Dear Rex,

Thank you very much for your letter and for the copies of the representations you have received about this proposed scheme.

The consultation process, which has resulted in the draft Scheme before you, began in October 2018. During this period, there have been multiple meetings with incumbents, PCCs, the deanery chapter, the Deanery Synod, and an initial open public meeting. The time, views and hospitality that have been shared by all involved is greatly appreciated.

The changes contained in the draft Scheme are considerable and a range of views has been shared by those affected. I recognise this has not been an easy process for anyone to experience and for any distress that has been felt, I am sorry.

This draft Scheme, if it were to proceed, would mean that the current incumbents would be dispossessed of their offices and they would not be designated to posts in the new structure. I recognise that there are members of the community and our congregations who are very distressed at the thought of the dispossession of their beloved clergy. This is something that both I and the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee (DMPC) have prayed on, deliberated and debated extensively and agreed is necessary to ensure that the right structure is created to care for the cure of souls and to further the Mission of the Church across the Gosport area. Therefore, I do wish the Scheme to proceed.

In order to help the Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee to consider this proposal I offer below my responses to the points raised in your letter dated 10 June 2019.
1. What were the main reasons for proposing to terminate the current plurality established for the Gosport benefices, unite the three benefices and their constituent parishes, and establish a team ministry for its area and how would this further the Mission of the Church in this area?

Since the establishment of the Diocese of Portsmouth in 1927, each bishop has presided over a steady decline in its congregations, in step with the rest of the Church of England. However, with the success of the Pioneer Project in 2016, the diocese saw a small increase in average weekly church attendance. This emboldened the diocese to aim for and strategically resource our churches for growth. The diocese asked the Strategic Development Unit for insights as to where this would have the most impact.

Key indicators were provided to the diocese by the Strategic Development Unit. These indicators allowed the diocese to identify areas of challenge and opportunity where a combination of the following factors applied:

- higher than average decrease in attendance over the previous ten years;
- low attendance when calculated as a percentage of local population;
- areas of strategic importance, such as main towns within a wider area;
- a large centre of population geographically distinct from other population centres and lacking local amenities.

The three areas identified for pastoral reorganisation, including St John, Forton; Christ Church, Gosport; and Holy Trinity, Gosport have the potential in terms of population, but not currently the capacity within their existing individual congregations, to make a significant impact in mission even if they were only to seek to increase their attendance to around 2% of the local population.

The aim of the draft Scheme is to create the right structures and to resource these with the appropriate staffing to enable church communities to grow in depth, impact and number in line with our diocesan vision. We want to do this by developing sustainable mission focussed church communities that can concentrate on the primary calling of the church to make new disciples. To do this we know that as well as adding new resources, we need to free the existing churches from the burdens of finances, administration and buildings so that rather than feeling forced to focus on maintaining the existing church structures they will also be able to support new projects, opportunities and communities. We will do this by:

- Undertaking pastoral reorganisation to create one mission unit consisting of a single parish benefice, with united leadership, ministry team, finance, governance, and administration; some local decision making would be delegated to individual congregations. This new structure would enable the other developments:

- Creating new ministry structure, including at least an ordained stipendiary team leader, a church planting minister, operations support, and specialist ministers to focus on children/young families, outreach and social engagement;

- Planting a new congregation or congregations with a church planting team gathered from inside and outside of the new parish;

- Resourcing existing congregations to promote outreach and growth alongside good teaching and pastoral care;
• Deploying pioneer ministers to engage with points of social need, such as via the food bank, with an emphasis on addressing life issues in the context of whole-life discipleship.

A new diocesan intern scheme, in conjunction with the national CEMES scheme, would be used to enhance elements of the new ministry structures: this would encourage interns, including as many as possible from the local area, to gain experience themselves in church planting, mission, and ministry in a variety of contexts while developing their own vocations. This builds on learning from the Discovery Gap Year and the Harbour Residency Year.

