Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011

Benefices of St Mary, Southampton; and St Barnabas, Southampton

Proposed Pastoral Scheme

1. On 17 November 2022 the Commissioners held a public hearing in relation to the proposed Pastoral Scheme providing for:

   • the union of the benefice of St Mary, Southampton and the benefice of St Barnabas, Southampton and their constituent parishes to form a new benefice and parish of “St Mary Southampton”;
   
   • St Mary’s parish church to be the parish church of the new parish, and St Barnabas’s parish church to cease to be a parish church (i.e., to become a chapel of ease in the new parish);
   
   • the appointment of the Reverend Jonathan Finch (the St Mary benefice’s priest-in-charge since 2018, who became its incumbent during 2022) as the first incumbent of the new benefice;
   
   • his parsonage house to be that of the benefice of St Mary, Southampton;
   
   • the disposal of the parsonage house of the benefice of St Barnabas, Southampton; and
   
   • for the future patronage arrangements for the new benefice (the Bishop of Winchester, being the sole patron of the current benefices, to be the sole patron of the new one).

2. The draft Pastoral Scheme was published in December 2021 and attracted 46 representations against and 13 representations in favour, 59 in total,
together with two out-of-time representations, one against and one in favour.

3. The Church Commissioners decided that the Scheme should proceed, notwithstanding the representations made against it, but with one change to the clause relating to the parsonage, to say that it would be transferred to the Winchester Diocesan Board of Finance (WDBF) for ‘diocesan purposes’ and not ‘disposal’.

4. In order to amend a draft scheme under the requirements of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011, the Commissioners had to consult the acting Diocesan Bishop and the diocese on the proposed change to the parsonage clause. The acting Bishop of Winchester has confirmed in writing that the diocese supports the decision and the amendment to the scheme.

5. This Statement sets out the decision reached by the Church Commissioners and the reasons for the decision, and the material factors they considered in their deliberation. The minute of the hearing is attached at Annex A and the summary of the representations is attached at Annex B. The minute is a note of the main points made in the hearing and is not a verbatim transcript of the event. Annex C sets out the consideration of equalities duties, but subject to the conditions which are set out in that annex.

Main reasons for the Commissioners’ decision

Overall, the Commissioners’ main findings were as follows:

- That the diocese had met the requirements of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011, and that the scheme had been brought forward for a proper purpose.

- That the statutory requirements of the consultation process had been met, and exceeded by the diocese, but they also noted the delays caused by the referral to the Independent Reviewer and the onset of the Covid pandemic, which were outside diocesan control.

- That the St Barnabas parish in its current form was unsustainable. There had been a well-documented decline over a long period of time, despite the presence of a stipendiary priest, and the diocese had been providing a high level of subsidy for some time due to the parish’s financial constraints.

- That the Bishop of Richborough, who has the alternative episcopal oversight of the parish, had been actively engaged and consulted on the scheme as proposals developed, and had come to a joint conclusion with the former Bishop of Winchester (Tim Dakin) about the way forward, which he supported in writing. (The current acting Diocesan Bishop had recently confirmed that his views remained the same).
• That an appropriate balance needed to be struck between the needs of the St Barnabas church community, and the needs of the wider non-church community in the parish. The Commissioners accepted the diocesan case that they needed to further the mission of the church, and make better provision of the cure of souls, by making suitable provision for the large student population of approximately 40,000 people, who lived in the area and the parish and attended Southampton University and Southampton Solent University.

• Further, after much careful deliberation, they also concluded that the scheme had not been motivated by a discriminatory purpose, against those who adhere to the traditional catholic tradition of the Church of England. They accepted the diocesan view that the proposals had been developed in partnership with the deanery, and placed significant weight on Bishop Norman’s support for the proposals. They also considered the diocese had taken their needs into account, given that there was alternative provision available in both Winchester and Bournemouth within the diocese. The Commissioners carefully considered if it was reasonable to expect the current St Barnabas congregation, who nearly all lived in Southampton, to travel to Winchester or Bournemouth for services, and whether this was an acceptable approach. They agreed that it was not ideal, but people, for example in rural areas, might travel lengthy distances for worship. They also noted that a small number of the St Barnabas congregation might attend St Michael’s the Archangel in Southampton, which had an Anglo-Catholic perspective.

