

**Neutral Citation No. [2018] ECC SEI 1**

**IN THE CONSISTORY COURT**

**DIOCESE OF ST. EDMUNDSBURY & IPSWICH**

**In the matter of**

**ALL SAINTS' CHURCH, LITTLE BEALINGS**

**-and-**

**In the matter of**

**A PETITION OF CELIA COOKE (Priest-in-Charge) and HELEN CLARKSON-FIELDSSEND (Secretary of the PCC) TO AUTHORISE MAJOR RE-ORDERING**

**Judgment of the Chancellor**

**February 21, 2017**

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**JUDGMENT**

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1. This Petition raises a series of questions which are particularly illustrative of the dilemmas faced by rural churches in the twenty-first century. It has stirred some controversy and has both its supporters and objectors. No objector has elected to become a party opponent. I will, of course, take the views of all those who have expressed opinions into account. I have decided that it is appropriate to grant this Faculty, with some conditions, and with the exception of one proposal, which I understand the petitioners have already considered and accept. The faculty will allow for a major re-ordering of this thirteenth century grade 2 listed church, because although it will result in harm, and in the case of two specific

proposals harm with a high impact, I judge that not only is that harm justified clearly and convincingly in terms of the needs of and benefit to the church, but that these proposals offer the only realistic way in which this church can be saved from inevitable closure. Additionally, I commend the petitioners for the degree and quality of their consultation with the parish, the statutory bodies and the Victorian Society and with the help and excellent advice of all these bodies, together with a realistic and cooperative stance on all sides, it has been possible to arrive at final proposals with which the petitioners and the bodies concerned are content. I decided I could properly determine the Petition on the papers as I have concluded it was both expedient and fair to do so.

2. THE PROPOSAL: (1) to replace the existing organ with a Klopp chamber organ; (2) to remove the existing vestry, cupboards and desk, re-siting the frontal cupboard in the sanctuary; (3) to remove and dispose of all nave pews, retaining six within the chancel, four in the main body of the church and re-floor; (4) to relocate the pulpit; (5) to replace the outer porch door with a partly glazed door; (6) to install kitchen facilities in the west end of the north aisle; (7) to install new heating (including wood burner); lighting and audio-visual systems; (8) to install a sewerage system close to The Street; (9) to erect a storage shed on the western boundary of the churchyard and ancillary works in accordance with the stated specification.
3. The Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) recommends these proposals for approval by the Court subject to 1) an archaeological watching brief during excavation for the sewage plant and 2) details of the proposed heating scheme being submitted to the DAC.
4. In the opinion of the DAC, the work proposed *is* likely to affect the characteristic of the church as a building of special architectural or historic interest and it recommended consultation with Historic England

(HE), the local planning authority, the Victorian Society (VS) and the Society for the Protection of Ancient buildings (SPAB). All but SPAB have responded.

5. The particular considerations of *In Re St Alkmund, Duffield* [2013] Fam 158 apply. The Court of Arches in *In re St John the Baptist, Peshurst* [2015] WLR (D) 115, reaffirmed the approach it set out in *In Re St. Alkmund, Duffield* [2013] Fam 158 in performing the necessary balancing exercise when determining petitions affecting listed buildings attracting the ecclesiastical exemption. It is this, as applicable in this case:

(1) Would the proposals, if implemented, result in harm to the significance of the church as a building of special architectural or historical interest?

(2) If the answer to the first question is in the affirmative, how serious would that harm be?

(3) Thereafter, how clear and convincing is the justification for the proposals?

(4) Generally, the greater the harm, the greater the demonstrable benefit will need to be to justify the proposals.

6. It is first important to consider what significance this church has. Whilst some of the masonry on the south wall of the nave is pre-Conquest, the church was built at the end of the thirteenth century. The eastern part of the south nave wall was widened and faced with Tudor brick in Henry VII's reign. In the nineteenth century, the north aisle was added. The font is fifteenth century, eight sided with two extant panels. It suffered damage during the Civil War and Commonwealth period. The tower was restored in the early twentieth century and a new altar added. A lavatory with disabled access was added to the outer west wall in 2000. The pews are a mixture of Henry Tillett and William Pattison's work. This is from the mid-late Victorian period. Pattison's are decorated with

poppyheads. The pulpit is twentieth century but has two Jacobean panels.

