

**Press Release - 9<sup>th</sup> October 2008**

For immediate use

## **Discussions begin about the future of St Laurence's**

An open meeting for the community of Ludlow was held in the Ludlow Assembly Rooms on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> October on the future of St Laurence's church building. The meeting was the first stage of a process of wide ranging consultation with all who have an interest in St Laurence's.

130 people attended the meeting, organised by the Parochial Church Council, with the Rev'd Andrew Mottram, Director of Ecclesiastical Property Solutions as the guest speaker.

The PCC is responsible for the care and maintenance of the building. An Asset Management Plan has identified over seventy items requiring repair or replacement in the next few years. Most significantly, the heating system, lighting system and the Victorian floors in the church are wearing out and will have to be replaced very soon. This situation presents the PCC with a unique opportunity to reconsider how the building is used and how it should be arranged for the future. The PCC is determined that whatever decisions are made, they are the right ones for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Those attending the meeting were welcomed by Rector Brian Curnew. He expressed his love for the building: "St Laurence's has a very special place in the life of Ludlow as both a place of worship, and as a venue for so many events. We all feel an affinity with it, and when it is time to undertake major repairs and renovations, we need input from all to help shape our plans. All the questions are for asking and all the answers are for seeking'. The Rector and the other speakers stressed that the meeting was the beginning of a process of consultation and that apart from the commitment to undertake the repairs, there were at this stage no other proposals for the building. The PCC Treasurer (Don Beattie) and the Clerk of Works (Shaun Ward) set out some of the facts of the situation.

The Rev'd Andrew Mottram emphasised the need to establish the facts before making any decisions about the future. "Everyone involved should be fully informed about the building, its origins, history and development through the centuries" he said. He commended the PCC for developing a forward looking Asset Management Plan which will be incorporated into the Conservation Management Plan, due to be completed in 2009. He reminded the audience that church buildings have been subjected to constant change and development through the ages. Although the exterior perimeter walls of St Laurence's have changed little since their construction, the interior of the building, its fixtures and fittings have been subject to continual change and development. "Any re-arrangement of the interior should be in response to its intended function, as a place of worship, and also a significant venue for many other activities in the life of Ludlow and the surrounding area" he said. The PCC wants to ensure that St Laurence's is 'fit for purpose' and has the facilities required in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Andrew Mottram showed examples of re-ordered church interiors, all associated with a major repair project.

The meeting was chaired by a Church Warden (Ewart Carson) who took questions from the audience. The meeting concluded with him setting out the next steps for action. These will involve extensive consultation with all stakeholders in Ludlow and its surroundings. He invited those interested in the future of St Laurence's to participate in the consultation process.

END 09.10.08

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## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION and CONTACT DETAILS**

St Laurence's Ludlow is one of the 24 "Greater Parish Churches" in the UK. Dating back to 1199, it is a prominent landmark in South Shropshire at the top of Ludlow town. Given a five star rating by Simon Jenkins in his book "England's Thousand Best Churches", the church is dubbed by him "the Cathedral of the Marches".

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The church is home to a rich range of treasures, from the imposing structure of the church itself and its famous 15th Century tower, to the complete set of 15th Century misericords; from the fine 18th century organ to its internationally important stained glass.

St Laurence's is the mother church of the Ludlow Team Ministry, covering 12 churches in South Shropshire, and led by the Team Rector, Revd. Preb. Brian Curnew and four clergy colleagues.

St Laurence's plays a key role in the religious life of South Shropshire, from regular Sunday worship to festival and civic services. It has a fine musical tradition. Its choir was founded in 1492, making it one of the first Parish Church choirs in the country. The church is also home to the Ludlow Choral Society, and numerous other musical events, from organ recitals to chamber music, and hosts major events as part of the Ludlow Festival. It attracts some 40,000 visitors a year from all over the world.

## **CONTACTS**

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