

Church Commissioners

Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee

Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011

**Benefice of Knottingley and Kellington with Whitley
(Diocese of Leeds)**

Note by Katie Lowe

Summary

- (i) Following the publication of a draft Pastoral Church Buildings Scheme providing solely for the closure for regular public worship of the church of All Saints, Whitley, a chapel of ease in the parish of Kellington in the diocese of Leeds, we received one representation in favour and two representations against.
- (ii) The representors against the draft Scheme believe that the Church of All Saints, Whitley should not be closed but become a community church. Mr White says there is no need to make a decision now, as the parish is not in debt and the church is not structurally unsound and a deferment of at least 12 months would allow for proper discussion to take place between the Diocese and Whitley Parish Council. His arguments are echoed by the Parish Council which is keen to engage with the PCC in exploring ways in which the Church and its facilities could be made available as a community centre, ministering to both the secular and spiritual needs of Whitley residents.
- (iii) The representor in favour of the draft Scheme, Mr David Broadbent, Chairman of Whitley Community Centre Management Group (WCCMG), states that for many years there had been concern within the parish regarding the lack of a Community Centre and since it had heard about the closure proposals it has carried out two surveys with residents. It points out that at a public meeting held in All Saints in June 2018 it was accepted that the church should close as a place of regular public worship. The WCCMG wishes to keep the building open and available to the local community but supports the draft Scheme as it now stands based on the results of the surveys.
- (iv) The Bishop notes Mr White's and the Parish Council's concerns regarding the loss of All Saints but believes the current situation is not sustainable financially. The proposal for closure was put forward locally and the PCC have unanimously decided to concentrate their efforts on St Edmund, Killington to meet the mission and pastoral needs of the whole parish. He points out that despite much local publicity in Whitley Bridge there has been no significant upturn in regular attendance at All Saints and believes the ongoing uncertainty has inevitably had an impact on the life of the parish. He also notes that local support for the idea of a community centre does not amount to the material resource required to realise it but

indicates that the Diocese has an open mind about likely future uses in the event of closure.

(v) The issues before the Committee are:

1. Is there a continuing pastoral need for the church of All Saints, Whitley for regular public worship or can the mission and ministry of the parish be carried out effectively from the parish church of St Edmund?
2. Is there local support for the closure?
3. Is the cost of repairing and maintaining All Saints as a church (including as set out in the QI Report) beyond the resources of the congregation?
4. Has sufficient consideration been given to alternative arrangements whereby All Saints could continue in use as a community Church or is the possibility of community use with a provision for occasional services more likely to be achieved by formally closing the building for regular public worship?
5. Do the diocesan proposals make better provision for the cure of souls in the Diocese as a whole and have due regard to the furtherance of the mission of the Church of England?

Recommendation

The Committee is invited to consider the representations and the issues set out in this report and, in the light of these, decide whether or not the draft Scheme should proceed.

Background

1. In April 2019 a draft Scheme was published providing solely for the church of All Saints, Whitley, being a chapel of ease in the parish of Kellington in the diocese of Leeds, to be declared closed for regular public worship. In addition to All Saints, Whitley the parish of Kellington has one parish church, St Edmund.

2. The draft Scheme carried the following "diocesan rationale":

"The chapel of ease of All Saints, Whitley, is one of two church buildings in the parish of Kellington. The Grade I parish church of St Edmund, Kellington is two miles away. In recent times, a single congregation, essentially comprising the same members, has alternated weekly between the two buildings.

The PCC, which has been struggling with the increasing financial burden of caring for two church buildings, can no longer sustain both buildings and is therefore seeking the closure of All Saints, Whitley for regular public worship. It is considered that the mission and pastoral needs of the whole parish can be met from Saint Edmund, Kellington."

3. We received three representations regarding the draft Scheme. Two representations against from Mr John White, a parishioner, and Mr John Hunter, Clerk to Whitley Parish Council, and one representation in favour from Mr David Broadbent, Chairman of the Whitley Community Centre Management Group.

