

Church Commissioners
Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee
Diocesan Rationale for Closures: 2010-2019
Note by Andrea Mulkeen

Summary

Following consideration of the Report on behalf of the Church Buildings Council on 'Struggling, Closed and Closing Churches', we thought it would be helpful to carry out a piece of research on the Diocesan Rationale provided when the Bishop's proposals for closure are submitted.

Attached is the analysis carried out; this also provides an overview on the closures which came into effect over the last ten years.

Recommendation

The Committee is invited to consider and take note of this analysis undertaken on the Diocesan rationale for church closures between 2010 and 2019.

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Diocesan Rationale for Church Closures 2010 to 2019

Executive Summary

- (i) During the last decade 209 consecrated churches were formally closed (although in eight cases these amounted to 'technical' closures only, with worship continuing to take place).
- (ii) For most closures there is evidence of a significant lead-in period while the building's future was under consideration, occasionally stretching back decades, even where there is a specific trigger (such as a large repair bill) to a final decision.
- (iii) The most common reasons cited for closure are unsurprising, usually consisting of several inter-linking factors, such as small or dwindling (often ageing) congregations struggling with caring for buildings which may be in poor condition, or need significant expenditure, or are no longer deemed fit for purpose. There are also some very localised factors, for example where the population has declined or shifted, or become more diverse; new development may be taking place in a different part of the parish; Sharing Agreements may be proposed or ending; or estate churches or cemetery chapels are no longer needed.
- (iv) Wider reorganisation has often preceded or accompanies the closure process. Diocesan rationale frequently refers to the health or viability of the parish itself, alongside congregation size and the condition of the building. This includes financial resources generally, an inability to support ministry costs or parish share, and the lack of individuals willing to serve as church wardens or on PCCs or provide lay leadership, or the lack of wider community support or engagement. Where other reorganisation is involved, the unwillingness of another parish to assume responsibility for a building as a chapel of ease is not unusual.
- (v) Many of the closed buildings were in parishes with more than one church building, some with several. In such cases, the number or proximity of other churches, and the desire to strengthen and focus mission and ministry in one building is frequently cited (in both urban and rural parishes). Sometimes, it is recorded, worshippers had already moved to nearby churches or other venues in advance.
- (vi) Excluding ruins, in around 20% of all cases a congregation had already ceased using the church building by the stage formal closure proposals were submitted to the Commissioners (reasons including the enforced closure of the building due to its poor condition, the expense of upkeep, a preference to worship in another building such as a nearby hall or school, simply handing over the keys and walking away, or the fact that there was no worshipping congregation by this stage).

- (vii) Closure remains very much a 'bottom up' process, with the trigger in most cases being a resolution by the PCC. There is limited evidence that decisions arise directly from diocesan or deanery reviews, although there are a number of cases involving very large benefices with several churches, where the rationale indicates there has been a strategic evaluation of future mission, ministry and building needs and resourcing across the benefice. (Some rural deaneries may only consist of two or three large benefices, so such a review may be deemed to be on a meaningful scale).
- (viii) Closures are distributed unevenly across dioceses: eight (mainly northern) dioceses had between eight and 18 closures apiece, accounting for 44% of the total; while 18 dioceses had between four and seven closures (47%); and 14 dioceses had no to three closures (9%) of closures overall. The two dioceses with most closures, Leeds and Manchester, accounted for 18 each (just over 17% of the total). Generally this suggests that most dioceses have not, to date, intervened pro-actively to address any concerns they may have around the viability or overall provision of church buildings.
- (ix) The profile of closures by listing status varies significantly from that of the church building stock overall: Grade I or II* listed churches account for 54% of all churches but just under a quarter of closures. In contrast, Grade II or unlisted churches make up 46% of the overall building stock but account for over three-quarters of closures. Even in dioceses with a lot of closures, these predominantly involve Grade II or unlisted buildings. This might take account of the greater availability of grant funding for highly listed buildings. Leaving aside financial considerations, dioceses might also be wary about pursuing closure where they consider use seeking could be particularly problematic, given that Diocesan Boards of Finance are responsible for the care and maintenance of such buildings until their future is settled. (In 31% of cases the Scheme closing the church building also settled its future, with some dioceses preferring only to pursue this single stage route to closure.)

Analysis of Rationale for Closure

1. This evaluation of church building closures between 2010 and 2019 focusses on the rationale for closure provided by dioceses when submitting such proposals. Such rationale is usually concise but highlights underlying factors, specific triggers and circumstances in which decision-making is taking place locally, from which more general conclusions can be drawn.
2. So that these closures can be seen in the wider context of the Church's overall building stock, key data from the statistical analysis provided for the Church Buildings Review (CBR) is provided below. This dates from 2015, the midpoint of the decade of closures under review.

The Church's Buildings Portfolio

3. The CBR report set out some key characteristics:
 - Around three quarters of churches are listed (more than half Grade I or Grade II*). Most churches are in rural areas, where the proportion that are highly listed is much greater than in urban or suburban areas; some 70% of churches in rural areas are Grade I or II*, in contrast to urban (27%) and suburban (36%) areas. Three quarters of Grade I listed church buildings are in rural areas.
 - While most church buildings are in rural areas, only a sixth of the population and a quarter of the attendance is. But while rural areas have six or seven times more buildings per head of population and so have much smaller congregations on average, church attendance per capita is around twice as high in rural areas.
 - While indicating that attendance alone does not reflect the contribution of buildings to mission, or their use by and value to the local community, the CBR noted that in rural areas, 75% of churches had attendance of fewer than 37 people, half fewer than 19, and a quarter fewer than 10. Nationally, a quarter of all churches had weekly attendance below 16, with around 2,000 below 10. Very small congregations bear a heavy burden of maintenance even though they may often be able to call on the goodwill and support of those not part of the regular worshipping community.
4. Significant variations between dioceses were highlighted:
 - An average of 393 church buildings per diocese masked a nearly fivefold variance between Portsmouth (171) and Oxford (810). Population size in relation to the number of buildings varied by a factor of more than 10 as between London and Hereford.
 - 15 dioceses had weekly worshipping attendance per building averaging below 50 people, of which three very rural dioceses - Hereford, Lincoln and Norwich - averaged below 30.

