



# Building a Haven

Congregation views

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to record the views of the St Thomas' congregation on the first phase of the building project and to organise those views to inform a project vision, rooted in the vision for St Thomas' church.

The report is therefore structured to position ST THOMAS' CHURCH VISION STATEMENT at the start, record WHAT WE DID to consult the congregation, record WHAT PEOPLE SAID through mind maps and give a sense of which topics were most frequently discussed. The congregation were asked to think about the ACTIVITIES they would like to accommodate in the church; a list is provided. The report then moves on to the PRIORITIES for the project as identified by the congregation, and BRINGS TOGETHER THE VIEWS to SUGGEST A PROJECT TITLE AND VISION. FURTHER DETAILS are recorded before outlining the NEXT STEPS for the project: combining this work with consultation with community stakeholders and initial funding enquiries. Here's where you can find each bit:

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## ST THOMAS' VISION STATEMENT



## WHAT DID WE DO?

### METHODS

Online meetings, written feedback sheets and children's activities were combined to reach as many people as possible.

- 7 meetings with home groups over Zoom (40 people participating in total)
- Children's questionnaire and activity sheet in Church in a Bag
- 15 written feedback sheets for adults sent by email alongside Church in a Bag
- 17 written feedback sheets delivered to people who are not online
- 2 phone calls to people not online
- 1 further response sent from a home group discussion
- 2 further online meetings with people
- 1 open meeting on Zoom

The consultation took place between January and March 2021.

Thanks to everyone who took part!

Over 60 members of the church congregation have directly contributed to this document, and more were reached (for example, partners of people in Zoom meetings, contacts of the PCC, or those contacted but who chose not to participate).

### WHAT DID WE ASK?

Whether discussed in a home group, written on a questionnaire or feedback sheet, or aimed at children, we basically asked the same questions:

- 1) What do you think is good about St Thomas' currently?
- 2) What is the potential for the St Thomas' building?
- 3) What is the relationship between the church building and the community?
- 4) How would you like the church to look and feel, for the congregation and others?
- 5) What are the 3 main priorities?

Everyone was encouraged to first think about the St Thomas' vision of being a 'haven' (see page 3).

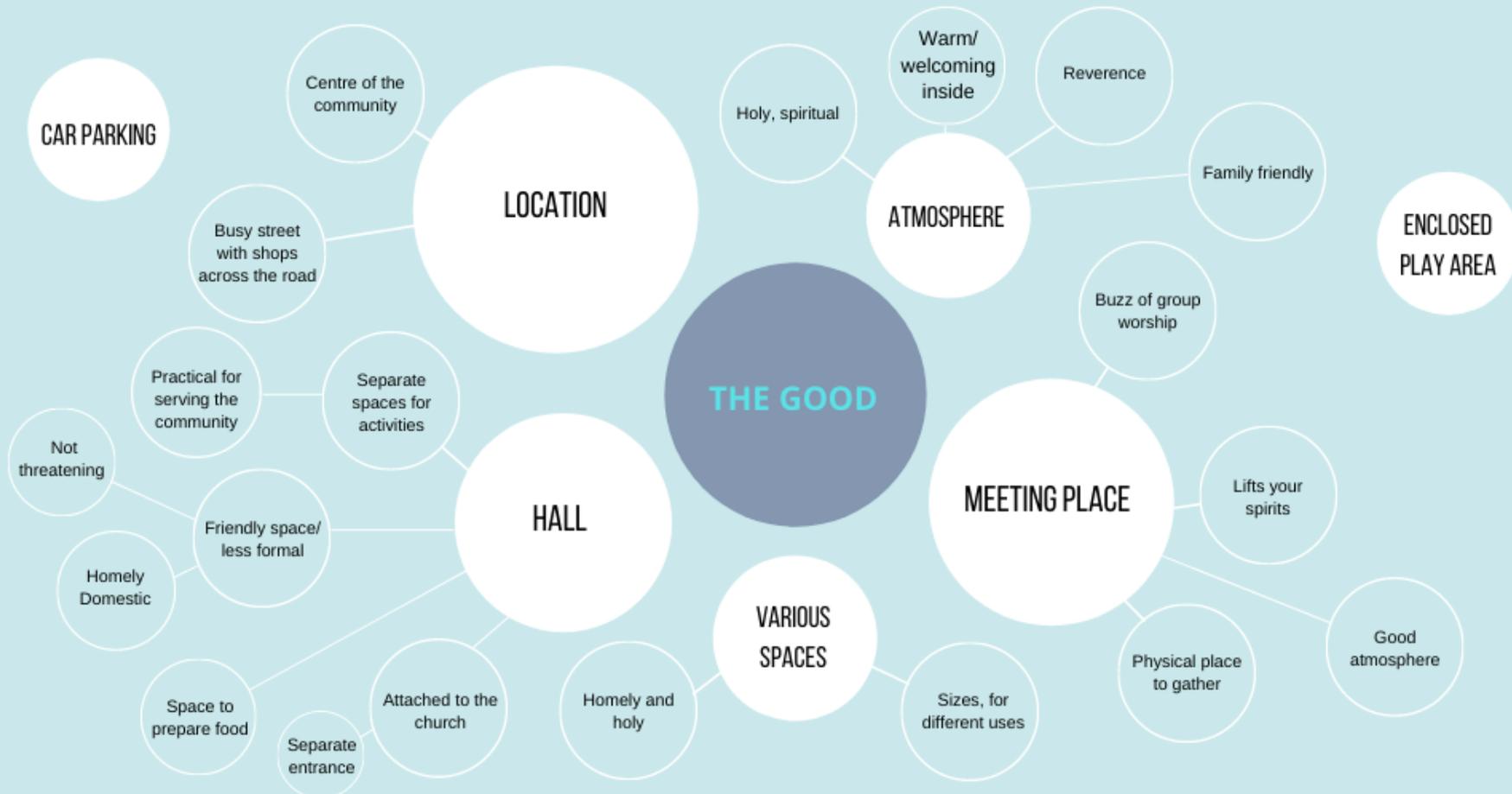
Everyone was asked to consider the whole church site: main church, the hall, the choir vestry/purple room, and the outside space.

