

Save our Spire Appeal Project

The tower and spire at the Grade 1 listed St John's church, were added to the building around 500 years ago, in the 15th Century, creating what is still today, the tallest spire in Worcestershire.

The history of the church goes back almost 1000 years, and it is very likely that the hill top site had been a sacred place for many years before the building of St John's began.

In the 19th Century there were a series of repair projects carried out on the spire. In 1836 the iron rod was replaced at a cost of £106, with further repairs taking place in 1857. In 1891 the top 25ft (7.5m) of the spire was replaced following a lightning strike, this cost £300.

In 2017 cracks on the external face of the top section of the spire at St John's were first noticed and emergency repairs were carried out, thanks to a donation from the Bromsgrove Rotary Club. The cracks were filled with resin and eight stainless steel bands were strapped around the cracking section to secure the structure.

An annual inspection of the spire is carried out by steeplejacks who also investigated the internal aspect of the spire to check for evidence of structural problems – non were found internally.

The 140 year old metal rod inside the top section of the spire is rusting, and thus expanding, causing the cracking of the sandstone which surrounds it. There's no evidence of other structural issues, but the top 2.5m must be rebuilt and the metal rod and stability weights replaced.

Appeal Timeline

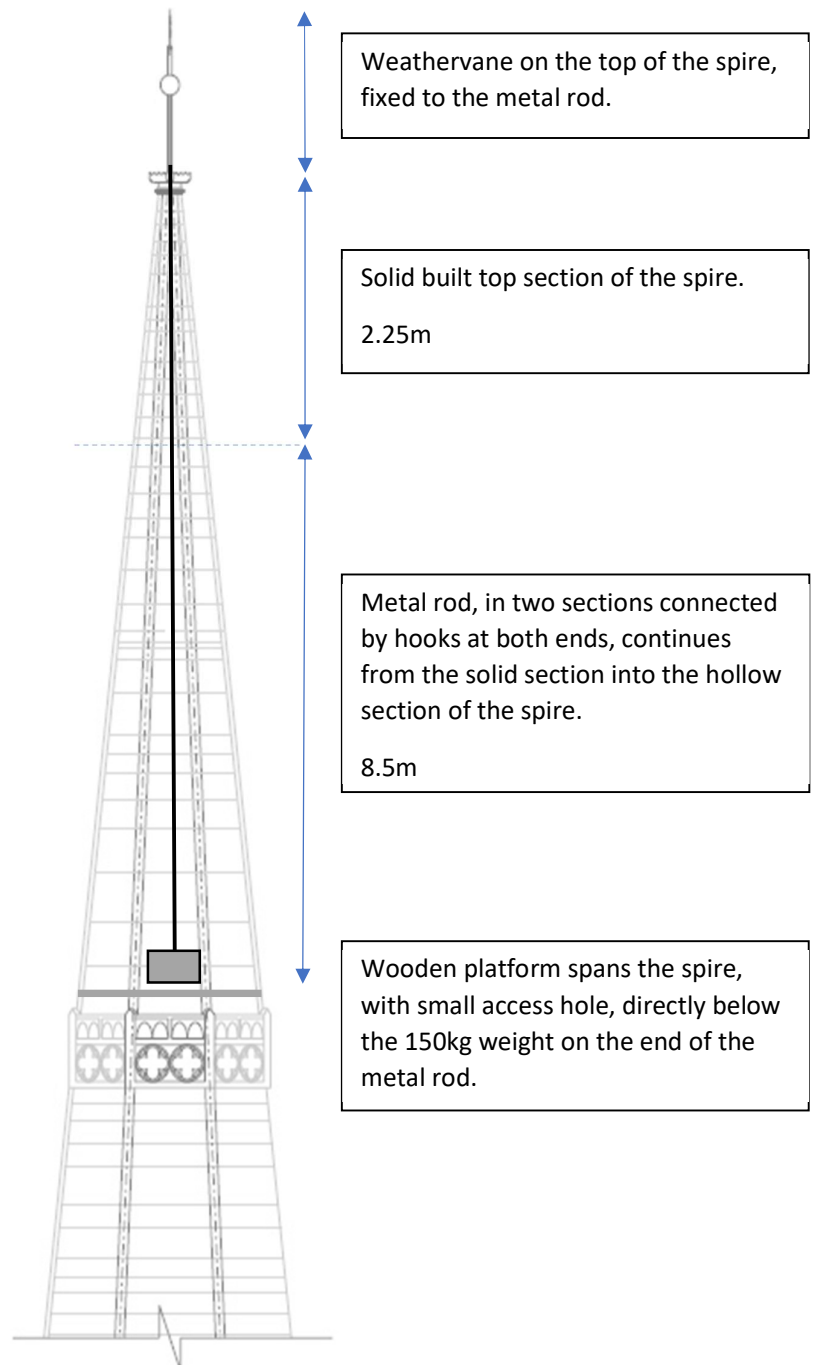
The Heritage Future Appeal was launched in 2018 to fund the necessary repairs, along with other restoration work and a plan to reorder the church with improved heating, lighting and facilities. Sadly, due to the redirection of funding during the pandemic, our invitation to apply for £1.2million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund was withdrawn.

