
ST ETHELDREDA'S, OLD HATFIELD
THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WEST END

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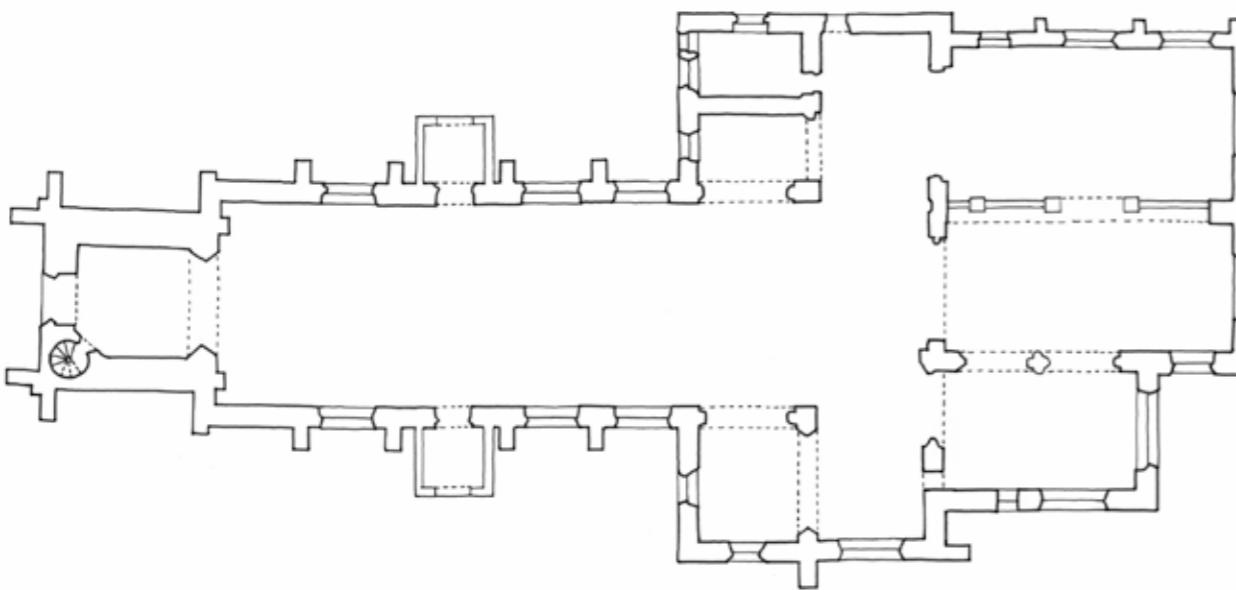
INTRODUCTION

Dating back to the thirteenth century, the Grade I-listed church of St Etheldreda has stood at the heart of the Hatfield community for 800 years. Today, weekly service attendances are growing, it is a popular venue for weddings, baptisms and civic services, it hosts regular concerts and its historical and artistic significance draws visitors from near and far.

Yet, the church is acutely compromised in its ability to serve its community and showcase its treasures by its want of facilities. It lacks toilets, a proper kitchen, a meeting and activities room and exhibition space. This deficiency, though, will be addressed by current proposals to redevelop the west end of the building. The scheme will create a new, enclosed multi-purpose parish room with mezzanine floor and associated amenities. The addition will not only allow St Etheldreda's to better fulfil its existing role, but will also bring opportunities to host new activities and bring new audiences into the church.

This prospectus introduces the rich history of St Etheldreda's, sets out the scope of the plans, the need for the alterations and summarises the benefits it will bring in the near and long-term for parishioners, the wider Hatfield populace and visitors.

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SCALE OF FEET



HISTORY & HERITAGE

Few parish churches can equal St Etheldreda's rich links to illustrious figures from British history, from kings to cardinals to prime ministers (three no less). Inside its walls are artworks by some of Jacobean England's most pioneering sculptors and spearheads of the Victorian Arts and Crafts Movement.

From its hilltop position adjacent to the fifteenth-century Bishop's Palace, St Etheldreda's overlooks Old Hatfield. It is, in fact, the second church on the site, but the only remnant of this predecessor is a small Purbeck memorial to a thirteenth-century knight. The current church dates to 1240 or thereabouts. Although heavily altered by the Victorians, who rebuilt the nave, the chancel and transepts survive from this early period. Later in the thirteenth century, the transepts were altered with the unusual addition of small western chapels, built with particularly

fine craftsmanship. The deeply cut mouldings and large stiff-leaf carved capitals of the arch leading to the chapel of the south transept are exemplary.

In the following centuries, the church was enlarged and enriched as the great and the good of Hertfordshire and beyond left their mark on St Etheldreda's. The west tower, dating to the fifteenth century, is thought to have been added by John Morton, Bishop of Ely (later appointed Archbishop of Canterbury and a Cardinal) who was responsible for constructing the Old Palace nearby. The Brocket Chapel, to the south of the chancel, is a taste of Tudor history. Although originally built by the Fortescue family in the thirteenth century, the chapel has come to be named after the plucky Hertfordshire merchant, Sir John Brocket, whose tomb is on the south wall. A Member of Parliament knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1577, in 1588 he marched a band of local



Far left: Tomb of Sir John Brocket; Left: Tomb of Elizabeth Brocket and Agnes Saunders; Following page: Tomb of Robert Cecil, 1st Earl of Salisbury

men to Tilbury to resist the landing of the Spanish Armada. The mettlesome venture is commemorated by a wall monument (1598) carved with the Brocket shield, above which hangs his helmet, testimony to his service to the Crown. Sir John's tomb is, though, eclipsed by the larger one of his wife and mother-in-law (1612). Dame Elizabeth Brocket and her mother, Agnes Saunders, are depicted as painted effigies, lying stiffly recumbent upon a tomb chest propped upon their elbows, set within an arched recess adorned with Renaissance foliage. The colouration, the heraldic shields on the upper storey and the architectural framework are prime illustrations of Elizabethan funerary monuments.

