

**Statement of Significance
Statement of Need
St. Thomas, Werneth
28 January 2026**

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1 Statement of Significance

1.1 Brief history and description of the church building, contents, churchyard and setting

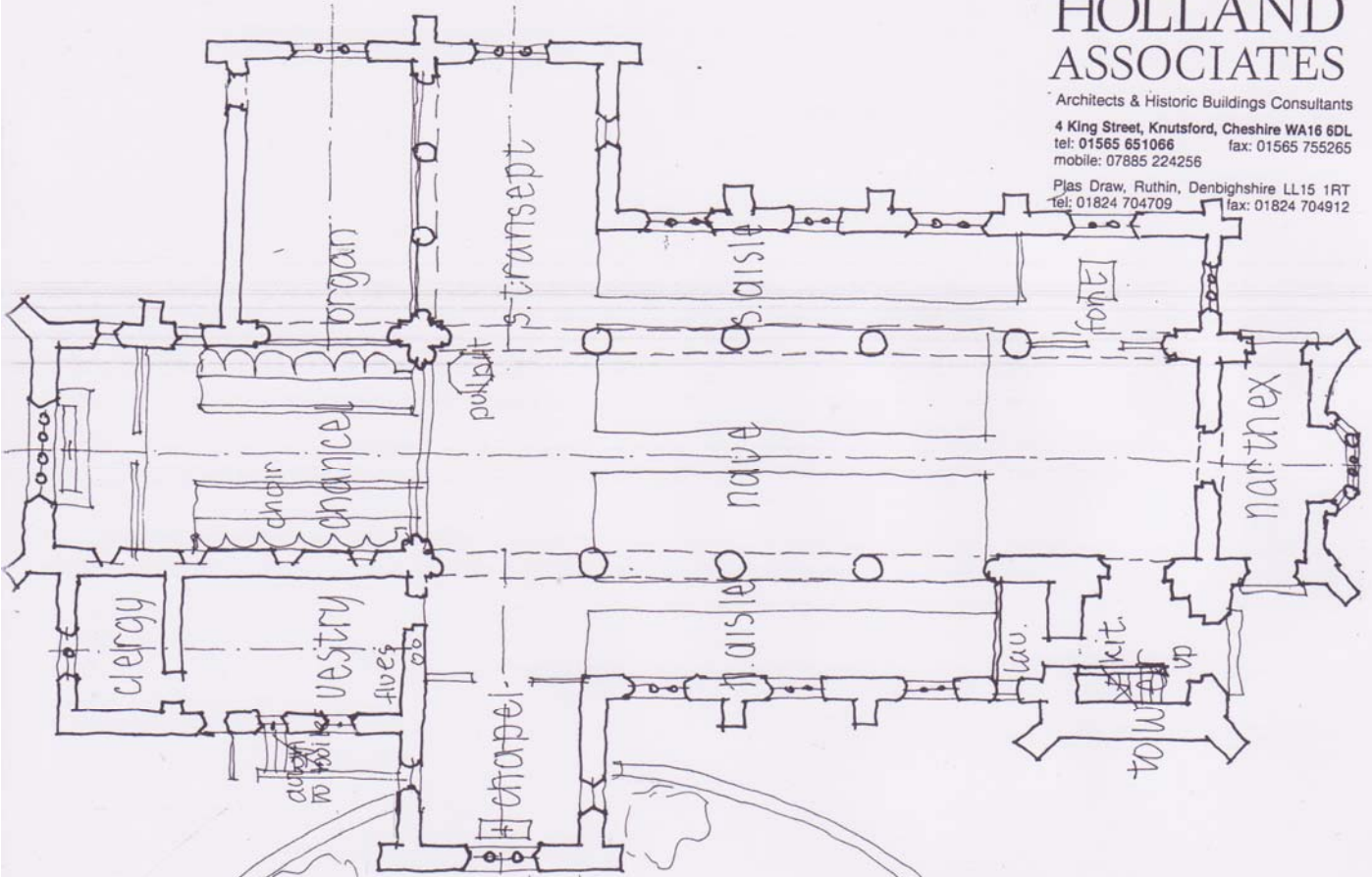
1.1.1 Plan of the Church

HOLLAND ASSOCIATES

Architects & Historic Buildings Consultants

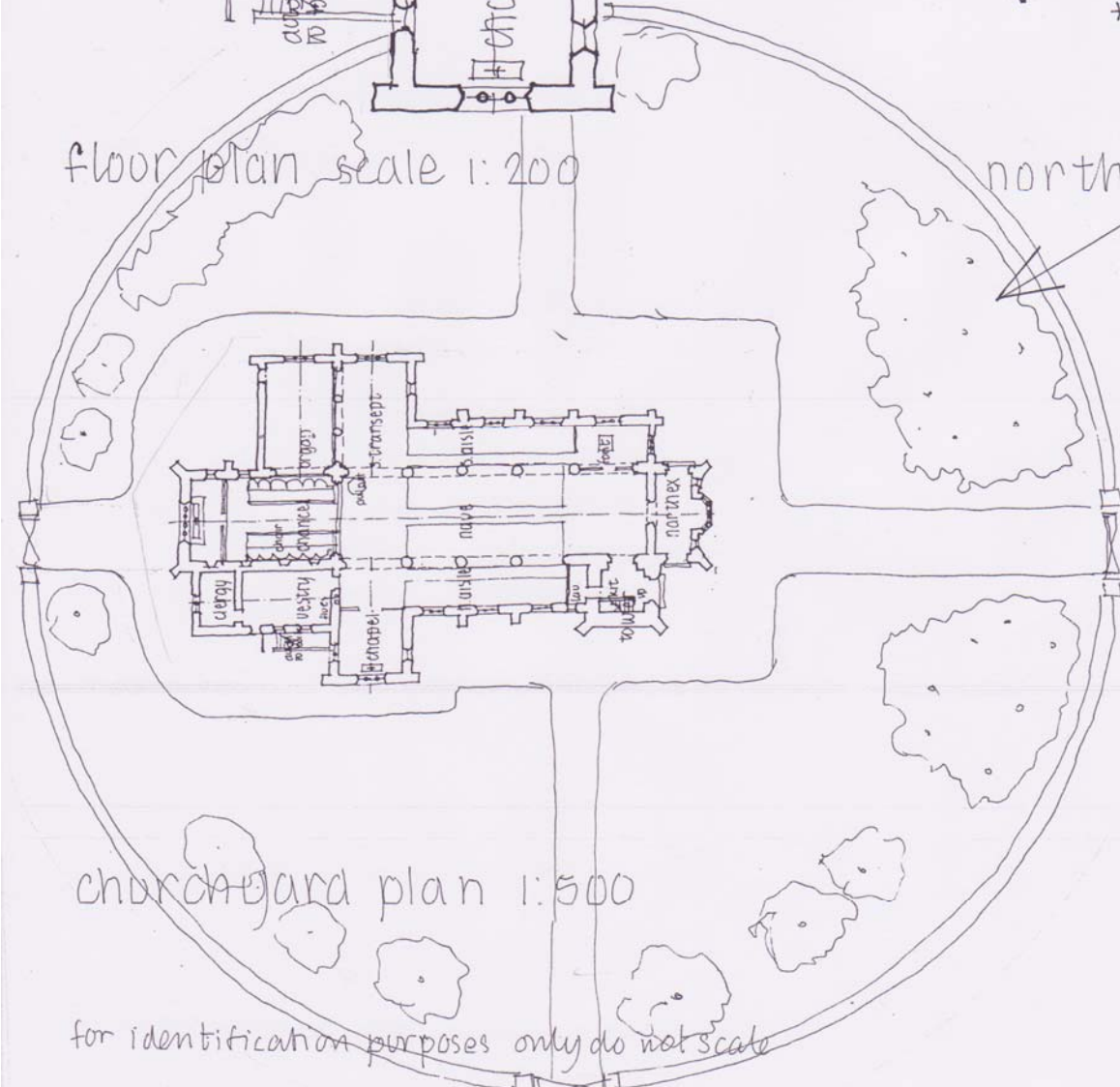
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floor plan scale 1:200

