

# Introduction

## Willen Church

## Hooke Heritage Project



Willen St Mary Magdalene church was built in 1680 and is today recognised nationally as being of high significance for its evidential, historical and architectural value. It is the only known church entirely designed by Robert Hooke, one of Britain's greatest scientists and polymaths, and is one of Milton Keynes' most important buildings.

The church has no toilets, water or hospitality space. Until recently those needing these facilities were hosted by The Society of the Sacred Mission at their nearby Priory, but in 2019 the Priory closed and the facilities became unavailable.

In 2021 a Quinquennial inspection of the heritage church showed remedial work was needed. As the church turned to fundraising for repairs they found their efforts constrained by its lack of facilities.

With these two outcomes now impacting the future viability of the church a building project, The Willen Church Hooke Heritage Project was created. This leaflet outlines the project's purpose, outputs and delivery process.

### Project Purpose

The key aims of the project are to:

- Preserve the heritage building and its location for current and future users
- Provide discrete toilet facilities and improve accessibility with minimal impact on both the exterior and interior of the heritage church building
- Increase space for education, spiritual learning, and community activities on the church site
- Provide interpretation and learning, sharing the stories of this exceptional building and of its polymath architect, Robert Hooke

### Project Outputs

The project will deliver:

- Building: implementation of the Quinquennial repairs to the heritage building; provision of a new building within the church grounds containing learning and hospitality facilities
- Creative interpretations: a public art installation giving contemporary form to Hooke's inventions; a digital installation interpreting our research into the church, Hooke's life and work
- Learning: a programme of activities aimed at community engagement and knowledge sharing

## Project Delivery

### Delivery team

The project is the responsibility of Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership Charity number 1200563. It is led by the St Mary Magdalene Congregation Leadership Team and delivered by a partnership of congregation and community volunteers supported by expert professionals.

Additional content, activities, skills and networks are being accessed through collaborations. Current collaborators include MK Public Arts Trust and MK Parks Trust. Discussions are currently taking place to explore threads of common purpose with potential partners in the education, heritage and commercial sectors.

### Schedule

The project is being delivered in the following three phases:

- Phase 1 Feasibility: completed under this phase are:
  - An architect's construction options appraisal, shared through public consultation
  - An independent audit of the heritage significance of the church building (Statement of Significance)
  - Evidence of need (Statement of Need)
  - Research into Willen church and Hooke's life, work and contemporary relevanceThese outputs together with the findings of the 2021 Quinquennial inspection report are currently being considered by those organisations with planning control (Oxford Diocese and Milton Keynes City Council). The feasibility stage is due to finish on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2024.
- Phase 2 Development: will include:
  - Construction planning: develop plans for implementation of repairs to the heritage church and for design of the new building; provision of detailed drawings for quantity surveyor estimation, planning permission and pre-tender planning
  - Creative interpretation: confirm brief, design and costing of the public art installation of Hooke's inventions, and the digital heritage installation
  - Learning: a community engagement and knowledge sharing programme of events and activities, delivered in collaboration with key partners
- Phase 3 construction: will include:
  - Repairs to the heritage church and construction of the new building
  - Further learning, community engagement and knowledge sharing programme

### Funding

Phase 1: the feasibility phase of this project has been delivered with funding from Heritage Fund, Oxford Diocese development fund, Society of the Sacred Mission, Milton Keynes City Council and St Mary Magdalene Church.

Phases 2 and 3: a Heritage Fund application is planned. Additional partnership funding will be delivered through implementation of the Congregation Leadership Team's fundraising plan working with trusts, foundations, commercial sponsors and individual donors.

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