Access ramp project at St Mark's Clerkenwell	
Church:	St Mark's Clerkenwell, Myddelton Square, London EC1R 1XX
Designation:	Grade II listed and in the New River conservation area
Total project cost:	£90,350
Cloudesley grant:	£30,000 in Spring 2017
Dates:	Initial planning: April 2016, although 10 years of extensive thought had gone into the project before a viable design was found. Work complete: April 2018
Contractors used:	Architect – Matthew Swinhoe – ZRP Architects. 26 Exmouth Market EC1R 4QE Main Contractor – JK Builders Ltd Structural Engineer – Alan Baxter Integrated Design Metal Fabricator – J Sailer Fabrication Ltd Building Control – Shore Engineering Ltd Arboriculturalist – Southern Ecological Solutions Ltd
Background	The grant from Cloudesley was a major contribution towards funding the construction of an access ramp via the church South entrance door. The aim was to provide a permanent, independent means of entry for people with specific mobility needs, including wheelchair users, disabled persons and the elderly unable to use steps, parents/carers with children and buggies etc. Modifications to the South door to assist entry were included in the plan. The project took around 2 years from planning to completion. Getting planning permission and a faculty was a lengthy process, due to the church being a listed building and with a large, protected tree near the site of the planned ramp. The solution was a curving ramp, "floating" on pillars so that the tree roots were not damaged, which bent round from the front of the church to meet a side door.
Benefits:	Colin Short, administrator of St Mark's Clerkenwell, says, "*We are delighted with the new access. The ramp is regularly used every day: by our preschool group, families coming to our Sunday and weekday services, daily Meditators and members of the congregation who use either a mobility scooter or a wheelchair. They cannot access the building without a ramp, so now our church is open to all. The ramp is also of great use during weddings, christening and funerals."*
Challenges:	It took some time for the church to decide on which of five possible entrance doors could be acceptable and affordable. The options were voted on by the congregation. The initial architects struggled to find a design that could work within all the constraints of the tight space, sloping site, fire exits, and protected tree. During the project's gestation, the required legal width of the access ramp also changed, which required rework. In December 2015 ZRP presented a design that was practical, attractive, deliverable and fitted in with the surroundings. This required removing the railings to open up the front of the church. This was a bold step, but the church felt confident doing it because they had been through all the previous designs and knew it was necessary.

	Opening up the west front would present a much more welcoming approach to the church To fit in with the appearance of the listed church and the conservation area, the PCC commissioned the bespoke design for the ramp. As a result, commissioning suitable suppliers of components and a building contractor who could undertake the work was a consideration. The final design of the ramp curved around two sides of the church through a sensory garden, rising over a meter on a sloping site. Achieving this needed a lot of customisation on site. The nearby trees in the park caused many issues. Inspection pits had to be dug, to examine the roots. An arborio-culturalist report was required, followed by additional structural reports. The church was required by the council to develop a design with bespoke root coverings, and with foundations that allowed for growth. The final design 'floats' on pillars to allow the roots freedom to grow, although it looks solid because a 'skirt' was added to stop foxes making a den underneath the ramp.  The delays and the more complex design caused costs to rise and rise, from an initial c.£60k project to the final cost of £90k. The end result of this long process is a design the church and the neighbourhood are *delighted* with. It has even been shortlisted for the President's Award under the 2018 National Churches Trust Church Architecture Awards.
Top tips for other churches:	**Speak to your neighbours and key organisations like the Council early on** and involve them. Understand their views and find out what they could add to the project. **Choose a good architect**. Use them to scope all possibilities and challenges. **Be very aware of trees**, and the complications they can cause. Whilst the "perfect" solution is sought, **implement the best achievable temporary solution that you can**, because you don't know how long the project will take, and other urgent issues will come along that take your time.
The Cloudesley perspective – why did this project gain support?	*Planning, design and consultation* It was clear that the church had been thinking carefully about this project over some time. They brought in the expertise of an architect at an early stage to help them to develop a design that met their requirements and those of the local planning authority, and who was also able to submit their faculty application. *Fundraising* The church developed a fundraising campaign to help meet the costs of the project. They displayed information about the project at the back of the church and used a 'thermometer' to show progress towards their fundraising target. In the end the church was able to contribute over 50% of the total project costs.