

St Mary's Church, Witney

The roof of the 13th-century chancel of Grade I listed St Mary’s Church, Witney will be saved, thanks to HLF and National Lottery players.

St Mary’s is the oldest building in Witney and its Grade I listing highlights its significance to our national heritage. The western half of the building – its main seating area – is nearly 1,000 years old. Much of the rest of the building, especially its magnificent bell tower and 156ft spire, was added in the 13th century when St Mary’s was re-dedicated. Its impressive size reflects the wealth and importance of Witney’s wool trade and weaving industry in the Middle Ages.

As a place of worship and a focus for civic ceremonies, St Mary’s offers one of the largest public spaces in West Oxfordshire. In addition, the building provides a focal point for the local community, hosting a wide range of community activities. These include the very popular beer festival and the food and drink festival, events that each year attract thousands of people into this ancient building.

The project aims to undertake urgent repairs to the Victorian roofs of the chancel and organ chamber, as well as repairing guttering and drainage, and restoring external masonry including one of the north windows.

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David Cameron, MP for Witney, said: “As a big supporter and patron of St Mary’s Church, I was delighted to hear they will receive Heritage Lottery Funding to restore the chancel roof.

“This well-loved church is a real focal point in the town and it’s so important we preserve and share its long and fascinating history. Benefiting from such funds is a big step in enabling the church to achieve this.”

Work on the chancel roof will complete a 15-year long weatherproofing programme that St Mary’s congregation committed to in 2000. Once the building is rainproof, St Mary’s can begin the task of transforming its interior spaces: revealing the beauty of its medieval sculptures and unlocking the stories that underpin Witney’s identity.