north



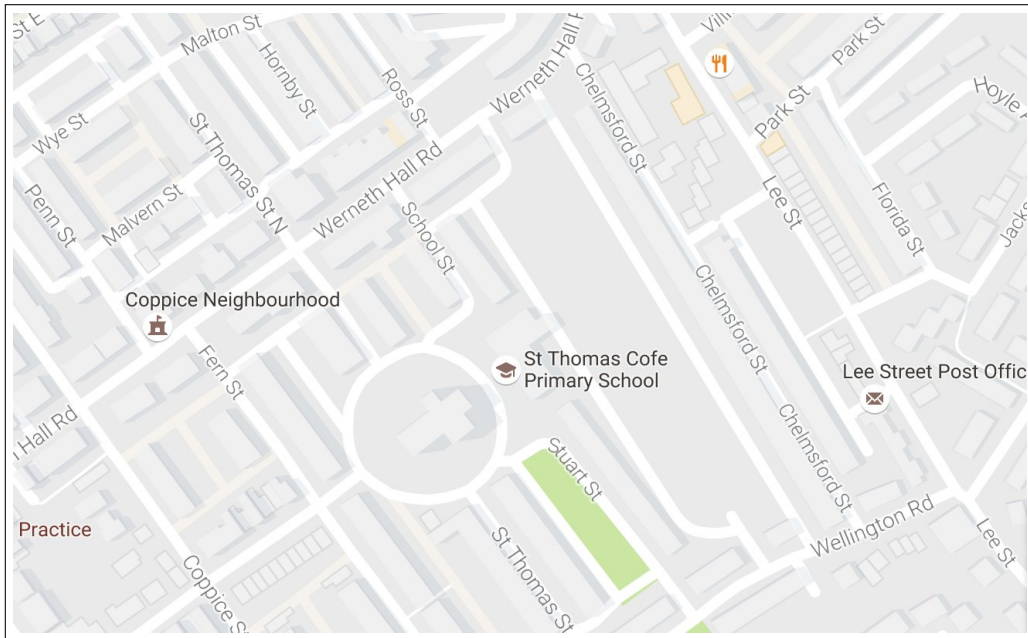
churchyard plan 1:500

for identification purposes only do not scale

1.2.1 Geography

At the top of a hill, and as the tallest building in the local area, the church is visible for many miles around, from the centre of Oldham, from the M60, and from the A62 “Oldham Road”, in Failsworth. It is a prominent landmark.

The estate was conceived with the church as its organising principle, as is visible from the street map.



The church is situated in a grassy, circular, well-maintained, grave-free churchyard (with listed railings) of which no formal use is currently made. Local children play there. Fairs used to take place in it. Snowdrops, bluebells, anemones and crocuses have been planted into the grass.

The listed front of St. Thomas’ Primary School, across St. Thomas’ Circle, matches the architecture of the church.

1.2.2 History of the Building

1853-55	St. Thomas Church built by (A. Trimen & G. Shaw)
1860	internal Chancel woodwork added (probably G. Shaw) (at the expense of John Platt)
1868	North and South transepts added (G. Shaw)
1874	Stained glass added to main West Window
1880-82	Organ Chamber added (J. Crowther).
1880-95	stained glass added to North and South Transcept windows
1883	East Window added (Capronnier)
1905	West Porch added.
1905	Reredos added behind altar.
1907, 1910, 1938	stained glass added to S. aisle windows. (Gustave Hiller; Heaton Butler & Bayne)
1909	Baptistery formed.
1920 (approx.)	Memorial Tablet for 1st World War added to base of tower
1930, 1938	stained glass added to N. aisle windows. (A. G. Moore; G. E. R. Smith)
1950 (approx.)	N. transept dedicated to those who died in 2nd World War
1960 (approx.)	Wardens' Pews introduced to the rear.
1970	Pews replaced with ones purchased from St. Paul, Chorlton
2018-19	Reorder including (a) removal of pews; (b) underfloor heating; (c) new toilets in base of tower; (d) new kitchen in N. aisle; (e) ramp at main entrance; (f) Warden's Pews turned into cupboards

1.2.3 Feel

For its size, St. Thomas' Church feels surprisingly intimate, described as "a memorable ensemble" (Section 1.3.4).

The sanctuary furnishings are of a very darkly stained wood; the screens around the Baptistery and the Memorial Chapel are of a lighter tone; and the floor an even lighter tone.

The church contains a substantial organ in some disrepair but which is Grade I listed by the British Institute of Organ Studies.¹ In 2010 it was the only such organ in Greater Manchester. It was recognised by BIOS as "an organ of outstanding historic and musical importance in essentially original condition".

¹<https://npor.org.uk/survey/N01681>

1.2.4 Community

The Church is situated in the middle of the most ethnically diverse parish in the Diocese of Manchester. In recent years, 88% of the population were recorded by the Church Urban Fund as not White British. St. Thomas' is now the only church in the Parish. The arrival of many families into the area from Eastern Europe must also be noted.