On the north side of the chancel, St Etheldreda's boasts even more impressive monuments. Separated from the chancel by a rare Renaissance arcade, the Salisbury

Chapel was added circa 1610 as a mortuary chapel to hold the tomb of Robert Cecil, first Earl of Salisbury, who died in 1612.

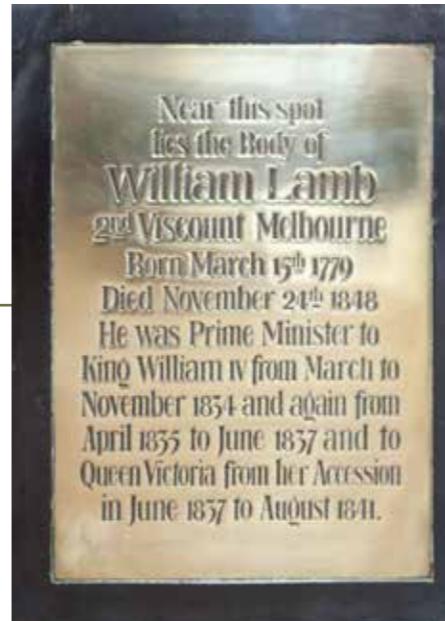
Cecil was amongst the foremost statesmen of his day: Secretary of State to Elizabeth I, Lord High Treasurer to James I, appointed to the Order of the Garter in 1606. His tomb was one of the most splendid of its age. With a price tag of £460, no expense was spared; the cost was higher than that of building the chapel itself. Cecil employed the finest craftsmen, namely Simon Basyll, Surveyor of the King's Works, and Maximilian Colt, the King's Master Sculptor who designed Elizabeth I's tomb at Westminster Abbey. Indeed, the monument would not look out of place at Westminster. Carved in white marble, the Earl lies in effigy, dressed in state robes, wearing the Order of the Garter



and holding his staff of office in his right hand. The black marble slab upon which it rests is supported by finely sculpted, kneeling personifications of the four Cardinal Virtues: Temperance, Justice, Fortitude and Prudence. Between them, lying on the tomb's black marble base is another figure, this time of a cadaver on a rush mat. Whilst to modern eyes, this may evoke something of the macabre, to contemporaries it would have carried a clear message of the transience of worldly rank and glory, since rich and poor alike end up the same after death. This so-called double-bier tomb was the height of fashion amongst some Jacobean aristocratic circles. Fusing a fifteenth-century Gothic template with classical statuary and French panache, the Cecil monument illustrates a leap in stylistic freedom compared to the Brocket tombs.



With such grandeur before them, a visitor would be forgiven for missing the two floor tombs that flank the Earl, yet, in their way these are no less impressive. To the south lies the aforementioned knight, a special survivor from the thirteenth century, his head, spear and armoured legs visible beneath a vast shield. To the north, lies the shrouded marble effigy of Sir William Curril, Warden of the royal estate at Hatfield. Carved in 1617, it is an affecting and original figure. Sir William is shown twisting, as though overcome in death, although some have suggested the pose is a play on his name: a Curril in life, he curls in death. The sensitive modelling is demonstrative of the skill of its carver, Nicholas Stone, the leading master-mason of the early seventeenth century. Stone, as Master Mason to the Crown, built up one of the largest studios of the time, specialising in tomb sculpture, and his influence spread countrywide.



Opposite: 13th-century knight, Salisbury Chapel; Above left: Plaque to William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne; Above right: Effigy of Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury



The richness of the decoration of the Salisbury Chapel makes a fitting home for these three remarkable tombs. The Chapel is the cumulative product of several centuries and nations. Built in the early seventeenth century to designs by Francis Carter (it is the only part of the church to be faced in stone), it was augmented by eighteenth-century Flemish ironwork brought from Amiens Cathedral, then lavishly decorated by Italian craftsmen in 1875. The nineteenth-century renovation stands in contrast to the Gothickisation of most Victorian renovations. Under the aegis

of the third Marquess of Salisbury, the interior was transformed with marble, mural, alabaster and Salviati mosaic embellishment by Italian workmen (the Marquess was to employ Italian painters later in the decade at Hatfield House). The early seventeenth-century Tuscan arcade was extended by one bay and its soffits and spandrels were richly painted. The Salisbury Chapel became a little corner of Italy in Hertfordshire.

