments in the wider cultural and civic life. This includes Remembrance Day (where the service echoes the outdoor one at the Cenotaph), the Christmas Carol Service (a town wide favourite and the start to Christmas for so many), Baby Loss Awareness week, The Queen's Platinum Jubilee, and others.

The church building was also open for ten days following the death of Her Late Majesty the Queen allowing people to pay their respects by signing the Book of Condolence and offering an opportunity for prayer and reflection. We held a service of commemoration for Her Late Majesty on the Saturday before her funeral, attended by civic leaders and people of the town.



A FANTASTIC BUILDING

The beautiful church building dominates Church Square and is a fine example of the Arts and Crafts movement. Completed and dedicated in 1926, the current building replaced an earlier church which was destroyed in a fire. The architect was William Caröe and the church is a fine example of his art with some impressive features. These include excellent examples of stained glass such as the Te Deum Window, presented by Mrs C J Bishop and Sir David and Dame Elizabeth Gamble; and an oak Reredos carved out of a single oak tree and given to the church to mark the Golden Jubilee of the Men's Bible Class in 1938.



The history of St Helens Parish Church walks hand in hand with the history of St Helens the town, the names of our industrial giants and patrons can be found around the building.

The church building is a central feature in the town centre regeneration plans, surrounded by new squares and streets leading from the bus and railway stations to the World of Glass, the Stadium and varied hospitality and retail areas around the town centre. Twice a week the market surrounds the building as it fills Church Square with traders, shoppers and music.

The church building is large enough to comfortably house small groups, worship in the chapel, a cafe in the hospitality area and meetings in the vestries. There is work to be done to redecorate some of the rooms, but only a couple of major work projects. The main work is maintenance to the roof (it is 100 years old) and work on the front of the building, protecting the stone work and also seeking to make the entrance more welcoming and accessible by investigating glass doors, removal of the wooden inner doors and upgrading the lighting to the outside of the building.

Alongside the church building there are the upper and lower halls, and the bridge rooms which offer useful office and storage space. The halls are intended as 'income generating' assets which can be rented out by various community and commercial groups in the town. At the moment these are being rented out roughly 50% of available hours, but with some revamping of the space it is hoped that more bookings will come in.

The halls also house the Our Warm Welcome group on a Monday which offers help, advice and English lessons to refugees and St Helens Foodbank on Thursdays. St Helens Street Pastors use an office in the bridge and operate a safe space from the Church to serve the night-time Economy.

100 YEARS: A NEW BEGINNING

St Helens Parish Church building, approaches its centenary year in 2026. Much of the history of the town is echoed in the Church building. For example, the magnificent font is a gift built by the Pilkington Family who invested heavily in the town where so many worked in their glassworks.

St Helens town centre is undergoing a time of major change and regeneration with St Helens Borough Council and the English Cities Fund (ECF) leading an ambitious programme aiming to transform the town centre over the next few years. Our plans for St Helens Minister see church and town centre walking together into a new, revitalised and hopeful future.

THE JOURNEY SO FAR

2019

Deanery Mission Review identifies St Helens Parish Church as a potential Minster Church. The PCC are consulted, and a time of initial a time of initial listening and discernment begins; listening to the town, listening to the church, listening to God.

2020

Rev. Rachel Shuttleworth appointed with responsibility to develop the Deanery Vision of St Helens Minster.

2021

In September, development of a Minster Task Force drawn from churches across the deanery to work with Rev. Rachel to discern where God is leading in the Minster Vision.

2022

A fact finding visit to Halifax Minister and resulting ongoing 'mentoring' relationship with Halifax Minister is developed. Engagement with the Major Church Network means gaining vast experience and shared learning from those churches.

In April & May, a preaching series on 'Generous Orthodoxy' and what being St Helens Minster could mean for our worship, our mission and our hospitality beginning to think about the culture of 'Minster' and how it is different to 'Parish', followed by a 'Thinking Minster' Vision Day attended by PCC from St Helens Parish Church and the Minster Task Force, led by Rev. Canon Neal Barnes of Liverpool Cathedral (formerly Vicar of Hull Minster).

Over the summer, the Minster Task Force collated all information from vision day and discernment time and create the Minster Mission plan. included in this process will be a consultation with the architect and fully costed plans for building works being drawn up.

ST HELENS MINSTER: A FIVE YEAR PLAN

2022 Following three years exploration of what it would look like to be a Minster, and the appointment of Rev Rachel Shuttleworth and a Minster task force, a five year plan is developed

Following 'Dreaming exercises' in October & November 2022, reflecting on the 6 key elements to Minster with clergy and lay readers, the five year plan is unveiled in its entirety to St Helens Parish Church PCC & Deanery Synod in November 2022.



2023 The Mission Plan is then presented to key stakeholders including St Helens Council, St Helens Chamber and other partner organisations.

Renovations & modernisation of lower and upper halls to generate an income to help in funding the mission and ministry.

We aim to revitalise our facilities to make them fit for purpose, as well as providing all day access to our Chapel as a quiet worship space.

2024 As our choir stalls and reredos are cleaned up, we'll update our heritage offering by developing signage and information materials about our history to encourage our position as a heritage site.

The beginning of the process for larger building projects planned to be undertaken in 2024-5. Including applying for faculties and architect consultations.

