



To the representors and the interested parties

Andrea Mulkeen
*Secretary to the Mission
Pastoral and Church
Property Committee*

Our ref: NB46/181

24 October 2019

**Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011
Benefice of Knottingley and Kellington with Whitley
Church of All Saints, Whitley
Proposed Pastoral Scheme**

1. The Church Commissioners have now carefully considered one representation in favour and two representations against a draft Pastoral Scheme providing 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.
2. The Commissioners have come to the decision that the Scheme should proceed, and the following statement indicates the reasons for their decision.

Background

3. 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's.
4. 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."

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, said that All Saints was built in the 1850s by local landowners and he believed it was as relevant now as it was then and that closing it would send entirely the wrong message to the community.
6. He said 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 said that since then he and at least four others had started to attend, which might not seem a lot, but represented a significant start out of their community. He pointed out that services on Remembrance Sunday and at Christmas were very well supported, with at least 30 attending, which he believed was in part due to the effort by some local people to advertise them widely. They felt let down that this had not been acknowledged and the proposal to close All Saints had been actively pursued. He pointed out that if the Church closed it was unlikely that they would attend services at the other church in the parish.
8. Mr White said that Whitley was a growing community, with a thriving primary school, attended by over 200 children, and plans for more social housing which he believed to be fertile ground for the church. He believed that All Saints served an important role and provided pastoral care to the village. Although attendance might not be large, it remained important to those who regularly attended. The church was almost next door to the school, and he thought it was important to maintain a close link. He said that the children could walk easily to events at All Saints, but this would be almost impossible when the next church was three miles or more away. He believed there was a significant interest in keeping the church and to take the opportunity to develop it into a community church, which he said had been advocated recently by the Archbishop of Canterbury.
9. He thought the church had no contact with the community, the current way of life and had not embraced change. He had suggested changing service times, as Sunday services were 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 he had suggested a monthly family service, but this had been ignored.
10. Mr White was aware that some repairs were needed to All Saints; that there were financial issues, although he said no real details had been provided; and that fundraising was not easy. However, he believed these must be common issues for many churches and pointed out that All Saints had 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 said he had offered to help with grant applications, but his offer had not been taken up.
11. He was concerned that there was an unconscious bias against the church in Whitley and towards Kellington where their vicar and almost all of the PCC lived. Mr White did not feel confident that anything he said would be taken seriously when the Archdeacon and PCC were so determined to close the Church but stressed that there was another way and asked that the request for closure be rejected. He believed he was not alone in these views but others who wanted the church to remain open felt that there was no point objecting as the decision had already been

taken and nothing they said would make any difference, a view also stated by their County Councillor.

12. Mr Hunter, clerk to Whitley Parish Council, wrote on its behalf and said that the total population of Whitley Parish was just over 800 and growing. He pointed out it was a community that was little served with local amenities and with limited public transport links to access neighbouring services. He said the only facilities available for residents of the village were the public house and the Church with its associated community-facing events. He stressed that the Church was a pivotal part of the community and one that would be sadly missed by residents.
13. He also pointed out the proximity of the church to the local school and said it provided 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 referred to, and enclosed, the results of a recent survey of Whitley residents. He pointed 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 urged the Commissioners to sustain the Church in its pastoral ministry and to keep it fully open for regular Sunday Service. The council fully understood the financial burden placed upon the Diocese in the upkeep of the Church and was 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 representations in favour of the draft Scheme

16. Mr David Broadbent, Chairman of Whitley Community Centre Management Group (WCCMG), stated that for many years there had been concern within the parish regarding the lack of a Community Centre, particularly since the village had more than doubled in size since 2006. He said 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 stated that the WCCMG had met regularly and in May 2018 put together a survey which could be accessed both online and on paper and attached the results. He said that in order to drill down on the results they were advised to do another online survey, which was held in October 2019. WCCMG was 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 said the group had also been active in the community and had the support of the local school and parish council and had been recognised by local groups in North Yorkshire for possible funding opportunities.
17. He pointed 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 said that the WCCMG wished to pursue keeping the building available to the local community but supported the draft Scheme as it now stood based on the results of the surveys.

Summary of the Bishop's views

19. The Bishop of Leeds said that the main considerations behind the proposal were as set out in the "diocesan rationale". He said the closure proposal was put forward locally and was not derived from a deanery plan or diocesan initiative. He pointed out that the PCC had written 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, sought the closure of All Saints.
20. The Bishop set out the timeline for the consultation process in detail and stated 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 said 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 was 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 said that the parish had 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, had not been undertaken because the PCC was not in a position to pay for the work. He pointed 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 within the next 5 years.
25. The Bishop said that the 2018 Annual Report and Financial Statements for the parish showed 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 pointed out that the parish had 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 believed the parish was therefore in a precarious financial position and the continued maintenance of two church buildings was beyond its capacity.

26. The Bishop explained that 70% of the regular congregation attended services at both churches and gave 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

27. He said that services were held on alternate Sundays in each building and the figures included up to 4 children. He added 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 stated 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.
28. The Bishop emphasised that the majority of the congregation already worshipped at St Edmund's and all were 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 offered similar worship included St Martin, Wormersley and St Botolph's, Knottingley (3.5 and 5 miles from Whitley Bridge respectively).
29. He stated that the Diocese had an open mind about likely future uses should the building close for regular public worship. He said there had been no formal discussions with the Whitley Community Centre Management Group. He added 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.
30. The Bishop commented 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 were not considered as All Saints was 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 said the PCC did 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 Edmund's.