The population of the parish is 6,755. Its IMD rank is 217 out of 12,178. This means that it is within the most deprived 2% of parishes in England.²

The Church itself is valued within a broadly Muslim area—not least because of the effectiveness of the enlarged St. Thomas Primary School, the Church's most natural partner for mission and ministry within the parish.

In many ways the church finds itself uniquely placed within this area. Its continuing presence is extremely important in enabling social cohesion: contact between local Muslims and Christians. Its heritage value is also immense, built as it was by the local mill owners. It is in many ways a focus and repository of Werneth's particular history and heritage. However at the moment, this heritage is broadly kept behind locked doors, and could be opened up so that many more members of the local community are able to appreciate it—and their place within the history of Werneth. This is a tremendous missed opportunity as the church fabric can offer a number of culturally enriching experiences in such a deprived area of Greater Manchester.

Many people who moved out while the South Asian population moved in still relate to St. Thomas—from various parts of Oldham.

1.2.5 Use

Since the removal of the pews, the Church is used for a number of different community activities, including weekly school services, school heritage visits, English Classes, Dance, Exercise Groups, Youth Clubs, Holiday Activities, voting, and more.

St. Thomas' congregation meets at 10:30 am on a Sunday morning.

1.3 The significance of the church (including its contents)

1.3.1 Benefactors

The benefactors were local mill owners: the Platt brothers, and the Radcliffe family.

1.3.2 Listing & Descriptions of the Church Building

The Parish Church is a Grade II listed building

1.3.3 Official List Entry

OLDHAM³

SD9104SE ST THOMAS'S CIRCLE

²<http://www.cuf.org.uk/parish/240303>

³<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1201687?section=official-list-entry>

780-1/7/71 Church of St Thomas
GV II

Parish church. 1853-55, with additions of 1868 and 1880-1882. By A. Trimen. Stone, with slate roof. Early English style. West porch added 1905 in Perpendicular style.

South door to porch in shallow segmental arch with traceried overlight. Swept angle buttresses with pinnacles and shallow canted bay in west wall, with Perpendicular tracery. 4-light window in West gable above.

NW tower and spire. 4-stage tower with angle buttresses. West door with shafts and interlaced capitals. Billet moulded hood mould. Traceried panelled door.

North window of tower cuts into second stage which is blind to west. Lancet window in third stage then paired bellchamber lights with steep gabled hood mould which cuts through chevron frieze. Shafts support projecting angle stone. Brooch spire with lucarnes.

3-light west window to south aisle, with reticulated tracery. Aisles divided into bays by buttresses, each with triple foiled lancet window. Curved triangular windows to low clerestory above.

Paired gables to side chapel and organ chamber with triple foiled lancet windows. Chapel and organ chamber to south, each with 4-light reticulated traceried window.

Chapel added 1868, and organ chamber added c1880. 2 wide lancet windows to south of chancel, and 4-light east window with cross finial on gable over. North aisle similar, the north chapel also added c1868.

INTERIOR: nave, with arcade of 5 bays to south, 4 to north, the tower occupying the north-west corner. Alternate cylindrical and octagonal shafts carry double chamfered arches. Stilted arched embrasures to clerestory windows over. Arched braced roof trusses with collars and two tiers of wind bracing.

Chancel arch with angled responds and stepped arch. Short shafts superimposed on responds carry inner chamfered arch. Slight hood mould carried on small foliate corbels. North and south chapels behind east bay of arcade, with open clerestory lights, of 5-lights to south, and a single light to north.

Ornate roof to chancel, of 4 bays with dog tooth moulding to arched braces of scissor braced roof, with cusped wind braces and angels carved at head of wall posts.

Emblems of saints painted in panels formed by wind braces. Elaborate open-traceried choir stalls with gilded coats of arms. Altar rails in similar style.

Painted panel to reredos, depicting adoration of magi with painted and carved frame, dated 1905. Traceried panels each side containing texts. Ornate traceried pulpit and eagle lectern, forming series with choir stalls and altar. Armorial glass in chancel north and south windows.

East window by Capronnier, 1883. Second World War memorial chapel to north, with oak panelling and altar.

STAINED GLASS in Renaissance style in north and south chapel windows, possibly by the same artist, 1880-1895. Both are memorials to Radcliffe family of Werneth Park. Stained glass in main west window, c1874. Medieval style, but faded colours and inscription now illegible.

North aisle windows by AG Moore of Liverpool, c1930 and 1958, and G.E.R. Smith of London. Stained glass in south aisle by Gustave Hiller of Liverpool, a series dated between 1907 and 1930, and by Heaton Butler and Bayne, 1910.