7. The impact of the proposals is assessed by the petitioners as follows:
  - a. it is said that the present organ is out-of-scale with the church and blocks the west window. The suggestion is replacement with a portable manual handmade organ which on its face seems a reasonable and uncontroversial suggestion, as does the VS's suggestion that all efforts should be made to find a proper home for it. The impact of this proposal is said to be Medium. I would assess it as Low to Medium.
  - b. There is said (unusually) to be more storage space than is necessary and the suggestion is to remove the vestry and its furniture, relocating storage space to the chancel and either side of the font. Again, this has not caused any controversy although I invite the petitioners to consider whether there is a private area that might be appropriately curtained off, if necessary, for robing and preparation. I do not make this a condition. The impact of this is assessed as Medium. I concur.
  - c. A much more controversial proposal is to remove most of the pews and retain five for private prayer and worship in the chancel. For larger services, chairs would be "sourced" (I presume "hired") from a reputable church supplier.
    - i. It is proposed to install a matching stone floor where pew removal has exposed the earth floor.
    - ii. It is acknowledged that the removal of the pews will have a high visual effect but the following is said:
      1. The current pews in the north aisle are little used and have an obstructed view of the altar.
      2. The pews in the nave are particularly uncomfortable

due to the shape of the backrests.

3. Their removal will provide a really significant and substantial space for activities rehearsed in the vision statements.

- iii. This is assessed as High. I agree. I also agree that the consequential floor replacement is of Medium impact.

- d. It is said that the pulpit has no particular significance and has a large and cumbersome platform. It is proposed to lead the service from the sanctuary, directly in front of the pews. The suggestion is that it is relocated (not disposed of, as was originally contemplated). This is assessed as having Medium impact. Were it being disposed of I would agree. As it is being relocated, I assess it as Low to Medium.
  - e. It is suggested that the wooden door in the south front of the tower is removed, creating accessibility and visibility. This proposal troubles both HE and me and I will return to it. This is assessed as having Medium impact. I assess it as Medium to High.
  - f. It is proposed to install kitchen facilities including a counter, low cupboards and appliances using a pre-existing water supply. This kitchen proposal, whilst still large for a church this size, has been modified and scaled back during the consultations and working through of the proposals. This proposal is assessed as being of High impact. I agree.
  - g. It is suggested that oil fired heaters are replaced with oil fired radiators, complimented by a wood fired burner on the east wall of the north transept. This is not controversial subject to final approval of the DAC which I shall make a condition of the faculty. The replacement heating, assessed as Low impact, does

not in my view have any impact in terms of the *St Alkmund, Duffield* test.

- h. It is proposed to install what is said to be “discreet” sound and wi-fi following assessment and updating to the electrical wiring. This is again uncontroversial and I shall permit it, but I shall add a condition that it is subject to final approval of the electrical wiring by the DAC. This is assessed as being of Low impact. I agree.
- i. Discreet augmentation of existing wiring is proposed to include “task lighting” in the kitchen area and sanctuary. This is uncontroversial if I allow the kitchen and associated items. I agree that this (of itself) is of Low impact.
- j. Resurfacing of the existing path to the Church is proposed. This is uncontroversial. The resurfacing, assessed as Low impact, does not in my view have any impact in terms of the *St Alkmund, Duffield* test.
- k. It is proposed that parking spaces at the entrance to the churchyard are created to include disabled spaces. This is uncontroversial, although the issue of parking generally is most certainly not. The creation of parking spaces at the front of the church is said to be of High impact. I would assess it as Medium.
- l. Internal redecoration is proposed. This is uncontroversial. This decoration, assessed as Low impact, does not in my view have any impact in terms of the *St Alkmund, Duffield* test.
- m. Erection of a storage shed on the western boundary of the churchyard. This does not appear to be assessed in the Statement of Needs. The shed does not in my view have any impact in terms of the *St Alkmund, Duffield* test.
- n. Install a sewerage system close to The Street. This is subject to objection by some people. This sewerage system also appears not

to be assessed in the Statement of Needs. The sewerage system does not in my view have any impact in terms of the *St Alkmund, Duffield* test.

