

Lymm Methodist Church

About Lymm Methodist Church

In the eighteenth century Lymm in Cheshire was largely an agricultural society comprising a collection of scattered hamlets with a very diverse social structure, including well-to-do families and their servants, and poor families working on the land or as home-based handloom weavers, sawyers and fustian cutters. From May 1747, on several occasions John Wesley stayed at Old Booth Bank Farm, on the perimeter of Lymm, and preached under an oak tree in front of the house. In 1834, a chapel was built nearby. (It was demolished in 1972 to make way for the M56 linking Chester to Manchester.)

The first Lymm-based Wesleyan house class was held in 1786. In the period up to 1811, following a split in Methodist Society, two chapels - one Wesleyan, one Primitive - were built. A Church of England enquiry put the number of Methodists in Lymm at up to 500. With the arrival of the railway in 1851 making access to Warrington, Liverpool and Manchester easy, the demographics changed, as professional people chose to live away from their place of work. With this influx of people, both Methodist Societies expanded. By 1850, the Primitive Methodists built a small chapel on a sandstone outcrop close to the village, to which a schoolroom was added in 1865. In 1897, a new 220-seat worship space was built a few yards above the chapel, releasing the original chapel and schoolroom to accommodate the growing Sunday school. In 1968, the buildings were connected by a new two-storey, flat-roofed building, provided additional rooms for the expanding junior church and the establishment of Cub, Scout and Brownie groups. This is Lymm Methodist Church today.



Over the years, each generation has adapted the premises to support mission and evangelism activities, and to meet the changing needs of the Lymm community by playing an important role in the community life of Lymm. For many years Lymm Methodist Church has held monthly lunches for the local community, raising £5,000 a year for Room at the Inn, a local charity for the homeless, and provides a place for friends to meet over a meal. It also organises weekly donations to a local foodbank and has regular collections for other charities. Its commitment to climate justice is recognised with a Bronze [Eco-church award](#): it is a Fairtrade church, hold services focusing on environmental issues, has reduced its energy use (including by the installation of LED lighting throughout the premises), and is on renewable energy tariffs.

Being so close to the village centre, the church is a valuable community resource. It is used every week by a dance group and community choir, Scouts, Cubs, Brownies and AA, and for Yoga, Tai Chi and Pilates classes, as well as social events, meetings and concerts. Typically, around 400 people use the premises each week.

However, the evolution of the premises has resulted in a collection of rooms on two floors, with five different levels, steep stairs and narrow corridors. Consequently, they present access issues for anyone with limited mobility, and make it difficult for families with young children, as well as large groups, to move around the site easily and safely.

What motivated this project

In 2016, we recognised that there was an increasing number of people who have no, or only a negative, experience of Church, and do not see its relevance to their day-to-day activities. They see out-dated buildings in which rituals are performed that they do not understand. They are reluctant to enter a place of worship. Consequently, their children have no experience of Church, resulting in a loss of two generations with no regular connection to Christian teaching beyond that in schools.

We realised that we needed to find ways to create an environment enabling people unfamiliar with Christianity to feel at ease, and to express to them God's love in ways that are relevant to their life experience. We then need to encourage them along the path of discipleship, to the point where they have a desire to know Jesus and grow in faith.

The cornerstone of the project is our Mission Plan, developed under the heading of 'The Methodist Way of Life', which was formulated in 2017 and has been reviewed annually. Our vision has four strands:

Worship

Continue to provide a strong, dedicated fellowship of Christians who want to grow closer to God and believe that collective worship, prayer and understanding the

scriptures are an important part of developing their faith. Constantly seek out ways for fresh expressions of worship and make it more relevant to the wider community.

Learning and Caring

Expand the use of technology for remote learning and worship. Take practical action to move towards net zero carbon emissions and promote climate justice.

Service

Serve our community by upgrading our premises to provide attractive, warm, safe and legally compliant spaces that are fully accessible for groups and clubs, and available for social events and public performances.