Baptistery to west of south aisle formed in 1909. Square font on squat cylindrical base, with statue of saint holding child. Low relief angels and children on each side of basin. Memorial tablet for First World War at base of tower, a painted wood triptych by Henry A Payne of Amberley, Gloucestershire.

Listing NGR: SD9195004233

1.3.4 Lancashire: Manchester and the South-East

St. Thomas, St Thomas's Circus, Werneth. 1853-5 by *A. Trimen* and *George Shaw*. A late Commissioners' Church, though the grant was only £125. Other costs were defrayed by local industrialists. On the crown of a hill, and part of a planned development. It sits in a circus at the centre of a grid of streets with terraces for mill workers. Sturdy NW tower with a broach spire, E and W windows with flowing tracery, triple lancets to the aisles. *George Shaw* added the transepts in 1868. Their large windows have flowing tracery incorporating S shapes typical of Shaw. Choir vestry, organ chamber, etc added by *J. S. Crowther* in the 1880s. Perp-style W porch, 1908. Arcade of circular piers, and a high arch-braced roof, that in the chancel with cusped wind-braces and angels at the corbels replacing the original roof: work carried out c. 1860 probably by *Shaw*, at the expense of John Platt of Platt Bros & Co. ...

FURNISHINGS. A memorable ensemble, with some outstanding pieces, the gifts of wealthy families who lived nearby. Chancel furnishings by *Shaw*, c. 1860. Elaborate canopied STALLS similar to those of St. Thomas, Lees, incorporating emblems of the Platt and Radcliffe families. — PULPIT. Also by *Shaw*. Highly ornate, with intricate canopied sides. — LECTERN. A great fierce eagle, typical of *Shaw's* workshop. — REREDOS. Atmospheric painting of the Adoration of the Magi in an elaborate painted and carved frame., by *Reginald Hallward*, 1905. — BAPTISTERY, W end of S aisle, created and fitted up with marble-lined walls and a mosaic floor in 1908-9. The FONT is a highly unusual piece, previously exhibited c. 1906 at the church art section of the Church Congress in Manchester. A large square bowl with attractive reliefs on the sides showing angels instructing and protecting children, with a pedestal on one side supporting a bronze Christ cradling an ivory baby. — FIRST WORLD WAR MEMORIAL. Triptych by *H. A. Payne*. The names of the dead flank a moving painting showing Christ bringing light to a stricken landscape inhabited by ordinary people.

STAINED GLASS. E window by *Capronnier*, 1883. Chancel side windows of 1892 with armorial bearings, nicely done. S transept, Parable of the Talents, 1895, perhaps by *Ward & Hughes*. S aisle, Peace, Love and Hope, 1920 by *Heaton, Butler & Bayne*. Baptistery, Peace, Love, Purity and Temperance by *Gustav Hiller*, 1911. Several other windows by Hiller's firm with dates up to 1930 appear in the baptistery and S aisle, evidently by another hand in the workshop and not as good. W window by *Mayer & Co.*, badly faded. N aisle: *A. G. Moore*, 1932, and *G. E. R. Smith*, 1958. N

transept: David and Solomon, 1889; the Virgin by A. G. Moore, 1935.⁴

1.3.5 Oldham Council Website

Parish church. 1853-55, with additions of 1868 and 1880-1882. By A. Trimen. Stone, with slate roof. Early English style. West porch added 1905 in Perpendicular style. South door to porch in shallow segmental arch with traceried overlight. Swept angle buttresses with pinnacles and shallow canted bay in west wall, with Perpendicular tracery. 4-light window in West gable above. NW tower and spire. 4-stage tower with angle buttresses. West door with shafts and interlace capitals. Billet moulded hood mould. Traceried panelled door. North window of tower cuts into second stage which is blind to west. Lancet window in third stage then paired bellchamber lights with steep gabled hood mould which cuts through chevron frieze. Shafts support projecting angle stone. Brooch spire with lucarnes. 3-light west window to south aisle, with reticulated tracery. Aisles divided into bays by buttresses, each with triple foiled lancet window. Curved triangular windows to low clerestory above. Paired gables to side chapel and organ chamber with triple foiled lancet windows. Chapel and organ chamber to south, each with 4-light reticulated traceried window. Chapel added 1868, and organ chamber added c1880. 2 wide lancet windows to south of chancel, and 4-light east window with cross finial on gable over. North aisle similar, the north chapel also added c1868.

