

Holy Trinity Sunderland Q & A

ABOUT THE PROJECT

What is the project Vision:

The Holy Trinity Regeneration project will reconnect the city with its past by transforming Holy Trinity into a cultural and heritage venue that brings the stories of the church and Old Sunderland to life through interpretation, events and performances.

Project outcomes:

- Establish a thriving new venue in Sunderland for culture, heritage and learning.
- Repair and conserve Holy Trinity, saving it for future generations.
- Adapt the building for increased use and provide it with a sustainable business plan.
- Increase its use and income through new events, activities and wider audience participation.
- Celebrate and mark the 300th anniversary of Holy Trinity
- Provide two apprentice opportunities with the contractor and deliver a craft skills training programme, increasing the skills and knowledge of target audiences and improving employability.
- With the community co-produce an engaging and creative activity programme that explores storytelling in all its forms.
- Deliver a range of new interpretation materials, products and experiences.
- Provide a training and development programme for new volunteers and deliver a step change in volunteer numbers.
- Through partnership work, lever in investment to an economically deprived area and change perceptions of heritage amongst the local community.

What will the space be when it reopens?

We are creating a new cultural and heritage visitor destination in the very heart of 'Old Sunderland' - the birth of the city as we know it today. It will be a welcoming, warm place for everyone with a love of Sunderland, heritage and culture - somewhere where the stories of Old Sunderland can come alive through beautiful interpretation and a vibrant programme of events and activities; - a space to hire and inspire all who come through the doors.

What can the community do there?

- **Enjoy a range of activities to learn about the stories of Old Sunderland:**
 - o Cabinet of Curiosities - Using the Vestry safe as space for precious Old Sunderland objects, alongside donated objects from the local community
 - o We will programme a series of heritage walks, talks and storytelling sessions for various audience groups.
 - o Sounds of Old Sunderland - A series of sound recordings will be available to listen to on site which explore different aspects of the area's heritage
- **Adults, families and children can take part in the Holy Trinity education programme:**
 - o A mix of adult confidence building activities and events, including performance, Community Choirs and Movement Workshops
 - o Church Mice Tales - A family trail around the church exploring the stories of Holy Trinity and Old Sunderland.

- A schools programme that links Holy Trinity closely with curriculum subjects such as history, English (storytelling) geography, art and design.
- **A place for the local community to drop in and enjoy:**
 - The space can be accessed by community members and visitors to the area who are welcome to enjoy the church as a social space.
 - Meet up with friends and neighbours at a 'Bring your lunch, grab a coffee' lunchtime social or performance
 - Take part in a series of memories / reminiscence events or take time out of the day for reflection in the lady chapel.
- **A place to attend and enjoy for a range of performances:**
 - Gigs and concerts from a mixture of local and national artists
 - Community Art Commissions - exhibiting community art that interprets the stories of Sunderland
 - Theatre performances (plays, spoken word, dance) and community workshops
- **Spaces to hire for group or individual use:**
 - The nave for a celebration or a concert
 - The vestry for a community meeting or special dinner
 - The library for a family activity or a story classroom
- **For all to take part in annual events, which are part of the citywide cultural offer:**
 - Christmas by Candlelight and New Year Celebration
 - We Love the Georgians Week
 - Heritage open days
- **A chance to volunteer, learning new skills and connecting with others:**
 - Volunteer Training Programme - we aim to provide all volunteers with the opportunity of developing their skills and learning
 - An opportunity for young people to get involved with the running of Holy Trinity and to sit on our Advisory Panel
 - Volunteers will be able to learn conservation skills and work with objects held at Holy Trinity and at other CCT sites

How is the site managed?

- By 1 full time Centre Manager (Tracey Mienie), supported by 1 full time Participation and Engagement Officer (to be recruited at the start of 2020).
- Some events and activity supported by seasonal staff
- Dedicated team of volunteers to help with day to day running and activity, alongside 'micro-volunteer projects' that are time limited and concentrate on specific tasks such as research, fundraising, marketing etc.

What is the space going to be called?

Holy Trinity will always be the name of the church, which is still a consecrated building. To save the building, and bring it back into use, its main purpose will no longer be as an active place of worship. We are aiming to find a name that will reflect its new use, so that people associate the name with that new use.

At the CCT we have successfully done this with other regeneration projects, for example, St Mary at the Quay is now Quay Place. In Sunderland, the regenerated fire station is called The Engine Rooms. We are not trying to forget that Holy Trinity was once an active place of worship (that's key to the story we are trying to tell). We would like to provide a brand identity that captures and embraces the heritage of the site that lets people know it is now a community space for cultural exploration, heritage learning and a performance space.

