

Agenda ref	11.1
Report title	All Saints (Corn Street) Roof Repair
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Date	28/05/2025

INTRODUCTION

1. In November 2024, The Revd Melanie Otto emailed The Revd Trudie Wigley (Chair of the House of Clergy) requesting that the decision to re-roof All Saint's (Corn Street) be revisited by Diocesan Synod.
2. This paper responds to that request, and provides a summary of the church's history, and the legal responsibilities of the Bristol Diocesan Board of Finance so that Diocesan Synod can consider how to proceed.
3. The paper is written in the context of the wide-ranging and substantial Racial Justice work being undertaken in the Diocese to implement our Racial Justice Strategy, and to fulfil the Bishop's Racial Justice commitments.

BACKGROUND

4. All Saints is located on Corn Street, Bristol, and is surrounded by commercial and residential buildings. In many cases, it shares walls, and parts of the property, with its neighbours (see Annex A Figure 1 for an external photo, and Figure 2 for a Google Earth image).
5. The history of All Saints Corn Street from 1721 to the present day is at Annex B, and – given its links to transatlantic chattel slavery, and Edward Colston in particular - is at the heart of our challenge moving forwards. The Annex, and the uncertainties described within, should be noted carefully.
6. In September 2023, Finance Committee agreed to budget £500k to re-roof the church as it was no longer possible to patch repair it and it was continuing to leak, causing damage to the church interior and its historic timbers. It was noted that further delays would exacerbate costs significantly, and the Diocese has a legal obligation to keep the building in good repair. This was reported to

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Diocesan Synod in November 2023, and in the Annual Report and Accounts for that year.

7. In 2023, drawings and a schedule of works was commissioned from DittrichHudsonVasetti architects for the re-roofing project, and in 2024 the Diocese submitted a Faculty application and a Planning Application. An invitation to tender for the work was also issued. The assignment of funds for the work was referred to Synod for approval in November 2023 as part of the 2024 budget with associated explanatory notes. Answers were given to questions raised regarding the cost and why the re-roofing was necessary.
8. Tenders for the roof repair were received in April 2025, two of which were just under the allocated budget (£500k). In May 2025, the project was paused at the request of Bishop's Council. Due to seasonal constraints on the work, a one year delay to the start is now inevitable.

ARTEFACTS

9. There are a number of monuments/artifacts in the church:

The vault monument was apparently recut by the churchwardens in 1843; however, there is doubt as to the accuracy of the restored text as the monument was deemed "mutilated" and illegible following the reordering that occurred in 1757.¹

The Vault's floor monument (see Figure 4 in Annex A) reads today:

GO AND DO THOU LIKEWISE. IN THE VAULT UNDERNEATH LIES THE BODY OF EDWARD COLSTON ESQ WHO DIED AT MORTLAKE 11th OCT 1721. ALSO SARAH COLSTON DAUGHTER OF EDWARD COLSTON JUNIOR ESQ & GREAT NIECE OF THE ABOVE DIED 28th JANUARY 1722 AGED 17 YEARS. THE ABOVE INSCRIPTIONS RESTORED SEP 1843.

The monument itself is c.172cm x 61cm. It is sealed in a metal surround, entirely abutted by encaustic tiles. These tiles appear to lie on a concrete bed and the floor appears to have been raised by c.6-7cm in total, assuming the floor level of Colston's monument (which is built into the window tracery design and was therefore potentially unmoved in later floor elevation changes) is the original floor level from 1729.

It is highly likely, but not certain, that Edward Colston's body remains in the vault (see '1843' in Annex B). This will require consideration once the potential options for future use have been discerned.

DISCERNMENT TO DATE

10. Since 2020, work has been undertaken to discern potential options for the future use of the building:

2020 - Informal discussions were held with Bristol City Council (BCC) to ascertain if the church might be converted into a museum. BCC indicated that it

¹ The Bristol Mercury reported on Saturday 7 October 1843

was not interested in pursuing this idea because the church has poor vehicular access and limited internal space.