The following 6 mind maps record all of the comments from the congregation. The bigger the circle, the more people talked about that topic!



# THE GOOD

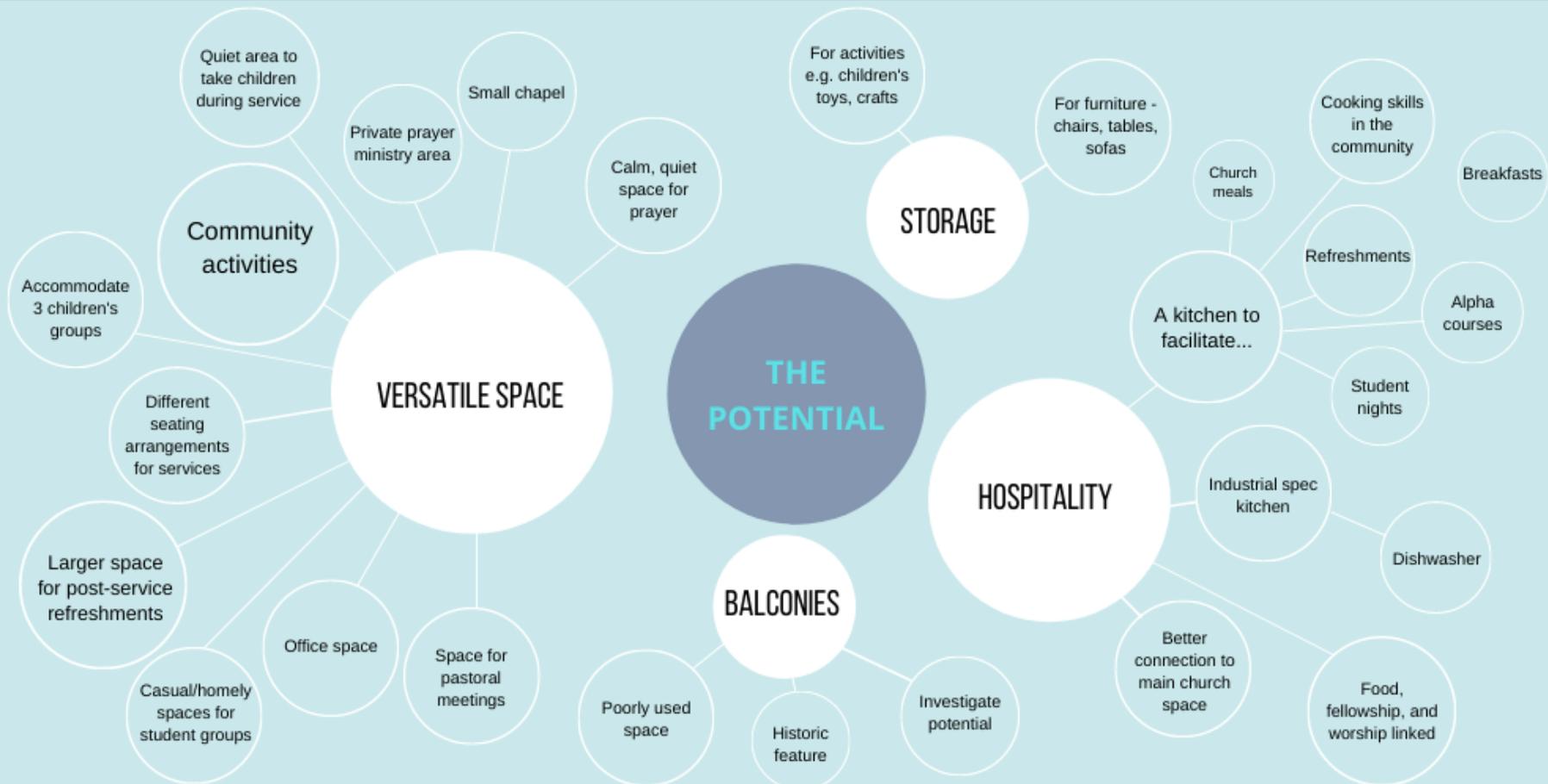
What do you think is good about St Thomas' church building currently?  
How does our church building help us to do our church activities and achieve our vision?