Development of social enterprise opportunities suitable for the needs of the local area and other income generation activities will be explored with the community.

The total Sunday attendance for the three affected parishes of St John, Forton; Christ Church, Gosport; and Holy Trinity, Gosport is 148 people from a total population of circa 21k, representing 0.71% of the local population. The combined parish share contribution is just over £55k and ministry cost is £110k.

Creating a new single parish benefice across the areas of Forton and Gosport will allow better coordination of mission energy, finance, and staffing, with strong vision and leadership, aided by skilled operations/administrative support, underpinning all ministry and mission in the area.

Making growth intentional and putting the right structure in place to reduce legislative and administrative burden is a proven method for achieving numerical growth and so furthering the Mission of the Church. There are equally examples from around the country where not getting the structure right in the beginning hampers the ability of the parish leadership to be able to effect change and grow.

All of the parishes have stated that they wish for the mission of the Church to grow in Forton and Gosport. The concerns raised by the representors objecting to the draft Scheme are in relation to the structure, and the dispossession of the clergy, not the shared aims.

2. Please set out the consultation process leading to the proposed draft Scheme, including any meetings held with the interested parties. In particular please confirm that the statutory consultations under s.6. of the Measure with all the PCCs affected were carried out before the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee made its recommendation to you and that they were offered meetings with the DMPC or its representative.

The timeline for the consultation process was as follows:

a) Thursday 4 October 2018: Private meeting with clergy who may dispossessed of office should the DMPC decide to proceed with pastoral reorganisation.

b) Monday 8 October 2018: DMPC decide to proceed to informal consultations on proposed pastoral reorganisation.

c) Thursday 18 October 2018: Public deanery meeting held on proposed pastoral reorganisation at St Faith, Lee-on-the-Solent.

d) Friday 19 October 2018: Informal consultation letters sent to all interested parties and to all who attended the public meeting.
e) **Tuesday 13 November 2018**: Gosport Deanery Chapter invited members of the diocesan team to attend their meeting to discuss the draft proposals.

f) **Thursday 22 November 2018**: The PCCs of Christ Church, Gosport; and Holy Trinity, Gosport met with members of the diocesan team to discuss the draft proposals.

g) **Sunday 25 November 2018**: The Incumbent of St John, Forton invited members of the diocesan team to attend Sunday worship and speak to members of the congregation after the service about the draft proposals.

h) **Tuesday 27 November 2018**: The Incumbent, PCC Secretary and Churchwardens of St John, Forton met with representatives of the DMPC to give their views on the draft proposals.

i) **Wednesday 28 November 2018**: The PCCs of Christ Church, Gosport; and Holy Trinity, Gosport met with representatives of the DMPC to give their views on the draft proposals.

j) **Friday 30 November 2018**: Deadline for receipt of responses to the informal consultation.

k) **Wednesday 5 December 2018**: DMPC met to consider the responses to the informal consultation. Due to the volume of responses and the short period of time between the closing date for such and this meeting, the DMPC deferred its decision on whether to proceed to formal consultations or not until the next meeting.

l) **Monday 28 January 2019**: DMPC discussed the statements of view and agreed to proceed with formal consultations on the draft proposals.

m) **Friday 1 February 2019**: s.6 formal consultation letters were sent to all interested parties. Those who attended the public meeting were also informed of the decision.

n) **Friday 15 February 2019**: The PCCs of Christ Church, Gosport; and Holy Trinity, Gosport met with members of the diocesan team to discuss the draft scheme.

o) **Wednesday 13 March 2019**: The PCCs of Christ Church, Gosport; and Holy Trinity, Gosport met with representatives of the DMPC to their views on the draft scheme.

p) **Tuesday 19 March 2019**: The PCC and members of the congregation of St John, Forton met with members of the diocesan team to discuss the draft scheme.

q) **Friday 22 March**: The Incumbent and Churchwarden of St John, Forton met with representatives of the DMPC to discuss their views on the draft scheme.