• The Commissioners agreed that on balance the scheme would further the mission of the Church and make better provision of the cure of souls, but it would be important for the priest at St Mary’s and others respect the worshipping tradition of the St Barnabas community as they moved forward together. However, they also accepted that this decision would be difficult for members of the St Barnabas church and that was to be regretted, but on balance the agreed that the diocese was right that the current parish was unsustainable and that they needed to make the widest provision possible for the needs of the whole parish.

Detailed reasons for the Commissioners’ decision

6. The Commissioner agreed that St Barnabas’s was no longer sustainable as a separate benefice. They noted that the benefice had had its own priest for 20 years and during that period had seen a steady decline in attendance and that it had been regarded as unsustainable in successive deanery plans since 2009. They also noted that, although it had met its agreed parish share, it had been receiving substantial (indirect) financial support from other parishes in the diocese during this period. The attendance had declined from 30 to 16 since the retirement of the parish priest.

7. They noted that the diocese had a structured approach in place to manage ministry provision, and that there was a three-year financial plan, and recommendations from the Deployment Working Group and the Deployment Development Group which had informed the proposals for St Barnabas. That framework took appropriate account of financial considerations across the diocese and had been approved by the Diocesan Synod, so had broad church
support. Therefore, the Commissioners did not support the view of the representors, and those at the public hearing, that the proposals had been solely instigated by the former Bishop of Winchester (Tim Dakin) for a discriminatory or improper purpose. The Commissioners placed strong weight of the views from the Bishop of Richborough that the parish was not viable in its current form, and his written agreement that the proposed scheme should go ahead. They also noted that the acting Bishop of Winchester had said in her oral representation that she had recently contacted Bishop Norman to check he was still in agreement with the proposals, and he confirmed that he thought they should still proceed.

8. Given Bishop Norman’s view, the Commissioners did not think that the proposals had been brought forward with the improper motive of discriminating against a traditional catholic parish. They also noted that the Independent Reviewer had reached the same conclusion.

9. They noted that the consultation requirements of the Mission and Pastoral Measure had been fulfilled, including the additional steps recommended by the Commissioners during the Covid period, and that there had been a high level of awareness of the proposals. The significant number of representations made showed that people had been made aware of the scheme and their rights to comment on what was proposed. They noted that factors outside diocesan control had delayed the proposals, including the referral to the Independent Reviewer and the onset of the Covid pandemic, and that further delay had been caused due to the need for the Diocesan Synod to approve the work of the diocesan working groups for deployment and development.

10. The Commissioners noted that the majority of the attendees at St Barnabas’s did not live in the parish and were drawn from a number of locations. They also gave weight to the oral representations from members of the community which had demonstrated that there was no formal mission plan for St Barnabas’s, and there was no evidence of social outreach or other activities to encourage engagement with the parish community, or any particular intention to address those local needs.

11. The Commissioners took the view that it was reasonable for the diocese to consider the needs of the whole parish community, and that they needed to balance the needs of the local student population, who were a key mission priority, and the needs of the St Barnabas community. The Commissioners asked the diocesan representatives during the hearing if there was any evidence of the students’ preferences in relation to worship. The Bishop confirmed that it was more likely that the students would not have a faith, but those who did would have various preferences (i.e. from evangelical to catholic). The diocese was concerned that funding for higher education chaplaincy had declined sharply in the last ten years, which was partly why the diocese needed to try a new approach to encourage outreach and engagement with the student community. St Mary’s was already successfully doing some of that work, as were other churches including St Michael’s which was more catholic, which had a student choir. The Commissioners supported the view that the needs of the local and student population would be better met by the proposed union of parishes and benefices.
12. However, the Commissioners also recognized that the decision would result in the loss of traditional catholic provision in Southampton, and regretted the pastoral impact that would have on members of the St Barnabas community. They also noted that the other parish in the city with a similar tradition, Holy Trinity, Millbrook, was also struggling as worship was no longer taking place at the church, and it was likely that closure proposals would be brought forward at some point in the future. This meant that the option of linking St Barnabas with Holy Trinity was not a feasible alternative to the current scheme proposed, even though it had been considered in the past by the deanery.