The rest of St Etheldreda's may not be able to compete in opulence with the Salisbury Chapel, but its interest does



Above left:
Memorial to John
Heaviside; Above
right: Stained glass
by Christopher
Whall; Opposite:
South transept
window

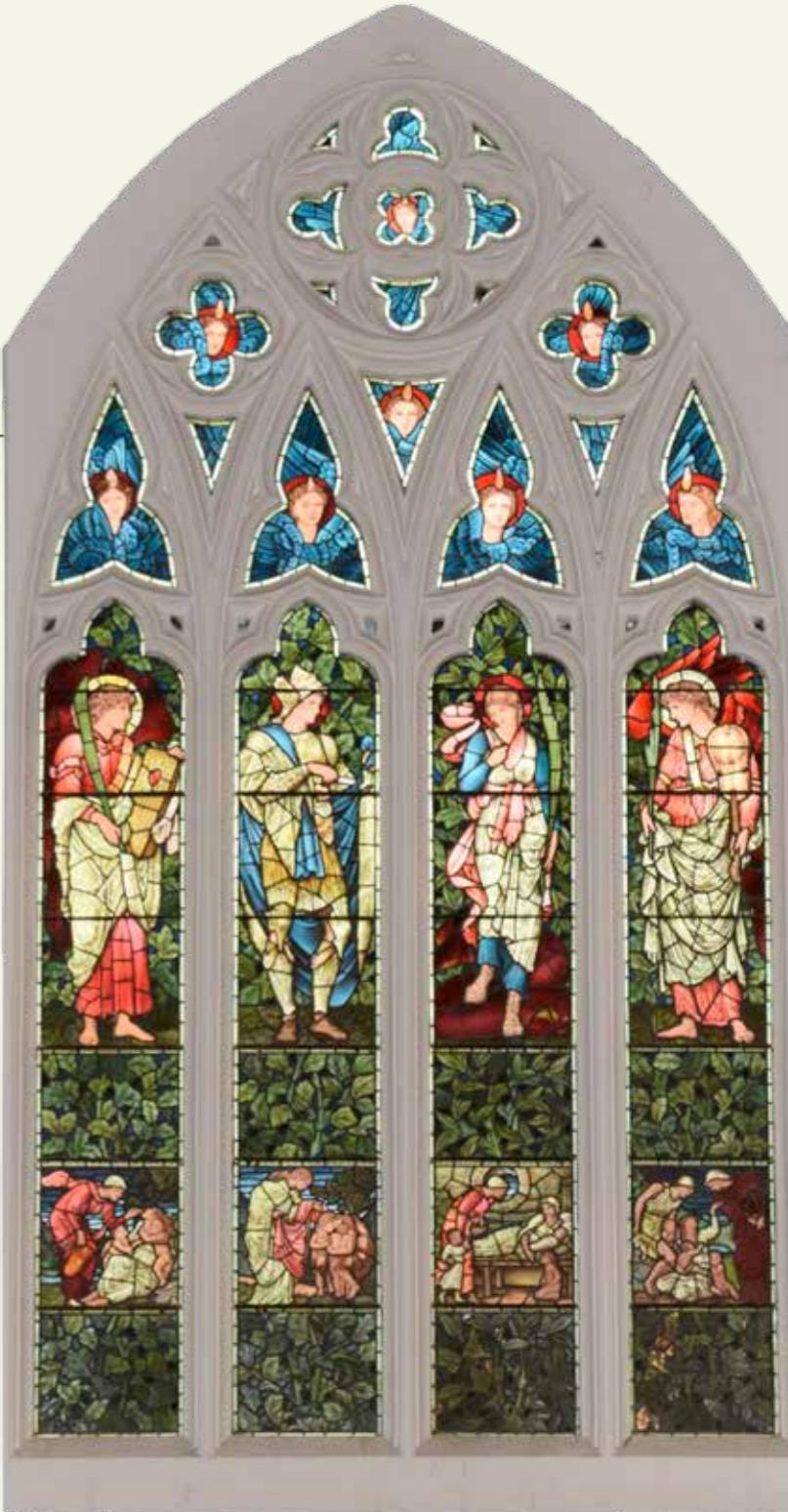
not end there. The north transept carries a small brass plaque commemorating Charles I's visit to the church to attend mass in 1647 whilst in custody of the Parliamentarian army en route to London. In the south transept, a plate behind the pulpit records the burial place of Sir William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne, twice prime minister and political instructor to the young Queen Victoria. Yet another prime minister has his cenotaph in the chancel. Robert Gascoyne Cecil, the third Marquess responsible for the remodelling of the Salisbury Chapel, is fittingly commemorated in a



monument (1909) between the Chapel and chancel. Three times prime minister to Victoria when the British Empire was at its zenith, the third Marquess is buried in the Cecil family burial ground immediately east of the churchyard. His bronze effigy in the church is an identical copy of one within Westminster Abbey. St Etheldreda's is brimful of memorials. Its walls and windows celebrate the history of Old Hatfield and its surroundings through the lives of its inhabitants: the south transept window (1894), designed by Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-

Jones, pays tribute to the Drage family; a tripartite window (1920) opposite, by the leading stained-glass artist of the Arts and Crafts Movement Christopher Whall, commemorates three Cecil brothers killed in World War I; meanwhile, the particularly fine epitaph (1787) to John Heaviside in the nave, adorned by classicised allegorical figures of death, records that he, 'to the manifold advantage of this place, and the general benefit of no narrow circuit, was for more than thirty years a resident surgeon in this Town'.

