

CASE STUDY

ST. MATTHEW & ST. JAMES, MOSSLEY HILL, DIOCESE OF LIVERPOOL, COFE

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Built in 1875, as the suburbs of Liverpool expanded outwards, St. Matthew & St. James occupies a prime hilltop site. This unfortunately made it something of a target for the Luftwaffe, and on 29th August 1940 the church became the first in the country to take a direct hit during World War II. It was gutted, but the walls and tower survived and the church was restored in the late 1940s. In 1975 an extension was added to provide space for community activities; in recent years this has been home to a very successful day nursery.



After almost forty years, by 2013 the extension was becoming dated and unsuitable for modern usage patterns; in particular it needed to be improved from a safeguarding perspective. There was also a need to provide hospitality within the church for large services and other community events.

The church formed a team to develop what became known as the Vision Project. With a clear missional focus, the remit was to ensure that the Grade II* listed church – including the extension – would support the church’s outworking of the Great Commission in the 21st Century. The architects chosen were Denovo Design of Liverpool, an innovative practice which showed great sensitivity to the liturgical and community needs of the church as well as to its heritage. Plans were drawn up to rebuild the extension, creating a new link between it and the church to incorporate a level-access entrance, and to build free-standing “pods” within the west end of the church itself to house toilets, a kitchen and a state-of-the-art audio visual system. Key to the design of these pods was the imperative to retain the west entrance for ceremonial use (e.g. for weddings)

and to keep the unrestricted views of the wonderful Karl Edwards west window. The pews were to be replaced with high-quality chairs.

Consultation with the DAC and with statutory consultees took place early in the process. This proved to be sensible as the City Council had some issues around the rebuilding of the extension and Historic England wasn’t entirely happy with the proposed link between new-build and old. The evolution of final designs is often an iterative process and it is wise to allow time for it to be done properly.

Mindful of the need to accommodate the nursery while the extension was being rebuilt, the team arranged for the work inside the church to be done first so that the nursery could use the church for the duration.

The project was completed in early 2017. The bulk of the cost was funded by the sale of a property owned by the church; much of the rest was fund-raised locally. The completed re-ordering of the church has attracted much positive comment and several other churches have already visited looking for inspiration towards their own projects, perhaps the ultimate sign of a successful job!