4. Attached are:

Annex A: A copy of the draft Scheme

Annex B: A scaled map of the area

Annex C: Correspondence with the Bishop regarding the representations

Annex D: Parish information form

Annex E: A copy of the quinquennial inspection report – dated July 2014

Annex F: A copy of the Church Buildings Report

Annex R: The representations

Annex S: Supplementary comments from Mr White and the Bishop's response.

Summary of the main points in the representations against the draft Scheme

5. Mr White, a resident of Whitley and parishioner of Kellington with Whitley for almost 30 years and a member of the church, says that All Saints was built in the 1850s by local landowners and he believes it is as relevant now as it was then and that closing it would send entirely the wrong message to the community.

6. He says that he was first made aware of a problem when he attended meetings in 2018 at which the community was told that there was an issue with attendance and finances, and that they should support the church or else the Archdeacon and the PCC would close All Saints.
7. He says that since then he and at least four others started to attend, which might not seem a lot, but represented a significant start out of their community. He points out that services on Remembrance Sunday and at Christmas were very well supported, with at least 30 attending, which he believes was in part due to the effort by some local people to advertise them widely. They feel let down that this had not been acknowledged and the proposal to close All Saints has been actively pursued. He says if the Church closes it is unlikely that they would attend services at the other church in the parish.
8. Mr White says that Whitley is a growing community, with a thriving primary school, attended by over 200 children, and plans for more social housing which he believes to be fertile ground for the church. He feels that All Saints serves an important role and provides pastoral care to the village. Although attendance might not be large, it remains important to those who regularly attend. The church is almost next door to the school, and he thinks it is important to maintain a close link. He says that the children can walk easily to events at All Saints, but this would be almost impossible when the next church is three miles or more away. He believes there is a significant interest in keeping the church and to take the opportunity to develop it into a community church, which he says had been advocated recently by the Archbishop of Canterbury.
9. He thinks the church has no contact with the community, the current way of life and has not embraced change. He has suggested changing service times, as Sunday services are only held at 9.30am which might be convenient for retired people, but for those with busy lives or young families a later start might be appreciated and has suggested a monthly family service, but this has been ignored.
10. Mr White is aware that some repairs are needed to All Saints; that there are financial issues, although he says no real details have been provided; and that fundraising is not easy. However, he believes these must be common issues for many churches and points out that All Saints has an annual gift day and last year the attendance was higher than anyone could recall in recent years and raised more than for many years. He says he has offered to help with grant applications, but his offer has not been taken up.
11. He is concerned that there was an unconscious bias against the church in Whitley and towards Kellington where their vicar and almost all of the PCC live. Mr White does not feel confident that anything he says will be taken seriously when the Archdeacon and PCC are so determined to close the Church, but stresses that there is another way and asks that the request for closure be rejected. He believes he is not alone in these views but others who want the church to remain open feel that there is no point objecting as the decision has already been taken and nothing they say will make any difference, a view also stated by their County Councillor.
12. Mr Hunter, clerk to Whitley Parish Council, writes on its behalf and says that the total population of Whitley Parish is just over 800 and growing. He points out it is a community that is little served with local amenities and with limited public transport

links to access neighbouring services. He says the only facilities available for residents of the village are the public house and the Church with its associated community-facing events. He stresses that the Church is a pivotal part of the community and one that would be sadly missed by residents.

13. He also points out the proximity of the church to the local school and says it provides an important pastoral connection; a ministry which would be difficult to sustain if the focus of all church activities was at Kellington.
14. Mr Hunter refers to, and encloses, the results of a recent survey of Whitley residents. He points out that the survey, which elicited responses from 33% of the residents, indicated that 95 out of 123 wished the church to be used jointly as a place of worship and community centre.
15. Whitley Parish Council urges the Commissioners to sustain the Church in its pastoral ministry and to keep it fully open for regular Sunday Service. The council fully understands the financial burden placed upon the Diocese in the upkeep of the Church and is keen to engage with the PCC in exploring ways in which the Church and its facilities could be made available as a community centre, ministering to both the secular and spiritual needs of Whitley residents.