# THE POTENTIAL 1

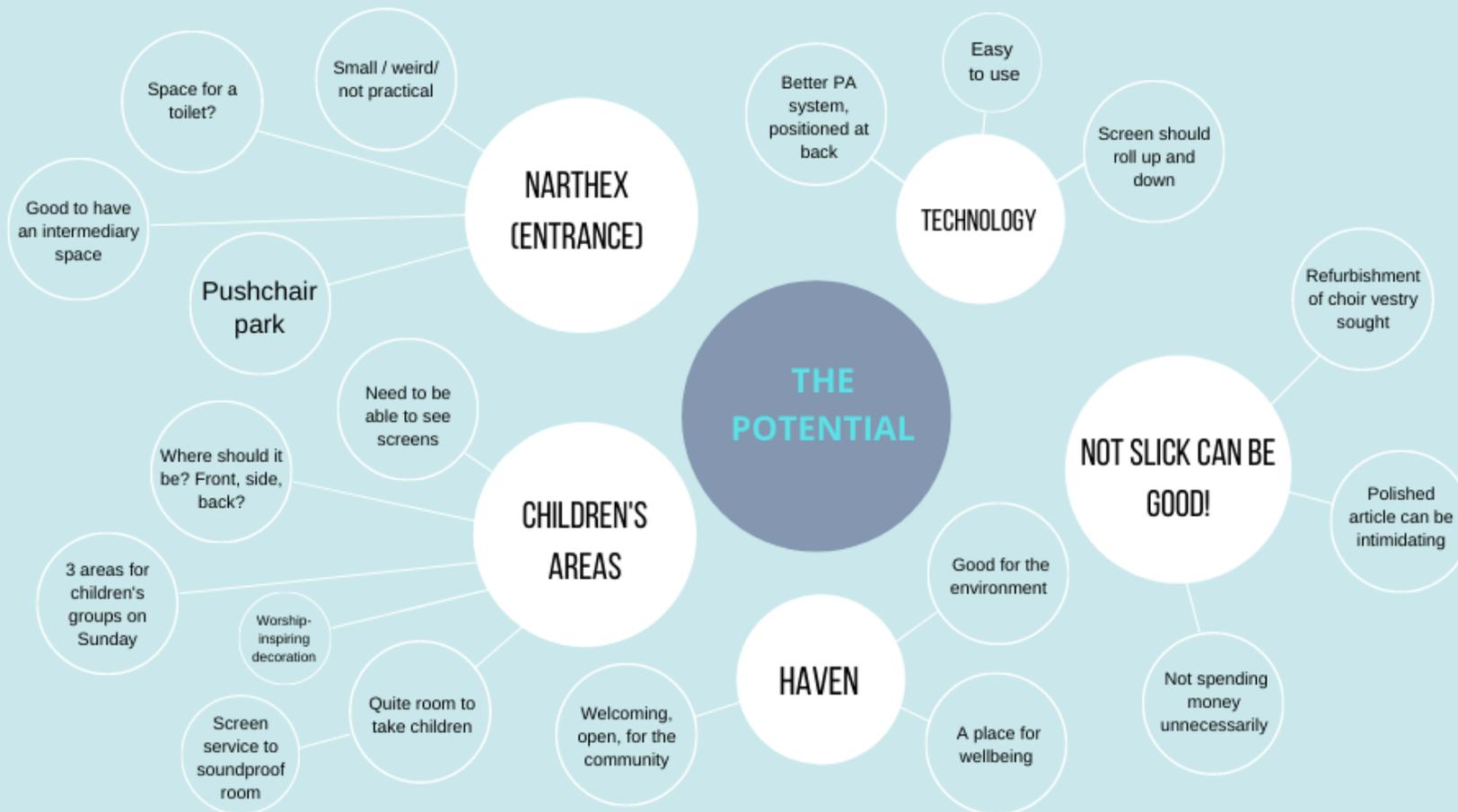
What is the potential for St Thomas' building?  
How could the building better help us to achieve our vision?  
What would you like to improve?





