

Re St. Mary Magdalene Cresswell

This is a Grade II building dating from around 1900 in brick with stone dressings designed by L. Ambler on the instructions of the Duke of Portland. Aisles were added in 1914, and a tower at the west end in 1927, all also by Ambler. The petitioners wish to remove the pews in the aisles, and there is mention of replacement chairs. The cost of removing the chairs and making good the floor is around £1500. This cost plainly does not cover the cost of good seating, suitable for a listed building, and there are no firm proposals for what is wanted.

I am told that the regular congregation is 30, with considerably larger numbers attending baptisms and funerals, in this ex-mining community. I understand that the parish has a number of moulded plastic stacking chairs that are used for these larger gatherings. That is satisfactory on that basis, that is, for occasional use on special occasions. However just as a decision that pews, a pulpit or other fittings can be removed, has to be carefully considered, and a decision made as to the effect of the removal on the appearance and significance of the listed building, arrived at, *so any decision as to what is to be introduced by way of replacement seating, has to be carefully assessed. That can be as damaging to the appearance and significance, as an ill-judged decision about removal.*

I have been given details of the Breakfast Club and of the successful First Art venture, which have demonstrated the need for more space, and which it is intended to meet by removal of these pews. I am satisfied that the removal of these very ordinary 20th Century pews will have only minor significance on the building as a listed structure, and the Statement of Needs and supporting documents gives a clear justification, showing the public benefit and mission opportunities the proposals will allow.

My practice – for reasons given above – is to require petitioners to specify the replacement seating when I allow pews to be removed. In this case, the petitioners are not in a position to do that. English Heritage and the Victorian Society both refer to the prospect of other chairs being obtained in the future, with approval.

I regret to say that I am more cautious about this happening at any time soon, for a variety of reasons. Indeed I have quite serious doubts about it ever happening! This is a small congregation and the church and Breakfast Club together are unlikely to be able to raise the necessary funds quickly or easily. I am sure they will find the plastic chairs work very well, and will be reluctant to raise and spend scarce resources on items that are not much used. It is plain that the usual congregation can easily be accommodated in the central pews, and seating in the side aisles will only be used for the larger occasional offices.

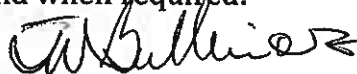
I am happy enough for the plastic chairs to be deployed as and when required, but I am not happy at the prospect of rows of these being on display week by

week. This is a listed building, and such seating, however practical and useful on an occasional basis, cannot be authorised as a long-term replacement. In practice, I suspect the spaces may well be left unoccupied and empty for long periods, and the petitioners/PCC will not rush to do anything. Unless I take some steps to move the process forward, I think things are likely to remain as they are now, in regard to replacement seating.

I therefore intend to grant the faculty for removal of the pews in the north and south aisles and making good, together with introduction of alternative seating, on condition that:

- a) the plastic chairs presently in the possession of the church shall only be deployed for the purpose of accommodating larger congregations or meetings of the Breakfast Club or other occasional groups, **as and when required**, and shall not be left set out in the aisle spaces on a permanent or semi-permanent basis*
- b) that by 31st December 2019, details alternative seating shall be presented to the Registry for my approval, stating the maker and model of the seats required, the number to be acquired, and whether any parts are upholstered and if so, the nature of the material and colour; any such proposals must have been considered beforehand by the DAC*
- c) permission is hereby given for the petitioners to seek to vary the above dates or conditions, by letter to the Registrar.*

I am afraid that I have been 'caught out' before by not insisting on petitioners presenting a 'total' package of proposals. By putting things like that, I do NOT throw doubt on the good faith or good intentions of these petitioners, but the circumstances here give rise to a real risk that they will find they can do very well with only temporary seating as and when required!



John W. Bullimore
Chancellor

8th December 2017