St Etheldreda's is no ordinary parish church. It is a building rich in treasures, many of which occupy important places in the trajectory of British history and art, that deserve to be explored. The transformation of the west end is an opportunity to celebrate this heritage, showcasing and sharing its story with new audiences and the community for years to come.



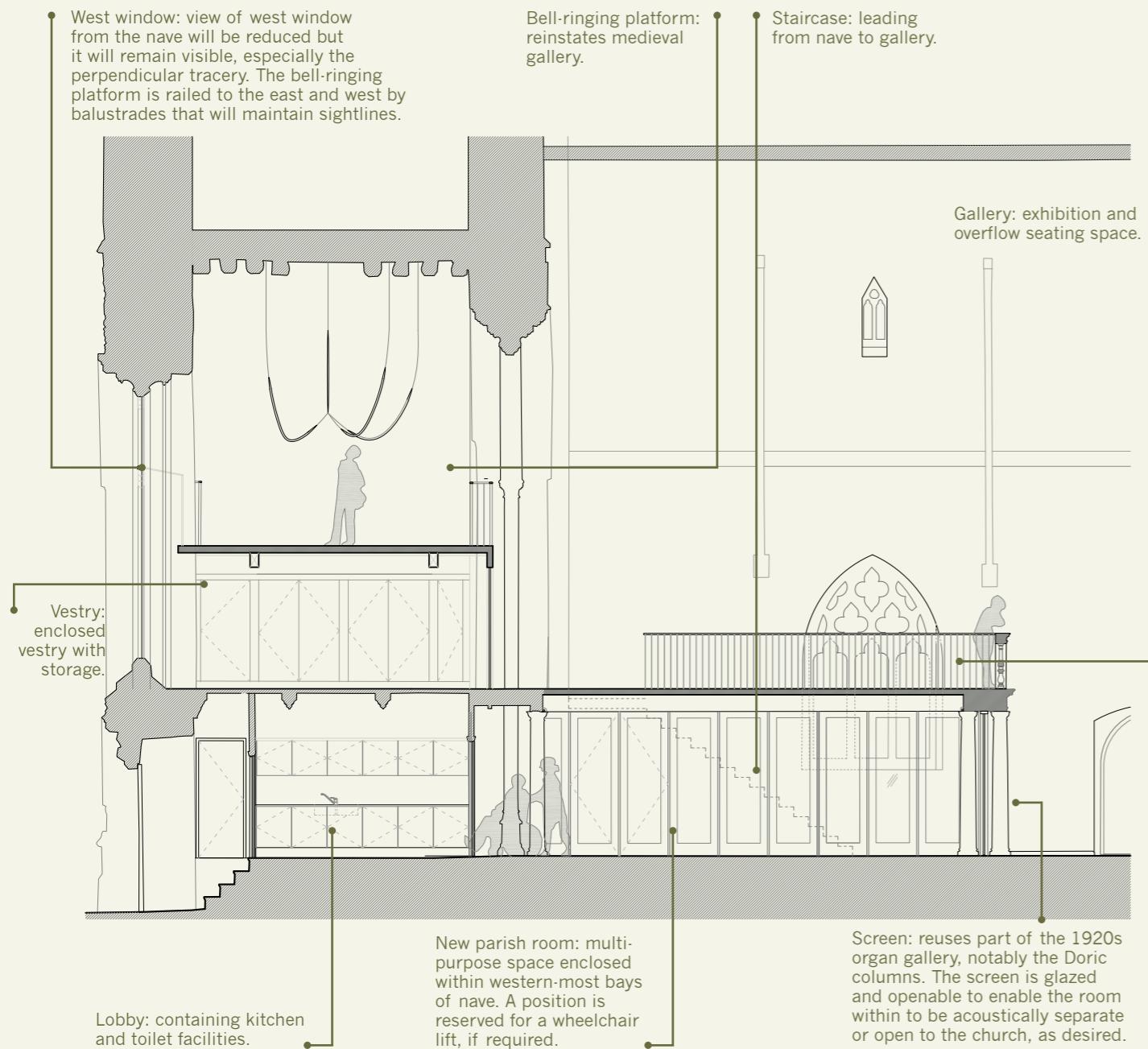


THE PROPOSALS

- Enclosed parish room
- Kitchen
- Three toilets (one accessible)
- Choir vestry
- Gallery
- Bell-ringing platform

Under the plans, the west end of the church will be reworked to create an enclosed space spanning the last two bays of the nave and medieval tower. The nave bays will be transformed into a new parish room separated from the main body of the church by a glazed screen constructed using the timber Doric columns of the existing 1920s organ gallery. The screen doors could be pulled back to open the parish room to the rest of the building, to provide space for additional seating during busy services or events.

The parish room leads westward through double doors into the base of the tower, which will be renovated to house a kitchen and three much-needed toilets (one of which is a disabled toilet). This lobby is also accessible through the church's now-rarely used fifteenth-century west portal, enabling



Opposite:
Proposed cross
section

independent access to the new facilities during services and an additional ceremonial entrance for processions throughout the length of the church.

The lobby leads via a spiral tower staircase to an enclosed, first-floor vestry, with oak cupboards to store the choir vestments. A glazed oak screen separates it from a generous gallery, open to the main body of the church that is railed by an oak balustrade evocative of the galleries found in the great halls of Jacobean houses. This balcony area, connected to the nave by a wide flight of stairs, will provide a multi-functional display space and overflow seating for large services.