31. The Bishop explained that the priest had a good relationship with the Whitley and Eggborough Community Primary School and led assemblies there which would not be impacted by the closure of All Saints. He said that in the past the school had used All Saints for special occasions, such as Christingle, but the building was too small to house the whole school community and in 2018 Christingle services took place in the school instead. He pointed out that it was not a Church of England School and access relied on the goodwill of its leadership at the time.
32. The Bishop acknowledged that it was a matter of great sadness when a church building was proposed for closure after over 150 years of Christian witness and that the PCC had written "with heavy hearts" when it asked for the closure process to begin. However, the Bishop said that the priest and PCC were currently spending time, energy and funds on two church buildings which were only two miles apart and he believed 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

33. The case had 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

34. Mr White said that he was disappointed that there would not be a hearing which members of the public could attend as it was not fair that something as devastating as the possibility of their church closing was not to be heard in public. He believed the consultation had not been honest as there had 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.
35. Mr White explained his proposals again and pointed 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 thought there was a demand;
 - he had on numerous occasions offered to complete grant applications as he had experience in this area;
 - he had suggested changing the service time and having a family service starting at 11am with refreshments afterwards;
 - he had suggested that the parish newsletter be delivered to households and that social media be used as some residents didn't even realise the village had a church or that it was still open;
 - PCC meetings were never advertised; minutes were not circulated, and financial accounts were not routinely shared with the membership;
 - numerous residents had attended the church in the past year;
 - the importance of the link between the church and the nearby school;
 - the Taylor report indicated that churches such as his should be opened up to the community, this was what the community wanted (as shown by the survey results) and the parish council was prepared to help achieve this;
 - there had 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 had not done so;
- no consideration had been given to All Saints becoming a Festival Church;
- their vicar was past retirement age and a new vicar should be given the chance to turn things around.

36. Mr White asked that any decision be deferred for 12 months to enable proper discussions to take place between the Diocese and the Parish Council and also asked what would happen to the monthly coffee mornings and the foodbank collections if All Saints closed?

37. The Parish Council said that it wished to make a further response but did not meet until 15th October and had been told that a response could be tabled if made available before the time of the Committee's meeting on 15th October.

Supplementary views of the Bishop

38. The Bishop acknowledged Mr White had very strong feelings about this matter, but said that he still supported the draft Scheme and commented 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 was 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 did not have the capacity or resources to undertake a major building project at All Saints, nor the need for two buildings close together, so had not needed to take up Mr White's generous offer of assistance with grant application;
- in terms of communication, copies of the parish newsletter were available on the parish website as well as in the local pub in Whitley; decisions about the times of services were taken locally by the PCC (which had considered Mr White's suggestion and did 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 attended both Whitley and Kellington.
- links with local primary schools were of great importance, but because of health and safety concerns arising from a risk assessment the decision had been taken that the children would no longer be able to attend All Saints. The Associate Priest had agreed to go into the school to hold special services including the Christingle service;
- Mr White had been provided with examples of churches that had formed successful partnerships with community groups and had been given details of the Diocesan Buildings for Mission Officer who would have been more able to assist further, but he had 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 could 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 there;
- the Diocesan Board of Finance 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.

Reasons for the Commissioners' decision

39. The Commissioners felt that the mission and ministry needs of the parish could be met from the parish church of St Edmund, Killington. They accepted the Bishop's views that it was strategically better to concentrate resources at St Edmund's than to keep two churches open, thereby releasing the PCC from the substantial burden of caring for both buildings and allowing it to focus on the future mission to the whole parish from St Edmund's. They noted that it was a unanimous decision of the PCC to seek closure of All Saints.
40. They also noted that in recent times a single congregation had mostly alternated weekly between the two buildings and accepted the Bishop's view that the small increase in the congregation following the first public meeting had not been sufficient to make a significant impact on the parish's income or the viability of All Saints.
41. They accepted the Bishop's view that the PCC did not have the capacity or resources to undertake a major building project at All Saints or undertake the car-parking project suggested by Mr White. They noted that two public meetings had been held and that the closure proposals had been paused for six months to see if the PCC and local community representatives could work together on a joint scheme but that following discussions the PCC confirmed its resolution to seek closure of All Saints. They also noted that the community had expressed a preference for a building with a community focus that might apply for a special licence to hold up to six services a year.
42. The Commissioners additionally noted that the Diocese had an open mind about likely future uses should the building close for regular public worship and was willing to engage in discussions regarding the possibility of the Whitley Community Group taking on the building provided it could demonstrate the viability of any proposals. They noted that if this transpired and there was also provision for a limited number of services in the building, this would achieve much of what the representors against the draft Scheme wished to see while at the same time relieving the PCC of responsibility for the building.
43. They noted that Health and Safety considerations had limited the use of the All Saints for school services and agreed that the availability of the building was not essential to the development of a good relationship with the Whitley and Eggborough Community Primary School. They noted that the incumbent led assemblies there which would not be affected by the closure of All Saints. They

also noted that the school was not a Church of England school and access relied on the goodwill of its leadership at the time.

44. The Commissioners were therefore satisfied that the proposals were likely to provide better provision for the cure of souls and further the mission of the Church.

Conclusion

45. In the light of these various points the Commissioners were satisfied that it would be right to allow the draft Scheme to proceed notwithstanding the representations made against it.
46. The Commissioners also considered all the other points made in the representations but felt that none of them was of sufficient weight to outweigh the points listed above.
47. They realise that their decision will disappoint some of those who made representations about the draft Scheme, but they hope that this statement will be helpful in indicating that their decision was reached only after careful consideration of all the relevant issues.
48. I enclose a notice, as required by the Measure, about the right to apply for leave to appeal to Her Majesty in Council against the Scheme or any of its provisions.

Yours sincerely

Andrea Mulkeen

Andrea Mulkeen
Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee Secretary
Church Commissioners