r) **Friday 29 March 2019**: Deadline for receipt of responses to the s.6 formal consultation.

s) **Wednesday 3 April 2019**: DMPC discussed the statements of view and recommended the draft proposals to the Bishop and he approved the draft proposals. It was agreed that the draft scheme would be submitted to the Church
Commissioners and they would be asked to undertake the notice and publication of the draft scheme.

t) Thursday 4 April 2019: A letter was sent to the interested parties informing them of the DMPC’s decision. It also said a further letter would be sent within ten days giving more detail on the discussions.

u) Friday 5 April 2019: The draft scheme and supporting documentation were sent to the Church Commissioners.

v) Friday 5 April 2019: An email was sent to all those that attended the public meetings letting them know of the DMPC’s decision.

w) Friday 12 April 2019: A letter was sent to all interested parties with further details of the issues discussed at the meeting of the DMPC on 3 April. It offered a further meeting with representatives of the DMPC should the PCCs wish to discuss the decision of the Committee.

x) Monday 15 April 2019: Church Commissioners publish the draft scheme.

y) Wednesday 29 May 2019: Deadline for representations for or against the draft scheme.

3. Please confirm the level of support, or otherwise, for what was being proposed during the local consultation process and how any concerns raised during that stage were addressed. Please comment on the view that the proposals were “set in stone” and that the consultation was nominal.

At the public meeting at the beginning of the informal consultation period in October 2018 numerous concerns were raised, the potential loss of their clergy, a fear that churches would be closed, how traditional church and patterns of service could be maintained, that the proposed union of benefices did not take existing relationships between parishes into consideration.

However, in one to one conversations with members of the diocesan team, both during and after the meeting, there was a recognition that uniting the benefices made sense. Whilst many expressed sadness to think that they might lose their current clergy, there was hope that with more resources our churches could grow and could be more missionally outward facing. Comments were also made from the floor of the meeting that very similar needs and proposals had been discussed within the Deanery on several occasions over the last 20 year period as the Deanery had realised the need for restructuring to address church decline, but never been able to carry proposals through to completion.

The informal consultation letter asked those who had attended the public meeting and the legally interested parties to give their views on the proposals:

- the proposed termination of any pluralities affecting the benefices;
- the proposed union of the benefice of Bridgemary, and the benefice of Rowner;
- the proposed union of the benefice of Elson, the benefice of Forton, the benefice of Gosport Christ Church and the benefice of Gosport Holy Trinity.
The focus on the benefice level during the informal consultation was to enable the parish structure to be shaped through the meetings with the PCCs during this period.

During these meetings, it became clear that the PCCs unanimously agreed that Elson should be included in the proposed union with Bridgemary and Rowner. Forton also expressed its wish to become a mission hub, to be outside of the traditional parish structure and to have a remit to work across the whole area of Gosport via a Bishop’s Mission Order.

Christ Church, Gosport and Holy Trinity, Gosport stated that they would be happy to work more closely together but would like to have separate District Church Councils for managing the separate parish churches.

These views were subsequently incorporated into the initial draft proposals that were brought to the DMPC meeting on 5 December 2018.

The written responses to the s.6 consultation and the views garnered by the members of the DMPC that had attended meetings with the affected PCCs were discussed at length. However, the DMPC agreed that the single parish benefice structure with a team ministry was the appropriate basis for future mission in the area. Therefore, with a unanimous vote in favour, the DMPC decided to recommend the draft Scheme to me without any amendments.

The numerous meetings held with PCCs, deanery chapter and deanery synod, and the changes that have been incorporated into these draft proposals demonstrate that no plan was ‘set in stone’ and this was not a nominal consultation.

4. Was there any consultation beyond that with the statutory parties? In particular was there consultation with the incumbents and PCCs of St Faith Lee-on-the-Solent and St Mary, Alverstoke? Why have those benefices not been included in this reorganisation? Did these proposals arise from a deanery plan?

