



The journey so far: Introduction and Background

The current organ, believed to be the fourth at KPC, is well-loved and has served the church very well for around 120 years...but it hasn't been overhauled recently and is in need of repair.

Additionally, it is significantly sharp in pitch which makes it difficult to use alongside other instruments as part of our general worship.

We want to maintain organ music as an important aspect of the church's worship, with an instrument fit for future generations.

Little is known about the earlier organs which would certainly have been much simpler instruments than the current 20th century one. We do know that for a significant time, the organ would have in the tower on the repositioned rood loft.



Condition of the current organ.

We asked Nicholson's (specialists who know the organ) to assess the costs of refurbishment.



Their report concluded that:

"Although some of the most urgent repairs have been completed since the 1970's, the rest of the organ is in universally poor condition.

Much of the surviving Bird material from 1902 has never been restored and demonstrates all the signs of 123 years of wear and tear." "the present instrument would require so much reworking that it would not make financial or artistic sense to do so."



Identifying our options

A new pipe organ at an estimated cost of £600k, was viewed as inappropriate.

We have explored options based on a digital recreation of a pipe organ; keeping the same look and feel but with some or all of the sound created digitally.

The benefits of this are:

- The organ will be tuned to concert pitch and can be used with other instruments.
- The console (keyboard) can be moveable, allowing the organist improved sightlines to the choir, worship leader etc.
- Using modern technology will require less regular maintenance/tuning.
- A large part of the organ chamber will be freed up – allowing the space for wheelchair access to the dais.

Assessment of Hybrid & Digital Options

A team including the the church organists (Charlotte and Rosemary), choir members (David and Stephen) and worship minister (Alex) visited two churches to assess examples of each type of organ. They were able to play the organs and talk to the suppliers.

Both of the organs visited were of similar specification (3 manuals, pedals, drawstops etc) to the current KPC organ.



The console of the fully digital organ at St Marys church, Witney

Sound & Playability

Being of similar specification, both of the organs were viewed as being similar in terms of ease of playing.

Being modern instruments with digital capabilities, either a hybrid or fully digital model would be able to be specified with a number of features that would make them easier to play for pianists.

The sound quality of both the hybrid and digital organs was good and it was felt that either option would be an improvement on the current instrument.

There was a slight preference for the hybrid organ at Our Lady of the Wayside. Either type of instrument is capable of being closely designed to the particular acoustics of KPC.

Heritage

An hybrid organ would retain a number of the original early 20th century pipes. At present none of these are visible (the pipes currently seen above the organ console are purely decorative). Most of the current 1000+ pipes within the organ chamber are purely functional in design and not particularly attractive.



The decorative pipes at KPC are not part of the organ



The console and retained pipes of the hybrid organ at Our Lady of the Wayside, Shirley

With a hybrid instrument, some of the retained pipes could be positioned so that they become visible.

The group felt that whether we chose a hybrid or a digital organ, the existing decorative pipes could be replaced with some of the original functional pipes,



Costs of a modern instrument

The PCC have agreed that addressing the issues with the current organ fits with the objectives of For future generations and that its replacement should be included in the project scope:

The cost of either a hybrid or fully digital organ will be dependent upon the final choice of specification of the instrument and any decision about improving the setting of the organ within the current arch.

It is clear however that:

- either choice would cost well under half of the cost of a new pipe organ and all would result in a better sounding and more usable instrument than our current pipe organ.
- an hybrid organ could cost up to twice as much as a fully digital one and would have higher ongoing maintenance costs.

Benefits of upgrading the organ

There are significant advantages in replacing the current organ, both for the way that we worship and for the wider For future generation objectives.

- Being in-tune with other instruments and having an enhanced number of organ sounds will allow organ music to be included in a wider range of worship styles and services.
- The ability to move the organ console means better site lines and communication between the organist, the choir and other musicians. The console will also be much more accessible rather than through the small door in the organ screen.
- The up-front and ongoing costs associated with a new instrument will be significantly lower than trying to refurbish the current organ or replace it on a like for like basis.,
- Additional features, such as organ pedal assist, will help pianists who are less familiar with organ playing.
- A more compact replacement frees up space for a ramp, allowing step free access to the chancel whilst simplifying the design of the dais.
- A fully digital instrument, if chosen, will provide additional storage space for musical equipment, etc.