- The national proportion of unlisted church buildings (22%) masked a very wide spread: from just 5% in St. Eds & Ips (with six other dioceses - Norwich, Salisbury, Hereford, Ely, Lincoln and Peterborough - also below 10%) to 55% in Liverpool. The five other dioceses with more than 40% of their buildings unlisted (Southwark, Manchester, Blackburn, Birmingham and Durham) contain large and mainly Northern urban areas, indicating that geography, history and economics all have a bearing here.
- Overall, 54% of churches are grade I or II* listed but there are 21 dioceses where the majority are grade I or II* and, of these, four where the number exceeds three quarters (Norwich 89%, St. Eds and Ips 86%, Ely 83%, and Peterborough 82%). There are only ten dioceses where the proportion of grade I and II* buildings is below a third, with only Liverpool (15%), Manchester (15%), Blackburn (20%), Durham (21%) and Southwark (24%) being under a quarter.

Closures between 2010 to 2019

5. The ten years between 2010 and 2019 saw **209** formal closures take effect. At just over 20 each year, this is consistent with the underlying annual rate of around 20 to 25 since the mid-1990s. As explored below, a small number involved 'technical' closures, or unsuitable buildings being replaced, while some nine Schemes dealt with ruins, but in turn this is balanced by closure proposals arising in this period but not yet in effect.
6. Among closures in the pipeline are around twelve from before 2018 where issues concerning access and title are still being resolved, or where the scheme is not yet in effect while disposal is finalised for single-stage schemes also settling a building's future. (Excluded also are proposals submitted in 2019 where schemes were published but not in effect before the end of the year).
7. Within this time-frame, the Commissioners adjudicated on 38 contested closures; in four cases they upheld the objections and these church buildings remain in use (in four other cases the proposals were withdrawn following representations). Additionally, four closures did not proceed under the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 as it was established they were not consecrated buildings.

Closures by diocese and geographic spread

8. Of the 209 closed buildings (of which 166 were parish churches, 33 chapels of ease, one Guild Church and the remainder ruins):
 - In terms of diocesan spread, eight, predominantly northern dioceses accounted for 44% of all closures (Leeds and Manchester, with 18 closures each, jointly account for 17% of the total). In Manchester's case, this amounted to 5.7% of its overall building stock (although in two cases replacement places of worship were being provided). **Annex A** provides a full breakdown of closures by dioceses.

- While the majority of all church buildings are in rural areas (57%), rural churches account for around 46% of closures (including ruins), with the remaining 54% of closures in urban and suburban areas.

9. In the Diocese of Manchester, while there were some closures in the city of Manchester itself and its suburbs, more than half were in mill towns in the North West (such as Bacup, Heywood and Bolton) which had seen significant economic and population decline since their nineteenth century heyday. The majority of closures in Leeds, were mainly suburban or on the urban fringe, but included six rural churches.

10. The likelihood of a strategic approach to closures might be expected to be most apparent among dioceses with the highest number of closures but this is not necessarily indicated in the rationale. In Leeds and Manchester underlying reasons include:

- Manchester: the factors most commonly cited are financial (17); the size/condition of the building (15) and the size of the congregation (13).
- Leeds: a broadly similar pattern emerges although, with the rural cases included, there is less stress on the condition of the building (6) and more on the size of congregation (16) and financial position (15).

11. In both Dioceses the rationale frequently alludes to a position of decline over many years, even if there is a specific trigger for seeking closure, such as a large repair bill.

Closures by listing status

12. Grade I or II* buildings account for 54% of all churches but just under a quarter of closures in the last ten years, with those which are Grade II or unlisted (46%) accounting for over three-quarters of closures.

| Listing status | Number of Churches | % of all churches | Number of Closures 2010-19 | % of closures | Closures as % by listing status |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|--|
| I | 4,300 | 27% | 15 | 7% | 0.34% |
| II* | 4,300 | 27% | 36 | 17% | 0.84% |
| II | 3,700 | 24% | 85 | 41% | 2.30% |
| Unlisted | 3,400 | 22% | 73 | 35% | 2.14% |
| Totals | 15,700 | - | 209 | - | - |

13. There is a reluctance among dioceses to pursue closure and take on responsibility for highly listed closed churches during the use seeking period, as these are buildings for which securing an alternative use is likely to be more challenging; some dioceses in any event focus on the single-stage process settling a building's future at the time of closure, so that the building is not a drain on diocesan resources. Of the 15 Grade I buildings closed in this period, six were directly vested in the Churches Conservation

Trust (CCT), and five others also subsequently vested. All the Grade I closures are rural buildings (with the exception of the ‘technical’ closure of the Guild Church of St Martin’s Ludgate). The Commissioners receive direct approaches from time to time from parishes seeking to vest their buildings in the CCT, as well as queries from dioceses, suggesting that the rate of closure among highly listed buildings would increase were vesting not an option only used sparingly.

14. Of the Grade II* churches, two were ruins, and while most are rural, ten are urban buildings (including two ‘technical’ closures in London). Three of the buildings have vested in the CCT, many have been found alternative uses. The Grade IIs also included seven ruins (including towers only).
15. Among dioceses with the highest numbers of closures – Leeds, Manchester, Chester and Durham – nearly all buildings closed were Grade II or unlisted (although they include three Grade II* churches).
16. The ten most rural dioceses account for just under a quarter of all closures. They (with the exception of Carlisle) include dioceses with the highest proportion of highly listed buildings. The majority of closures again occur among Grade II and unlisted buildings (three ruins are included in the Grade II figures):

| Diocese | Grade I | Grade II* | Grade II | Unlisted | Total |
|----------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Hereford | 0 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 6 |
| St E & I | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Norwich | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Carlisle | 0 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 9 |
| Salisbury | 0 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 6 |
| B & W | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 5 |
| Lincoln | 0 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 6 |
| Gloucester | 2 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 6 |
| Truro | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Exeter | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Total | 6 | 10 | 22* | 12 | 50 |

Technical Closures, Replacements and Ruins

17. Included within the closure total are various cases which either did not constitute the cessation of worship within the building, provided for its replacement, or involved ruins:
 - technical closures: in five London case and one in Lincoln, closure was a ‘technical’ device to effect formal transfer of a property, usually arising because of a PCC’s investment in the building, with each scheme providing for continuing Anglican worship use.
 - replacements: in eight cases it was intended to replace unsuitable buildings either with new builds or adapting existing properties (usually church halls) to become new places of worship, however not all have so far been replaced.