# THE POTENTIAL 2

What is the potential for St Thomas' building?  
How could the building better help us to achieve our vision?  
What would you like to improve?



# RELATIONSHIP TO COMMUNITY



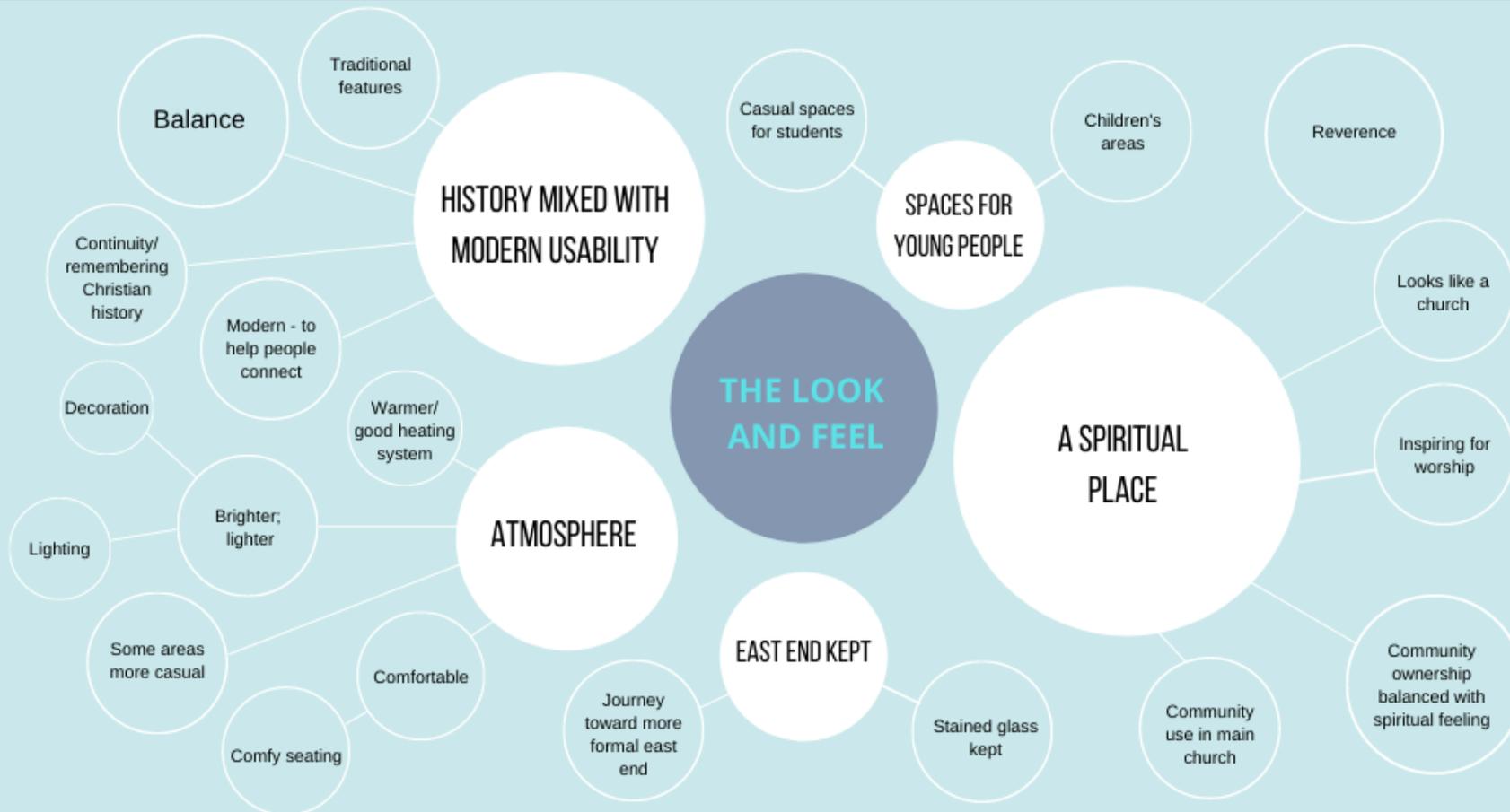
What is the relationship between the church building and the community?  
What would you like it to be?