07/09/2022 – A meeting was held at the church between The Rt Revd Viv Faull (Bishop of Bristol), The Ven Neil Warwick (then the Archdeacon of Bristol), the Church Commissioners, and Church Buildings Council to discuss options for the building's future. This included Novelette-Aldoni Stewart (Chair of the CBC Contested Heritage Committee), Jennie Page (Chair of the Church Buildings Council (CBC) and Statutory Advisory Committee on Closed & Closing Churches (SAC)) and Wendy Matthews (Head of Mission, Pastoral and Church Property).

24/01/2023 – In addition to previous stakeholder discussions, 07/09/2022 The Revd Guy Hewitt (Director of Racial Justice for the Church of England) attended a meeting at the church to discuss future use options. His informal view was that the church had potential for future use, in a positive, reparative, way.

27/02/2023 – A working group was formed of the stakeholders from the 07/09/2022 meeting and a further meeting took place on 24/01/2023 to discuss progress. After exploring future options for All Saints (Corn Street) in meetings from 07/09/2022 to 27/02/2023, The Rt Revd Viv Faull (Bishop of Bristol), - mindful of the Anglican involvement in, and benefit from, Atlantic Chattel slavery - concluded that the Diocese of Bristol should retain the church and consult on its future, rather than transferring it to the Church Conservation Trust (CCT), or disposing of it.

11/12/2023 - The Revd Anjali Kanagaratnam was appointed as Racial Justice Officer ('Projects') and was tasked with project managing the consultation for the future use of the church. Bishop Viv provided an overall brief for the consultation: that it was to be used as a "resource rather than an inhibition to the Diocese's Racial justice work in the context of Transforming Church. Together" with a proposal that it should be retained, and - subject to consultation - could be developed as a place of education, repentance and reparation.

November 2024 – The Revd Melanie Otto raised concerns about Bristol Diocesan Board of Finance budgeting £500k to re-roof All Saints Corn Street.

2025 – Key stakeholder consultations are now underway. The Revd Kanagaratnam is due to report the findings at the end of July.

LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

11. Mr Lee Coley (Diocesan Registrar) has provided the following legal advice:

a. **BDBF Liability for Closed Buildings**

Section 61 (2) (a) of The Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 states:
"the diocesan board of finance shall be responsible for the care and maintenance of the building closed for regular public worship, so far as is reasonable in all the circumstances, and the safe keeping of its

contents, whether in the building or elsewhere, and shall insure the said building and contents". So, rather than the Parish, the BDBF is required to take on responsibility for insuring and maintaining a closed church during the use seeking period.

b. Financing repairs and maintenance of Closed Buildings

1) All Saints (Corn Street) is vested in the DBF for the specific purposes outlined in the 1984 Pastoral Scheme as a "study and exhibition centre and for such special and occasional religious worship". It is held by the DBF for those purposes only and any change to that (either by separate lease or for a different use) necessitates the processing of an amending Scheme under the Mission and Pastoral Measure. As the use has lapsed, it remains vested in the DBF under the provisions of the Measure, and is de facto in a 'use-seeking' period. Due to this, the cost of repairs and maintenance of closed churches is paid for from the Diocesan Pastoral Account that the BDBF is required to hold under the 2011 Measure, and in line with Section 94 (3) of that Measure.

2) In some situations, the Church Commissioners are able to assist DBFs with the repair, maintenance and insurance of closed church buildings during the 'use-seeking period' and pending the coming into operation of arrangements under a pastoral church buildings or pastoral (church buildings disposal) scheme. The Church Commissioners were contacted to ascertain whether they could assist with the costs of the re-roofing project but given the (lack of) available funds in the Closed Church Buildings Support Account they felt it was unlikely that they could contribute more than £25,000.

