

Supplementary comments from Mr White and the Bishop's response

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From: John White

Sent: 01 October 2019 09:25

To: Katie Lowe

Subject: All Saints Church Whitley: Proposal to Close (A voice in the wilderness)

Good Morning Katie,

Thank you for your last email.

I was disappointed to hear that there will not be a hearing where members of the public can attend, this doesn't seem very fair that something as devastating as the possibility of our church closing cannot be heard in public.

I have consistently objected to the proposal to close our church and I feel the consultation has not been honest.

There has been several suggestions to help the church increase revenue, increase congregation and help with the repairs but all have been dismissed by the PCC and the Archdeacon.

I am repeating my proposals once again,

1. The large open area to the front of the church could be opened up during the week for car parking with a small fee. We have a Car home almost opposite the church which is desperately in need of parking for its staff, and would welcome the use of this area.

Our village which is right next to junction 34 on the M62 is used by car sharers who often block side streets, again I am confident that they would welcome some off street parking and avoid annoying residents.

2. I have on numerous occasions offered to complete grant applications as I have had some experience of this previously, having successfully applied for funds for a sports club, our allotment association and the community.

Once again this was dismissed with no reason given.

3. I have repeatedly suggested ways to encourage greater participation of local residents, for example our services are held early in the morning, with no acknowledgment of modern living. I have suggested a monthly family service starting at 11 with refreshments afterwards but I have received no response.

I have suggested that the parish newsletter be delivered to households and that social media is used. Currently the parish newsletter is not even distributed in the village, and when asked some residents didn't even realise the village had a church, or was still open.

Communications with the local community consist of one noticeboard, hardly a way to promote the church in 2019.

PCC meetings are never advertised and no minutes are ever circulated, and no financial accounts are ever routinely shared with the membership.

Despite references to small representation from the community of Whitley, I have seen numerous residents attend over the past year,

Mrs Mowbray
Mrs Shaw
Mr and Mrs Pierce
Mr Haywood
Mr and Mrs Walker
Myself Mr white
Mr and Mrs Slater
Mr and Mrs Bradley

I doubt that many will attend the Parish church.

4. Our local primary school, has more than 200 children, and is literally 3 minutes walk from the church. There has been a tradition of holding a Christmas Christingal service for the children where they hold a small candle and learn about Christmas.

I have had 3 children at the school and all have attended these services over the years and enjoyed and benefited from seeing the real meaning of Christmas.

I now have a 6 year old grandson who attends the school who enjoyed the service in his first year, even if he did sing a fellow child's hair with his candle? But they all had great fun and went away with the real meaning of Christmas.

For some children this might be the first time they enter a church and we owe it to generations of children to go to their local church.

All this will be lost if our church closes as there is no way 200 children will be able to go to the parish church 3 miles away.

In addition to the above,

5. Lack of support from Diocese

I have been very surprised at the lack of support from the Diocese, it feels as if the local clergy are determined to close the church and do not welcome any assistance.

Charlotte Lilley from the Diocesan office offered to provide examples of church's which had turned things around and developed Community church's, nothing was ever forthcoming.

The Official in the Diocese Robin Gamble who works with Church's was never approached, I rang him and he agreed to he said the Diocese would need to approach him.

I am afraid this suggests to me that help was not wanted as the local clergy did not want any interference in their desire to close All Saints.

The Archdeacon openly said "This church will not continue to hold services of worship" and made his views very clear that he would not entertain any suggestions to keep the church open or indeed develop it into a Community Church.

Suggestions of creating a Festival church were dismissed.

Our vicar who I am sure has served us well over the years is now past his normal retirement age, and I understand the Bishop is considering what to do.

Surely it is worth giving a new vicar a chance to turn things round? And not give them an even smaller congregation to lead.

6. Lack of vision

There seems to be a complete lack of vision and no enthusiasm to develop All Saints as a local hub for the community.

I have seen the Taylor report and it is clear that church's like ours should be opened up to the community and not closed down.

7. Consistent support from Parish Council

The Parish Council which is the elected body representing all the people of Whitley have consistently supported the church remaining open and in its recent submission to the Commissioners they have said they are prepared to help.

It is disappointing therefore that there has been no engagement to develop this.

I have read in one of the submissions to you that the community has accepted the church closing.

This is not true as can be seen from the statement from the Clerk to our Parish Council.

The Parish Council paid for a survey of all the community and the overwhelming response was for church to remain as a place of worship and be developed for other community activities.

The church has completely ignored this and simply said it must have robust plans whilst making it clear they were not interested in working toward meeting the communities aspirations.

A few other points,

What will happen to the monthly coffee mornings?