Evangelism

Appoint a Children and Families Worker who, with the support of volunteers can deliver the Christian message to the five local primary schools and local secondary school. Introduce activities to help children and young people to further explore Christianity and follow a path of discipleship. Upgrade the premises to modern standards, dispelling any sense that the Church is an alien, dying institution, and giving a strong sense of the vibrant nature and joy of belonging to a Christian fellowship.



Our redevelopment project

Having completed the Mission Plan, it became very evident that the premises were not fit for purpose on many fronts. In 2018 we decided that we needed a bold vision, a view shared by the District Property Secretary and our appointed architects.

We developed a design which would see the central part of the linking building demolished and replaced by a new glass-fronted, two storey building, providing a much more welcoming, well-lit main entrance and refreshment lounge above. A lift would be

installed, along with a new staircase with low-rise steps, making it easier to move around the buildings, and all rooms would be made wheelchair and pushchair accessible. Other improvements envisaged included an upgraded ground-floor kitchen, a new first-floor kitchenette, and new toilets, including a Changing Places toilet. We also decided to equip the worship area with theatre lighting and install flooring suitable for dance performances.

Our church buildings have always been expensive and inefficient to heat because of their size and poor insulation, and because our central heating system is split into only two heating zones, meaning that an entire suite of rooms must be heated, even if only one is being used. Redeveloping the buildings would give us the opportunity to address this and make our energy use more efficient.

Initially, we intended to retain a gas boiler, but as the years of planning went on, the contribution of fossil fuels to the climate crisis focused our minds. This, along with the Methodist Church's target to reach Net Zero by 2030, led us to explore other heating options. We visited [Audlem Methodist Church](#) in Cheshire, which in 2022 replaced its gas boiler with a blown-air heating system using air source heat pumps. We were impressed by the efficiency and controllability of this system which, allied with a renewable energy tariff, would enable us to reach Net Zero by ending our use of fossil fuels entirely. This would not only be good for the planet, but also better for local air quality. All of this would add a significantly to the cost of the project, but it was a futureproof solution which would demonstrate our commitment as a church to climate justice.

Who has been involved

Making major changes to a public building is no small undertaking, and from the outset we have had to employ professionals with the relevant skills and experience. The first of these was our architects, Finlason and Partners, who have remained with the project throughout the eight years and helped us to develop and refine the design. But there have been numerous other professionals (and fees!) along the way, including building services engineers, a quantity surveyor, structural engineers and surveyors investigating foundations, drainage, electrics and asbestos. Crucially, in the last year, as we neared the point when we would invite tenders from contractors, we appointed a project management company, Innov8, to guide us through the process and ensure that we had the support we needed to get best value. Innov8 will remain involved until construction is finished, liaising with the contractor, DJL Construction Ltd, on our behalf.

Our fundraising

Fundraising started with small community events in 2018, but these were put on hold when the pandemic hit in 2020 and didn't restart until 2022. Initially, we approached our church family to seek pledges. We held a harvest supper launch event, wrote letters, created professionally produced flyers and made a video setting out our vision. We set a target of £250,000 (half the anticipated cost in 2022), so that we could make credible grant applications. The response was magnificent, despite the escalating cost of the project, and by December 2025 the church family had pledged £309,000. Most of this came from pledges, but various fundraising social events and other individual initiatives added to the pot, as well as building a valuable sense of collective purpose.

The church family's commitment put us in a strong position to make successful applications for grants, and two church members with considerable experience in this area invested hours of work in researching and preparing applications. In the end, we raised a further £386,000. We received support from many Methodist-related bodies. The largest awards (£100,000 each) came from Benefact Trust's Methodist Grants Programme and Sankey Valley Methodist Circuit, which particularly recognised the value of our investment in a more environmentally friendly heating system. Methodist Church North-West England District gave us £80,000 and grants also came from the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, The Norwood and Newton Settlement, The Garfield Weston Foundation, The Melbourne Road Memorial Trust Fund, The Laing Family Trusts, The Congregational and General Charitable Trust and a community group, Lymm Ladies. Early success in receiving large grant awards buoyed us up, but there were some surprises and disappointments along the way. A grant application to the Joseph Rank Trust was unsuccessful, we couldn't get funding for a Changing Places toilet, and sources of funding for green energy solutions were surprisingly few and far between. What became clear is that, however well our project might appear to fit eligibility criteria and however positive the exploratory conversations with grant-awarding bodies, there are no guarantees of success.