13. They also noted that some members of the St Barnabas’s congregation might be open to worshipping at St Michael the Archangel, Southampton (or possibly at St Michael and All Angels Bassett Avenue) in the future and shared the Bishop’s hope that others, who had been prepared to travel to attend St Barnabas’s, would also be prepared to travel to Holy Trinity Winchester, which was the closest alternative outside Southampton.

14. The Commissioners saw no reason to believe that the union of parishes and change of status of St Barnabas’s to a chapel of ease made it likely that the church would close for worship. They noted that the St Mary’s incumbent and congregation expected that St Barnabas’s would develop a new congregation of its own and that the building would be used for worship and other forms of mission.

15. They noted that the draft Scheme provided for the disposal of the St Barnabas’s parsonage house and the concern of some representors that it would no longer be used to house someone engaged in mission. In view of the assurances from the Bishop and Assistant Archdeacon that it was intended to use this house for a member of the ministry team of the proposed new benefice, the Commissioners proposed, using their power under s.10(3) of the Measure, to amend the draft Scheme to provide instead for its transfer for diocesan purposes. Although this would not prevent a future disposal of the house if it ceased to be so required, they felt that this more accurately reflected what was intended.

16. An amendment under s10(3) requires the agreement of the bishop after consultation with the DMPC and after such further consultation as the Commissioners see fit. In this case the Commissioner considered that no further consultation was required as the proposed amendment reflected the views put to them. They have consulted the Bishop who has agreed to the amendment.

Conclusion

17. In the light of these various points the Commissioners were satisfied that it would be right to allow the draft Scheme, as amended by them, to proceed notwithstanding the representations made against it.

18. They realize that their decision will disappoint those against it, 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.
19. 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.

20. I enclose a notice, as required by the Measure, about the right of the representors against (only) to apply for leave to appeal to His Majesty in Council against the Commissioners’ decision that the Scheme, as amended by them, should be made.

Wendy Matthews  
Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee Secretary  
Church Commissioners
Annex A – Minutes of the 17 November public hearing

The public hearing was held at Southampton Football Club on 17 November 2022. The meeting was chaired by Canon Peter Bruinvels (Deputy Chair of the Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee).

Also in attendance were members of the Church Commissioners’ Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee: The Rt Revd Graham Usher (Bishop of Norwich), the Ven Simon Fisher (Archdeacon of St Helens and Warrington, diocese of Liverpool), the Revd Mark Beard, the Revd Christopher Smith (via Zoom), the Revd Anne Stevens, Canon Shane Waddle and Garth Watkins (via Zoom).

Also in attendance were the Committee Secretary, and the Commissioners’ Deputy Official Solicitor supported by the Committee’s Chaplain and various members of the Commissioners’ staff.

Approximately 50 people attended the meeting. Richard Pearcey, Steve Castle and Jonathan Baird spoke against the draft Scheme. Emily Stewart, Josh Zhu and Catherine Delve poke in favour of it. The Bishop of Southampton, Canon Gary Philbrick (Acting Archdeacon of Bournemouth) and the Rev Jon Finch spoke as part of the diocesan team.

Note: This minute is a note of the main points made in the hearing, it is not a verbatim transcript.

Speakers against the Scheme

1. **Richard Pearcey** asked why the St Barnabas’s parsonage house would be made available to a curate or other member of the St Mary’s ministry team under the proposed arrangements when such an opportunity had not been afforded to the current St Barnabas benefice. He asked that clause 7 of the draft Scheme providing for this house’s transfer to the WDBF for disposal be delayed, as it could still be required to house a minister aiding in the increase of St Barnabas’s congregation.

2. He also reiterated that despite what had been said by the Bishop, St Barnabas’s had paid its parish share contributions to the reworked method in relation to the Common Mission Fund.

3. He fully accepted that the numbers coming forward for PCC offices were not as many as he would have liked, but those who had done so were committed and had rotated roles and responsibilities to ensure St Barnabas’s continued to function as a church. The only time it had been closed was during the lockdown period when no churches were allowed to stay open.

4. He also thanked the clergy who had helped to ensure that worship had continued at his church since the retirement of the last incumbent.