What will happen to the well supported foodbank collections?

Since the announcement that the PCC was seeking closure the annual gift day collection has raised the largest amounts in recent years, I think it is very unlikely that this amount of money will be forthcoming if the church is closed.

The closure of our church will only increase the lack of interest in the Christian church.

The right thing to do is have the vision to work with the community and build a community church which can help meet running costs and develop a hub for other activities.

The right course of action would be to reject the request to close the church and recommend that the PCC the Diocese work with the Parish Council to come up with a plan.

In summary I would ask that you defer any final decision on our church for a period of at least 12 months for proper discussions to take place between the Diocese and the Parish Council.

We should be exploring ways to keep our church's open, not look at reasons why they should close.

You may think I am alone in these views but I am not, but many of my neighbours feel there is little point fighting to keep All Saints open when there is such resistance to change.

I am not confident any of my views will be taken on board, as I have consistently been rebuffed.

There is no need to make a decision now, the church is not in debt, it is not structurally unsound and a deferment would allow more time to do something quite remarkable for our community.

I pray you will make the right decision.

Yours Sincerely,

John White
member of Kellington and Whitley
Parish

From: John White
Sent: 01 October 2019 14:23
To: Katie Lowe
Subject: Picture of All Saints Whitley

Hello Katie,

Will the panel have pictures of our little church?

Hardly looks like a church worth closing.

Will you give copies to the panel please?

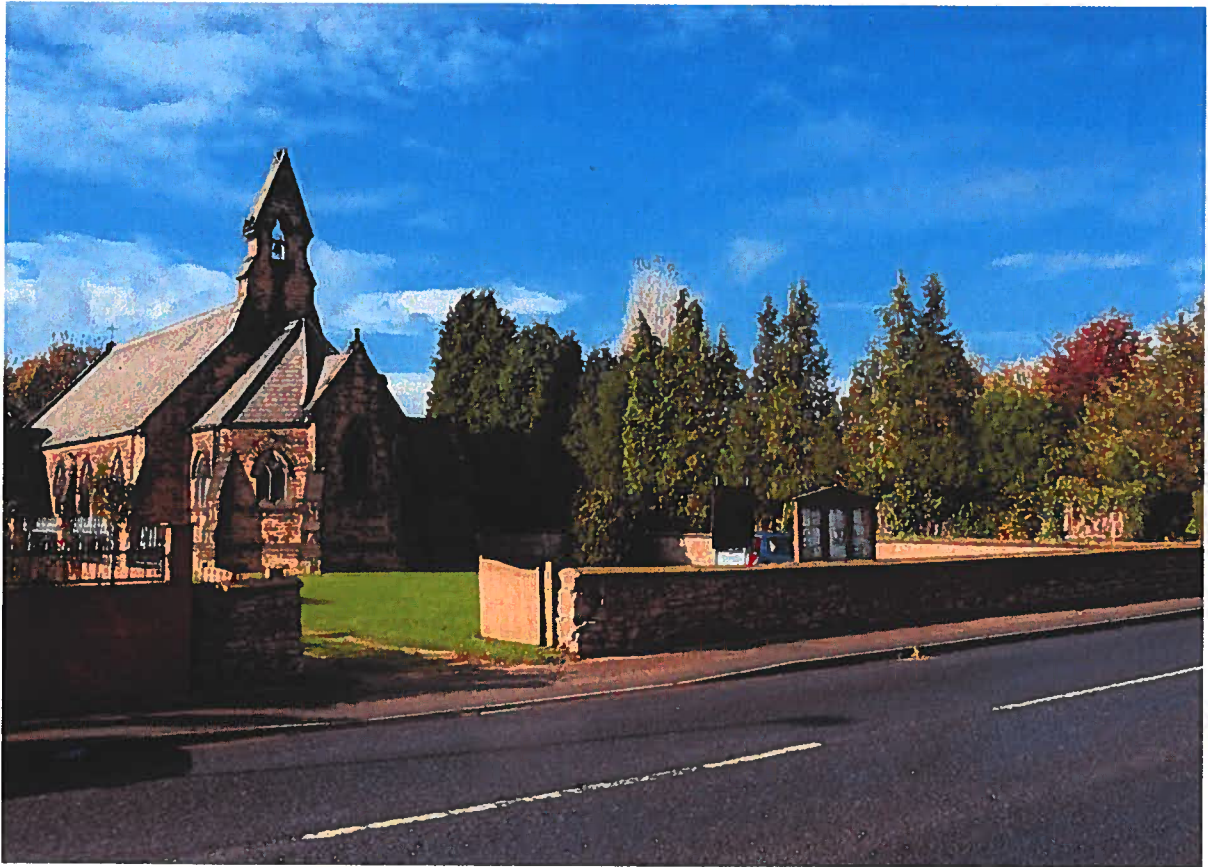
How many people are on the panel? Am I allowed to contact them direct?