What is the history of Holy Trinity East End?

Holy Trinity is located on Church Street in Sunderland's East End. It was completed in 1719 as the port's first parish church and at the time was at centre of the town of Sunderland. At different times in the 18th century the building also hosted the council rooms, the magistrate's court, the first public library for the town and the town's fire engine.

By 1851 the town of Sunderland had spread West, and the area around Holy Trinity church had become the 'East End' of the town.

The Church of England closed the Grade I listed church for worship in 1988. Shortly afterwards it came into the care of The Churches Conservation Trust (TCCT), the national heritage charity protecting historic churches at risk.

Despite an investment by TCCT of almost £500,000 on repairs and maintenance, the building was placed on Historic England's Heritage at Risk register in 2014.

To find a sustainable future for the building and to bring it back into daily public use, The Churches Conservation Trust has been working in partnership with local people and Sunderland-based organisations since 2012. The project partners include Sunderland City Council, The Cultural Spring, Sunderland Business Partnership, ATG Creative Learning team at Sunderland Empire Theatre, City of Sunderland College, University of Sunderland and Sunderland Music Education Hub to develop a sustainable future for the building as a multi-use cultural and community centre.

Following a local and national fundraising campaign in 2017, the plans for the building won an award of £2.8 million from National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) to bring Holy Trinity back into use. Without this investment the building would have had to be closed permanently and was at risk of being lost entirely.

CCT are also a major partner in the Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) working with Sunderland City Council, Tyne and Wear Preservation Trust, Historic England and Sunderland Heritage Forum to revive historic Sunderland and reconnect it with the modern city centre. The aim of the HAZ is to help rejuvenate and unlock the potential of the area to help it achieve sustainable growth and includes an intensive programme of research, repair and regeneration, alongside community projects encouraging local people to get involved.

Who is the CCT and why are they responsible for Holy Trinity?

The Churches Conservation Trust is the national charity protecting churches at risk for over 50 years. We care for the churches vested in us by the Church Commissioners of the Church of England, repairing the damage from sometimes years of neglect, and work with local communities to bring them alive again.

Holy Trinity came into our care in 1988, when the local parish could no longer continue to use it as a place of worship, or afford to maintain it. Between 1988 and 2016 CCT has

spent £461,133 on vital repairs, but the building required a much larger investment to carry out all the repairs needed to make it safe for the future.

Why were the pews removed from Holy Trinity?

53 pews were removed from the church in 2018 following local consultations regarding preferred new uses. These pews were not the original Georgian box pews, but subsequent 'modern' early 20th century bench pews which we believe were installed in 1935.

The removal of nave seating allows for a variety of flexible seating arrangements and increased access for wheelchairs, pushchairs and people with limited mobility. The pews were removed in order to free up floor space for multiple and mixed uses, e.g. workshops and classes, rehearsals, performances, and concerts, and to allow greater access throughout the building.

Removal of pews from working and former churches is increasingly common practice, as communities require more flexible seating arrangements and improved access.

In order to remove the 20th-century pews, TCCT consulted with over 500 local people, Historic England and Church of England, including the local vicar, and sought permission from Sunderland City Council in accordance with listed building planning law.

What happened to the pews?

The pews were sold to an established dealer in ecclesiastic furniture. The money that was raised from the sale was put toward the funds needed to adapt the building for community use and restoration of highly significant historical items such as the 1719 William Etty font.

Why were the pews not disposed of locally?

As part of our exploration of disposal options, we approached a range of interested parties including the Diocesan Advisory Committee, the national Church of England Contents Register, and representatives on our Holy Trinity Advisory Group. In the absence of interest we then approached local architectural salvage companies; however the only firm offer to take the pews came from Church Antiques, a reputable national company specialising in ecclesiastical furniture.

Why is the organ being temporarily removed?

The organ is not physically built into the fabric of the church, but it is situated in the NE corner of the nave, closely abutting external walls to the North and West and the chancel steps to the South.

The fabric of the church in this area has suffered high levels of saturation from the wall heads at high level, causing large areas of plasterwork to become damaged and unsafe requiring removal and careful repair. The paint does not allow the fabric to breathe internally and large areas need to be removed. At floor and sub floor level there is saturation due to poor drainage and the fact that the floor voids were infilled (c1935) with rubble and concrete. This is also contributing to the high levels of moisture in the ground floor and base of the walls. The intention is to remove this infill and reinstate a sub floor void but with ventilation. The floor in the chancel area is visibly cracking and in poor condition, and the engineer has recommended its replacement immediately to the South of the organ. The ceiling has suffered water damage and is due to be completely removed and

replaced. The existing windows (two concealed by the organ) are unoriginal and sealed – new windows are to be inserted that allow ventilation.