8. The needs set out by the Petitioners are said to be an attempt to arrest a very serious decline in attendance, an overall ageing congregation and, in short, a real and present threat to the viability of the church. The benefice has around 1000 people; the parish is some 460 souls and around 32 people are on the electoral roll. Sunday morning services (Holy Communion) are poorly attended but the new “Messy” service which takes place at 4pm on Sundays has attracted several “new” families. In common with many rural churches, seasonal services and weddings, funerals and baptism attract much higher congregations.
9. A survey and open meeting in 2015 identified the following needs in addition to the church’s central function as a place of worship. It was noted that the 4 villages within the benefice lack café, shop, public house, post office and so on. Six needs were identified:
  - a. A large flexible space suitable for social groups and activities in addition to worship;
  - b. Greater accessibility for the young and for disabilities;
  - c. A café area with flexible seating providing a place for the community to meet and eat;
  - d. A safe space accessible without the need for transport for vulnerable groups to meet and learn and share as exemplified in the Statement of Needs;
  - e. Financial independence to help finance other essential amenities and, potentially, other churches within the benefice.
  - f. Potential training opportunities in the community.
10. It is said in the Statement of Needs that the proposals are needed now because:

- a. The PCC as trustees of the Angela Cobbold Hall (ACH) have decided this building is structurally at a point where it is financially not viable to keep it open and a decision has already been made to sell it. Using money to improve it would not, in the view of the petitioners, answer the real problem this church has and it cannot carry out both schemes.
- b. The sale of ACH does not remove the obligations of the trustees to provide spiritual and social edification for the village, but these proposals will make up for the loss of community space and increase community involvement with the church.
- c. The closure of the *Admiral's Head* public house and *Lux Farm Café* have removed existing points for people to meet and socialise on an *ad hoc* basis.
- d. The Head Teacher of *Bealings Primary School* has a strong interest in using the proposed changed space for school activities associated with spiritual and social learning opportunities. The priest-in-charge (a petitioner) has been appointed a governor of this school and, for the first time in 10 years, the school has used the church for play and for a service.
- e. In short, it is said that if the proposals are rejected there is a high risk bordering on certainty that the church will not be sustainable.

11. I have noted the extensive opening times of this church.

12. I have read a feasibility and business plan dated September 5, 2017 for regeneration of this church. What is called the café hub committee contains at least 11 members with wide-ranging experience across many areas and disciplines including church renovations, kitchen interiors, music, teaching art, youth training and programmes including youth clubs, catering food and beverages and financial operations and compliance. There has been wide consultation by the petitioners with



this committee including CBC, HE, VS and SPAB.

13. The report points out that the church is running on an insecure financial footing and has identified the changes said to be necessary which form the basis of the proposals and have identified potential donors. I have read the full report covering some 26 pages. I have also read the Design and Access Statement and the technical and topographical plans and data attached to the petition.

14. In a project of this complexity it is natural that amendments and changes will have been suggested and made during the course of the Petition and I will reflect those in the course of this judgment.

15. Turning now to the comments and representations.

a. I begin with HE.

- i. In its pre-application advice of April 24, 2017, HE recognises that the removal of the pews and the installation of the kitchen will have the highest impact.
- ii. Despite the contribution of these simple pews to the aesthetics of the church HE did not object to their removal “as part of a holistic scheme for expanding the use of the building.”
- iii. There were criticisms of the design of this unusually large kitchen whose commercial appearance was said to “not sit comfortably with the ecclesiastical character of the interior.” HE asked for further consideration to be given to accommodating the kitchen more discretely within the church and gave examples of possibly reducing the size of the kitchen, omitting the use of stainless steel and/or glazed screen and concealing the appliances in timber cupboards.
- iv. Although the date and significance of the south door was said to be unclear, HE warned that the replacement of a

solid timber door with fully glazed doors can appear most incongruous and suggested retention of the existing door with a glazed door behind it.

