



## ***Westminster Abbey 2020 Vision Notes for Editors***

**UNDER EMBARGO: 00:01 hrs Monday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2009**

### **Overview**

Westminster Abbey is a Grade I listed building and part of the Parliament Square World Heritage Site. It is a 'Royal Peculiar' which means that its status is defined by a Royal Charter granted by Queen Elizabeth I in 1560 and is based on a direct relationship between the Abbey and the Sovereign. The Abbey, though a part of the Church of England, is therefore independent of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London. The Dean of Westminster is the head of the Abbey and responsible directly to HM The Queen.

The Abbey, first founded by St Dunstan in 960, has evolved continuously over its thousand-year history with extensive additions and alterations to its fabric over the years. It is a living church which continues to evolve. Henry III's 13<sup>th</sup> century church, which is the basis of the Abbey as it exists today, largely replaced Edward the Confessor's earlier 11<sup>th</sup> century Abbey. Later additions include the Lady Chapel added by Henry VII in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the West Towers which were begun by Christopher Wren and completed by Nicholas Hawksmoor in 1745. Gilbert Scott was responsible, among others, for much remodelling of the north side of the Abbey in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

*2020 Vision* is a development plan approved by the Dean and Chapter of Westminster for the future of the Abbey over the next decade. The plan aims to open up the Abbey by improving visitor access and facilities. The theme underpinning the vision is summarised by the key ambition of: *Access to Welcome, Wonder and Worship*.

*2020 Vision* key elements:

1. **New Education Centre**
2. **New Visitor Facilities:**
  - a. **Cellarium Café**
  - b. **Triforium museum**
  - c. **Visitor Reception Centre**
3. **Corona - a new roof over the Lantern to 'crown' the Abbey**

The Abbey is running an exhibition and public consultation outlining *2020 Vision* in the Chapter House from 29 June to September. Plans will also be available at [www.westminster-abbey.org](http://www.westminster-abbey.org).

The public are being invited to submit their views and comments to the Dean and Chapter of Westminster for consideration.

No views have yet been taken about the form of suitable designs. That will be the subject of an architectural competition if, following this consultation, it is decided to go ahead.

It is predicted that the cost of the education centre, the café and opening up the Triforium could be about £13 million. An estimate of the cost of the proposed corona, for which there is at present no design, is likely to be in the region of £10 million. These costs, if all these plans go ahead, will need to be met by fund raising.

### **1. New Education Centre - No 1 Dean's Yard**

The *2020 Vision* development plan begins with work on converting part of No. 1 Dean's Yard into a new education centre. This will be the first time that the Abbey has been able to bring in school groups; to give them proper understanding of the Abbey's place in the country's faith, history, architecture, art and heritage. As well as allowing the Abbey an opportunity to give schoolchildren and students an important perspective on the history of the Abbey and of the UK, we can also offer a view of day-to-day life at the Abbey in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We shall shortly be appointing a Head of Education to oversee the development of this education centre.

### **2. New Visitor Facilities**

#### **Cellarium Café**

A new café will be sited in the Cellarium, an important and beautiful part of the former medieval monastery, currently in use as staff facilities. This will replace the limited catering facilities currently on offer in the Cloisters.

#### **Triforium museum**

The Triforium is a gallery which runs 70 feet above the floor of the Abbey and around almost all of its internal walls. At the east end which we are proposing to develop, it was intended to house chapels, but over the centuries has never been put to that use. The Triforium gives an entirely new perspective of the Abbey to the visitor, and a magnificent view along the whole length of the Abbey, previously only seen by the public on TV broadcasts for major services, which John Betjeman described as "the best view in Europe".

The plan to open up the east end of the Triforium enables the Abbey both to give the public access to this magnificent new perspective and to create a new and much larger Museum, and an exhibition space. There are many Abbey treasures and artefacts, such as the wonderful 14<sup>th</sup> century illuminated manuscript, the Litlington Missal, and the Liber Regalis as well as glass, stonework and vestments which could be put on permanent public display for the first time. There will be an opportunity to take advantage of the latest interactive electronic access tools.

To allow all visitors safe and easy access to the Triforium, and to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act, it will be necessary to construct a lift outside Poet's Corner. There will be an architectural competition, overseen by RIBA, to produce designs. The principal brief is that the new lift should be discreet and entirely sympathetic to the historic fabric.

### **Visitor Reception Centre**

Freeing up the present Museum in the Cloisters, an important part of the Abbey dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> century monastery, means that we can use this part of the Abbey precincts as a Visitor Reception Centre - a facility the Abbey has never had before - as well as a place for conferences and evening receptions.

### **3. Corona - new Lantern roof**

One of the historically most important and symbolic areas of the Abbey is underneath the Lantern where the Crossing - the space in front of the High Altar - is where every monarch has been crowned for the last thousand years. This area was damaged by an incendiary bomb during World War II. Above the Crossing currently rests an ornate ceiling erected in 1958, which itself is under the Lantern - a small pyramidal roof.

This area of the Abbey roof represents "unfinished business" and, over the centuries, many architects have put forward plans to complete this part of the Abbey. Christopher Wren, Nicholas Hawksmoor and George Gilbert Scott all had plans for completing this part of the Abbey which were never realised.

Many of the finest cathedrals have a structure over the crossing which enhances in an uplifting way this central and important part of any church; for example Ely, York Minster, Canterbury and, most recently, Bury St Edmunds. St Paul's has its dome.

The Dean and Chapter of Westminster believe that a corona - an architectural device based upon a monarch's crown - would be a highly symbolic way to mark the setting of the coronation, and to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of the Coronation of HM The Queen on 2 June 2013. An opportunity to complete this part of the Abbey is one they would wish to take provided there is general agreement that this would be a significant and worthwhile enhancement of the Abbey

### **Funding**

These projects will only be possible if sufficient funds can be raised. This is not an easy time to be asking for assistance but the Dean and Chapter believe that the importance of these changes, the transforming difference they will make to the welcome the Abbey would be able to provide its million-plus visitors each year, and the significance of the Coronation anniversary in 2013 give these plans an importance which they wish very much to realise if the support is available to them.

## **Key people**

### Dean & Chapter

The Dean and Chapter manage the Abbey on a day-to-day basis. They are led by the Dean, the Very Reverend Dr John Hall who assumed his current post in December 2006. He was previously Chief Education Officer of the Church of England. The other members of Chapter are the Sub Dean, the Revd Robert Wright (also Rector of St Margaret's and Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons); the Canon Theologian, the Revd Dr Nicholas Sagovsky; the Canon Treasurer, the Revd Robert Reiss; and the Canon Steward, the Revd Dr Jane Hedges.

### Receiver General

The Receiver General, Sir Stephen Lamport, is head of the lay staff of the Abbey and principal advisor to the Dean & Chapter.

### Surveyor to the Fabric

The Surveyor to the Fabric (consultant architect) is John Burton who is also Surveyor to the Fabric at Canterbury Cathedral and a senior principal with the architect's practice Purcell Miller Tritton.

### Clerk of the Works

Jim Vincent is responsible for all building and maintenance within the Abbey church and its precincts, either by an in-house team of craftsmen or by contractors.

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