5. He stressed that the church hall, seen by some members on the previous day, was a valuable asset; the lady who ran the dancing class there had spent a lot of her own money on it to keep it in good condition. The Outer Avenue Residents Association had recognised it as a community asset.
6. The main issue was that leaving a city of 250,000 with no traditional catholic church could not be regarded as ‘mutual flourishing’. He suggested that St Barnabas’s type of churchmanship as a resolution parish was being disadvantaged, a point which had been made by some of the other representors against the scheme, including Reverend Robin Nash and Mr Andrew Orange.

7. What was needed was a dynamic Anglo-Catholic priest who could revive the St Barnabas church and who could also use the hall to its full advantage.

8. **Steve Castle** was concerned that the legislation placed a higher priority on money than God. He explained his long links with St Barnabas’s church and how it had helped in his mental health and spiritual life. He related his own personal experience of having the vision for the church ‘trashed’ by the Bishops in the diocese, which had led directly to a decline from 60 in 2009, to 31 in 2012. In his view the Deanery Synod acted homophobically, and was not inclusive. Prior to 2009 there had been discussion of joining St Barnabas with Holy Trinity Millbrook, but after 2009 the parish had been categorised as being ‘unsustainable’.

9. He asked why it had been possible for the Diocese of Portsmouth to make three appointments of Traditional Catholic clergy for their smaller city, between 2017-18, bringing the total number of such appointments to four since 2014, when the Winchester Diocese was claiming that no such priests are available. One of their previous churchwardens was deterred from pursuing Church of English ministry and had since spent the last year at a Spanish seminary, with his priestly training continuing at Allen Hall, London.

10. He felt that St Barnabas’s was being particularly targeted by the diocese and asked why his parish should have any confidence in the diocese given that it had suffered from diocesan-driven decline.

11. **Jonathan Baird** introduced himself as a general synod member for the Diocese of Salisbury, and also a member of the ‘Save the Parish’ group.

12. He said that the current woes of St Barnabas’s could have been avoided had it not been denied a vicar. Prior to the actions of a previous bishop (Michael Scott-Joynt), it had a decent sized congregation numbering in the 30s.

13. It had an ancient tradition and was now hanging on by a thread; it must not be snuffed out. Everything about St Barnabas’s was to be revered, from its furnishings to its smell and atmosphere. He could not see the traditional catholic tradition of St Barnabas’s continuing under the proposed merger with the Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) -style of St Mary’s which would bring in nightclub lighting and a stage for a band. The Church of England was strong because it was broad.
14. He thought that the Diocese was not handling matters well, and that the members of St Barnabas’s (along with St Jude, Maybush) were victims of its bullying. Some of that smelled of commercial greed and was seen as a money-making exercise to benefit the diocese’s ‘favourite’ churches.

15. The diocese needed to pause this and other reorganisations, which had been instigated under the previous Bishop, and give itself some time to recalibrate. In the meantime, it should give St Barnabas (and separately St Jude’s too) its own incumbent to help it to rebuild itself. This was a driven decline and needed to be stopped. All of this was causing additional costs for the wider Church too, as evidenced by the need to hold the hearing and the associated costs.

**Committee questions**

16. In response to questions from the Committee the representors said that the outcome they wanted for the proposals to be dropped, and they did not agree with Bishop Norman’s assessment of the situation. Mr Baird, who had visited St Barnabas’s recently, described the ages of its congregation as being much younger than the Diocese seemed to think: only the churchwarden was over 60, with the majority of the others being below 30. Later on, Mr Pearcy confirmed that there were currently 15 people on the St Barnabas electoral roll and roughly 10-12 worshipping on a Sunday.

17. With regard to whether St Barnabas’s might be minded to rescind its resolution regarding women in ministry, as had been suggested during the tour of the parishes the day before, Mr Pearcy said that the PCC’s position on that was not clear-cut: from his knowledge there was likely to be a 2:4 voting balance, with two in favour of rescinding and four against. Mr Castle confirmed that those who were against rescinding were not likely to go to St Michael’s. One of the reasons he had suggested rescinding the resolutions was because of the difficulty of getting traditional catholic priests to support worship during the vacancy. They thought it unlikely that the HTB-type congregation at St Mary’s would make arrangements which would cater successfully for their tradition.