- v. The kitchen area has been reduced in scale in more recent revisions.

b. Then the CBC:

- i. In its observations of April 28, 2017 it was excited by the vision of the parish to see the church as a stronger element of the community.
- ii. The CBC did not find that many of the proposals were not contentious (except for finances).
- iii. It also recognised the high impact of clearing the pews and providing new flooring, though it asked the petitioners to consider reworking the more significant pews to be useful in the chancel. It did believe clearing the nave of pews would yield considerable benefits.
- iv. Whilst content with introducing a café facility in the church, the Council was concerned at the size and scale of the kitchen.
- v. The Council did not believe it would be appropriate to dispose of the pulpit because it had re-used Jacobean panels. The proposals before me are to relocate it.
- vi. Following redesign of the kitchen and the scaling back of its size and scale, the Council was content to defer to the DAC on this proposal.

c. The VS:

- i. The VS gave its observations on May 10, 2017. It recognised the need for some additional flexibility and raised the possibility of removing the plain pews in the

centre of the church and relocating the poppy-headed pews from the aisle to the nave with the possibility of making these moveable with the assistance of a furniture trolley or castors. It objected to the complete removal of the pews.

- ii. The VS objected to the proposed replacement seating being upholstered and cited the guidance from the CBC.
- iii. It also objected to the size and scale of the kitchen and said no case had been made for anything greater than a smaller more discrete servery.
- iv. By its second observations dated October 31, 2017 the plans had been revised and the VS welcomed these revisions. The VS's view was that the retained pews should be of the poppy-head variety.
- v. The revised cupboard design was welcomed but it still felt that the servery could be scaled back significantly.
- vi. The blue upholstery on the chairs was said to be less than ideal and suggestions were made to stain the chairs to match the retained pews.
- vii. If re-flooring was still being contemplated, it was said to be preferable to distinguish between the nave and the aisle in some form.
- viii. The parish were encouraged to find an alternative owner for the existing church organ.
- ix. In reply to the DAC, the architect's comments were that the pews to be retained were the poppyhead ones. The kitchen could not be reduced further to fulfil its function and whilst the cabinet form of servery would be less obtrusive when not in use it was the architect's view that this would not be the case when it was in use, which was expected to be a

good deal of the time. The upholstery on the chairs would be removed and they would be bleached down to harmonise with the colours within the church. There would be demarcation in the floor covering between the nave and the aisle.

- x. Following this response, the VS said it had no objection to the proposals.
- d. Turning now to the representations for and against the proposals. I have seen and read some 25 letters and emails supporting the proposals. The central reasons are these:
- i. The proposals will improve the long-term survival of the church by offering more for the local community. Amongst present difficulties are an ageing and declining congregation.
  - ii. The proposals have already engendered considerable support in the community including volunteers wishing to help.
  - iii. The community spirit encouraged by the proposals will greatly increase interest and attendance in the church by different generations.
  - iv. The opportunity for many different functions will be created, including concerts.
- e. I should make clear that some of these written representations are detailed and I have read them carefully. Whilst all of them favour the proposals there are some reservations about whether the predicted use of the café hub may be over-optimistic, the difficulties in accessing the church and observations that the catering must be of sufficient quality to attract custom.
- f. Unsurprisingly in a project of this kind, there are also those who

object to the proposals. None wished to become Parties Opponent to the petition but do wish me to take their views into account in reaching my decision which I shall do. I shall also set out the petitioners' response to what is said. I shall summarise the points made by those objecting, but I have read their representations in detail. They are in the form of 11 letters or emails from 10 people. These are the main concerns and the responses:

i. Sweeping nature of the Proposals

1. What is said by, amongst others, James Pawsey, Mr O'Halloran and Peter Kidd, is that the church is still used by a small, active congregation and these changes will alter the church beyond all recognition. Mr Pawsey makes particular observations about the reordering of the south aisle.
2. The petitioners respond that the congregation is rather small, the attendees generally elderly and insufficient even to provide churchwardens. Market research was conducted and, albeit it is accepted that this is a snapshot, saw only 1 person come into the church outside of services in the period observed. Present costs for the services cannot be sustained. Regarding the south aisle, pews are being retained and for much of the time will remain in the same place, but the proposal allows flexibility of approach. It is noted that Mr Pawsey voted in favour of the submission of the Faculty despite his reservations and he is plainly an admired, longstanding and dedicated member of the church community.