Summary of the main points in the representation in favour of the draft Scheme

16. Mr David Broadbent, Chairman of Whitley Community Centre Management Group (WCCMG), states that for many years there has been concern within the parish regarding the lack of a Community Centre, particularly since the village has more than doubled in size since 2006. He says that in March 2018, when they heard a recommendation was being put forward that All Saints would close as a regular place of public worship, the WCCMG was set up to find out what local residents would like to see happen. He says that the WCCMG has met regularly and in May 2018 put together a survey which could be accessed both online and on paper and attaches the results. He says that in order to drill down on the results they were advised to do another online survey, which was held in October 2019. WCCMG is in the process of putting together a plan to identify either an existing property or new build that could be converted into a Community Centre. He says the group has also been active in the community and has the support of the local school and parish council and has been recognised by local groups in North Yorkshire for possible funding opportunities.
17. He points out that at a public meeting held in All Saints in June 2018 it was accepted, having considered the arguments, that the church should indeed close as a place of regular public worship.
18. He says that the WCCMG wished to pursue keeping the building available to the local community but supports the draft Scheme as it now stands based on the results of the surveys.

The Bishop's views

19. The Bishop of Leeds says that the main considerations behind the proposal are as set out in the "diocesan rationale" (see paragraph 3 above). He says the closure proposal was put forward locally and was not derived from a deanery plan or

diocesan initiative. He points out that the PCC wrote to the area Bishop in July 2017 saying that it had discussed the situation and unanimously decided that the only sensible way forward was to concentrate its efforts on the upkeep of the Grade 1 listed church of St Edmunds and, reluctantly, to seek the closure of All Saints.

20. The Bishop set out the timeline for the consultation process in detail and say that at a public meeting held at All Saints in February 2018 there was some opposition from the community to the closure of the building and it was decided to pause the process for six months to see if the community and the PCC could work together on a joint scheme for the future of the building. Following the public meeting the Independent Whitley Community Centre Management Group published a questionnaire about the future of the church but, despite a majority of respondents stating that they would like to see the church remain open as a joint place of worship and community centre, there was no significant increase in church attendance during this period.
21. He says that following a second public meeting in June 2018, which provided clarification about the process for closing a church building and determining its future use and where responsibility for managing the process and decision-making lay, the PCC confirmed its resolution to seek closure and it was therefore decided to start the formal consultation.
22. In response to the formal consultation, Whitley Parish Council cited the work of the Community Group and argued that more time was needed for full engagement and consultation. A meeting was sought and took place with representatives of the Parish Council in December 2018, at which Mr John White, as a member of the Council was present. The rationale for seeking closure was explained and the community group's interest discussed. At the end of the meeting the Parish Council Chair and Vice-Chair indicated that they were content with the proposals.
23. Mr White, who is a member of the congregation, had been in touch on several occasions during 2018 with Diocesan Officers to ask questions and express his opposition to the proposed closure and although not a statutory interested party, had sent an individual submission to the DMPC in January 2019 objecting to the closure.
24. The Bishop says that the parish has carried out works identified in the last quinquennial inspection report that were essential to keep the building wind and watertight. However, items of major expense, such as the restoration of windows, have not been undertaken because the PCC was not in a position to pay for the work. He points out that the last quinquennial inspection report for St Edmunds, Kellington in 2015, also identified a range of required work, most significantly the need to re-roof the Chancel and North East Chapel in the next 5 years.
25. The Bishop says that the 2018 Annual Report and Financial Statements for the parish show that unrestricted income received in 2018 was £25,577 while parish expenditure of unrestricted income was £28,946, which included payment for church running costs, buildings' maintenance and the parish share, which was paid in full. He points out that the parish has been dipping into its reserves to meet its running costs and that its total unrestricted parish reserves at the end of 2018 were £18,524; there was also a Whitley Church Repair Fund of £393 and a Kellington Fabric fund of £1,956. He believes the parish is therefore in a precarious financial position and the continued maintenance of two church buildings is beyond its capacity.

