

All Souls, Bolton

Short description of the project

All Souls church is being regenerated into a modern, multi-purpose building for the local community and people of Bolton, becoming 'a place to inspire' for:

- Heritage, skills and creativity
- Events, meetings and business
- Connecting the community

In 2005 Inayat Omarji, a local resident, approached The Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) to propose ways of dealing with the graffiti and lead theft at All Souls. Following a visit Inayat was inspired to take action to turn All Souls – at the time unused and rarely visited - into a well-used, multi-purpose space.

All Souls Bolton, an independent social enterprise, was set up to provide a new lease of life for the church through heritage, enterprise and community activity and to work with CCT's Regeneration Taskforce and the local community to achieve this. A creative adaptation and the insertion of two large pods will provide spaces for the new uses and help to leave the historic fabric untouched.

CCT secured funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage, Bolton Council and a number of trusts and foundations to deliver the project. The project is now entering the final months of the construction phase, which began in August 2013, and All Souls is due to open in autumn 2014. It will then be leased from the CCT to All Souls Bolton.



Virtual image of the future of All Souls, Bolton © Andy Marshall

What would have happened without this project?

Since its closure in the 1980s All Souls church (Grade II*) has been a target for graffiti, vandalism and theft. Largely unvisited and empty for 25 years it grew less and less relevant to the local community despite being a beautiful, towering presence in the Crompton neighbourhood. As one of 345 churches in the CCT's estate, maintenance and management was undertaken and a vast part of the Trust's effort went towards the repairs of damage caused by vandals. The empty church was subjected to continuous attacks and had become a focus for anti-social behaviour, including graffiti and several attempts at arson. The down pipes were regularly obstructed, smashed or stolen and it also suffered repeated lead thefts with all the associated damage.

Without visitors or community management the church faced an uncertain future and a rising repair bill. With these problems and the lack of a sustainable use the CCT would have found it extremely difficult to prioritise expenditure towards the works that included the complete re-roofing, extensive re-pointing and brickwork repairs and re-glazing of the many large windows.



A rejuvenated All Souls being gradually revealed during works © Andy Marshall

What has the project achieved, or difference has it made?

When the new centre opens, All Souls will be a multi-purpose space combining community, business and heritage uses.

Although not yet open to the public, progress towards achieving these outcomes has already commenced during the project's construction. One of All Souls' most important aims is to increase the life chances of people in the local area, and the project is focusing on skills as a way of delivering on this outcome. Six bursary placements were appointed to work on the capital phase of the project, placements that were a contractual requirement for the successful contractor. The bursaries were recruited using local networks and partnerships which helped raise awareness of the opportunities within the local area. This resulted in fifty applications for the placements, many of which were from the immediate neighbourhood – an area with a diverse ethnic mix and one experiencing significant economic challenges.

Guided by the specialist heritage sub-contractor Lambert Walker, the six bursary placements have worked on the masonry, roofing and glazing repairs. The placements were paid through the project for three months but the quality of the trainees and their work was so high five were then employed directly by the sub-contractors for the rest of the project. One placement will be awarded a full time apprenticeship following completion of the capital work.

Many of the placements had no experience of heritage or historic buildings but have used the project to acquire skills that will provide more choices for many of them in their future careers. The trainees have delivered high quality conservation work and have deepened the reserve of skills available to the rest of the heritage sector.



Developing skills has formed an important part of the work at All Souls © Andy Marshall

What were the main lessons learnt or challenges overcome?

The community had very little interest in the building as solely a heritage asset. Therefore, at the early stages of the project a broad consultation process was carried out, gathering ideas and evidence and asking people what they wanted and felt that the local area needed.

Partnerships with local organisations have also been extremely important. All Souls Bolton is a grassroots charity with local credibility and recognition – this brings with it a network and access to local resources and skills. CCT brought with it skills in regeneration, conservation and fundraising to form a strong partnership of local and national perspectives. To that core we have added other partners who can contribute and benefit from the project and who have helped us reach target audiences or develop specialist elements of the project.

Long term commitment is perhaps the most important lesson. This project has taken many years and has experienced a number of challenges but the team has kept going through the adversity and picked the community up when the future has looked bleak. A strong community vision, the right skill sets and people who really care about the project have been central to keeping the project going.

What is the future of the project?

All Souls Bolton are working on their plans for the opening of the centre in autumn 2014, securing tenants and developing their proposals for community activities. The community will be welcomed into the 'new look' All Souls with a programme of opening events. The church will house a café, IT facilities for the community, classrooms, business space, exhibitions and much more.

All Souls is a flagship project for the CCT. Being the largest project we have ever undertaken it has been invaluable in helping the Trust forge partnerships and develop best practice for future schemes. The CCT's Regeneration Taskforce, as well as working with churches on the Trust's estate, also now advises communities who are in danger of losing their own local churches. The vital lessons learnt and acquired through the Bolton project will be used to help these 'preventative' projects around the country.

The CCT now has a body of research, which will help structure the future of craft skills training as an essential part of the CCT's future projects, and go on to advise and create learning for other organisations on how to use similar approaches.

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