ii. Inadequacy of parking provision

1. It is said that the absence of parking facilities will make the proposals unsustainable. This point is made by Toni Cornish, supported by, amongst others, Eileen Kidd (who fears a car park in the approach to the church), Joan Moon, Mrs Jennifer Cook (who raises the problem of saturation parking already occurring), Peter Carr and Mrs Wilson and Mr Harold (although they support the proposals in principle).
  2. The petitioners respond by, first, acknowledging the concern. They undertake from their side to do what they can to discourage congestion, including using shared parking facilities where possible. The petitioners are consulting with the school, the village hall committee and the Suffolk County Highways Department to ease congestion especially around the “pinch” points. The plan is to introduce gradual opening of the café hub facility in order to assess parking issues progressively.
- iii. Adequacy of the existing ACH
1. A number of those objecting comment on the adequacy of the ACH which, it is said, could provide the same facilities for less money. Toni Cornish makes this point supported by Eileen Kidd, Peter Kidd, Joan Moon, Mrs Jennifer Cook and Peter Carr.
  2. The petitioners respond that they cannot afford to maintain both the church and the ACH and that the PCC has resolved that its duty in this situation is to maintain this grade 2 listed church. In any event a

decision has already been made by the diocese that the ACH will be sold – a decision supported by the Cobbold family as it happens.

iv. Need to spend this sort of money in a village of this size

1. This is to an extent overlapping with the ACH objection (Peter Kidd raises both points).
2. The petitioners justify the scheme by its central point, that it is to reinvigorate and retain this church as a living place.

v. Dividing the village

1. Toni Cornish refers to these proposals dividing the village.
2. The petitioners respond that those objecting are, in fact, a very small minority.

vi. Sewage and Sewerage issues

1. This is raised by both Toni Cornish and Peter Carr. In short, it is that increasing use will mean increasing sewage passing through insufficient sewerage facilities.
2. The petitioners respond by saying that the architect has taken this into account. The system will be used solely by the church and will not affect neighbours. Mains drainage will be considered in the future if the opportunity arises.

vii. Inadequacy of consultation

1. One objector raises the issue of insufficient consultation.
2. The petitioners have responded in detail showing how much consultation there was and I have formed

the clearest view that, whatever else is said, this is a proposal distinguished by the degree of its consultation, not by the lack of it. There is, in my view, no merit in this objection.

viii. Inadequacy of business plan

1. Toni Cornish asserts there is insufficient evidence of any business plan showing how the proposed scheme is viable and the consequences of a failed project for a village with a (then) redundant church. D. Williams (who raises a number of additional issues), Mrs Jennifer Cook, Mr A. O'Halloran join in this objection.
2. The petitioners respond by saying that, following perfectly proper questions at the open meeting held, an offer was made to review the plan with any interested party. The parishioner who had raised the questions at the meeting was visited at home, the figures were reviewed and the parishioner has subsequently written a letter in support of the project. It was reviewed by the PCC and was independently audited. Again, in respect of this objection, whilst I understand viability is always a concern and never guaranteed in any business, charity, major or minor entity, I am satisfied that the evidence plainly shows a proper business plan with a realistic path to viability.

## 16. DISCUSSION

- a. At the heart of this petition is whether I should grant a Faculty for major reordering of this very pleasant and ancient church in Little



Bealings. There is no doubt that the impact of some of the changes will result in harm to the significance of the church as a building of special architectural or historical interest. In the case of the removal of the pews and the installation of the kitchen, even in its revised form, the harm to the significance will be high. In the case of the other proposals the harm will be much less (except for the proposed removal of the south door) and, in some instances, there will be no harm at all.

- b. The question then will be how clear and convincing is the justification for the proposals and the greater the harm, the greater the benefit that will need to be demonstrated to justify them.
- c. Much of the assessment and resolution to these questions comes down to whether the church is sustainable as things are presently and, if not, whether the proposals provide, a viable path for its future and whether that could be achieved by less harmful means.

17. CONCLUSIONS. The proposal generally is to create a flexible space in the church to allow the creation of a café hub as well as to carry out some ancillary reordering of certain items, refurbishments and redecoration.

18. The removal of a number of pews and the installation of the kitchen area is at the heart of the scheme to create both the flexible space to be used to use the church in such a way as to draw into it a wider group of people of all ages.