26. The Bishop explains that 70% of the regular congregation attend services at both churches and gives details of the usual Sunday attendance figures for services held at each of the two churches during the month of October as below:

	All Saints, Whitley Bridge	St Edmund, Kellington
2014	16	16
2015	11	23
2016	12	24
2017	16	22
2018	17	24

He says that services were held on alternate Sundays in each building and the figures included up to 4 children. He adds that the Statistics for Mission record seven people joining the worshipping congregation in 2018 and the priest reported that three members attended worship at both churches; two attended only when services were held at St Edmund's and two attended only when services were held at All Saints; not all attended regularly. The Bishop states that unfortunately, this small increase had not been sufficient to make a significant impact on the parish's income or the viability of All Saints.

27. The Bishop emphasises that the majority of the congregation already worship at St Edmund's and all are welcome. He said that arrangements could be made to provide transport for those unable to get to St Edmund's themselves. Apart from Kellington, which was at the eastern edge of the Diocese, other nearby churches which offer similar worship include St Martin, Wormersley and St Botolph's, Knottingley (3.5 and 5 miles from Whitley Bridge respectively).
28. He states that the Diocese had an open mind about likely future uses should the building close for regular public worship. He says there have been no formal discussions with the Whitley Community Centre Management Group. He adds that there were local proposals for developing the site for worship and community use around 2010-11 and planning permission was obtained by the then WCCMG but in the absence of funds, the project did not proceed. Members of the WCCMG were present at the second public meeting in July 2018 and were informed that if All Saints were to close a proposal for a community use could be put forward at the "use-seeking" stage although no guarantees of a successful outcome could be given.
29. The Bishop comments that a partial closure of the building and the disposal of part for community use, or the application for grants to enable the building to be developed for both worship and community space was not considered as All Saints is a small, simple, unlisted church building consisting of a nave with a central aisle and an apsidal chancel, with no kitchen facilities and a toilet was housed in a small, detached, brick building. He says the PCC does not have the capacity or resources to undertake what would be a major building project and fundraising exercise to re-develop and/or extend All Saints for both community and worship use, particularly given its on-going responsibilities regarding the Grade 1 listed church of St Edmunds.
30. The Bishop explains that the priest has a good relationship with the Whitley and Eggborough Community Primary School and leads assemblies there which would not be impacted by the closure of All Saints. He says that in the past the school has used All Saints for special occasions, such as Christingle, but the building is too small to house the whole school community and in 2018 Christingle services took

place in the school instead. He points out that it is not a Church of England School and access relies on the goodwill of its leadership at the time.

31. The Bishop acknowledges that it is a matter of great sadness when a church building is proposed for closure after over 150 years of Christian witness and that the PCC had written "with heavy hearts" when asking for the closure process to begin. However, the Bishop says that the priest and PCC are currently spending time, energy and funds on two church buildings which are only two miles apart and he believes that the closure of All Saints would release the PCC from the substantial burden of caring for two church buildings and would allow them to focus on the future mission to the whole parish from a single building, the parish church of St Edmund's.

The sifting group's decision

32. The case has been examined by the Committee's case sifting representatives who recommended that it should not be afforded a public hearing.

Supplementary views of representors against the draft Scheme

33. Mr White says that he is disappointed that there will not be a hearing which members of the public can attend as it is not fair that something as devastating as the possibility of their church closing is not to be heard in public. He believes the consultation had not been honest as there have been several suggestions to help the church increase revenue and congregation numbers and help with repairs, but all were dismissed by the PCC and the Archdeacon.
34. Mr White explains his proposals again and points out, in particular, that:
- the large open area to the front of the church could be opened during the week for car parking with a small fee, for which he thinks there is a demand;
 - he has on numerous occasions offered to complete grant applications as he had experience in this area;
 - he has suggested changing the service time and having a family service starting at 11am with refreshments afterwards;
 - he has suggested that the parish newsletter be delivered to households and that social media be used as some residents don't even realise the village has a church or that it is still open;
 - PCC meetings are never advertised; minutes are not circulated, and financial accounts are not routinely shared with the membership;
 - numerous residents have attended the church in the past year;
 - the importance of the link between the church and the nearby school;
 - the Taylor report indicates that churches such as his should be opened up to the community, this is what the community wants (as shown by the survey results) and the parish council is prepared to help achieve this;
 - there has been a lack of vision and enthusiasm to develop All Saints as a local hub for the community, with no support from the Diocese and the local clergy determined to close it;
 - diocesan officials offered to provide examples of churches which had turned things around and developed a Community Church but have not done so;
 - no consideration has been given to All Saints becoming a Festival Church;

