

IN THE CONSISTORY COURT OF THE DIOCESE OF LIVERPOOL

SIR MARK HEDLEY, CHANCELLOR

In The Matter of ST.DUNSTAN, EDGE HILL

JUDGMENT

1. The church of St Dunstan Edge Hill was designed by Aldridge & Deacon and was consecrated by Bishop Ryle, the Bishop of Liverpool, in 1889. It is now a listed building at grade II*.

2. The application is a petition for a faculty to effect the following work – “to take up and relocate the font; to introduce a new altar and Ambo; to remove and dispose of the existing nave altar and Lady Chapel altar; to install additional lighting; to remove and dispose of seven high-level metal halide light fittings; to box in the electrical services in the baptistery.” I had earlier granted a faculty in respect of the renewal of the heating of the church, work which is almost complete.

3. This is in effect a substantial re-ordering of a significant listed building. It follows that there is a general presumption against any change which might affect significantly the character of the building. I am satisfied that these works, if permitted, would have that effect. Accordingly I have inspected the building and have come to the conclusion that I should give written reasons for my decision. The proposed works are uncontentious in the parish and have the support of English Heritage, the applicants having agreed to one matter sought by English Heritage.

4. Although the church was originally built to accommodate a congregation in excess of 800, the present congregation rarely exceeds 25. The area has seen widespread decline and loss of population and lies in an area which has long been acknowledged as one that is very difficult for Christian ministry. However, the church is part of a team and offers worship in a distinctly Catholic tradition. It follows that such worship can be offered to a wider area than merely the geographical parish itself and the present congregation are enthusiastic.

5. The details of the proposed re-ordering are, perhaps unusually, driven by a major rethink of the liturgical needs and priorities of the church and congregation. The liturgical impetus is based on the communal worship of a pilgrim people as distinct from a liturgical performance put on for the benefit of a passive congregation. In other words, it is intended that the congregation should move from font to ambo to altar during the course of the Eucharistic liturgy. That is a move that is strongly supported by the present congregation. Although the church is in a position to afford the works for which a faculty is currently sought, it is provisional in the sense that there may be a desire to substitute chairs for the remaining pews and to renew the lighting at low level. It may well be that a Church of England secondary school is to be rebuilt in the area and an additional new and significant use for the church may then be found.

6. As I have indicated, I am satisfied that the proposed works would affect the character and significance of the building. However, I am entirely satisfied that, in conjunction with the proposed liturgical development, the effect of the works will be to enhance that character and significance. In those circumstances, and subject to a consideration of certain individual items, I propose to grant the faculty sought in respect of the proposed works.

7. The nave altar may be removed but must be stored pending any further order unless it is disposed of as proposed to another church as approved by the DAC. The Lady Chapel altar is of no significance and may be disposed of. The lectern has historic interest and value, although it is not serviceable under the present arrangement; it may therefore be removed and stored in the Chancel but not disposed of. The font may be moved from its present position to the proposed position some 3 metres forward provided that, as requested by English Heritage, the step is left in place denoting the existence of a baptistery. Large pews have already and lawfully been disposed of and the smaller and lighter pews will be returned freestanding to the main body of the church for use in worship. I approve the scheme for lighting and boxing in. I add that replacement of light bulbs in the low level lights and like-for-like replacement of shades will not require a faculty. The proposed new altar and ambo are approved on the basis of the design approved by the DAC.

8. The effect of the re-ordering is that all liturgical activity will take place in the nave of the church and both Chancel and the Lady Chapel will no longer have a liturgical function, although the Lady Chapel will provide meeting and children's church space. That seems to me to accord with the proposed liturgical developments. For the reasons that I have given, and subject to the conditions above, I grant the faculty sought in this petition.