19. I find the proposals have been properly analysed to set out a case that such a scheme provides a reasonable path to the continued viability of the church both financially and as a part of this community. I have not found any other proposal to be either possible, or, in any event likely, to return the church to solvency or to attract larger numbers of people of differing ages.

20. In those circumstances, this church faces two possibilities: one is its inevitable decline to a point, sooner rather than later, where it will have to close. I do not know if some say “better that than these changes” but, if they do, I reject that approach. The second possibility is that a realistic way is found to try and reverse this decline. There can be no guarantees, but, on the evidence before me, I am satisfied that the bold and imaginative proposal put forward by the petitioners provides a realistic, and, indeed, the *only* realistic path for its survival.

21. Change in any community can be disturbing, particularly when it involves changes to a much-loved church. It is natural that regular parishioners will be reluctant to lose the interior of a church they love and support, as evidenced by their presence at the church. Sadly, however, they are a declining presence and, in terms of simple age distribution, they are only going to decline further. At the moment in this church, no-one is coming up to take their place and the viability of the church is now in real doubt. It is also worth considering that each historical age has faced its challenges. Although in our time, the decline of conventional religious belief seems to pose insuperable problems for churches, in truth these are no less dramatic and unsettling than the challenges posed in mediaeval times by horrors such as the plague and dynastic war, in the Tudor era by the Reformation, in the seventeenth century by the Civil War and deep religious conflict and in the conflicts between low and high church in the Victorian period. The church did not remain the same architecturally either over the period. Each age through which the church lived brought changes to how the church looked and was furnished. We sometimes might think that traditional churches as we see them now were always like that. They were not. There was a time when pews themselves were a huge, ‘modern’ innovation and doubtless had their supporters and detractors.

22. The challenge faced in this church by the petitioners is whether this church can be reunited with its village as the focal point it once was. The hope is that by bringing people in other aspects of the church may also come to be appreciated. Part of the problem with churches in the modern era is not so much conscious rejection but lack of any reason for the community to go to, and be in, the church. In other words, their potential engagement never stands a chance. This proposal is to change that and I am impressed both by the enthusiasm it has generated, but also by what I consider to be real thought that has been given to protect the best in the church and to try to bring together those who use the church now and those the petitioners would wish to bring in.

23. I turn now to the specific objections raised. What lies behind one line of objection is that the changes are too sweeping. Judging the exact line to be drawn in a proposal such as this is not easy. I have examined the proposals both individual and collectively to examine the harm to the existing significance of the church against the clear need that I find to have been established. The petitioners have responded by the retention of a number of pews and those the most decorative. They have responded by scaling down the size of the kitchen. They have agreed to retain the pulpit and relocate it and to remove the unattractive upholstery from the chairs. Without the kitchen installation the café hub cannot work and without the removal of the pews the flexibility of the space which is essential to the plan cannot be achieved.

24. The problem with parking is genuine. I understand what the objectors are saying, but, to use a colloquial expression, one cannot have it both ways. If the church is to become what it once was, a focal point of the village, people have to be encouraged to use it much more than is happening presently or likely to happen in the future without intervention. People nowadays use cars to get around. Ergo, there is

going to be pressure on parking. I am, however, encouraged and impressed that the petitioners are not ignoring this issue. They are involved in active consultation as described to try and find solutions particularly at certain times of the day. They are also going to introduce the café hub in such a way that they can monitor the parking issue progressively, but I do not consider that concerns about parking should dictate the viability of this church. Parking problems are capable of regulation, solution or, at the least, amelioration.

25. A number of people have raised the question of whether the ACH could be renovated and used instead of altering the church. I cannot really consider that because the decision has already been taken to sell the ACH. That is not within my jurisdiction. But, even if it were, I am satisfied renovating and using ACH would come nowhere near to addressing the central problem faced by the church of a declining congregation that is not being replaced and where the continuation of this in the future will mean in reality that this church will sadly have to be closed.