- their vicar is past retirement age and a new vicar should be given the chance to turn things around.
35. Mr White asks that any decision be deferred for 12 months to enable proper discussions to take place between the Diocese and the Parish Council and also asks what would happen to the monthly coffee mornings and the foodbank collections if All Saints closes?
36. The Parish Council says that it wishes to make a further response but does not meet until 15th October and has been told that a response can be tabled if made available before the time of the Committee's meeting on 15th October.

Supplementary views of the Bishop

37. The Bishop acknowledges Mr White has very strong feelings about this matter, but says that he still supports the draft Scheme and comments as follows on Mr White's points:
- Although the financial situation of the PCC was a factor in pursuing closure it was not the only consideration;
 - the initial outlay and the ongoing responsibilities (insurance, surfacing and obtaining planning permission) necessary for creating a parking area would be an additional burden on to the PCC, which is already struggling to maintain two buildings less than two miles apart;
 - despite much local publicity about the proposed closure, with no significant upturn in attendance (or financial giving), the PCC does not have the capacity or resources to undertake a major building project at All Saints, nor the need for two buildings close together, so has not needed to take up Mr White's generous offer of assistance with grant application;
 - in terms of communication, copies of the parish newsletter are available on the parish website as well as in the local pub in Whitley; decisions about the times of services are taken locally by the PCC (which has considered Mr White's suggestion and does not believe this would make any significant improvement in attendance or commitment), and a number of the people mentioned by Mr White started worshiping at All Saints prior to the closure proposals being published and several attend both Whitley and Kellington.
 - links with local primary schools are of great importance, but because of health and safety concerns arising from a risk assessment the decision has been taken that the children will no longer be able to attend All Saints. The Associate Priest has agreed to go into the school to hold special services including the Christingle service;
 - Mr White was provided with examples of churches that had formed successful partnerships with community groups and given details of the Diocesan Buildings for Mission Officer who would have been more able to assist further, but he has never contacted her or the Church Growth Adviser;

- the Festival Church suggestion was discussed but at a public meeting the community preferred to have a building with a community focus that may apply for a special licence to hold up to six services a year (which if pursued would give the same level of worship services a year as a Festival Church arrangement);
- the Diocese could not add clergy to its existing numbers and the burden of this matter would also not be attractive in recruiting clergy to a post here;
- the DBF would be keen to engage in discussions with the Whitley community group on its interest in taking on the building of All Saints should the draft closure scheme come into effect. The viability of any proposals would need to be given full consideration, but early conversations would seem to suggest that this could be an option that might keep the building in community use and available for a small number of services a year, whilst freeing up the PCC to concentrate its limited resources on St Edmund's, provided the community group could demonstrate how such a proposal could be resourced.

Issues

38. The main issues for the Committee are:

- Is there a continuing pastoral need for the church of All Saints, Whitley for regular public worship, or can the mission and ministry of the parish be carried out effectively from the parish church of St Edmund?
- Is there local support for the closure?
- Is the cost of repairing and maintaining All Saints as a church (including as set out in the QI Report) beyond the resources of the congregation?
- Has sufficient consideration been given to alternative arrangements whereby All Saints could continue in use as a community Church or is the possibility of community use with a provision for occasional services more likely to be achieved by formally closing the building for regular public worship?
- Do the diocesan proposals make better provision for the cure of souls in the Diocese as a whole and have due regard to the furtherance of the mission of the Church of England?

Recommendation

The Committee is invited to consider the representations and the issues set out in this report and, in the light of these, whether or not the draft Scheme should proceed.



(Signed) Katie Lowe

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9 October 2019