- ruins: nine of the closures dealt with ruins (or remaining towers) where there had not been worship for many years (include one church severely damaged by fire).
- in three other cases a continuing worship element has been incorporated as part of a new use.

18. Examples of the rationale for the London ‘closures’ covered by the above paragraph included:

- Ludgate St Martin: enabling a former guild church to become a chapel of ease in a nearby parish (closure was the only means to effect such a change of status);
- Harrow Weald St Michael & All Angels: the terms of a 19th century London diocesan trust in which much parochial property was vested prevented the proceeds from the disposal of such property being applied to benefice property. Closure scheme enabled the building to be transferred to the London Diocesan Fund in trust for the PCC so that funds from the parish hall could be applied to new development proposals.

19. Proposals to provide new places of worship to replace unsuitable buildings occurred in Blackburn; Chester, London and Manchester (2 apiece); while in Battersea (Southwark) two existing buildings were replaced by a new place of worship.

20. Dealing with ruins/towers accounted for two cases apiece in Lichfield, Norwich and St Albans; and one each in Blackburn, Gloucester, Southwell & Nottingham and St Edmundsbury & Ipswich. All but one was located in rural areas.

Rationale for Closure

21. All diocesan proposals for reorganisation (which includes church closures) are accompanied by a brief summary of the reasons for what is proposed. Examples in relation to various church closures are provided in **Annex B**. Overall, some general conclusions can be reached from analysing the rationale:

- The most common factors (often several inter-relating) include viability, the declining size and age of the congregation struggling with the building’s upkeep, the condition of the building, cost of maintenance and repairs, it no longer being fit for purpose, and a desire to focus energy, mission and ministry on another church building in the parish.
- Financial considerations as described often relate to the wider viability of the parish itself, not just the cost of upkeep or repair of the building (including in some cases the inability to meet parish share and support ministry costs over a number of years).
- Where parishes are already responsible for a number of buildings, often in close proximity, there is a desire to focus mission and ministry in one only (or the others, if more than one); where (as is frequently the case) there is other reorganisation included as part of the proposals (such as a union of benefices or parishes), there is a reluctance on the part of the other parish to take on responsibility for the building concerned.

- Distinctive reasons in particular cases include, for example, estate churches population shifts or growing diversity, or the impact of industrial decline on residential areas. In a small number an ecumenical consideration arises, such as around the formation or ending of a Local Ecumenical Partnership or Sharing Agreement.
- Decisions on closure decisions often evolve over a very lengthy time-frame. In some cases, a chronology of formally reviewing a building's future dates back decades, outlining efforts over many years to revive interest in the church and engage with the wider community. There may then be a specific trigger, such as a deterioration in the condition of the building or a large repair bill.
- In around a fifth of cases (and excluding ruins), a congregation has already ceased using the building by the time formal closure proposals are put forward. The reasons for this range from preferring to worship in an alternative building such as a school, problems filling leadership roles, simply walking away and handing back the keys, or issues around the building's condition, including closure on Health and Safety grounds or the withdrawal of insurance cover.

22. Nearly all closures continue to emerge from a bottom up rather than top down process and are pursued at the PCC's request.

23. The table below details the incidences where various factors were specifically cited in the diocesan rationale. Usually multiple interlinked factors were identified for each closure, such as 'a very small congregation not having the financial resources to maintain the building and carry out repairs'. However, the incidences for each factor need to be treated with slight caution: factors may still have applied in individual cases where not articulated directly in the rationale (an example being the citing of PCC requests for closure). However, this does give a very broad overview of the most commonly mentioned factors in the diocesan rationale. Unsurprisingly, congregation/parish size, financial factors and the condition of buildings all feature prominently.

| Locality related | | Parish/congregational factors | | Building related | |
|---------------------------|----|-------------------------------|-----|--------------------------|----|
| Remote | 10 | Financial | 141 | Unsuitable (Replacement) | 19 |
| Over-churched area | 12 | Parish/ congregation size | 124 | Overlarge | 12 |
| Planning/Transport Blight | 4 | Clergy numbers/ lay officers | 26 | Condition/repair costs | 97 |
| Population Shift | 20 | Strategic Reviews | 11 | No Building/ Ruin | 6 |
| Population Diversity | 6 | PCC Request | 111 | | |

24. While a selection of specific case examples is provided in Annex B, a range of quotes under the relevant headings are set out below:

- **Remote:** “Its inaccessibility at many times of year meant that the number of services which could be held was limited and, pastorally, there was no need for a place of worship in this location”; “A very remote small medieval chapel-of-ease in a field above site of deserted medieval village”.
- **Over-churched:** “...deemed over-churched in terms of buildings and church communities (7 Anglican churches serving population of 25k); “Town with population around 50k had 11 Anglican church buildings with a USA of around 500”.
- **Planning/Transport blight:** “Cut off from rest of [parish] by a 6 lane dual carriage way”; “Detached from what centre of population there was and sited by side of busy main road, with difficult access”.
- **Population shift:** “Hamlet no longer exists; colliery village completely demolished following the closure of the pit in the 1950s and the occupants relocated”; “....said to be, in latter part of 19th C, most heavily industrialised area in Europe. By 1980 major collapse in steel and metal-related industries, with estimated 27,000 jobs lost in this area alone. 1,400 acres now derelict and abandoned. Slum houses cleared because of heavy pollution”; “a planned housing development would further accelerate trend of population shift away from historic centre of parish towards mission church”; “Population movement away from this end of village. New residential development was close to ... church (1 mile SE)”.
- **Diversity of population:** “now situated in an area where majority of population belonged to another faith community”; “parish could no longer afford to maintain 3 churches in area where Christian population was a minority”.
- **Financial:** “PCC struggling to meet its financial obligations”; “Parish could no longer sustain both buildings and it was felt that mission and pastoral needs could be met from St Mary’s”; “PCC unable to meet its financial obligations and parish no longer considered viable as a separate administrative unit”; “To focus resources of time, resources and people on 1 church building would enable church to sustain mission & ministry across parish more effectively”; “the combined PCC determined St John’s should close as part of managing economic decline”; “... struggled to cover costs, parish share and maintenance of building”; “Parish not able to sustain 2 church buildings and agreement at parish, deanery and diocesan level that for sake of mission and good stewardship resources were best concentrated at [...]”; “financial burden of looking after 2 buildings in area of high deprivation seemed unsustainable”; “church finances run at deficit”; “Parish unable to meet its parish share for some years and initiated closure process”; “PCC were unable to pay for repairs and their regular outgoings”; “Parish recognised that its outgoings far exceed its income”; “Struggled to be a viable church for a long time and had come close to closure many times”; “For some time PCC had been concerned

at low numbers of people attending St Mary's, which had resulted in significant difficulties in remaining solvent”.