26. The question of whether this amount of money needs to be spent in a village of this size, which is raised particularly by Mr Kidd, is an objection I do not entirely understand. The amenities proposed to be provided within the church are entirely reasonable for a village of this size, particularly in view of what I am told about existing amenities. Ensuring the viability of this church (or doing the best that can be done to do so) is, in my judgment, very much in the interests of this village. The petitioners have explained how they wish to raise the money. Again, one cannot have it both ways. If the proposal is to make changes to the church that will reflect its grade 2 listing and make it the sort of building that people will wish to visit and use means it has to be done properly. Otherwise it would be met by objections from the consultative

bodies and parishioners that not only was the church being altered, but was being altered using inappropriate materials not worthy of the church. In that case, the grant of a Faculty would be most unlikely.

27. There is some objection that the proposal has divided the village.

Whereas I accept that there are supporters of, and those opposed to, these plans, I have not seen any evidence that the village is divided in the sense that I suspect the objection means.

28. The sewage issue and the adequacy of the sewerage system is perfectly properly raised by the some of the objectors, but I have considered the response of the petitioners which has satisfied me that proper thought has been given to this aspect and I note that the system services the church independently.

29. I do not find there was inadequate consultation. In my judgment, whatever the merits or otherwise of the proposals, the one aspect that stands out is the great care that has been taken (and continues to be made) to consult fully on these proposals.

30. There is concern about the viability of the scheme and whether a proper business case has been made for it. There is some concern even amongst some supporters that the predictions in respect of the café hub may be over-optimistic. I have considered carefully what is said on this topic. Clearly, it would be inappropriate to grant a Faculty if I considered the scheme was not viable, because the solution would not be addressing the need. However, I note the care the petitioners have taken to explain their figures and to have their analysis independently audited. I am also advised by the DAC that it recommends these proposals for my approval. No business proposition is ever guaranteed to succeed but there is much force in my judgment in the petitioners' point that if the café hub was not the success they hoped, the other elements of the flexible space would still be there for use by the community and I would

observe that, outside of the café hub proposal, the kitchen facilities would still be a powerful incentive for people to use the church more frequently for projects, concerts, teaching, training and the like.

31. The petitioners have amended their proposal to remove the upholstery from the chairs and to bleach them appropriately and, with that understanding, I shall not make it a formal condition. It would be a breach of the Faculty not to proceed as they have indicated without a variation from the Court.

32. There is one proposal which I do not find to be justified and that is the plan to remove the solid timbered south door. I appreciate that there is some anecdotal evidence that some people have said they do not find it welcoming and I have some sympathy with them. Sometimes, I feel greater efforts could be made by churches to make clear by which door people should enter and whether or not the church is open and can be entered. If a service is taking place, it seems a pity that visitors may not realise they can enter as long as they do not disturb the service or that, at other times, that they can enter freely. I agree that a glass door may, to an extent, encourage people to enter when they might otherwise not have done.

33. However, I do not find that this fact justifies the removal of what is an expected solid timber door very much in keeping with the exterior of the church. In my judgment, a glass door, however welcoming, would be a jarring sight when approaching the church. I also think that there are other steps the petitioners could take to make clear that the church is open and I am confident they will have a number of ideas as to how to do this. HE proposed a glass door placed on the inside of the wooden door. I have not had any observations on this proposal, so I cannot assess its practicality, but, if the petitioners do wish to pursue this option, I would be prepared to consider it as a variation to the Faculty

I am going to grant, as it was not the subject of opposition other than in the terms expressed by HE.

34. Accordingly, I order that a Faculty in the terms requested should pass the Seal, with the exception of the removal of the south door. There is a condition that both the heating arrangements and the electrical wiring must receive final approval by the DAC when the details are finalised. If, for any reason, the proposals in their entirety cannot be funded then the petitioners must apply for a variation of the Faculty because if the proposals cannot go ahead as a whole, some may be possible as standalone works but others may not.

35. I want to say this finally. I very much hope that all the existing congregation will get behind these proposals now that the Faculty is to be granted. On any view, there are a large number of very positive features in these proposals even though they will mean change. It is clear to me that the intention of the petitioners is not to follow some fad or fashion – change for change’s sake – but to save this church as a living church for future generations. As Shakespeare said through Hamlet: “there is nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so.” The bold proposals here can open a new chapter in this church’s long history and those coming to the church for the first time or after a long absence will look to the existing congregation to see what they are thinking about what has happened. A positive and enthusiastic response to newcomers will do more than anything to increase the chance that these plans will succeed. I wish success to everyone concerned in and with the future of this church.