

The Parochial Church Council and congregation of **St Mary's Church, Alveley**, propose using **Alveley Methodist Church** ('Chapel') in ways that would both be in keeping with the historical and traditional contributions the Chapel and its congregation have made to village life since the Chapel was built in 1862, and be in line with the current and future needs of the present-day local community, by providing community services and activities in a welcoming, friendly and inclusive atmosphere.

We have a **vision** to **preserve** the Christian presence in the village that has been provided by the Chapel over the years, to **promote** community life in a modern world and to **demonstrate** God's love to the people of Alveley in practical ways. We are committed to promoting a unified Christian message of peace and reconciliation and to rejecting any inter-denominational jealousies.

As the scope of our activity develops, we would strive to **work harmoniously** with existing **village clubs, societies and associations**, being careful to provide additional activities and services, avoiding duplication or rivalry with other village facilities. We are committed to ensuring that our plans are entirely in accordance with the Chapel's designated Town and Country Planning Class DI use.

### Distinctive Purpose

Alveley is well-endowed with good public buildings, especially

- **Village Hall and The Pavilion**, large practical meeting places booked from time to time by organisations and individuals for events, interest groups, functions etc.
- **St Mary's Church**, a large sacred space, open every day and used from time to time for public worship and community events.

**Our vision** for the Chapel is to be mainly an **Open-house** or **Drop-in** venue.

It would be distinctive from Village Hall and Pavilion as a **small** venue, open **most days** for **much of the time**, and distinctive from St Mary's as a **practical** space able to be **heated and warm for most of the day**.

**Our plans** for the use of the Chapel have both continuity and development:

1. **Immediate use** without alteration, allowing present community users to continue their meetings and activities as usual.
2. **Medium-term use** with increasing diversities as a **drop-in** and **youth** centre, needing some alterations especially for heating and insulation.
3. **Longer-term development**, anticipating substantial internal modernisation and alteration, guided by the experience of diverse use as below; also relocating some present church activities.

## 1. Plans for Immediate Use

The Chapel and grounds are currently used regularly by a number of village groups. We would encourage these activities to start up again as soon as possible after the acquisition of the Chapel in order to ensure as little disruption to their functioning as possible – including:

- The Alveley Singers, with approximately 40 members, meeting weekly for choir practice.
- Oasis, a monthly drop-in coffee morning, open to all and any, and frequented regularly by up to 40 people each month, with proceeds from the sale of teas, coffees and cakes being donated to charity. The Severn Strollers and Striders group of walkers and ramblers systematically use Oasis as the perfect finishing point for their outings.
- Garden Allotments in the Chapel grounds.

Our immediate plans for use also include transfer to the Chapel of certain community activities currently held in St Mary's Church, wherever it is thought that the Chapel would provide a more suitable and welcoming venue for them. Such activities could include the monthly meeting of the Film and Lunch Club, the Sunday morning Children's Club, and the weekly Parents & Toddlers group.

We consider that all such activities could be started up and fully functional immediately after the purchase of the Chapel and the completion of any initial necessary repairs. As these are existing, on-going activities, there are no funding issues and staffing would be assured, as at present, by volunteers.

## 2. Medium-Term Development and Future Vision

This second phase is to be started as soon as our immediate plans have been implemented, consulting with local agencies. But crucial between October and April is the insulation of the Chapel to high standards, and this is likely to be our priority for initial grant-aided work – see *Funding* below.

We envisage developing use of the Chapel's facilities in two main directions:

- **Extended youth work**, providing a meeting place for the young people of the village and the church for a variety of after-school and evening organised events and activities as well as informal "drop-in" sessions, providing a safe and friendly place to relax with friends with access to computer games and other indoor games (such as table football & table tennis), internet access and help with homework. Further developments could include the running of holiday clubs for primary school children. This exciting development would provide a new and much-needed facility for the village's young people, for whom there is, sadly, no current provision. It would also be entirely in keeping with the original vision of the congregation of Alveley Methodist Chapel to minister to the young people in the village.
- **All-age or any-age "drop-in" centre**, for use by as wide a range of people as can be imagined, providing services and facilities as diverse as:
  - A place of welcome, friendship and a listening ear
  - An informal meeting place for friends to share a cup of tea and a chat
  - A lending library – to compensate for the recent reduction from a weekly to a fortnightly service provided by the mobile lending library, extending its accessibility through receiving returns and orders; and to compliment that

service by extending the reading materials offered to include Christian books and magazines.

- Internet access – for those without their own access at home; computer learning and shared interests (e.g. family history), with help and guidance at times.
- A place for quiet reflection; a reading room
- “Big Society” services such as providing help to those who experience difficulty with administrative tasks such as filling in official forms or writing letters, and hosting Citizens Advice Bureau sessions
- Office services such as photocopying – church office equipment could be relocated from the Vicarage and access to office services made available to members of the public.
- Liaison space and times, e.g. for local and county Councillors (Tina Woodward) and Community Action Officer (Tom Brettell)

Timetabling for the introduction of these services would depend on a number of factors, including the execution of any building work that might prove necessary; we plan to begin implementation as soon as possible after acquisition of the Chapel and completion of any immediate repairs. But crucial between October and April is the insulation of the Chapel to high standards.

**Funding** for building work for initial interior refurbishment required above is being sought via Shropshire Council’s Rural Challenge Capital Fund, part of the Market Towns Revitalisation Programme. Running costs would be met from Church funds, supplemented by some income-generation from the above.

The drop-in centre would be staffed by volunteers drawn from the Church congregation and the wider village community. Investigations have begun into the possibility of employing, through a Christian youth organisation, a young graduate embarking on a career in Christian youth work and in search of a first experience in such work. Accommodation for such a youth worker could be found with a member of the Church; funding and the possibility of working jointly with young people’s groups in other local Churches are being explored.

### **3. Longer-term development and use**

Through the village’s experience of the above, and through continuing consultation and feedback, we will develop best proposals for internal modernisation and alteration, and more creative use of the surrounding land for the community. Priorities will emerge which justify applications for further external funding (as in 2 above), matched by our own giving and fundraising. Likely candidates would be:

- A full kitchen refurbishment to catering standards
- an outdoor sports area with basketball and all-weather table tennis
- Accessible toilet facilities
- An extra room, e.g. for counselling or interviews.

Also in the longer term, we anticipate many present activities of St Mary’s being relocated to the Chapel. Since 2005, much of our work in the village has taken place in the Stables and Barn at Church Farmhouse, through the kindness of the owners Prof Andrew and Rev Dr Ruth Sims. This includes Sunday Clubs, Men’s Breakfast in the Barn, Alpha, Nurture groups and many other meetings. Eventually a new venue will be needed, and the Chapel will provide ideal accommodation.