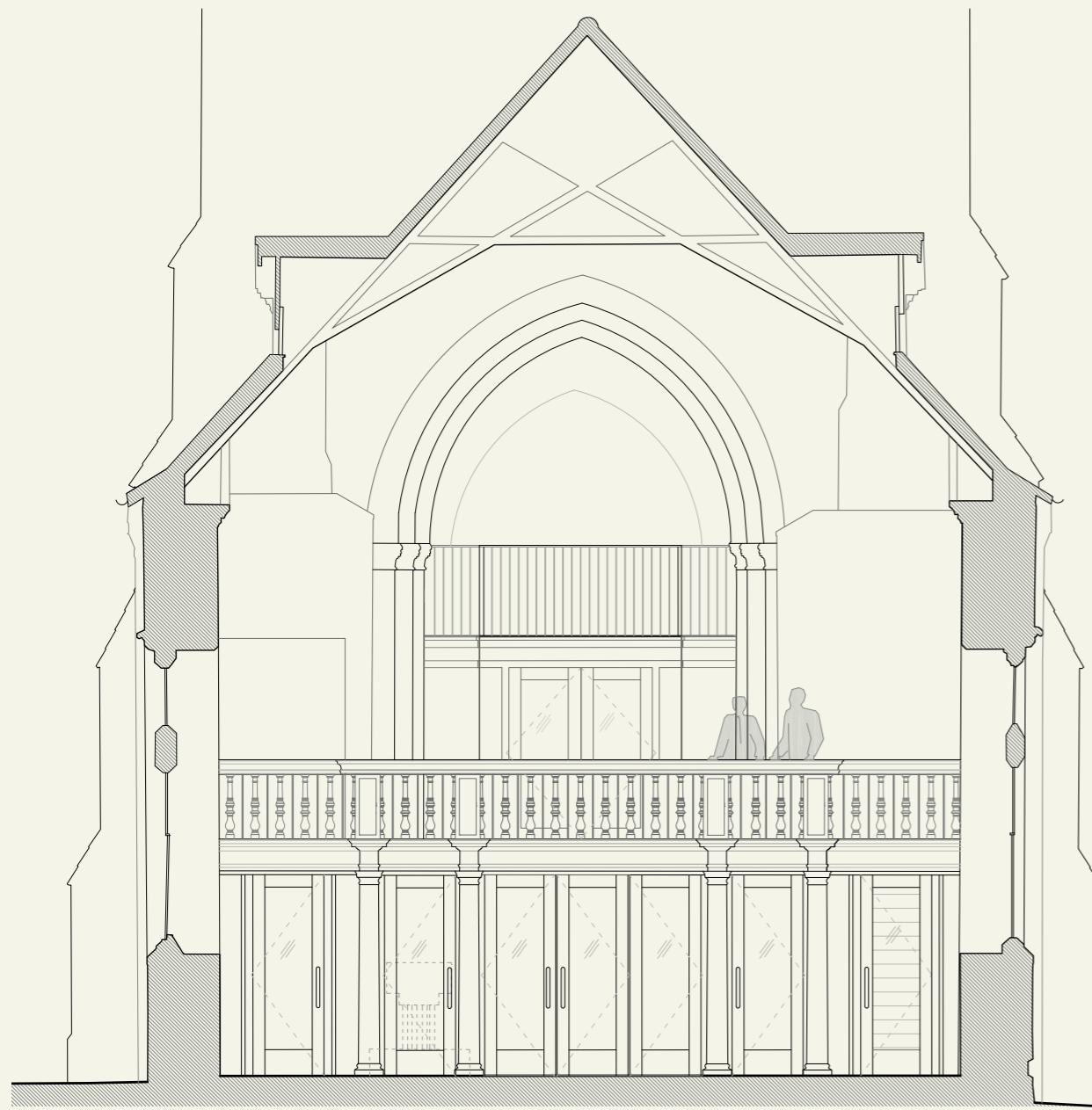
The ceiling of the vestry supports the final element of the scheme: a bell-ringing gallery. The new floor recreates a hitherto lost arrangement of the medieval

church, as indicated by the presence of a blocked doorway at this level that the scheme will reinstate to give access to the tower stair.