# THE LOOK AND FEEL

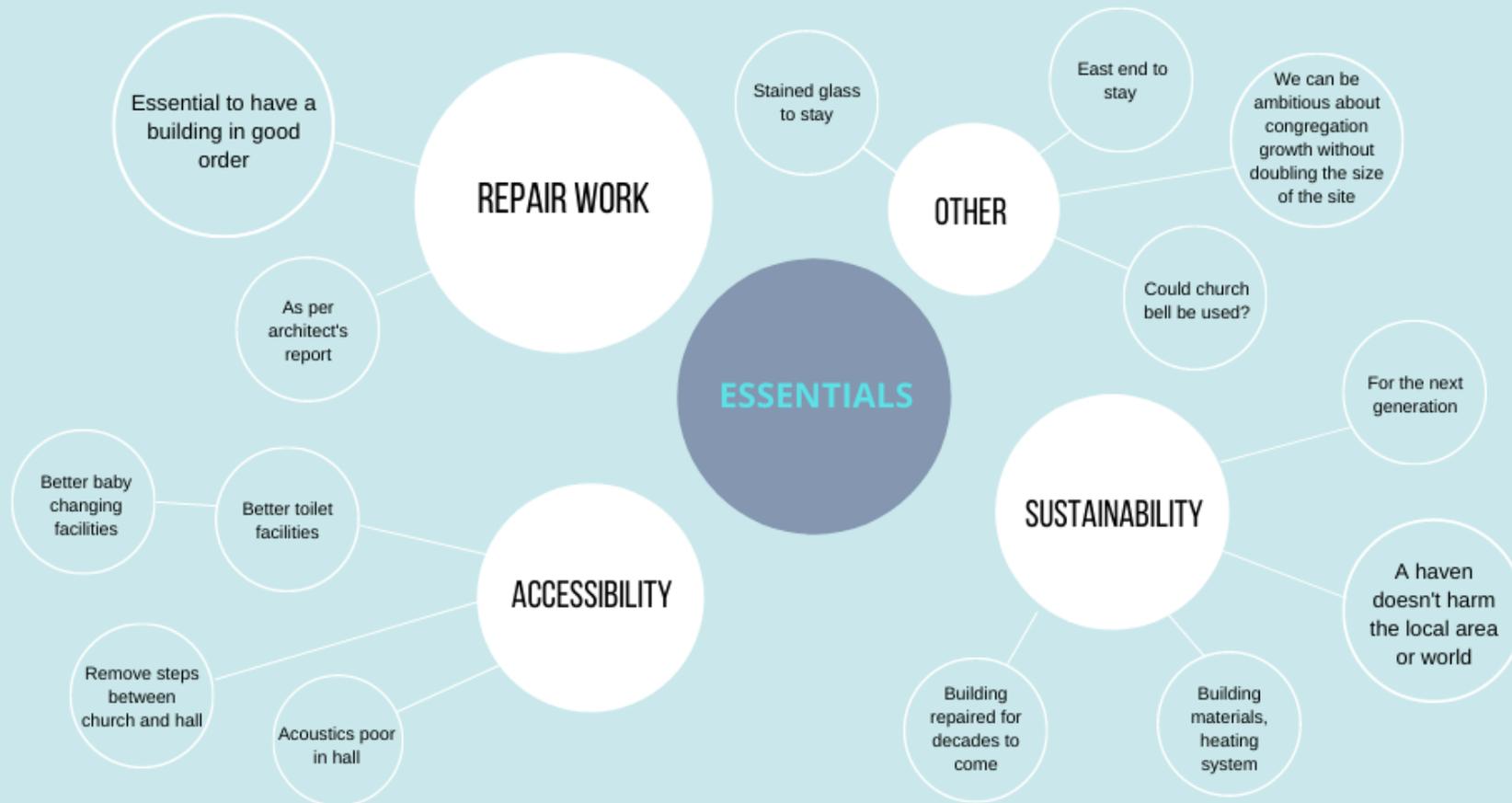
How would you like the church to look and feel, for the congregation and others?