18. On the question of whether they would travel to Bournemouth or Winchester instead, Mr Castle thought not, as most of those on the electoral roll now were based in Southampton, and only one came from further afield. The public transport links, particularly on a Sunday, were limited.

19. They pointed out that St Michael’s electoral roll was some 129, with only 24 residing in the parish, yet it had recently received a half-time house-for-duty appointment, which also suggested that St Barnabas’s was being side-lined or disadvantaged.

20. In response to a question about how St Barnabas’s would promote mission if the Scheme did not proceed, Mr Castle said that a new dynamic priest would need to be appointed, who could liaise with community groups and other churches like St Michael’s, and who could redevelop their buildings to make them accessible seven days a week. He personally would also be happy to liaise with the Diocesan Giving Advisor, to seek advice on how to improve the parish’s financial position.
21. Mr Pearcey added that if St Barnabas’s was able to increase its congregation, that in turn would mean it could contribute more to the Common Mission Fund.

**Speakers in favour of the Scheme**

22. **Emily Stewart** said that she had been drawn to St Mary’s in 2018 by the way its mission was articulated, with Jesus placed very much at its centre. It also provided something for the individual and the community and had inspired her to become an ordinand.

23. She explained the workings of the various small groups which she looked after and said that about 20 groups, helped to promote the Gospel, and provide mission and practical support: some 270 people were engaged with this outside Sunday worship.

24. She also described other initiatives like Marketplace, fundraising and outreach days operating from St Mary’s. They also undertook practical tasks such as decorating homes and tending gardens. She was sure that St Mary’s would be able to ensure that St Barnabas’s type of churchmanship would be provided for in the proposed arrangements; it had a ‘gentle approach’ and was not a ‘cookie cutter’. St Mary’s had a passion for strengthening relationships with God and Jesus was always at the centre of all that it did.

25. **Josh Zhu** also explained his connections with St Mary’s, and said that he was a local resident. He said that he felt accepted and loved at St Mary’s, which had a diversity of ethnicities. He emphasised three strands of its mission in particular, the Marketplace initiative, three Alpha courses run annually, a project on football and mental health for men.

26. St Mary’s had been very successful over four years, and he was confident that it could do the same for St Barnabas’s.

27. **Catherine Delve** also explained her links to St Mary’s. She felt that the challenges that the Southampton churches faced today were similar to those in the late 19th Century, when the parish had stepped up to confront social deprivation and associated issues like alcoholism, including through the founding of the Southampton Football Club.

28. Pioneering work must however not stop; something that St Mary’s was actively doing, using a model which had been proven successful in other cities.

29. Since 2018 St Mary’s had seen a huge growth in its congregation numbers, from 30 to over 500 attending services or coming through its doors for the other activities associated with it. Most of these were new to Church or returning to faith.

30. She also mentioned the various initiatives undertaken, like Marketplace. All of these helped to attract more to church, and in turn increased the congregational giving and ability to attract grants. It was hoped that St
Barnabas’s could play its part in this too. The focus for St Mary’s was growth for Jesus, and it had a proven track record.

31. With the help of its incumbent (the Reverend Jon Finch) St Mary’s would aim to revitalise St Barnabas’s.

Committee questions

32. Responding to a question on how St Barnabas’s would be used as a chapel of ease, Mr Finch said that it would be part of St Mary’s vision and plan, but would have weekly gatherings in its own right, and develop its own community.

33. With regard to the worship and mission activities which would take place there, Ms Delve said that there would be a two-pronged approach: the vision would be worked out by the St Mary’s staff team, whilst empowering others in the congregation to discover their own vocation and mission.

34. She expected others to be called to St Barnabas’s in the same way she and her husband had felt called to St Mary’s, following 10 years at their previous church.

35. Asked whether all the activities at St Mary’s were new initiatives, or were undertaken with existing partnerships, Ms Stewart said she did not know what had taken place before her arrival in 2018 but the core principle since then had been a to be a missional church for the whole City. All new initiatives had been in partnership, like Marketplace developed with Southampton City Mission and others with the local authority. Other churches had come to them to see what they did and apply it to their own circumstances.