Challenges along the way

There have been many challenges.

Researching alternative heating systems proved time-consuming and difficult because the professional advice we received was non-committal, comparative performance data was unavailable, and environmentally friendly heating solutions are currently rare in churches. We spent some months talking to manufacturers and exploring different electrical heating systems before we were lucky enough to stumble upon Audlem Methodist Church, who gladly shared their experience of using a blown-air system

powered by air source heat pumps. This gave us exactly the information we needed and enabled us to be confident about this heating solution.

The biggest challenge was our inability to get reliable cost estimates in the early concept and detail design phases. This meant that we spent a lot of time and money developing a design which we would later discover was beyond our reach financially. We were only able to achieve clarity in early 2025, when we finally had a fully engineered design available for a quantity surveyor to scrutinise.

Timing has also been against us. We faced a huge escalation in the cost of the project because of inflation in the construction industry, caused by skilled labour shortage following Brexit, supply chain issues following the pandemic and the 11% general UK inflation in 2022/2023. Between 2018 and 2024, the construction cost increased by 23%. The situation worsened in that professional fees, estimated in 2018 at £57,000, are coming in at £120,000. Inflation only accounts for £13,000 of this; the balance is fees that we were unaware of at the start of the project.

A further challenge is that, because the project involves some elements of work which improve accessibility (which is VAT-exempt), it is not possible to get a proper understanding of how much VAT needs to be paid until the contractor produces a detailed cost breakdown. This entails a detailed review of 95 individual tasks.

So, where did all this leave our project financially? Well, in 2018 we were given an estimated cost of £450,000, which by early 2024 had increased to £669,000. When the quantity surveyor looked at the engineered design in early 2025, he told us, to our horror, that it would cost £1.2 million.

A significant proportion of the cost was associated with the glass-fronted, new-build element of the project, and the structural engineers' insistence that the existing buildings needed to be underpinned - despite having said previously that they have stood happily on sandstone for 175 years.

Confident as we were that we could raise £700,000, we realised that we would never be able to raise £1.2 million. We therefore went back to the drawing board, abandoned the new-build element and rescoped the project, so that we could deliver all the key features within the existing footprint of the buildings. In the process we sought to retain as much as possible of the original design, so that we weren't reinventing the wheel and paying twice for it. In the end, with a lot of work and attention to detail on the part of all involved, we reached the point where we had a design which would deliver what we needed at a price we could afford.

Value engineering was necessary. For example, the size of the lift has been limited by cost, and some spaces will be heated by electric panel heaters rather than air source heat pumps, which are more efficient, but more expensive to install. We also couldn't

afford to install solar panels – something which would have complemented our heat pumps perfectly and made our vast roof areas productive. The design may, perhaps, lack the drive-by appeal of the glass-fronted new-build concept, but our consolation is that we have taken the more environmentally friendly approach to building.

Tenders went out in August 2025, and the support of Innov8's project manager through this and the contract-negotiation phase of the project proved utterly invaluable. The initial quotes all exceeded our budget significantly, but he skilfully used his experience of the industry to negotiate the price down so that it came within budget. Without this professional support, we would have been at sea.

In November, a contractor was appointed, following approval from Church Council. After seven years of work, it was an emotional moment. We then spent a frantic few weeks emptying the buildings, which would be closed for the duration of the work, and preparing for the hand-over to the contractor in early January 2026. The work is expected to take six months. In the meantime, we have made alternative arrangements for holding our services and all our other church outreach activities elsewhere, and we are using our website, emails, videos and social media to keep our church family informed.



Check back for further updates from Lymm Methodist Church as their project progresses!

With thanks to Paul Thompson and John Woodthorpe for this piece and for the photos. For further information about the project visit [Lymm Methodist Church's website](http://www.lymmmethodistchurch.co.uk) or you can [email Paul and John](mailto:paul@lymmmethodistchurch.co.uk).