# ESSENTIALS



The essential aspects of the project and its design, plus a free space for ideas



## ACTIVITIES LIST

Everyone was asked to think about what activities they would like to see take place in the church. These potential activities define what the revised church site should aim to accommodate.

All age services in different formats  
Refreshments after services  
Children's holiday clubs  
Continuing Encounter, Creative Café and Natter  
Meals together (banquets/feasts/celebrations)  
Christmas meal  
Bring & share lunches  
Group breakfasts  
Alpha courses (with food)  
Marriage courses (with food)  
Expanded student nights (with food)  
Drop in's with bacon sandwiches  
Pensioner lunches  
Message & massage  
Wellbeing times  
Fitness-type classes  
Self-contained flat for a caretaker

Admin centre for staff  
Office space shared with a charity or Christian group  
Lived in/worked in throughout the week so it becomes a drop-in  
Meeting room for ministry  
Private prayer ministry  
Meditation and prayer  
Councillor office/ surgery for residents  
Polling station and election day café  
Christmas tree festivals  
Tots groups  
Children's parties  
Café space outside in summer  
Quiet reflective space outside  
Safe place for children to play  
Art exhibitions  
Craft activities  
Community events – theatre/cinema/music venue/choir performances/café/restaurant/dances

We've got loads of ideas!

6 Key themes emerging: a need for better catering facilities, a wellbeing focus, the idea of the building being open throughout the week, the need for spaces for small pastoral/ministry work, better use of our outside space, and, above all else, use of the church for various community activities.

## PRIORITIES

Each group/pair were asked to give their top priorities for the building project. Here's a tally of the priorities from 9 groups:

Versatility/flexible space for services and community uses	### II
Welcoming – inside and out	###
Hospitality/kitchen/catering	III
Accessibility	III
Repair work	II
Different spaces to suit different activities	II
Sustainability	I
Spiritual place	I
Frontage	I
Resourcing with people	I

Note that some groups accepted the repair work as a given, and saw accessibility and sustainability as essential to any project, rather than listing it as a specific project priority for St Thomas'. This means the importance of accessibility, repair work and sustainability are given less emphasis in the tally.

The written feedback sheets did not ask for priorities, but the repair work, comfortable seating, heating, and office space were recurrent themes amongst older respondents.

Some of these priorities (such as 'frontage' and 'welcoming'; different spaces and versatility) could be amalgamated.

Groups were not given options for this question, so considering they could have answered any priority, there is a considerable amount of consensus here!

## BRINGING THE VIEWS TOGETHER

So we've got all the things that everyone said. It's quite a lot to take in. Thankfully, there's quite a lot of unity in the comments and contributions.