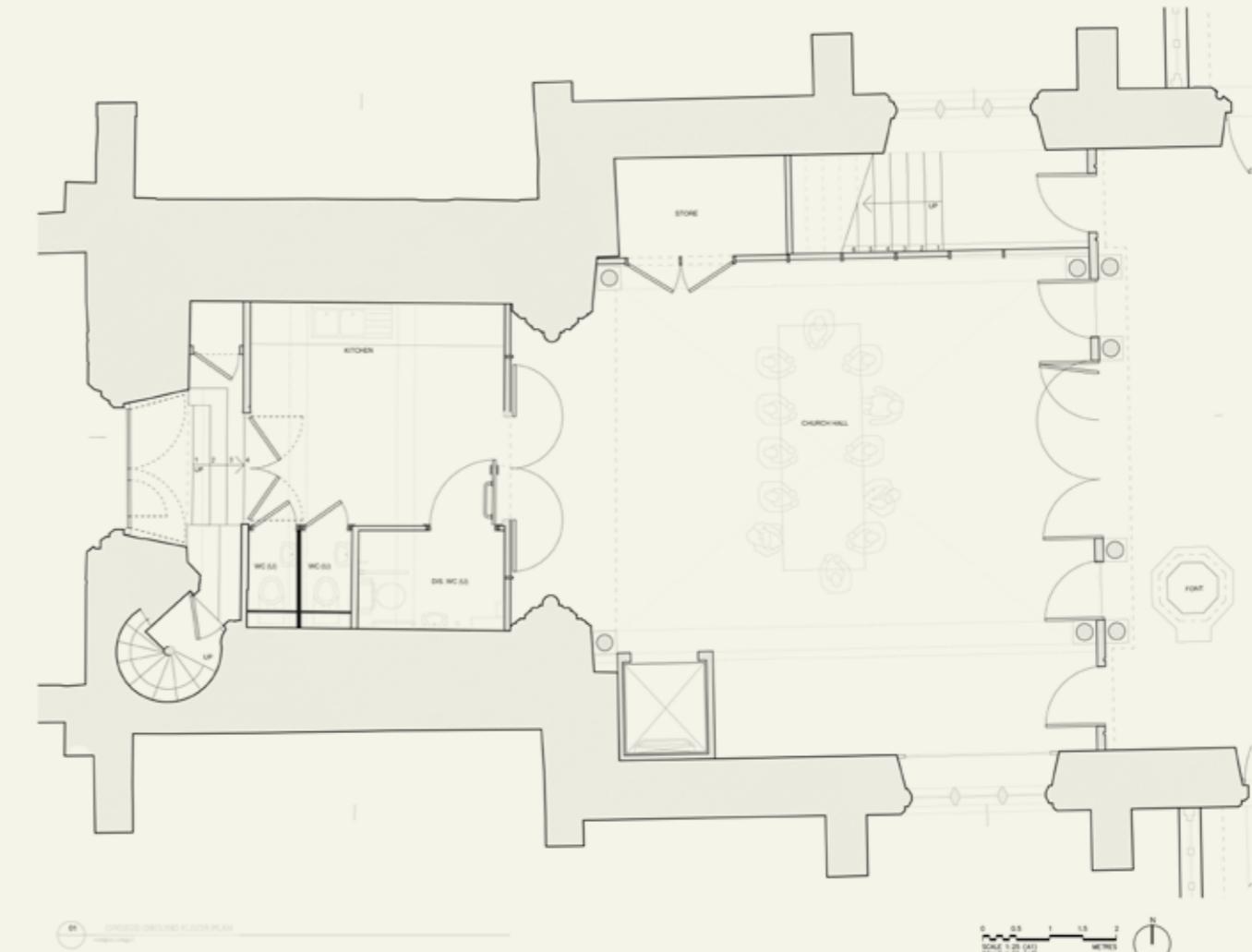
The scheme will thus deliver three tiers of usable space to greatly increase the functionality and serviceable floor area of the church. Sensitively conceived, the plans transform the currently cluttered west end of St Etheldreda's to yield a lasting positive legacy for the church and the town.

The designs have been prepared by leading historic building specialists, Richard Griffiths Architects, whose previous projects include Lambeth Palace and St Albans Cathedral. During stakeholder consultations to date, the proposals have been well received. Historic England is supportive of the scheme.