- **Parish/congregation size:** “Small and mainly elderly congregation declining in numbers and struggling for some years”; “increasingly small congregation, mostly living outside the parish”; “Attempts to engage wider village community not successful, and small congregation [12] did not feel able to commit to frequent fund raising”; “only 149 residents in village and only 3 regularly attended church”; “Parish identified self as unsustainable during Diocesan Plain Speaking process as congregation had fallen to between 12 and 18 and no longer able to pay parish share”; “Small congregation getting smaller & finding it more and more difficult to sustain life of church. ... To focus resources of time, resources and people on 1 church building would enable church to sustain mission & ministry across parish more effectively”; “Population of parish was very small and there were no names on the ER”; “Dwindling and largely ageing congregation, becoming more of a struggle to meet day to day requirements of running parish. Number of public consultations held to try and garner support for ongoing mission and ministry of church but with little success”; “The congregation had shrunk to a handful and the church wardens no longer wished to carry on”; “There were no remaining regular attenders, and in a parish with 3 other churches, St Peter's was therefore no longer felt to fulfil any real pastoral need”; “Population of parish very small in a benefice well provided for places of worship”; “Congregation had declined in recent years to point they felt that care and maintenance of building could not be sustained in longer term”; “Church could no longer be maintained by its parishioners and not a viable congregation to sustain regular acts of public worship”; “Served a community of 69 residents. Tiny hamlet in benefice containing 7 churches”; “Congregation at St Stephen's had declined to very small numbers, leaving building unsustainable and no longer required pastorally and the parish unviable”; “Dwindling congregation who believed that their needs for the future might be met by imaginative partnership with the local school”; “Church could not be sustained by parishioners and not a viable congregation to sustain regular acts of public worship. [Large medieval church; very small parish with extremely small congregation]”; “Not a viable congregation to sustain regular acts of public worship and parish church could not be maintained by parishioners.”
- **Clergy numbers/lay officers:** “difficulties with filling leadership roles”; “Very small congregation; no operative PCC or parochial officers, pastorally redundant”; “No churchwardens for past 2 or 3 years and heavily dependent on one person, PCC Secretary, to carry out all necessary practical and administrative duties.”; “No longer possible to find anyone locally to take on responsibility for caring for remote building, or act as church wardens”; “No longer any worshipping congregation, church wardens or PCC”; “Small congregation of church closed the doors and “walked away” with the resignation of the PCC and churchwardens at Easter 2011; no incumbent, PCC or church wardens since then”; “PCC no longer functioned. Had its last service

at Christmas 2012 after which time the congregation locked the door and walked away. The congregation had shrunk to a handful and the church wardens no longer wished to carry on"; "Leadership of church had been for some time shared among even fewer, increasingly ageing, members of congregation"; "Lay leadership had been shared increasingly among fewer and fewer people"; "Unfortunately members had declined to point that parish unable to elect PCC or churchwardens"; "No one came forward to act as church warden or serve on PCC".

- **Strategic Reviews:** "No longer any parish officers and an increasingly small congregation, most living outside the parish, looked after by a priest from nearby.... Deanery Plan looking at deployment between 2014-2017 proposed union of two benefices to address diocesan deployment issues and strategies"; "Hastings Review concluded St Leonard's not required for CofE worship. 1 of 2 parish churches in parish"; "As there was no reasonable possibility of making building suitable for public worship, PR & formal closure pursued. 3 parishes had been associated informally since 2010 & Grantham Deanery Plan envisaged this relationship being formalised"; "2007 Deanery Plan had proposed closure: average weekly attendance around 20 for past 5 years (about half from outside parish)"; "2007 Deanery Pastoral Review recommended union of parishes and feasibility studies on the 2 church buildings"; "Closure proposals arose out of Mission Action Planning process undertaken in 2006"; "... review carried out by Archdeacon of Leicester in 2007 to assist PCC, who then concluded worship should be concentrated on 1 church building".
- **PCC Request:** "Parish ceased to use building in July 2018 and requested formal closure. Came as result of falling congregation numbers, difficulties with filling leadership roles and cost to parish of looking after 2 buildings just a few minutes walk from each other"; "Parish could no longer sustain both buildings and it was felt that mission and pastoral needs could be met from St Mary's"; "PCC unable to meet its financial obligations and considered it no longer feasible for congregation to continue to sustain building"; "Parish no longer wished to use building for worship (had 3 other buildings)"; "PCC of united parish indicated no longer any pastoral need for church, a building it could in any event no longer maintain"; "Future of building under consideration for some years and parish decided to concentrate worship at Christ Church (a quarter of a mile to NE) where it would be able to better sustain its mission and ministry"; "Dwindling regular congregation over many years; church no longer fulfilled pastoral need for which built. PCC reluctantly concluded closure was best way forward"; "PCC wished to be released from burden of care and maintenance and to focus energy and resources on developing mission and ministry to whole parish from parish church of St James"; "PCC felt that membership of God's family not determined by loss of building, that church was beyond buildings and about people"; "PCC reluctantly requested closure as felt congregation and building couldn't be sustained, even with support from wider community"; "Parish struggling financially to look after both of their buildings

and little/no interest locally; they wished to seek closure”; “Small congregation unable to meet running and maintenance costs of church building and desire to release it from this burden”; “Closure at request of PCC, because of structural problems of building and high costs of repair and renovation needed”; “It was the parish’s view that the church was no longer pastorally required”; “Proposal for closure originated with PCC who found it increasingly unsuitable for worship & mission, & wished to provide a more flexible & welcoming space for both liturgical & community use”; “Closure agreed unanimously by PCC and congregation (of 5) as it was uncomfortable for use in winter and could not be maintained for services by people of increasing frailty”; “Parish hoped that by moving into the building of St George this would make a more variable and sustainable congregation and provide a better long term future”; “PCC concerned uncertainty about future of building was sapping energy and making it difficult to move forward; hence requested closure”; “PCC requested closure as a result of substantial repairs needed to church being beyond means of its congregation of some 10 people”; “PCC decided to identify one building as focus of congregational worship and mission”; “PCC no longer found it viable to maintain and support 2 parish churches within a mile of each other and sought closure”.