3) In addition, there is a trust - The All Saints Church Lands Charity - which has reserves of £2m+ (albeit some in property), the investment returns from which it uses to support their charitable objects, and a number of our churches have been beneficiaries of this charity. This charity has just merged with two others, to form the Bristol Ecclesiastical Charity, and the objects are currently being merged and updated. Once the objects are known, we will investigate the extent to which they may be able to support future work in All Saints.

4) With regard to the Grants for Listed Place of Worship (GLPOW) Scheme, there is doubt that All Saints meets the criteria for a legitimate claim, given it is essentially closed for worship. Even if a case could be made, the maximum amount claimable would be £25k.

FINANCIAL AUTHORITY

12. As the BDBF is responsible for the care and maintenance of the building, it can authorise expenditure to undertake necessary works. As with any other expenditure, Synod approve the Annual Budget, on the advice of Bishop's Council, who are presented the proposed budget by Finance Committee. Given our legal obligations for repair and maintenance, the costs were assessed to be a 'force majeure'.

URGENCY

13. To date, the annual cost of supporting the building (insurance, utilities, inspections and maintenance) is in the order of £18k. As the roof continues to deteriorate, these costs will rise exponentially.
14. Given the increasing damage caused by further water ingress/frost/wind, the sooner the works are commenced, the less it will cost the Diocese. Our architect has suggested that a delay to March 2026 will increase the costs of repair by up to 5%, so in the area of £25k. Further delays will incur exponentially increasing costs (see para 19).

THE DIOCESE OF BRISTOL'S STRATEGIC RACIAL JUSTICE PRIORITIES

15. The Diocese of Bristol Racial Justice Strategy identifies five priorities, all of which have defined activities, and which have been costed, and funds earmarked:
 - a. Acknowledge and repent of the Church's past involvement in and benefit from transatlantic chattel slavery.
 - b. Challenge and address institutional racism, listening to and learning from the experiences of UKME/GMH people.
 - c. Recruit and support more UKME/GMH clergy, staff and volunteers.
 - d. Make our churches truly welcoming to everyone, taking responsibility for the need for profound cultural change in our Church.
 - e. Engage with the Diocesan Board of Education to improve curriculum resources related to racial justice.

The future of All Saints (Corn Street) is considered in this context, and in the light of our regrettable history.

16. In order to help discern the future of the building, The Revd Anjali Kanagaratnam is collaborating with Be on Board, a Bristol-based organisation, who will lead a consultation seeking the views of a range of key stakeholders (from the community within the wider church). In parallel with this, Cleo Lake, a community engagement professional, researcher and artist, will run a series of community engagement exercises to gather the view of the wider community. The initial consultation will be completed by July 2025 and the results will be used to inform the decision on the future of the All Saints (Corn Street). One of the options for its future may include disposal; however, the current view is to retain, maintain and re-utilise the building so that it might contribute towards the Diocese of Bristol's desire to lament, repent, and repair relations.

VAULT ACCESS

17. In order to understand the implications of some of the potential future uses for the building, Dr Chris Barnes undertook research to ascertain how Edward Colston's vault might be accessed. It had been previously supposed that the vault could be accessed either via the blocked-up doorway to the left of the

monument (see Figure 5 in the Appendix) or via the boiler room (see Figure 6 in the appendix). However, upon further examination this was assessed as unlikely. Following research in the archives, it was determined that the blocked-up doorway used to lead to a 'little vestry'. Also, the heating system in the boiler room goes through the rear wall and out into the rear end of the south aisle, against the west wall. Consequently, it is unlikely that these pipes extend as far as the vault in question. Therefore, there is no visible point of entry into the vault, other than breaking open the seal. It is uncertain how many layers lie beneath; it may go straight to the void where the remains were reinterred in 1854, or it may be laid on a bed of screed, or other tiles.

