

Neutral Citation Number: [2025] ECC She 3

DIOCESE OF SHEFFIELD

In the Consistory Court

HHJ Sarah Singleton KC, Chancellor

In the Matter of ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST, RANMOOR

Works: Repair of Church Spire and Tower

Judgment

1. The church subject to this Petition is St John the Evangelist in the suburb of Ranmoor in Sheffield which is a beautiful 19th Century church built in gothic revival style. The church is listed at Grade II*. The tall and slender tower and spire of the building are landmarks in the area.
2. The works for which permission is sought are extensive internal and external repairs to the tower and spire which are urgently needed: to protect people inside and outside the building from the risk of injury from falling masonry, to preserve the structural stability of the spire and to weatherproof and prevent water ingress to tower and spire. The DAC considered the works at their meeting of 14th January 2025 and recommended them for approval. Public Notices have been appropriately posted and prompted no objections.
3. The Petitioners were first alerted to the need for these works during the most recent QI inspection. This led to extensive further surveying of the problems including a rope access survey. It was concluded that there were significant defects in the tower and spire which mean that the building is in critical condition and at risk of collapse. Indeed the building is now on the Heritage at Risk list held by Historic England. The Petition is accompanied by extensive documents to support the need for the works and the plans for them to be undertaken. Those documents include the outcome of extensive surveys that have taken place and highly persuasive if alarming photographs.
4. A full Statement of Significance about the entirety of this iconic church has been lodged alongside a project-specific Statement of Need. The Statement of Need starkly summarises the extensive evidence. This document asserts clearly and cogently that the repairs are urgently needed to address the structural issues, to prevent further deterioration and to ensure the safety of the building for its users and the community. The document lists the specific priorities as: spire structural stability, tower safety, weather proofing, and aesthetic restoration. The document sets out the commitment of the Petitioners to undertake this work to the highest standards.
5. The Victorian Society were consulted about the works and have communicated by their email of 6th February 2025 that they do not wish to comment on the proposals. A response which I infer conveys their support for the works to be undertaken. Historic England have also been informed of the details of the proposed works and they have replied by email of 25th February 2025 as follows:

Historic England considers the repair proposals to be appropriately informed. The proposed approach should be effective at dealing with the issue of internal stone decay, which has resulted in thin section masonry to the spire.

The proposal to line the inner face of the spire with brick masonry would not only provide additional masonry thickness (to help withstand the wind loads) but also prevent further decay of the stonework through the use of sacrificial pointing to the brickwork lining.

The specification of the bricks and the proposed use of hot lime mortar/ grout fill will ensure maximum porosity. Any unamended application for approval for this work can be determined without further reference to Historic England.

6. The best present estimate of the costs of these works including architect fees and VAT is £1,028,100 and fund raising is underway The Petitioners state that £550,000 is available in existing funds to allocate to this project. The Petitioners will no doubt need to support their fundraising applications with Faculty Permission.
7. It is not necessary for a long or discursive judgment to establish that these works must be permitted and undertaken as soon as possible. These are very costly works and some of the funding for them is in place. The Petitioners have plans for fundraising to meet the rest of the costs.
8. Although the works involve the exterior of the building, the purpose is to maintain and repair the existing structures and I do not consider that Local Authority planning permission is advised. I assume that the Planning Department of Sheffield City Council are aware of what is proposed and supportive. If not, they should be informed and their position confirmed. The insurance position must also be confirmed. I do not propose to make either of these necessary steps the subjects of a proviso.
9. I propose to direct that a faculty issue to permit these works. The works are described in the DAC advice and the Petition in more detail than the heading of this judgment. The Faculty should set out the detailed description as the subject of the permission. I propose to extend the time in which the works should be completed to 3 years. I wish the Petitioners success for this crucial project.

HHJ Sarah Singleton KC

Chancellor of the Diocese of Sheffield

12th May 2025