- **Unsuitable (Some replacements):** “No step-free access and cost of significant structural work to provide ramp would be disproportionate to use of building and beyond parish's means. PCC wished to be released from burden of care and maintenance and focus energy and resources on developing mission and ministry to whole parish”; “Roof severely damaged and subsequent ingress of water made church unusable for last 6 years or more and all utilities disconnected for H & S reasons. Beyond economic repair. PCC had no funds and building would not attract grants or financial assistance”; “Proposed new PoW with additional ancillary accommodation better suited to needs of the parish”; “running expenses were very large burden on small congregation and building was in wrong position in relation to town”; “mission church in east of parish was more modest, affordable running costs, good hall facility and potential for further development”; “1970s building to be replaced on same site by modern place of worship ... with community facilities as part of wider major redevelopment”; “Existing church building was inflexible and expensive to maintain; PCC was clear it needed to be replaced if work of the parish was to be taken forward”; “Would be strong case for provision of new place of worship within a large housing development planned in another area of parish.”
- **Overlarge:** “Church seating capacity of 890 was far larger than Parish population of 112”; “Overlarge space not suitable for size of congregation and did not provide flexibility for different kinds of worship”; “Parish’s needs would be met far better by a much smaller place of worship, from which they could grow”; “Very large church building which small elderly congregation could no longer maintain.... endeavours to attract additional community users proved unsuccessful”; “Congregation (around 30) found building too large for its

needs and currently worshipped in church hall”; “Very big building difficult to use for modern worship. Average Sunday attendance c 25.”

- **Condition/repair costs:** “Building in poor state of repair; recent masonry falls and extremely damp. In deprived area ... and cost of repairs & upkeep beyond resources of parish, diverting energy away from mission and outreach. Proposed new PoW based on extensive remodelling of existing hall”; “Deteriorating condition and high cost of repairs led PCC to seek closure, with longer term intention being to demolish church and sell part of site to raise funds needed to build a replacement place of worship”; “Despite many years of hard work to keep the church going, maintenance issues had now overwhelmed the ageing congregation”; “Congregation moved to nearby ... when insurers declared use unsafe. Closure followed increasing concerns about condition of the cliff and retaining structure which was heavily cracked with large fissures”; “... closure in part precipitated by structural condition of building and the structural cracks in walls attributed to expansion and shrinkage of clay soil base. Closure process instigated by significant cracks appearing in arch and walls”; “Roof severely damaged and subsequent ingress of water made church unusable for last 6 years or more and all utilities disconnected for H & S reasons. Beyond economic repair”; “Parts of church structurally unsafe and building not been used for health and safety reasons. Rebuild and repair work required to rectify major construction and design defects beyond means of small congregation”; “Not used for worship since it was severely damaged by a fire in 2009, since then badly vandalised”; “QI revealed need for substantial repairs but parish unable to carry these out and condition deteriorated further”; “As far back as 1969 declared unfit for purpose by a Bishop's Commission, when impossibility of congregation maintaining building fabric was recognised. Recent QIs added to the maintenance burden, identifying need for complete re-roofing. PCC decided to seek closure when insurers refused to renew building insurance because of state of electrical installation”; “when heating system broke so too did morale of those remaining members”; “Serious boiler issues in 2013 would cost more than £20k to rectify. Proved to be trigger prompting members to conclude church no longer financially sustainable”; “In poor condition mainly as result of water ingress due to flaws in original design of church”; “Fabric of church deteriorating and becoming dangerous”; “a dual purpose church/hall built in 1925 and required very substantial alterations and refurbishment to bring it to acceptable modern standards”; “Cost of repairs was far beyond priorities of parish”; “During recent QI serious structural problems found, caused by subsidence. At that point insurers withdrew public liability insurance & church had to be closed temporarily on grounds of health & safety”; “Severe structural problems. Possibility of retaining and adapting present building had been considered and judged impractical”.
- **No Building/ruin:** “Rarely used by 1900. Last service held in 1915; roof and contents removed in 1947.....Below ground remains of a deserted medieval village lie just NW of church”; “Only a tower. Remainder of building apparently

demolished in 19th C when new church opened nearby”; “Remains only (tower) of former medieval church..... was replaced by new Victorian building in 1851 located in centre of village”; “PCC decided in 2010 that it no longer wished to have responsibility for maintenance of ruins and surrounding churchyard”.

25. As detailed earlier, there were also some other, very specific reasons provided, including ‘technical’ closures; two churches within same churchyard; dealing with ruins, towers only or fire-damaged buildings; and those cases where the congregation had already some time ago vacated the building.

Not being used for worship prior to closure

26. In the fifth of buildings (excluding ruins) where worship had already ceased and congregations had vacated the buildings before formal proposals for closure were put forward, in some cases this had been formally agreed with the Bishop and Diocese, for example, where services were suspended on Health and Safety grounds; in other cases the parish had simply walked away from the building, sometimes a number of years earlier, or having decided they no longer required it themselves, had vacated and leased it to another worship group:

- “Not used for worship since 2009. PCC petitioned for closure as building was too expensive to heat and maintain and insufficient individuals willing to continue to form *PCC [formally closed 2015]*”; “Tiny village of 35 residents; 1 of 10 parish churches. Last act of worship in 2000. Closed since on health and safety grounds following storm damage. Attended services in neighbouring village, 1 mile away [*Formally closed in 2011*]”; “PCC no longer functioned. Last service at Christmas 2012, after which the congregation locked the door and walked away”.

Conclusion

27. The diocesan rationale provides a useful snapshot of the reasons for and circumstances in which closure has been pursued in the last ten years. As set out above, this highlights that such decisions have in almost all circumstances emerged locally, within the congregation or parish itself, and usually over a very considerable period of time (with in several cases, the congregation already ceasing to use the building before the formal process is under way).
28. Closure often takes place either in the context of simultaneous pastoral reorganisation, such as where a parish is being dissolved or united with another parish or sometime after such reorganisation has already happened, involving a re-assessment of the need for, and use of, the various church buildings within the wider pastoral entity. Such decisions are rarely limited to factors specific to the building itself but embrace wider considerations around the mission, financial health and viability of the parish.
29. Closures are distributed unevenly across dioceses, with eight (mainly northern) dioceses having between eight and 18 closures apiece, (44% of the total); while 18 dioceses had between four and seven closures (47%); and 14 dioceses had nought to

three closures (9%). This suggests that most dioceses have not, to date, sought proactively to address any concerns they may have around the viability or overall provision of church buildings.

