



Drone pictures offering a bird's eye view of urgent restoration work going on at St Mary's RC Church in Regent Road, Great Yarmouth, and its place in the town

Pictures: BRIAN LAFFERTY



## Stunning new drone images capture church restoration from above

**A church restoration project is offering a new perspective on its town and the streets that surround it.**

Pictures taken documenting repairs to the roof of St Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Regent Road show its crowded urban setting, hemmed in by houses and Great Yarmouth's main tourism thoroughfare of Regent Road.

The drone images taken by Brian Lafferty, chairman of the church's finance committee, offer new views of the town from above; the Minster, town hall, and St Spyridon's tower rising up in the distance.

Work to repair the roof of the Grade II\* centre for worship is going ahead thanks to a grant of close to £150,000 from English Heritage - but £1.5m is needed to fully restore it.

Mr Lafferty said a time capsule containing messages from Bishop Alan Hopes, the priests, pupils

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of St Mary's and St Peter's RC School, local politicians, volunteer groups, and parishioners, as well as coins from our era and a copy of this newspaper had been put inside the roof to mark the completion of the first phase.

St Mary's was opened in 1850 on land which, at the time, lay outside the main town.

Today it is in the heart of a compact urban area facing directly onto Regent Road with its souvenir shops, sweet treats and bustling holiday vibe.

On a normal Sunday it has a congregation of up to 400 people drawn from some 48 nations. During the pandemic services have been broadcast via YouTube.

Mr Lafferty said the beautiful building was at the heart of the town reaching beyond the Catholic community to

welcome everyone.

Visitors who strolled in off Regent Road were impressed by its ornate beauty, but behind the scenes the church was in a parlous state.

In the 1960s the Welsh slate roof had been replaced by concrete tiles whose weight was causing huge strain on timbers.

In places water had come in and ruined paintings.

Mr Lafferty said the aim was to get the whole community involved with an online candle project launching soon allowing people to make donations from £1.

"St Mary's was the first thing that was on the beach. The whole town was built up around it.

"It is important to everyone," he said.

Its architect Joseph John Scoles (1798-1863) designed a number of listed buildings in the town including St Peter's Anglican Church (later St Spyridon's Greek Orthodox Church) and Britannia Terrace on Marine Parade.




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