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⁴from the entry for St. Thomas, Werneth in *Lancashire: Manchester and the South-East* by Clare Hartwell, Matthew Hyde and Nikolaus Pevsner (pp 546-547)

font on squat cylindrical base, with statue of saint holding child. Low relief angels and children on each side of basin. Memorial tablet for First World War at base of tower, a painted wood triptych by Henry A Payne of Amberley, Gloucestershire.⁵

2 The Proposals: their effect on the significance

2.1 Part of the church to be affected:

The proposals will affect the nave, the columns either side of the Chancel Arch, the pulpit, and the front chandeliers, immediately adjacent to the Chancel Arch.

2.2 What is the significance of this area/ item?

The chancel, sanctuary and pulpit are obviously focal points of the church building.

2.3 How it will be affected?

2.4 Will work to this area/item affect anything around it? What are you doing to mitigate any potential negative effects?

It is proposed to install screens either side of the Chancel Arch, on the columns, but not obscuring the Chancel Arch.

The chandeliers immediately in front of the screens will be raised to enable better viewing of the screens.

We've made the decision to apply to install the screens on the front columns and raise the front chandeliers in order to avoid raising a middle set of chandeliers, breaking up the rhythm of the chandeliers.

We've made the decision to apply to install a screen either side of the Chancel arch in order not to obscure the chancel, sanctuary, and altar.

Permanently fixing the screen to the column behind the pulpit would mean that the pulpit becomes visible during Sunday morning worship, and Thursday morning school worship. The portable screen currently obscures the pulpit when it is in use.

3 Statement of Needs: Screens either side of the Chancel Arch

3.1 General information

The parish is the most diverse in the diocese: 90% South Asian.

However, there are increasing numbers of African and Eastern European families moving into the parish—of a broadly Christian background.

⁵<http://planning.oldham.gov.uk/conservation/acolnetcgi.gov?theme=&ACTION=UNWRAP&RIP-NAME=Root.PgeResultDetail&TheSystemkey=304>

The parish is extremely deprived and ranks 217 out of 12178 parishes for deprivation, where 1 is the most deprived.

The building is well-used by an increasing number of different groups, for community, social and religious purposes.

This notably includes, in addition to Sunday worship, use by St. Thomas Primary School on a Thursday morning for school worship (450 children plus staff). The existing screen is used every week for this purpose.

3.2 What do you need?

We need to improve the provision of screens in the church:

1. A single screen is inadequate to cover all the viewing angles; a second screen would remove the number of places in the church where the screen cannot be seen.
2. Fixing any screen to the walls will reduce health and safety risks. Both screen and people could potentially be damaged due to any mishap.
3. Fixing the cables and connectors would mean that the AV equipment would be able to be used much more consistently; there is currently a risk of damage to connectors, or of incorrect connections resulting in frustrating problems on a Sunday morning, or at other times, when the equipment cannot be got working. Doing so would also simplify the process of setting up for Sunday morning worship, enabling more people to be able to set it up.

The congregation has been consulted, with the existing screen in as close a position to the final position as possible. The congregation were satisfied that the screen would be large enough, and that sight lines would not be obscured by the columns.

The school has been consulted. As well as increased visibility, the proposals would allow more children to sit closer to the sanctuary, making more space in the nave available for them to sit.

3.3 The proposals

The proposal involves fixing two 85" TV screens to the columns either side of the Chancel Arch, just above the capitals.

The proposal also includes install a connector box so that an hdmi input from e.g. a laptop could be shown on the screens. This will be installed discreetly beneath the pulpit stairs.

The proposal would integrate with the church's existing loop and PA system.

3.4 What other options have been considered?

The only other options, as we see it, are:

1. To have a drop-screen from the top of the Chancel Arch, as at St. Matthew, Chadderton. But this would be expensive to install, difficult to repair, and would have obscured the sanctuary.

2. To have staggered screens, e.g. a screen half-way back down the church on the N. side. But adjusting the chandeliers would have had a messy result: raised on either side at asymmetrical heights.
3. To keep the existing arrangement. But there are issues around consistency of operation, health and safety, damage, and obscuring the pulpit.

3.5 Why should the proposed changes be made now?

The One Oldham Fund invites applications from churches for Capital Funds for Community Spaces. This project nicely meets the criteria for that.

The issues around consistency, setting up, health and safety, and potential damage (as mentioned above) are not going away!