Section, looking westward



Ground-floor plan





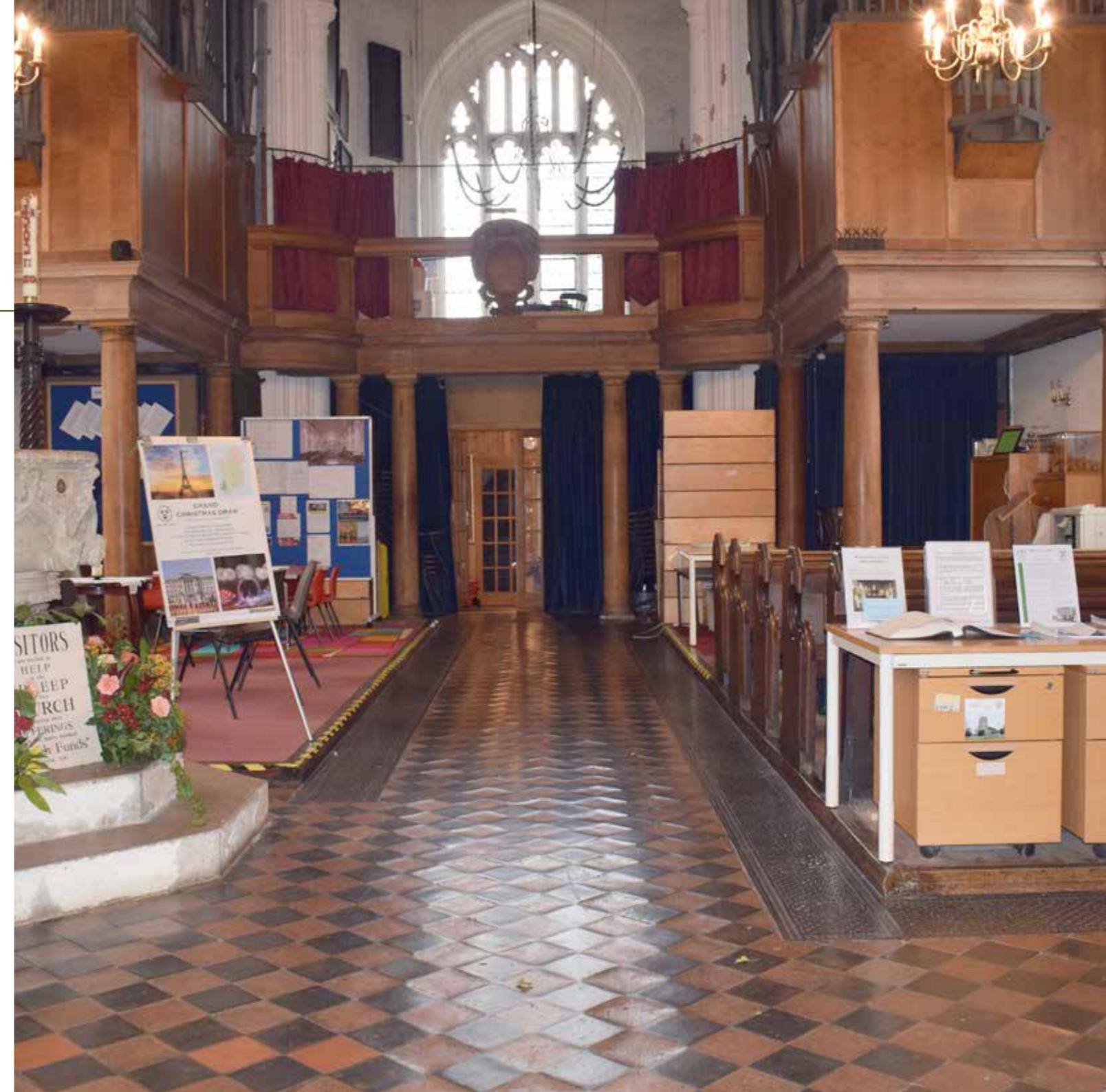
THE NEED

Opposite: Current interior, looking westwards;
Following pages:
Current west end and kitchen facilities

St Etheldreda's is an anchor in its community. While the parish is not large (about 120 on the electoral role), its Sunday services draw averages of 80-100 attendees, and figures are growing. Outside of regular worship and prayer, it stages concerts and, within its church hall, it hosted various groups including Scouts, mothers and toddlers and the local bat society. However, it could do much more.

The inflexibility of the building has been a challenge for many years. It has only the most basic of kitchenettes, no community space, a cramped vestry and no toilets, the latter of which has been a long-standing problem that can deter potential congregation members and limits the capabilities for wider community use. The issue is now acute: the nearby church hall, which

St Etheldreda's has leased for the past five decades, is no longer available for use. The hall provided toilets, a full kitchen and a space for meetings, social functions and the Sunday school. Without it, St Etheldreda's has an urgent need for alternative facilities, the absence of which will inhibit both its growth as a church and its place as a community and cultural amenity.



AN OPPORTUNITY

The west end redevelopment will prove an immeasurable asset to the church's existing daily activities. The large enclosed parish room will meet a pressing need for Sunday School accommodation and other meetings, which would be able to proceed at the same time as services within the main body of the Church thanks to the glazed screen. But the project will also open doors to new initiatives and innovation.

A COMMUNITY ASSET

The multi-purpose space has the potential to host a variety of different events, from yoga lessons to art groups to evening classes. In the first instance, it has the promise to generate revenue for the church via rental fees; in the second instance, it will deliver a vibrant, flexible base for the people of Old Hatfield to use in ways that reflect their

Community-run activities that could take place within the new parish room include:

- Parent and baby groups
- Luncheon clubs for older residents
- Brownies/Guides
- Yoga, pilates and mindfulness classes
- Youth club for primary-school children
- Support group for dementia sufferers
- Book clubs
- Art groups

creativity, needs and ideas. As a parish space, the addition has the potential to become a meaningful part of community life. Numerous activities, diverse ages and multiple sectors of the population will be brought together under one roof. Essentially, the ambition is to support the town's social infrastructure to make for a stronger community.

MUSIC

Hatfield already has a strong musical tradition. St Etheldreda's is the home of two growing choirs, it supports choral and organ scholarships and hosts regular amateur and professional concerts. Yet, with only a cramped vestry for the choir, no rehearsal room for musicians and, of course, no toilets for concert-goers or performers, St Etheldreda is unable to fulfil its musical ambitions. The proposals will give the

choir a spacious, well-equipped vestry, a new ringing platform to improve bell ringing and better aptitude for staging performances, in terms of rehearsal space, hospitality and overflow seating. The new facilities will enable the town to build its musical legacy, as part of the vision for a more dynamic place to live and visit.

HERITAGE

St Etheldreda's sits amongst an internationally renowned group of listed buildings, including the medieval Bishop's Palace, the seventeenth-century Hatfield House and the smaller-scale domestic architecture of Old Hatfield. It boasts artworks by leading Jacobean sculptors and Arts and Crafts stained glass pioneers within a Grade I-listed structure that dates back to the thirteenth century. It has associations



with royalty, prelates and prime ministers; a roll call of illustrious figures has worshipped in it, from Charles I to Samuel Pepys. But the church remains under-appreciated and under-visited by the tens of thousands who tour the House and Palace every year. The redevelopment of the west end is a chance to rectify this.