POTENTIAL OPTIONS FOR FUTURE OF ALL SAINTS (CORN STREET)

18. Once the consultation organised by The Revd Anjali Kanagaratnam has been completed, the results will be considered alongside the potential options for the church's future. Some of the options are unpalatable, but they are described here for completeness:
 - a. **Seek permission to ruin or demolish the church building**
Whilst this may be possible, it would be challenging and costly as the church building shares walls with neighbouring commercial and residential buildings. The questions of exhumation, and de-consecration of the land would, in all likelihood, arise.
 - b. **Sell**
Attempts were made to sell the building prior to 2020; however, prospective purchasers were deterred by the costs associated with bringing the building up to standard. These have now increased due to the ingress of water damage, and the required works to the roof, and the additional work required to make the building accessible.
 - c. **Transfer to the Church Conservation Trust (CCT)**
The CCT is a national charity that seeks to save historic churches at risk. The CCT receives more requests than it can accommodate so it only takes a small number of church buildings each year that it deems both of high historic significance and at risk. There is no guarantee that the CCT would accept All Saints (Corn Street) as a candidate.
 - d. **Retain**
Re-utilise the church building so that it might contribute towards the Diocese of Bristol's desire to lament, repent and repair relations. In this scenario, it is possible that exhumation, removal of artefacts and de-consecration of ground may all be required.
19. None of the above options can be implemented quickly due to the necessary legal processes; consequently, the roof of All Saints (Corn Street) will continue to deteriorate. If the work is delayed, the Church Architect, Izaak Hudson, has estimated that the costs will increase by 5% in 2026 (an additional £25,000) and then increase to additional £75,000 – 100,000 for each year of delay, beyond 2026.

DISCUSSION

20. Bishop's Council reviewed the situation in March and May 2025, and have concluded that the least-worst option remains to repair the roof, as tendered, on the grounds that:
- we have a legal liability to do so,
 - the roof is fragile, and will require increasingly more costly maintenance unless a more permanent repair is made,
 - most of the potential future options under consideration will take a number of years to come to fruition, in which time yet further expenditure on the roof will be necessary to ensure that the DBF meets its legal liabilities, and obligations to owners of adjoining properties,
 - by not carrying out the work, the appraisal of options following the consultation on the future of the building will be compromised as the building will deteriorate further.
 - we have obligations to maintain the integrity of the church building as All Saints is attached to commercial and residential properties (see Figure 2).
 - The longer we wait to repair the roof, the greater the (wider) public safety risk becomes.
21. Concurrently, the Diocese is putting in place targeted resource to support PCCs in developing renewal schemes and in raising the required funds, noting that it is the responsibility of the PCC in each case to bear the cost of the work, which is not the case for All Saints Corn Street.

DECISION

22. Whilst the final decision on future use has yet to be made, it is clear that all the *most likely* options will require an intact roof. Given that further delay will incur further costs, it is recommended that Diocesan Synod supports the motion:

Diocesan Synod has considered Bishop's Council's review of the future options for All Saints Corn Street, and concurs with its conclusion to proceed with the roof repair.



R D Leaman CB OBE
Diocesan Secretary and CEO
Diocese of Bristol

28 May 2025

Annexes:

A. Images of All Saints Corn Street

B. All Saints Corn Street - History

ANNEX A – IMAGES OF ALL SAINTS CORN STREET

Figure 1 – Exterior photo of All Saints, Corn Street

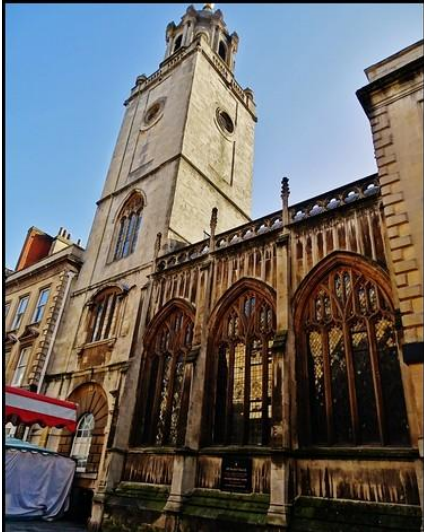


Figure 2 – Google earth image (outline of church is marked in red)

