

CASE STUDY TRYING A NEW APPROACH: HEATED CUSHIONS



N.B. This case study considers only one possible approach, which will not be suitable for every church. Always seek professional advice.

Key Points

- Marown Parish Church, in the Diocese of Sodor and Man, is a rural church that has successfully trialled heated chair cushions as an alternative way of keeping parishioners warm.
- Whilst this is currently only a trial, it is a potential solution for keeping people comfortable in occasionally used churches, and/or could be used in tandem with existing oil/gas heating, to reduce the hours it needs to run. They could also be a suitable 'stop gap' solution for churches who's heating system has failed.



1 Heating the entire building with radiators, driven by an oil boiler, led to high energy bills for the parish.

2 Heated chair cushions were introduced, initially in a trial and proved to be a good solution. They are movable to where people sit.

3 The cushions are rechargeable, so do not need permanent cabling to be installed.

The context

Marown is a rural parish church on the Isle of Man, with a nave and two transepts. It runs a Sunday service every week.

For more information visit the church's [website](#) or its entry on the [Church Heritage Record](#).

The need for change

The ineffective oil boiler was incurring significant financial costs through the energy dissipating into the space of the building. The parish aimed to cut its carbon emissions, and the current reliance on fossil fuels made it an unviable method of heating the church in the long term.

Watch the case study videos

To find the case study video of Marown Parish Church, [click here](#), or go to www.churchofengland.org/environment

What were the options?

The church were eager to implement a solution which would be quick and simple, without the need for significant upfront investment, and when offered a trial of the heated cushions were keen to take part.

Other environmentally-friendly heating systems, such as heat pumps and infra-red heaters, were ruled out on the basis of these requirements. Whereas, the pew cushions met these criteria, with no need for a faculty application, fundraising or intrusive building work.

What was done?

- 19 electric, rechargeable heated cushions were purchased
- The cushions are not fixed to the pews and can be recharged with a regular socket, using the renewable electricity that the church now also purchases.
- Original 3 month 'trial run' involved gathering feedback about their effectiveness from members of the congregation, with a view to considering the possibility of their use as the primary source of heating.
- Existing oil heating system has been retained, to be used for larger congregations, such as weddings and seasonal celebrations.

How well does it work?

The parish report that the cushions are easy to use and that the direct warmth they provide has been popular with the congregation.

As they are not fixed in place, people can position the cushions to make themselves most comfortable, i.e. putting them on their lap, sitting on them, or behind their back.

In the longer term, the success of the cushions has encouraged Marown church to think about additional alternative heating solutions, with the current idea being to introduce two larger electric heaters into a side chapel and host services there.

How much did it cost?

The cushions cost £500 in total, all of which was covered by a small grant.

*“During this whole project, we have learnt not to be afraid to experiment, to think carefully and creatively about what we **can** do in this particular church, and not to be put off by thoughts that ‘there’s so much that we can’t do, or can’t do yet’. If we can only make some small changes, or take some small steps, then we can use those as our stepping stones to what we hope and pray will be something greater and more beneficial in the future.”*

Rev Canon Janice Ward, Vicar for the Parish of Marown, Foxdale and Baldwin