36. On whether St Barnabas’s type of services would be maintained in the new arrangement, Mrs Delve said that the “old” St Mary’s congregation had been nervous about a ‘take over’, but she thought the new team had embraced their needs and both groups had been enriched in their worship. She cited the example of a young man who had come to St Mary’s through its football links and who now attended the traditional 9.15 am service and had formed a strong friendship with an 86-year-old lady there, borne out of mutual respect. Most of the former St Mary’s congregation went to the early services.

37. On what sort of relationship was expected between St Barnabas’s and the local student population, Mrs Delve said there were no fixed ideas at this stage, but she expected relationships to be developed through prayer, and consultation. There was already a thriving student ministry at St Mary’s, and she thought this would grow at St Barnabas’s which was nearer to the University.

Speakers from the diocese

38. The Bishop of Southampton explained that much work had gone on into developing the proposals, including conversations between the Bishop of Richborough and the then Bishop of Winchester including how best to maintain Traditional Catholic ministry in the Diocese. The provision for the
better cure of souls for each of the parishes concerned was the central consideration.

39. Were these proposals to proceed, it was hoped St Barnabas’s traditions could be catered for in the proposed arrangements, at St Michael’s or in Bournemouth or Winchester, both of which had thriving traditional catholic congregations. The loss of St Barnabas’s tradition in Southampton was not being actively sought as had been suggested by some, but she was satisfied that the current arrangements for that parish were no longer sustainable: the Bishop of Richborough had recently confirmed that he continued to support the scheme.

40. It had to be accepted that the St Barnabas model was not working. The Diocese was encouraging deaneries to be forward thinking: the union of benefices and parishes, with St Mary’s as the resource church, would promote the vision of the local Church.

41. She explained that the legislative requirements with regards the consultations under the 2011 Measure had been met but had been drawn out due to the St Barnabas parish’s approach to the Independent Reviewer, and then Covid. She was satisfied that the proposals were the best way forward but acknowledged and regretted that it would be painful for the St Barnabas’s congregation.

42. **Canon Philbrick** explained that he had been Area Dean from 2007-11 and since in 2005 the strategic view had been that the St Barnabas benefice and parish should be linked with Millbrook. However, by 2011 it was felt that this was no longer sustainable. Contrary to what had been suggested, the current proposals did not stem just from the previous Bishop; the deanery had supported St Barnabas’s but it had not flourished.

43. He stressed that the Bishop of Richborough supported the proposal and although he regretted the loss of traditional catholicism in Southampton, there were other centres and options within the diocese. The Independent Reviewer had also agreed that the proposals were not discriminatory. St Mary’s was willing to work with others.

44. Mr Finch said that he sat on the steering group ‘Love Southampton’ and most of St Mary’s ministry was undertaken through partnerships. Little had been happening before 2018.

**Committee questions**

45. In response to a question the Bishop acknowledged that describing the St Barnabas’s tradition as anglo-catholic was inadequate and that it should have been referred to as traditional catholic. On what steps would be taken to provide for the traditional catholic tradition, the Bishop said she would respect the five guiding principles, including that of mutual flourishing. However, mutual flourishing needed to work for St Mary’s as well, which welcomed women’s ministry.
46. There would need to be discussions, were the proposed Scheme to proceed, about how exactly St Barnabas's tradition would be addressed. This might be as an afternoon service at St Barnabas's, or perhaps at St Michael's, failing which they would have to go to either Bournemouth or Winchester. Some of St Barnabas's congregation already travelled in from outside the parish, so hopefully travelling a relatively short distance to these other churches would not prove too much of an issue.

47. Canon Philbrick added that finding male priests to support the St Barnabas’s tradition during the vacancy had not been easy.

48. Mr Finch said that openness was needed from the outset; there would be challenges, but he was happy to have conversations with St Barnabas’s congregation. He was however confident that these proposals would have a beneficial impact on the large student population, which between the two universities at Southampton and the Solent was roughly 40,000 students; St Barnabas’s was halfway between the two.