The problems with the building fabric are particularly prominent in the area of the organ, and not doing works because of the organ would leave a considerable 'gap' in an otherwise consistent approach towards trying to solve the problems of the church as a whole. This would leave a significant area to deteriorate even further over time, and put into question the investment of doing the other repairs nearby.

The organ in its current location would obstruct the repair works taking place to the floor and walls and significantly affect the physical working areas required. There has been a suggestion that the organ could be partially dismantled (for example with just the lower section remaining) – but this does not allow access to the walls and floor areas, and would need extensive protection which would actually enlarge its footprint, further reducing the area to undertake works.

For the repairs to take place, and to protect the organ from dust and possible damage whilst repairs take place, the organ has been dismantled and stored by local organ builder John Lightbown and Sons.

What is the plan for the organ in the project?

The original plan for the organ in the major project was always to keep it in the space (without refurbishing).

Due to the unexpected £500K increase in repair costs found during the development phase, CCT postponed submitting the NLHF Round 2 for six months in order to raise more money. The NLHF then agreed to increase the amount of money they would invest in the project to help this unexpected cost, but on the understanding that a value engineering (VE) exercise was also carried out. This is when all project costs are looked at to see if there is anything that can be cut of the project to reduce the overall cost.

The organ was included as a VE item as it was not used regularly, its condition was deteriorating, and it was the one of the largest costing non-repair items. It now also needed to be removed from the site to allow works to the chancel floor. After internal discussion a decision was taken to reduce the budget for the organ from £60K to protect and for minimal works to it, to £55K to remove, store and replace casing only, and dispose of the interior mechanism.

Who are Sunderland Save Our Heritage Trust?

Knowing that the project could not afford to put the whole organ back, CCT looked to see what other options there were for the organ as a complete instrument. It was agreed that the instrument still deserved to be refurbished, used and maintained if possible. The advice CCT received was that, if costs prohibited the organ being kept at Holy Trinity, efforts should be made to rehouse the organ as a whole instrument, ideally in another church, and failing that, it could be disposed of for parts.

Having made enquiries through specialist organ networks, an expression of interest came from a German company called Instrumente Ladach, the leading specialist in the international purchase and sale of used pipe organs. It was understood that if CCT gifted the organ to the company, they would restore it and make it available to a church community that could not afford a brand new organ.

As part of the preparations for this expression of interest (it was not a done deal), CCT submitted the LBC application for the organs permanent removal. Due to the objections on the Sunderland City Council planning portal, CCT took the decision to withdraw the LBC application.

From this, an independent group Sunderland Save Our Heritage was formed by local people, specifically to raise money for the organ as they are passionate about trying to return the organ back to the church as a whole instrument. You can find out more about the SSOH and how to help with their fundraising for the organ [via their facebook page](#)

What are the plans for the organ now?

The organ has now been removed and stored. The main project has budget to store the organ for 12 months (this commenced in July 2019). It also has the budget to return the organ casing and console. It does not have the budget to reinstall or repair the organ.

In March 2019, CCT met with representatives from the SSOH. A tiered approach to the organ was agreed with them, and announced at a public meeting on 11th March 2019.

It was agreed that the funds to return the organ to the church needed to be raised by the group within the 12 months that the organ is stored for. If SSOH are near their target (£50K for repairs and adjustments for organ to be partially usable and for safe maintenance access), this storage period may be extended. However, if SSOH are not near their target, then it was agreed that the organ casing and console will be returned to the building and interior mechanism disposed of.

How do the plans for the building involve local people?

These works will re-establish the church as a central part of Sunderland's people's lives and it will be a key project in the city's culture-led regeneration.

As part of the project's consultation process the Holy Trinity Advisory Group was set up, comprising representatives from a range of local organisations to provide advice in specific areas during the delivery of the Holy Trinity project, act as an advocate for the project and provide advice to project staff on raising the profile of Holy Trinity as a multi-purpose venue for the City of Sunderland. They have recently transitioned into the Holy Trinity Ambassador Group so they can continue to support the project in this vital role.

We have a social media presence on Facebook and twitter where all projects updates are published, and a mail chimp newsletter to subscribers alongside our project mailing list.

Other groups that we regularly update include:

- Sunderland Old Township Heritage Society
- Sunderland Heritage Forum
- VCS East Area Network
- Elected Members Hendon Ward
- Heritage Action Zone partners
- Heritage Lottery Fund North East (and other project funders)
- Sunderland City Council
- Lord Lieutenant Tyne and Wear
- Sunderland Business Partnership