Post pandemic the decision was made to concentrate on the urgent need to repair the spire top, and the St John's Spire Appeal was launched in 2022.

A new application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund began.

Our application must be submitted by the end of October 2023, due to the NLHF relaunching their schemes. The application will be for £250,000 – the maximum within the scheme we are applying to.

The total cost of the project is estimated at £360,000 plus vat. This figure is constantly increasing due to inflation and the increases in building supply costs in recent years.



Heritage at Risk Register

In November 2022, owing to the issues on the spire and other stonework concerns at the church, and due to lack of funding in place to resolve these issues, St John's Church Bromsgrove was placed on Historic England's "At Risk" register.

www.historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-at-risk/search-register/list-entry/22713

Engaging in Heritage

The key outcome required by NLHF is to engage more people in heritage.

To this end our appeal will include a number of initiatives to encourage engagement. Our projects will range from "Meet the Stonemason" days, developing information boards both inside and outside the building with printed versions and QR codes for online information and increased interaction with local groups – schools, scouts and local interest groups.

Recently a survey was conducted to gather information: www.tinyurl.com/StJohnsHeritageSurvey

Letters of Support

It is vital that we obtain letters of support from local organisations who support our appeal and are keen to see the restoration project, and the increased engagement, take place at St John's church.

As the civic church, and the largest place of gathering in the town, with the tallest spire in Worcestershire, Friends believe that the church's future must be secured. There is no central funding and we are reliant on the support of the town's businesses, organisations and residents to keep St John's in the heart of our community.

Additional Funding

It is hoped that in 2024, with a successful result from the NLHF application, additional funding will be found from local and national sources.

Full Project Costs = £432,750	Predicted Income	Remaining Total	
Friends of St John's Reserves	25,000	407,750	
LWP Scheme VAT recovery	63,225	344,525	
Heritage Lottery Grant Funding	250,000	94,525	
Friends of St John's Corporate Sponsors, Events and Private Donations	20,000	74,525	
Local Charitable Trusts	35,000	39,525	
National Churches Trust	30,000	9,525	
Other National Trusts	10,000	- 475	Target Surpassed!

Worcester Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC)

A meeting to present our current position with the spire was attended by The Venerable Nikki Groarke Archdeacon of Dudley, Mark Carter DAC Secretary, Mary Worsfold BDC Conservation Officer, Rev Ray Khan Vicar St John's, Jo Slade Friends Chair, Hilda Roxborough Friends Trustee, Richard Lamb Architect and Ian Ceney Structural Engineer. Members of the DAC not in attendance, but in receipt of the information Steve McLeish Historic England, Tim Bridges DAC, representatives from the Council for the Care of Church Buildings and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

It was made clear that the DCC's priority for the fabric was to carry out the urgent work on the spire.