30. While Grade I or Grade II* listed buildings account for 54% of all churches, they made up just under a quarter of closures; Grade II or unlisted form only 46% of the overall building stock but accounted for over three-quarters of closures. Even in dioceses with a lot of closures, these predominantly involve Grade II or unlisted buildings, meaning that overall the Church's traditional building stock has become slightly more heavily weighted towards higher listed buildings. What this might mean in terms of the likely pattern of future closures is yet to be determined.

Table 1: Closure by Dioceses 2010-19

| Diocese | Closures | No of Churches | % Closure |
|--------------|------------|----------------|------------|
| B and W | 5 | 562 | 0.9 |
| Birmingham | 1 | 187 | 0.5 |
| Blackburn | 8 | 276 | 2.9 |
| Bristol | 1 | 205 | 0.5 |
| Canterbury | 1 | 324 | 0.3 |
| Carlisle | 9 | 337 | 2.7 |
| Chelmsford | 4 | 582 | 0.7 |
| Chester | 10 | 349 | 2.9 |
| Chichester | 6 | 487 | 1.2 |
| Coventry | 2 | 241 | 0.8 |
| Derby | 4 | 318 | 1.3 |
| Durham | 10 | 272 | 3.7 |
| Ely | 1 | 334 | 0.3 |
| Exeter | 5 | 611 | 0.8 |
| Gloucester | 6 | 385 | 1.6 |
| Guildford | 0 | 205 | 0 |
| Hereford | 6 | 409 | 1.5 |
| Leeds | 18 | 623 | 2.9 |
| Leicester | 5 | 311 | 1.6 |
| Lichfield | 9 | 559 | 1.6 |
| Lincoln | 6 | 631 | 0.9 |
| Liverpool | 7 | 243 | 2.9 |
| London | 10 | 489 | 2.0* |
| Manchester | 18 | 316 | 5.7 |
| Newcastle | 1 | 237 | 0.4 |
| Norwich | 3 | 640 | 0.5 |
| Oxford | 6 | 810 | 0.7 |
| Peterborough | 6 | 376 | 1.6 |
| Portsmouth | 3 | 171 | 1.7 |
| Rochester | 0 | 264 | 0 |
| S and N | 7 | 305 | 2.3 |
| Salisbury | 6 | 570 | 1.0 |
| Sheffield | 4 | 213 | 1.9 |
| Southwark | 4 | 362 | 1.1 |
| St Albans | 2 | 406 | 0.5* |
| St E and I | 2 | 478 | 0.4 |
| Truro | 2 | 305 | 0.7 |
| Winchester | 0 | 402 | 0 |
| Worcester | 4 | 275 | 1.5 |
| York | 7 | 589 | 1.2 |
| Total | 209 | 15,712 | 1.3 |

Overall, 8 (mainly northern) dioceses had between 8 and 18 closures apiece, accounting for 44% of the total; 18 dioceses had between 4 and 7 closures (47%); and 14 dioceses had 0 to 3 closures, between them accounting for only 9% of all closures.

Most Closures (8 to 18)

Manchester and **Leeds** had the highest number of closures by a significant margin, (**18 each**) which, taken together, was just over **17%** of the overall total. (The Leeds total includes those for the former Dioceses of Bradford, Ripon & Leeds and Wakefield).


The next largest grouping, with **10 apiece**, were **Chester, Durham & London**, closely followed by **Carlisle & Lichfield** with **9 each**, and **Blackburn (8)**. *However, the London figures include 8 which were 'technical' closures only, as the buildings were either being replaced or continuing to be used (in some form) for Anglican worship.

Middling Closures (4 to 7)

The largest number of dioceses fall within this category: three (**Liverpool, Southwell & Nottingham and York**) had **7** closures; seven (**Chichester, Gloucester, Hereford, Lincoln, Oxford, Peterborough and Salisbury**) had **6**; three (**Bath & Wells, Exeter & Leicester**) had **5**; while five (**Chelmsford, Derby, Sheffield, Southwark & Worcester**) had **4** each.





Least Closures (0 to 3)

Three dioceses (**Guildford, Rochester & Winchester**) had no closures in the last decade; five had only **one** each (**Birmingham, Bristol, Canterbury, Ely & Newcastle**); four (**Coventry, St Albans, St E & I, and Truro**) had **2** apiece and two (**Portsmouth and Norwich**) had **3** each. The 'closures' in St Albans and in one of the St E & I cases dealt with ruins.

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| <p>West Ealing St James (London) (01/11/2019)</p>  | <p>Parish ceased to use building in July 2018 and requested formal closure. Came as result of falling congregation numbers, difficulties with filling leadership roles and cost to parish of looking after 2 buildings just a few minutes walk from each other.</p> |
| <p>Great Fencote St Andrew (Leeds) (10/1/2019)</p>  | <p>2 parishes in benefice with 8 churches. St Andrew's one of 4 church buildings in parish; Grade II* parish church less than 2 miles away at Kirkby Fleetham and a single congregation had been alternating between the 2 buildings. Parish could no longer sustain both buildings and it was felt that mission and pastoral needs could be met from St Mary's.</p> |
| <p>Frosterley & AA (Durham) (1/6/2019)</p>  | <p>The congregation had dwindled to very low numbers and there was difficulty recruiting people onto the PCC. The village hall, rather than the Church, had become the village focal point and these proposals were regarded as the sensible and pragmatic next step. Parish of Frosterley was combined with Stanhope and Rookhope to form new parish of Stanhope, Frosterley and Rookhope.</p> |
| <p>Hereford St Barnabas (Hereford) (13/06/2019)</p>  | <p>Parish no longer wished to use chapel of ease for worship and had not done so for some time (3 other buildings). <i>(Part used since 2008 for community purposes and occasional worship by deaf church; part leased to a local charity; subsequently being used by another church for worship and community use).</i></p> |
| <p>East Orchard St Thomas (Salisbury) (01/07/2018)</p>  | <p>Although congregation had reduced to three, closure in part precipitated by structural condition of building and the structural cracks in walls attributed to expansion and shrinkage of clay soil base. Closure process instigated by significant cracks appearing in arch and walls. Following public meeting general acceptance of need for closure. Some of parishioners already moved to worship at nearby St Luke's.</p> |