St Mary, Alverstoke asked to be included in the informal consultation process. Members of the diocesan team attended a parish meeting discussing the draft proposals on Wednesday 14 November. The Incumbent and members of the PCC attended a meeting with representatives of the DMPC on Wednesday 28 November 2018.

St Faith, Lee-on-the-Solent did not request to be included in the pastoral reorganisation. The Incumbent was fully informed of the proposals as he sits on the DMPC and through his role as Assistant Area Dean.

The DMPC agreed, at its meeting on Monday 28 January 2019, that Alverstoke was not to be included in this proposed pastoral reorganisation as it is a very different socio-economic demographic to that of Forton and Gosport. It is recognised that all our churches may require assistance at different times to help further their mission in their parish, however St Mary, Alverstoke has seen a 26% increase in its usual Sunday attendance figures in the past five years and currently has 1.63% of its population attending. Additionally, the parish of Alverstoke already encompasses three Anglican churches (St. Mary’s, St Faith’s and St. Francis), under a single PCC. If the proposed Scheme is approved, the urban centre of Gosport would then have 2 fairly equally sized adjacent parishes, one comprising the existing Alverstoke parish, and the other the combined Holy Trinity, Christ Church and Forton, both with multiple centre of worships and a single PCC, and therefore achieving a parity of provision without Alverstoke parish being a part of the current proposed Scheme.
Lee-on-the-Solent is a discreet community with very defined boundaries, that very much sits as a separate large village to the South Western side of Gosport Deanery. It would not therefore be helpful for it to be included as part of a proposal to better restructure provision for the urban town of Gosport. Additionally, St Faith, Lee-on-the-Solent has also seen an increase of 19% in usual Sunday attendance over the past five years and has 1.92% of its population in attendance, and therefore the drivers for the current proposals do not apply to that part of the Deanery.

There is currently no deanery plan for Gosport.

5. Was there any consultation with these parishes or the deanery about how the Church Commissioners Strategic Funding should be used? To what extent are these reorganisation proposals linked to that funding? Is that funding aimed particularly at parishes with static or declining congregations and, if so, do these three parishes fall into that category? Please also comment on their financial viability.

During each of the meetings between the PCCs and the diocesan team, the opportunities around possible Strategic Development Funding from the Church Commissioners was discussed.

As above, these reorganisation proposals were spurred by the investigation of the Strategic and Development Unit into where we could significantly increase the impact of the mission of the Church in our communities. The funding is accessible to dioceses that can evidence that intervention with this funding will make a measureable impact on church growth and sustainability in an area.

The figures as outlined in answer to the question below, demonstrate quite clearly that St John, Forton has been declining in numbers for a long period of time. Whereas this is not the case for Christ Church, Gosport; and Holy Trinity, Gosport, they cannot on their own become self-sustaining.

A representation against the draft Scheme evidences that since 2017, Holy Trinity, Gosport has been stating that its parish share apportionment is not sustainable. However, the three parishes combined only meet the cost of one clergy post.

The structures that have been put forward within the draft Scheme are structures that the DMPC agreed need to be in place irrespective of whether we are awarded additional funding by the Church Commissioners.

6. Please give attendance figures for these parishes over the last ten years. How do they compare with those for other parishes in the deanery and across the diocese? Please comment on the suggestion that any recent increases at Holy Trinity and Christ Church are mainly from worshippers transferring from other parishes because of dissatisfaction with new arrangements there.

The attendance figures for the deanery for over the last ten years are below in table 1 and they are displayed as a percentage of the population in table 2.

The figures for Christ Church, Gosport; and Holy Trinity, Gosport look considerably healthier over the ten year period in comparison to the rest of the deanery. Over the past five years, St Mary, Alverstoke and St Faith, Lee-on-the-Solent have seen larger increases.
The parish returns also note that the congregations for Christ Church and Holy Trinity are approximately 50% and 80% gathered from outside of the parishes. There is anecdotal evidence of people moving between churches over a number of years for a number of reasons but this is not documented.