I am sorry if I am being such a nuisance but I really don't want my church to close and be lost to the community.

Thank you

John White





From: Bishop Nick
Sent: 07 October 2019 08:52
To: Katie Lowe
Cc: Charlotte Lilley; Peter Townley; Tony Robinson; Lisa McIntyre
Subject: Benefice of Knottingley and Kellington with Whitley

Dear Katie,

Thank you for forwarding the further letter from Mr White which you received in response to my letter of 23 August 2019.

I understand that Mr White feels very strongly about this matter and his continued interest in the future of the building is understood and appreciated. However, having followed up his comments again, I feel I have to make the following further response.

Mr White raises the idea of using the grassed area at the front of the church as a car park as a means of generating revenue for the PCC. It is important to note that, although the financial situation of the PCC was a factor in the proposal to pursue closure of the building, it was not the only consideration. Whilst this suggestion might potentially generate income for the parish, there would be insurance implications to consider as well as the increased maintenance of this area of land. Regular use would require it to be properly surfaced, and it is likely that planning permission would be required. The initial outlay and the ongoing responsibilities would add an additional burden on to the PCC, which is already struggling to maintain two buildings less than two miles apart.

Mr White notes that he offered help in applying for grants for the building. This offer is generous, but despite much local publicity about the proposed closure there has not been a significant upturn in attendance (or financial giving) such that the congregation now requires two buildings so close together. The PCC does not have the capacity or resources to undertake what would be a major building project at All Saints and wishes to concentrate its resources (human and financial) on the Grade I listed St Edmund's.

Mr White suggests changes that could be made to the communication and service provision within Whitley. I understand that copies of the parish newsletter are available on the parish website as well as in the local pub in Whitley. With regard to changing the times of services, this would be a decision taken locally by the PCC. Clearly, the PCC has considered this and still does not believe this will make any significant improvement in attendance or commitment. It is also my understanding that a number of the people mentioned by Mr White actually started worshipping at All Saints prior to the closure proposals being published and that several actually attend both Whitley and Kellington Church. I should add that Mr White appears not to have spoken with the local clergy about service times.

Links with local primary schools are always of great importance to us and I am pleased to hear that the Christingle service is so well regarded. It is, however, my understanding that the local school carried out a risk assessment following the last service attended at the church and has decided that the journey on foot next to a busy A road is not safe. As such it has taken the decision that the children will no longer be able to attend All Saints. The Associate Priest, however, has agreed to go into the school building to hold special services including the Christingle service.

With regard to support from the Diocesan office, I can confirm that Charlotte Lilley did provide examples of churches that had formed successful partnerships with community groups and also gave Mr White details of the Diocesan Buildings for Mission Officer who would have been more able to assist further with this matter. However, as I understand it, Mr White never contacted her to follow this up. Equally, Robin Gamble (Church Growth Adviser) has no recollection of having been contacted by Mr White.

The Festival Church suggestion was discussed. However, I understand that at a public meeting the community suggested it would prefer to have a building with a community focus that may apply for a special licence to hold up to six services a year. If this were to be achieved, it would give the same level of worship services a year as a Festival Church arrangement.

Mr White's suggestion that a "new vicar be given the chance to turn things around" does not show cognisance of how clergy are deployed, housed and paid. We cannot add clergy to our existing numbers – especially in circumstances such as this. The burden of this matter will also not be attractive in recruiting clergy to a post here.


In response to Mr White's further comments, I can affirm that the DBF would be keen to engage in discussions with the Whitley community group, who have expressed an 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 by the Diocesan Closed Churches Task Group before any recommendation for new use could be sent to the Church Commissioners. However, early conversations would seem to suggest that this could be a very positive proposal and worthy of further exploration, as an option that could 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 financial and human resources on St Edmund's. The community group would have to demonstrate a commitment to the financial resourcing needed to make such a use viable into the future.

It was "with a heavy heart" that the PCC requested closure be considered as it felt that there was a lack of pastoral need for the building. The closure of All Saints Whitley will release the PCC from the burden of caring for two church buildings and will allow it to focus on its mission work within the parish. I understand that this is a very painful process for all involved, but, for the reasons given, I am supportive of the draft pastoral scheme.

Best wishes.

+Nick

The Rt Revd Nicholas Baines
Bishop of Leeds

 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
Diocese of Leeds