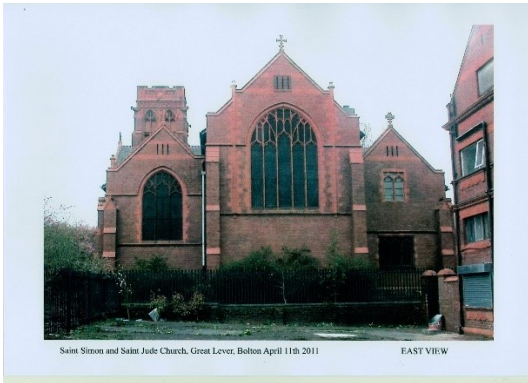
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| <p>Stocksbridge St Matthias (Sheffield) (19/07/2018)</p>  | <p>Parish working with 2 others in Cornerstone Mission Partnership for several years; for last 3 shared one stipendiary priest. In early 2014 became evident St Matthias church unsustainable as a parish church. After extensive consultation with 3 PCCs & Stocksbridge Christian Centre, an LEP in the parish of Bolsterstone, concluded the 3 benefices should become a united benefice with strategic oversight of a united ministry to whole Stocksbridge Valley area. With support of deanery, archdeacon and Bishop, PCC decided could no longer support or finance building. About 21 worshippers on a good Sunday, but not covering costs of running such a large Victorian church. Decided to seek closure. and moved to St John the Evangelist, Deepcar, less than a mile along the road.</p> |
| <p>Walsall St Michael & AA Caldmore (Lichfield) 01/06/2018</p>  | <p>Parish identified self as unsustainable during Diocesan Plain Speaking process: congregation had fallen to 12- 18, no longer able to pay parish share. Many no longer lived in parish and its nature had greatly changed: c. 70-73% minority ethnic. Dissolution of benefice & parish was part of current deanery plan in light of proposals to re-imagine ministry and reduce no of stipendiary posts. Number of other places of Christian worship within easy reach, with St Matthew, Walsall only ¼ mile away. Proposals divided parish into 2 parts that existed as former separate parishes, reflecting underlying nature of the communities.</p> |
| <p>Litherland St Andrew (Liverpool) 01/12/2017</p>  | <p>A decline in size of the congregation (to 6), and a consequent reduction in the finances available to meet parish share commitments and maintenance of the building. No funds available even to meet heating costs, let alone cover essential repairs and pay parish share. Over last few months worship conducted at nearby team church of Bootle St Matthew.</p> |
| <p>Tresmere St Nicholas (Truro) 30/01/2017</p>  | <p>Capacity for about 80 people. No electricity or running water; limited parking. Very small rural parish; popn c.200 and other community buildings. Currently only 2 on PCC, one from outside parish; both felt unable to continue. Four worshippers (2 outside parish). Recent work to secure coping stones wiped out PCC's bank account. Couldn't raise monies to continue to maintain church. Public meeting recognised probably no way forward other than to seek closure. Eglosekerry parish church 3 miles from St Nicholas's and ready to welcome remaining congregation.</p> |

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| <p>Altrincham St John (Chester) 02/01/2017</p>  | <p>Small congregation (USA c. 20) struggled to cover costs, parish share and maintenance. In recent years Diocese had been looking at long term viability of St John's and in regular dialogue with PCC to monitor situation. Parish contained a lot of non-conformist chapels and surrounded by several Anglican churches with larger congregations. Some of repairs in last QI outstanding but closure discussions prompted by ageing and dwindling congregation. PCC had reluctantly agreed time had come for closure as church no longer viable.</p> |
| <p>Great Yarmouth St John (Norwich) 22/07/2016</p>  | <p>PCC sought closure. Last used for public worship in 2007. Building required c £515k repairs which parish couldn't afford. Potentially dangerous - congregation had been worshipping in adjoining octagonal hall but it was also closed in 2009 on Health & Safety grounds. PCC regarded Great Yarmouth Minster as their priority.</p> |
| <p>Freeby St Mary (Leicester) 14/04/2016</p>  | <p>Small hamlet with population of 45 and declining number of tenant farmers. Congregation of between 6-10 had used nearby URC chapel since 2001 (when PCC advised no assurance could be given of safety of building, due to nature and extent of structural defects resulting from differential settlement caused by local ground conditions).</p> |
| <p>Stour Row All Saints (Salisbury) 01/11/2015</p>  | <p>Dwindling, ageing congregation (as few as 3 people attending 4 services held a month). Increasingly difficult for PCC to keep building safe and real financial issues - had to find £12k this year and would find it difficult to fund next year. PCC felt could not afford to maintain church and sought closure. Parish within benefice of 8 rural church buildings.</p> |

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| <p>Bedford Leigh St Thomas (Manchester) 18/08/2015</p>  | <p>Suffered catastrophic electrical failure in 2013; needed complete re-wiring. Temporarily closed on health & safety grounds. Cost and other repairs beyond means of congregation. Parish supported closure for mission and pastoral reasons - mission church (All Saints) in E of parish was more modest, affordable running costs, good hall facility and potential for further development. Also a planned housing development would further accelerate trend of population shift away from historic centre of parish towards mission church.</p> |
| <p>Witton St Mark (Blackburn) 03/11/2014</p>  | <p>As a result of changing demographics and reducing numbers/income, it was felt the area could be better served through parish reorganisation and closure of this building. PCCs in consultation with Archdeacon believed this would enable more effective mission and ministry in this part of Blackburn. The building sat in an area with an increasingly strong Asian Heritage and Muslim population.</p> |
| <p>Bentham St Margaret (Leeds) 01/04/2014</p>  | <p>No longer required to meet pastoral needs of parish. Church members unable to support it financially; parish church of Great Witcombe only a mile away. Closure first proposed in 1973 as congregation extremely small and church considered too great a financial burden for PCC. By 1981 PCC requested closure but delayed while Reverter issues addressed, although services ceased in 1982, following which congregation worshipped at parish church.</p> |
| <p>Ryde Holy Trinity (Portsmouth) 26/01/2014</p>  | <p>Ryde deemed overchurched in terms of buildings and church communities (7 Anglican churches serving popn of 25k). Attendance figures at HT had reduced significantly, ER declining from 72 in 2001 to 30 in 2012. Parish unable to meet its parish share for some years and initiated closure process. Last QI had identified £216k urgent repairs.</p> |