The addition will, for the first time, give the church a place to showcase its history and heritage. The new first-floor gallery will endow St Etheldreda with the space to display a permanent exhibition on its fascinating past and architectural and artistic heritage, with the potential also to hold additional temporary exhibitions. Doing so would help to embed the building within the Hatfield House–Bishop’s Palace tourist trail, encouraging greater appreciation of this

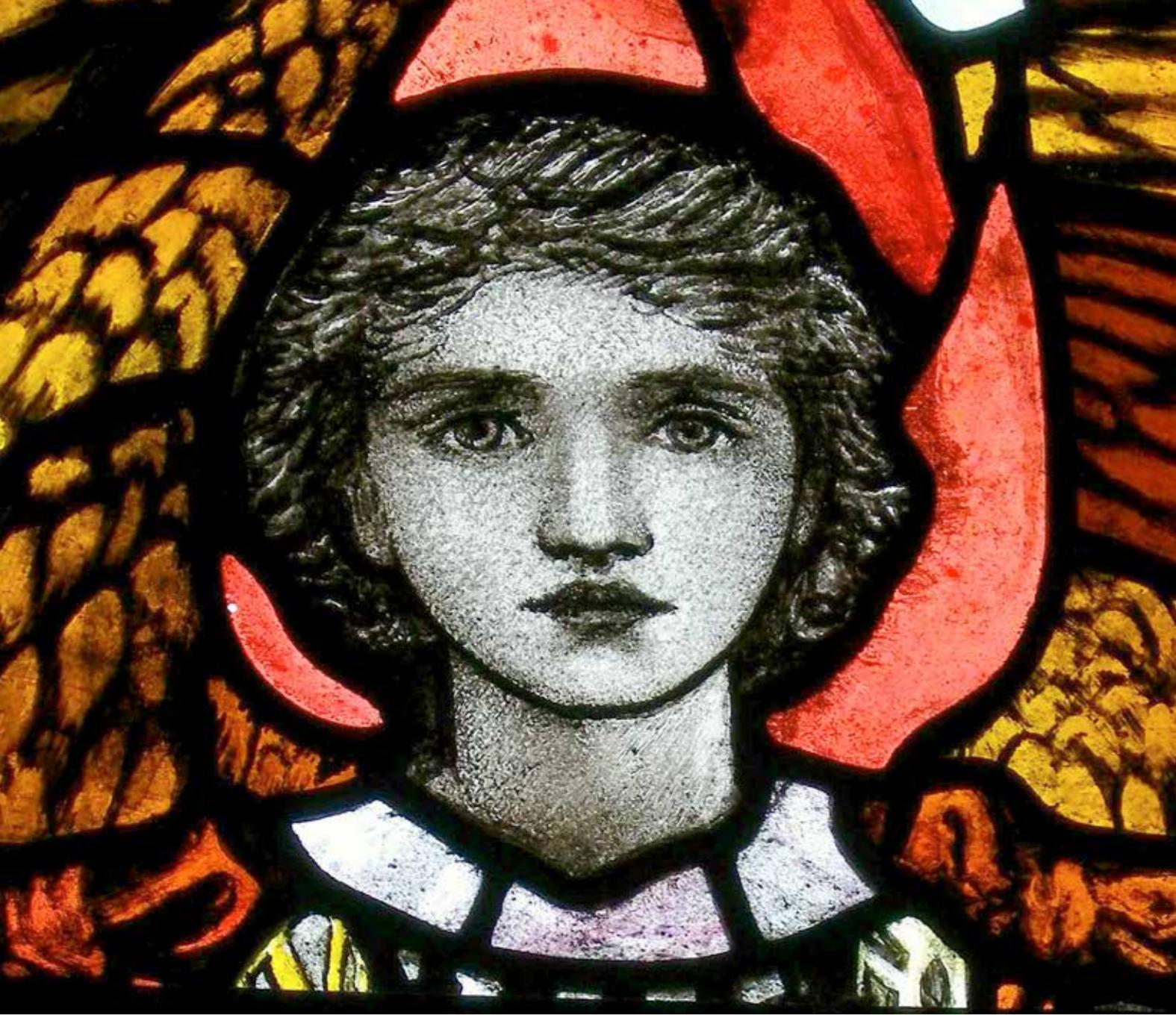
hidden gem. Its use will, though, extend beyond the tourist season. The gallery’s display will be a year-round means of engaging the curiosity and input of local residents. Art trails, temporary artist exhibitions or school displays could take place within the gallery, opening up St Etheldreda’s to a stream of new audiences.

St Etheldreda’s has a transformative part to play in the cultural life of the town and region, and the redevelopment will help it to achieve this. Closer inspection of the church and its history is a rewarding experience, and the gallery is a means to stimulate it.



The west end project belongs to a vision for a more vibrant, prosperous Old Hatfield. As a community space and visitor destination, it will contribute socially, economically and physically to the development of the town. The facilities it will deliver will benefit parishioners and visitors alike, allowing the church to better discharge the functions it enacts now, but also step into new roles.

Over the past 800 years, each era has left its own mark upon St Etheldreda's. The transformation of the west end will be the newest chapter in its story, one that cements its commitment to its community and confirms it as a local treasure of national importance.



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