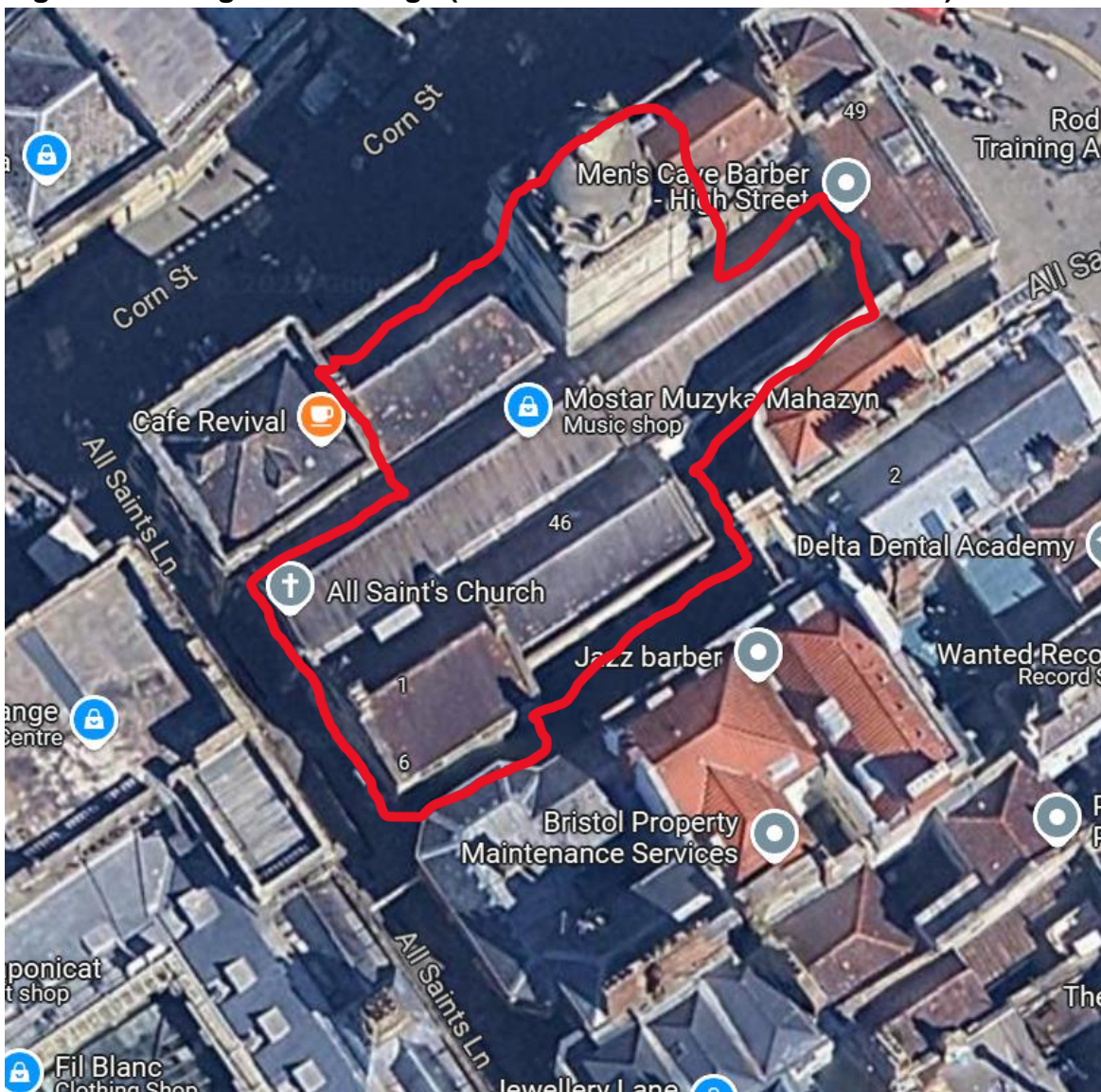


Figure 3 – Edward Colston's monument designed by James Gibbs, with an effigy carved by John Michael Rysbrack



Figure 4 - Edward Colston's vault floor monument



Figure 5 - The entrance to the 'little vestry', formerly assumed to be vault entrance.