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| <p>Crewe Christ Church (Chester) 29/11/2013</p>  | <p>Future under consideration since 1970. Nave demolished under faculty in 1977 (outbreak of dry and wet rot). Closed in 2 parts. (1) 1980: Popn of parish only 1,500; fallen significantly in recent years. Could neither maintain nor use extensive fabric (seating capacity of 1,050). Tower & baptistry declared redundant. Chancel, of more recent construction, remained in use (to be redesigned into smaller 140 seat church).). 2)2013: Congregation had aged and dwindled over years, down to average of 6 regular worshippers. Could not now afford to heat building in winter and could only just cover insurance. Sought closure.</p> |
| <p>Hull St Matthew (York) 02/07/2013</p>  | <p>PCC could not maintain week on week running costs, let alone cost of repairs identified in condition survey (in excess of £600k). In poor structural condition. Parish of St John the Baptist and parish of St Matthew had been working increasingly closely together. St Matthew's had a small congregation and the major expenditure required by its structural problems meant the PCC unable to continue to keep the building open. It was felt that a parish focused on St John's with its strong facilities represented a much improved base for mission of the Church in this part of Hull.</p> |
| <p>Barrow in Furness St Luke (Carlisle) 20/02/2012</p>  | <p>1. In bad state of repair requiring considerable investment to bring up to minimum standards for continued use. Problems included serious water ingress caused by roof failing & need to replace unsafe wiring & electrical installations. 2. Town of Barrow, popn c. 50k had 11 Anglican churches with a USA of c.500. 2 other churches in parish & a further one in team. USA in parish around 35. In light of major repair needed, congregation's inability to fund it, over-provision of buildings in town and relative ease with which congregation could be provided for at other churches in parish, closure instigated by PCC. Supported by Deanery.</p> |
| <p>West Torrington St Mary (Lincoln) 29/10/2011</p>  | <p>Served a community of 69 residents. Tiny hamlet in benefice containing 7 churches. Cold and required cleaning every time used. Not enough people to do necessary work to keep it in use. Proposals for closure had been considered on 2 previous occasions in 1990s but not progressed following local revival. This third request for closure from parish observed that church was no longer viable.</p> |

Bolton le Moors SS Simon & Jude (Manchester) 03/10/2011



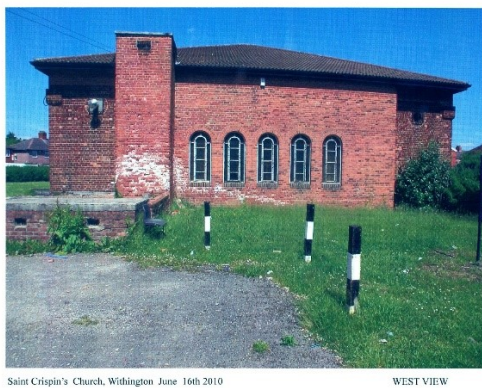
Concern as 2007 Deanery Plan prepared re. viability of building and congregation. Pastoral links with St Peter's & St Philip's Bolton suggested but not developed. When 2010 Deanery Plan drafted, concerns had increased. Parish decided to try to establish worship centre in nearby C of E primary school and to be pastorally linked with Five Saints Team. Small congregation (around 30) had struggled to maintain building for many years and reached stage could no longer cope with costs of outstanding repair (£100k) & upkeep; preferred school option.

Hamsteels St John the Baptist (Durham) 07/02/2011



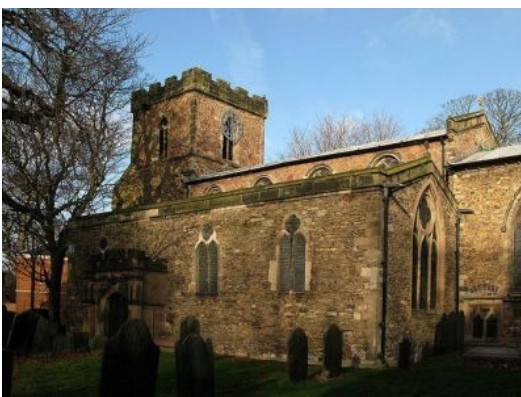
Hamlet no longer exists ; colliery village completely demolished following the closure of the pit in the 1950s and the occupants relocated.

Withington St Crispin (Manchester) 01/02/2011






Large building with serious inherent and deteriorating structural faults; in very poor state of repair and costs beyond means of parish. Congregation (around 30) found building too large for its needs and currently worshipped in church hall. 1981 survey estimated costs in excess of £371k (included foundation and wall tie failure). Adjacent church hall to be refurbished into new place of worship.

Belgrave St Peter (Leicester) 28/06/2010



Future under consideration for several years. Parish felt current arrangements for worship unsustainable; review by Archdeacon in 2007 to assist PCC, who then concluded worship should be concentrated on 1 church building; majority preference was to retain St Alban's. Felt parish could no longer afford to maintain 3 churches in area where Christian popn was a minority. St Peter's considered cold, costly to heat and not very flexible. Average congregation in mid 30s. 1 of 3 parish churches (St Gabriel also closed in same scheme).

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| <p>Welsh Bicknor St Margaret (Hereford) 02/06/2010</p>  | <p>In isolated location with few dwellings close by and in a parish with a tiny population. Services had not been held in church for some years. Parish first requested redundancy in 2000 because cost of maintaining building was unsustainable for such a small community and with an average congregation of 2.</p> |
| <p>Allington St John the Baptist (Salisbury) 01/02/2010</p>  | <p>1 of 2 parish churches in united parish. Allington and Boscombe PCC no longer found it viable to maintain and support 2 parish churches within a mile of each other and sought closure. Parish population 500; ER 32; Sunday attendance often fewer than 10. Building in good condition but other was better supported and had better facilities.</p> |
| <p>Orrell Hey St John & St James (Liverpool) 01/01/2010</p>  | <p>Severe structural problems. Possibility of retaining and adapting present building had been considered and judged impractical. Cost of repair beyond means of existing church community. Area subject to Housing Market Renewal Initiative. Site to be sold for residential development and new place of worship to be provided on adjacent, better located site in benefice.</p> |