After the presentation the group were taken on a tour of the outside of the building to show the issues with the south side stonework and to look at the crack in the spire via a telescope.



Following the meeting Mark Carter issued the following report:

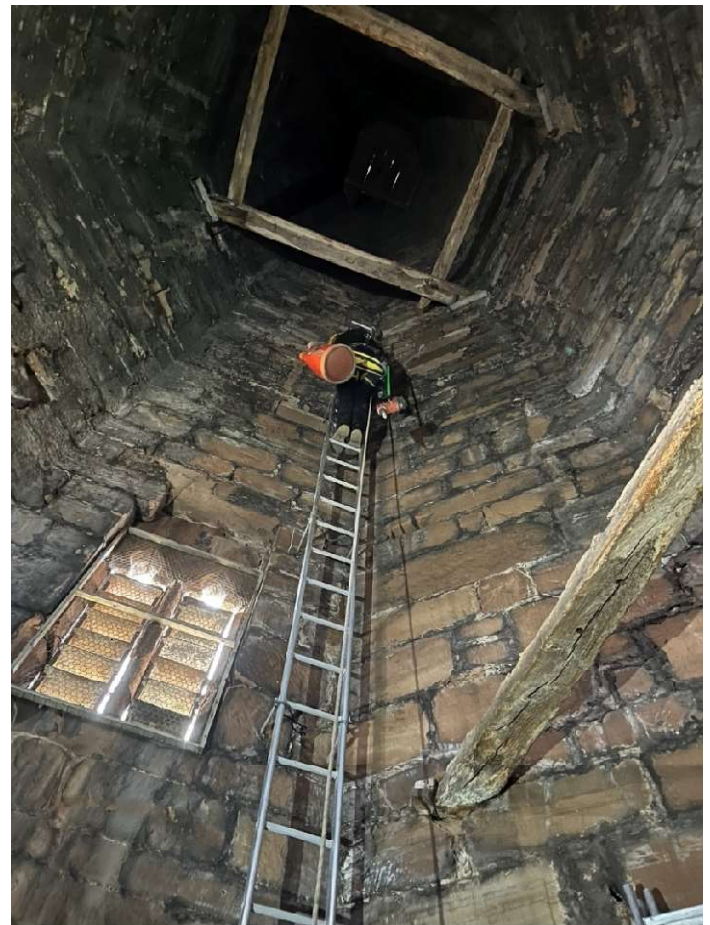
Archdeacon Nikki and I attended the visit on 30 November, along with Bromsgrove DC's conservation officer Mary Worsfold. We were grateful to Richard Lamb and Ian Coney for their technical analysis. The remedy appears to be the rebuilding of the top 2.5m of the spire with associated stabilising. The restoration of the spire is clearly a major need for the church building but also for the town and the DAC would clearly support the restoration, subject to agreement on the details of the scheme.

It is the PCC's intention to apply to the NLHF for up to £250k (the current threshold for single-phase applications). It was noted that there was a need to include provision in the bid to the NLHF for the required interpretation and outreach work, which could be a significant amount. The Friends are looking into this, along with the other funders to be approached for match-funding.

For the local authority, Ms Worsfold confirmed that no planning permission would be required for the works, and that the obtaining of Faculty negates the need for Listed Building Consent. Although the authority does not have funding streams for such work, she offered to help bring the works to the attention of councillors and others who may be able to support the works as clearly this is a major project for Bromsgrove.

Mark Carter, Church Buildings Officer

Photographs



Become a friend today

Raising funds through community based events for the ongoing maintenance, restoration and improvements at Bromsgrove's landmark and historic church building.

www.facebook.com/FriendsStJohnsBromsgrove Twitter @FriendsStJohns