The stand-out perceptions are:

- We are located in the heart of The Groves and we want to function as the heart of The Groves too
- Our church building is a meeting place for communal worship and community activity
- We need to create a versatile space to accommodate various functions within the building. These include:
  - A large, flexible space for community activities
  - Quiet, calm space for prayer, reflection, and prayer ministry
  - Different formats for services (e.g. All age services, Mid-week communion)
  - Children's work (ideally 3 separate spaces on site)
  - A quiet place to take children during church services (potential with the service streamed into it)
  - A place for pastoral work and ministry
- We want to be able to offer more food, and increase our hospitality, so the kitchen facilities need to be improved
  - A bigger/better/more industrial kitchen
  - The connection between the kitchen and the main church building needs to be improved and steps removed for accessibility
  - We see a connection between food, fellowship and serving the community
- We want to be welcoming, inside and out
  - There are mixed views on the outside of the church, but most people feel it is not very welcoming.
  - The trees, railings, walls and doors should be considered to make the church look more open and inviting
- We are all in agreement that the main church should feel like a spiritual, special place
  - There is appreciation of the history of the church and its historic features, either for the sense of tradition and continuity of the Christian faith or for their contribution to a conducive atmosphere for worship
  - Most people would like to see the traditional features (especially the stained glass and East end) kept alongside a more modern approach to the decoration and use of the space

- We need a well-repaired building in which to worship and do God's work
  - We know we have a lot of stonework, roof, and guttering repairs to do and this will be central to our project
  - This will be a costly aspect of the project
- We consider a sustainable and accessible approach essential
  - By sustainable, we mean both environmentally-friendly and long-lasting, so that the building can be passed down to the next generations in good order
  - By accessible, we mean being accessible and welcoming to all, including removing steps, providing accessible facilities and improving acoustics. The new work will adhere to Church of England accessibility guidelines.

## SUGGESTED PROJECT TITLE AND VISION

The vision for the project is its foundation stone. It should encapsulate the aims of the project in such a way that whatever challenges occur during the life of the project, whatever budget is agreed, it can be returned to as a set of unifying aims. It should be as short as possible and ideally memorable, even for those who are tangentially associated with the project.

The concept of 'haven' is in the church vision and has repeatedly been associated with the building project in sermons and prayers. It was used at the start of each consultation meeting and feels appropriate as a keyword to summarise the project.

## BUILDING A HAVEN

Our vision for the building project is to build a haven, a place that is:

- Welcoming
- Hospitable
- Versatile
- At the heart of The Groves

We will repair our building and prioritise accessibility and sustainability.

(If we thought it better, we could make the acronym 'HAVEN')

**H**ospitable

**A**ccessible

**V**ersatile

**E**nvironmentally-friendly

**N**urturing our relationship with the community (yep, the last one is a fudge... if you can improve it, that would be crackin'!)

## FURTHER DETAIL

We've covered the headline acts, but there's detail to add from the consultation:

- Car parking
  - It's useful!
  - It conflicts with green-space
  - We need to consider how much we need
- Balconies
  - Identified as poorly-used space
  - We've been informed by the Diocese that we'll need to keep the balconies as an architectural feature of special interest
  - We can investigate what we can do with these spaces
- The enclosed play area at the back is good for children
  - It could be improved
  - Gates would need to stay/be replaced if we wanted to use the front as an outdoor play area
- We need more storage
  - We need it already, and we'll need more if we have chairs and tables to store for a flexible space
- Having spaces with different atmospheres is useful
  - We're all agreed that the main church should have a sense of reverence and respect about it, but having more casual areas for students, or support groups, or small groups, is beneficial too
  - The entrance area to the church might feel more relaxed than the east end. It should be a good area for welcoming people to services and might have practical functions
  - We should think carefully about the spaces we want children to use. They should be inspiring for connecting with God

We might go back to any of the comments represented in the mind maps (pages 5 – 10) as we move into the detailed design stage.

## NEXT STEPS

Once we've defined our broad vision, we can talk to local stakeholders in the community and think about how to fund our project.

- 1) Gather previous work. There's been a City of York Council project on regenerating The Groves in the past few years. It didn't amount to much practical change, but we might be able to draw upon their research. There's also our previous research.
- 2) Identify local stakeholders (people who might use our building, help fund the project, or work with us) and talk to them about what they would like to see happen at St Thomas'.
- 3) Draw together the congregation views reported here and the community views from the above consultation, and bring it to a...
- 4) Project Design workshop

Invite people to a workshop where we move from the broad vision to project design. This would be good to schedule in late June 2021.

Alongside these, the PCC has voted in favour of an application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. We will need to put in an inquiry or expression of interest form first, and if we are permitted to apply, we can then make a funding application. If we're not accepted, we'll have to create an alternative fundraising strategy.