Figure 6 – Boiler room (facing East)



ANNEX B

ALL SAINTS CORN STREET – HISTORY

1140s – Church originally constructed.

Early 1400s – major renovation, construction of current nave, north and south aisles.

1585 – Glebe House (old parsonage) was built adjacent to the church and now shares water, gas and electrical supplies.

1721 – Edward Colston was interred at the church which had been long associated with his family. His grave is marked by a nearby monument, designed by James Gibbs, with an effigy carved by John Michael Rysbrack (see Figure 3 in Appendix).

1757 – Church re-ordered.

1782 – Outer wall of the North Aisle was rebuilt.

1835 – Major phase of repairs

1843 – Edward Colston's body was reportedly exhumed and reinterred in the vault, which was described as "very deep", directly in front of the monument. There is a possibility that the individual exhumed and identified as Colston in 1843 was not, in fact, Colston; the identity was questioned by contemporaries.²

1755 - A faculty was granted to raise the floor in the body of the church, amongst other reordering works.³

1850 – Chancel rebuilt.

1882 - a faculty was petitioned regarding the organ chamber, reading desk, pews, and encaustic tiles.⁴

1883 - Faculty work was completed, including the relaying of artistic encaustic tiles and 'the old tombstones in the aisles [were] lowered', with Minton's tile paving placed upon them.⁵

1905/6 – Glebe House restored.

1906 – All Saints Lands Charity was granted a 999-year lease on the Glebe House. The Charity still uses the premises but wishes to surrender the lease in the near future.

1970s-1980s - The uniform floor tiles currently in situ were most likely introduced when the pews were removed.⁶ Interestingly, the alignment of the memorial stone appears to have moved in relation to the monument since

² 'The Great Colstonian Controversy!!!' was the headline from the Bristol Times and Mirror on Saturday 23 September 1843 both of which questioned the identity of the exhumed body.

³ A faculty was granted on 12 April 1755 for raising the floor in the body of the church, replacement of the pulpit, altar, seats and pews, alter the door to the vestry room, paint and beautify the church (BA, P.AS/ChW/15).

⁴ BA, P.AS/ChW/22/2.

⁵ All Saints reopened on Friday 24 August 1883 following a significant reordering. The nave had been filled with open oak seats having carved frontals, and the floor was re-laid with artistic encaustic tiles. The tombstones in the aisles had been lowered, with Minton's tile paving placed upon them. *Western Daily Press* Saturday 25 August 1883.

⁶ Some work was done with the pews, alongside the fire escape, west door, heating, chancel ceiling and lights in 1976 (BA, EP/J/6/AS/13). The pews were removed in 1984 (BA, EP/J/6/AS/17).

c.1900, potentially suggesting that the monument was again moved between 1970s and 1980s.⁷

1984 - Closed for worship as population moved out of central Bristol and there were already two other churches in close proximity (St Stephen's (City) and Christ Church with Ewen). All Saints was transferred to Diocesan Board of Finance for use as a study and exhibition centre. It has also been used as a resource centre by the Diocesan Board of Education.

2013 - Diocesan Board of Education moved to Hillside House (current Diocesan Support Services Office).

2018-2020 – St Nicholas Bristol, Bishop's Mission Order (BMO), used the church as auxiliary space for children and young adults work whilst St Nicholas' crypt was being renovated.

2020 – Considerable water ingress, and the roof patch-repaired.

2022 – St Philip and St Jacob Bristol (locally known as Central) temporarily used the church as worship space whilst Central's roof was repaired following significant lead theft.

⁷ Further archival research may assist.