

21st-Century Church: Better in a New Building or Heritage Building? Part 4 of 4: Wise Stewards

St Aldates was already a significant community in the city with a strong Christian tradition and it might have been expected that it could rest on its laurels, unchanged. But when the church tried to use the building for events midweek, it proved to be difficult and uncomfortable. Even though some refurbishment had taken place in 1981, it was felt that there was still significant untapped potential in the building that could be released.

The church's other meeting space was limited to around 130 people and leaders decided that the main church building was valuable floor area that was underused. Apart from the changes allowing the church to host more activities, the re-ordered building is made available to others for approved activities, providing income and sustainably sharing the property. The real wisdom was in accepting the need to carry out a thorough refurbishment project, rather than small improvements. This included heating, lighting, creating a new level floor, AV installation, reorientation, new furniture, redecoration, new entry building and completely renewed hard and soft landscaping.



New entrance building to St Aldates

St Alfred's had a relatively small site which incorporated a tennis court. Alongside the site were public tennis courts so the inevitable decision was easy. The church had declined invitations to amalgamate with others. The first difficult task was to pay off the outstanding debt on the existing church foyer before revealing the design solution to demolish it. This was handled wisely and graciously.

The new design, retained the existing church hall complex and was presented to the members on several occasions, responding to feedback at each stage. The eventual building is based upon sustainable design principles at every level and received a sustainable design award.



St Alfred's with thermal chimney and rammed earth wall

Rev Peter MacPherson, senior minister at St Alfred's said, "Fred's (Studio B's) flexible design has allowed us to do so much more ministry than before. People comment that the place has "a lovely feel." How you create a "feel" is a mystery but good design is certainly part of it."

Next time: Epilogue on New vs Heritage