2025 Larger scale building projects are undertaken including: completion of the roof replacement, removal of pews, renewal of stone work at the front of church and rethinking of the entrance.

As much as possible around the building work, we hope to increase the number of events and bookings in both the church building and halls. We will begin to develop a programme of activities and events marking the centenary year in 2026.

2026 In our centenary year, St Helens Parish Church will aim to be redesignated as St Helens Minster. Part of a year of events to mark 100 years and celebrate the redevelopment of the Town Centre (which should be largely completed by the end of 2025), St Helens Minster will launch a new era in the life of the town centre.

Building on our rich heritage and proud history, the Minster will be at the forefront of a new future for St Helens as a town with renewed hope and purpose.

SIX KEY FEATURES OF ST HELENS MINSTER

These 6 key features were strands that emerged from the Thinking Minster Day; along with 6-12 months of prayerful discerning and reflection by the Minster Task Force, Deanery Chapter and Synod and the PCC at St Helens Parish Church, as well as our research into Urban Minsters, which included a visit to Halifax Minster and engagement with the Major Churches Network. They are what the Minster Task Force has identified as the six key identifying features of St Helens Minster.

ONE A PLACE FOR WORSHIP AND DISCIPLESHIP

First and foremost, St Helens Minster is here for the glory of God: to share his love with our town and to offer a place where people can gather to worship and to journey in faith as they find out more about becoming and being a follower of Jesus Christ.

We are unashamedly a place where we believe God will meet with those who seek him, there will therefore be in the Minster a dedicated place for quiet prayer in the Chapel, a rhythm of prayer and worship gatherings, opportunities to engage with courses and groups who study the bible and introduce the Christian Faith.

We have at our heart thriving, growing worshipping communities of people who identify St Helens Minster as their church, and through the ministry here they are encouraged to be people who pray, read and learn about Jesus, so that they will tell others the good news of Jesus Christ, serve God in the world and give of their money and time (www.ruleoflife.org.uk).

TWO

A PLACE FOR ALL PEOPLE

There was a strong sense that the building is not 'ours' it is a gift from God for the blessing of the whole community. We will therefore look to have it open, welcoming, a space people can come into. Also we will seek to encourage its use as a concert venue, an exhibition space for local artists, a town wide space where one is needed. For celebration and commiseration.

St Helens Minster should be a place where people come together. Building on our civic ministry, we will develop a programme of services designed to welcome people into the space to mark the seasons and rhythms of life including the annual Christmas Carol Service.

THREE

A PLACE OF HOSPITALITY

On the 'Thinking Minster' Vision Day, there were many mentions of 'the smell of coffee' when people were asked what they wanted the Minster to look, feel, sound and smell like. There was also a sense of the importance of it being a place of welcome, openness, encouraging people to come in and see.

This built on a strong sense throughout many months of the importance of having some kind of cafe in the Minster, and the possibility that the unique selling point of that would be our ability to open the creche area. Therefore parents and carers would feel able to bring their children. A cafe will help to break down the barriers, encouraging everyone to feel that the church is a space they are welcome to come into, to pray, to sit, to chat to someone, to ask for advice and be signposted.

Through our relationship with MitE (www.mite.org.uk) it is hoped there will be awareness around the town about community activities being held in the church, opening times and the hospitality available for people joining activities in their break time or simply dropping in for prayer and a chance to chat.

FOUR

A PLACE OF HOPE AND SAFETY.

Our location in the heart of the town centre means that we have a number of people who gravitate towards the building in search of help, refuge, guidance and care. As the Minster we are a resource, seeking to signpost them to anywhere that may be of help.

We therefore need to be updated and maintain an up-to-date register of what help is on offer to people, we need to equip volunteers to deal with enquiries and to offer people a kind, safe, pastorally sensitive place to come to when they are in need.

FIVE

A PLACE AIMING FOR CARBON NEUTRALITY

As part of the Church of England, St Helens Minster will be committed to the collective aim to be 'Net Zero carbon' by 2030. This will impact our collective life in all sorts of ways. Our impact on the climate will be taken seriously when updating infrastructure in the Church buildings and doing any building work.

We will also aim to adopt the most carbon-neutral options as we develop activities, a cafe and plan and manage events at St Helens Minster. We will support local businesses particularly those with an 'eco' slant.

A PLACE FOR CIVIC IDENTITY

St Helens Parish Church is a landmark heritage site in the town, at the heart of the town centre it already attracts visitors from far and wide. We will build on this, welcoming tourists and visitors with leaflets telling people about the building and posters displayed around which tell people about the building and its place in the wider history of the town.

As the Civic Church for St Helens, we will continue to be a place where people come to celebrate large town-wide events and we will seek to champion the borough of St Helens and its unique character. The Minster will be the Minster for the town, a place of pride: a place to remember a proud past and celebrate a hopeful future.



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“Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you... and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare”

Jeremiah 29: 7

**ST HELENS IS YOUR TOWN;
ST HELENS MINSTER IS YOUR
MINSTER... HOW CAN YOU BE PART
OF MAKING THIS HAPPEN?**



Share your ideas and thoughts with us by scanning the QR code above.



ST HELENS
PARISH CHURCH

This booklet was produced by St Helens Minster Task Force 2022