However, the more significant issue is that there needs to be a sustainable structure in place across all parishes in the deanery. Therefore, Bridgemary, Elson and Rowner will be brought together as a united, single parish, benefice. Following their work with the Council for Social Responsibility, St John, Forton are clear about what they are called to do in mission for their community. The current congregation of St John’s desire is to make their church a chapel of ease to free them for mission, this necessitates incorporating the geographical area of the parish as part of an expanded benefice.

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7. Why have neither of the current incumbents been designated as the first holders of the team rector and team vicar posts in the proposed new benefice? Please confirm that dispossessing them from their current offices is not the primary purpose of the Scheme and comment on how the draft Scheme sits with the advice in paragraph 2.19 of the Code of Practice to the Mission and Pastoral Measure (copy attached).

Dispossessing of our current clergy is not the primary purpose of the Scheme.

At the meeting of the DMPC on 3 April 2019, members recognised that in the past it had dealt with proposed pastoral schemes in which certain existing clergy were “designated” to a new post. The example was given of the most recent scheme that was made for the West Wight Team Ministry. In this case, both clergy in that team had been recruited, with the agreement and input of the affected parishes, with the possible future team ministry structure in mind explicitly advised.
In this case, though the number of clergy posts in the proposed draft Scheme remains the same, the roles themselves will be different to the clergy roles that currently exist. The example of the ‘team rector’ and ‘church-planting team vicar’ has been widely circulated, as this is a potential team ministry model that DMPC members would like to see – a team rector with strategic oversight for both traditional parish ministry and the creation of new congregations in a range of traditions; and a team vicar with the specific expertise to create brand new worshipping communities; plus other clergy and lay people with different skills. However, this model is not set in stone – it could equally be that the team rector or a pioneer minister has the church-planting expertise.

Members therefore agreed that an open and transparent recruitment process was beneficial to ensure that clergy and lay ministers are appointed with the relevant gifts for these new roles.

The changes brought in regarding compensation for loss of office under the 2018 amendment were specifically brought in to enable dioceses to undertake pastoral reorganisation that may result in the dispossession of clergy, in order to further the Mission of the Church.

When General Synod voted on this, there was considerable support from within the House of Clergy as well as the House of Laity. It was felt that this indicates that there is, in the wider Church, a recognition that we need to find ways of being able to undertake such pastoral reorganisations when we need to.

Dispossessions without subsequent designation of first office-holders from existing incumbents is not something the DMPC or I take lightly. In all four draft Schemes that have come before you, the new offices in the proposed Schemes will not obviously accommodate or suit all of our existing clergy. Where there is a reduction in similar posts, the DMPC did not feel it could designate one clergy person over another to that office. It was also noted that some of the existing clergy have felt called to other roles in the Church or have been unsure as to whether they are yet called to a proposed new office in their current area and the legislation enables them to be compensated for their loss of office while they discern the next phase of their ministry.

Currently the church is not reaching 99% of the population of Forton and Gosport. There is huge potential to expand the impact of the Church on the lives of people in the area by diversifying the way that we bring the message of Jesus to those people. In order to provide traditional ministry and new forms of worship through church planting in a strategically coherent way, we need a structure in place that releases its ordained and lay ministers to minister and promotes mutual, sustainable flourishing. The DMPC believes that the single parish benefice structure with a team ministry is the best structure to support this mission. This is in line with the advice in relation to the Gaulby judgement.

8. Please comment on Holy Trinity, Gosport PCC’s view that it was misled during the consultation process about whether it was possible for Mr Davis to be appointed as team rector by the Scheme. Would you be prepared to amend the Scheme to provide for this (or to designate him as team vicar)?

It is regrettable that after four meetings with members of the diocesan team, two of which were also with representatives of the DMPC, that the Churchwardens and PCCs of Christ Church, Gosport and Holy Trinity, Gosport seem to have been unsure
as to the option that the DMPC has, under the Measure, to make first appointments to the offices. From the 14 parishes in the formal consultation process, these are the only two who seem not to have been fully aware.

As stated in the above timeline, following the decision of DMPC at its meeting on 3 April 2019, an initial letter was sent to all the interested parties telling them of the decision but this was also followed with a subsequent letter on 11 April 2019 that included a more in-depth explanation of a number of the main issues raised that had been deliberated upon by the DMPC in order to enable them to reach their decision. This included a specific section on designation of clergy posts, how the DMPC had done them in previous schemes and why it was not choosing to do so now.

The issues around the potential dispossession of our clergy have been prayed on, considered and deliberated by the DMPC and myself over the past eight months. The DMPC has made its recommendation to me in the draft Scheme and I will not amend it now.

9. If the scheme is made as drafted would you intend that the team rector would be appointed first in order that he or she could then participate in the choice of the team vicar?

The intention is to recruit the team rector and have them participate in the recruitment of the team vicar.

10. What is your response to the view that loss of trust following the consultation process and not designating Mr Davis as team rector will make the proposals difficult to implement or lead to some people leaving these congregations or the Church of England?

The Churchwardens of Christ Church, Gosport and Holy Trinity, Gosport have made a representation against the draft Scheme due to the prospect of the dispossession of their incumbent though acknowledging that they are in favour of the Scheme in principle. The incumbent of St John, Forton and its PCC are supportive of the draft Scheme and the wider vision and so I am hopeful of their goodwill.

I recognise that irrespective of whether this draft Scheme proceeds or not there will be work to be undertaken to enable those of differing views to come together in reconciliation and I would pray that through that process all would find their spiritual home in our churches.

There is of course reputational risk for the Church by undertaking this Scheme. However, there is even more reputational risk if the mission of the church continues to essentially retreat as it is impacting fewer and fewer peoples’ lives. Therefore, we have to intentionally aim for growth, strategically, sustainably and have the right structure to enable it.

These changes are Gospel driven with mission as the motivation. We must do all that we can to draw others into friendship, relationship and discipleship with Jesus.

11. Please comment on the views expressed by Mr O’Neill and Ms Peacock that St John’s Forton is not suitable to be a “mission hub” or not needed as such. Is this, as suggested, a cornerstone of these proposals? If so, why is it being dealt with separately rather than as part of this draft Scheme? Or is it linked to the use of the Commissioners funding rather than to this proposed reorganisation?
The St. John’s church building sits in a prominent position on the main A32, and is only a very short distance from St. Vincent’s Sixth Form College, and also large areas of housing where significant numbers of young adults have been identified as still living in their parents’ homes. We acknowledge that major investment will be needed to enable the building to fulfil its potential as a mission hub, and that forms a key part of our current application to the Strategic Development Fund, but it is ideally suited as a location for a mission hub. The church have recently started to welcome large numbers of young people through enabling the church to be used as a venue for live music, which has helped show the clear potential for significant impact going forwards.

This draft Scheme is focussed on creating a benefice and a parish structure that will be sustainable. There is the need to get the legal framework in place that will enable the ministry team to invigorate mission in the area. It was felt it was better to get the parochial structure in place first and address the future of the building of St John, Forton separately.

The aspirations for St John’s are a key part of the application to the Strategic Development Fund.

12. How was the name of the proposed new benefice and parish arrived at? Would you be prepared to alter it, as requested by Alderman O’Neill?

The suggested name for the proposed new benefice was created in line with precedent. However, it can be amended by a Bishop’s pastoral order, should this Scheme proceed and the new parish wishes to. This possibility has already been discussed by the DMPC and been viewed favourably.

13. Are there any other factors which the Commissioners should be aware of in their consideration of these representations?

There are no further factors to my knowledge.

Should this matter be brought to an oral hearing of the Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee, my representatives will attend and respond to any questions raised. Should it be dealt with on the papers and there are any further questions please let me know and we will supply further written responses as soon as possible.

With good wishes.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]