49. Asked for more detail about the £700,000 by which the Diocese had had to subsidise the St Barnabas parish, the Bishop explained that in a Diocese where the Common Mission Fund relied so heavily on congregational giving, the current arrangements were no longer sustainable. Southampton, as a whole, was a relatively deprived area, and the diocese, had other congregations to consider as well.

50. On the question of why St Mary’s paid a lower parish share than St Michael’s, the Bishop explained that that was a historic arrangement which would enable St Mary’s time to find its feet, after which it too would be expected to pay more towards the Common Mission Fund. It’s share target had been set at £59k for the next year.

51. Mr Finch agreed with this. He said when he had started at St Mary’s, some of its income sources were not good ones, like car-parking on football match days, which had been disruptive and had caused some damage to the church-site. He and his team were finding other ways of generating income.

52. In response to a question on the traditional catholic provision in Bournemouth, the Bishop replied that St Katherine’s was doing very well and had developed a relationship with nearby St Nicholas’s and was looking outwards and working together with others. St Ambrose in Christ Church Westbourne was also available for people who wanted a conservative evangelical approach to church.

53. In response to a question about which churches had responsibility for civic services the Bishop replied that the demise of the Queen had been marked at St Mary’s, which had a traditional civic role and was larger, but that the Mayor had also been at the service at St Michael’s. The civic role was mainly divided between the two.

54. In response to a question on student church preference, the Bishop replied that whilst most students would not have a faith, there were students who were attending church. The diocese needed to try new approaches because the funding for higher education (HE) chaplaincy had declined sharply in the
last decade, and currently there was only one curate who had some HE responsibility as part of their role. Student worship preferences would vary, but what mattered was having the resources and capacity for outreach. As an example of positive engagement with the students, the choir at St Michael’s was mentioned, which was funded by the University.

55. As to the intended use of St Barnabas’s parsonage, Canon Philbrick said that there was no immediate intention to dispose of the building. It would be used to house a member from the St Mary’s ministry team.

56. On why St Barnabas’s was to have its status changed to a chapel of ease, Mr Finch was asked to respond: he said that the plan was for it to develop its own identity and that it would have weekly gatherings and its own community.
Annex B – Summary of the main points in the representations

Headline summary of the main points in the representations against

1. The representors against say that the Bishop’s proposals do not have sufficient regard to the traditions of the St Barnabas parish; that the parish has a history of being bullied by the diocesan hierarchy which is against its type of church tradition; that it has not had the financial support that has been afforded to St Mary’s; and that the proposals could lead to the closure of St Barnabas’s church.

Headline summary of the representations in favour

2. Those in favour say that the proposed merger makes good sense missionally as St Mary’s has the energy, focus and leadership to significantly multiply its impact by uniting with St Barnabas.

The Bishop’s response

3. Following normal practice, a copy of the representations was sent to the Bishop to seek her response on the representations and the matter generally. The Bishop of Southampton explained that the parish of Southampton St Barnabas, which received episcopal oversight from the Bishop of Richborough, had shown a steady decline over the past 30 years despite the presence of a full-time, freehold incumbent until 2019.

4. In 2011 the parish was subject to a visitation commissioned by the then diocesan bishop which was undertaken by a retired Archdeacon of Canterbury whose report concluded that the parish was really struggling and that, despite the then incumbent and his PCC recognizing that plans needed to be set for future development, none had been implemented, and the parish continued to decline.

5. The Bishop of Winchester had an obligation to make best provision for the cure of souls of the parish; the Provincial Episcopal Visitor had given input that the current model of ministry (an independent Society parish) was no longer viable. He had also given input that the Society Anglo-Catholic tradition in Winchester Diocese would best be served by a consolidation of four congregations (which were already gathered from wide areas) and clergy into three centres, one in the city of Winchester (ten miles from St Barnabas), and two in Bournemouth.

6. The Bishop said that she was fully committed to mutual flourishing of traditions and to fulfilling obligations under s.3(2)(a) of the 2011 Measure. The approach taken to mutual flourishing and s.3(2)(a) obligations had been for the Provincial Episcopal Visitor and the Bishop of Winchester to agree and jointly implement the diocesan plan: neither Bishop was unaware of the downside of the plan for provision within Southampton, but it was made to fulfil the broader obligations and commitments of each Bishop.
3 Functions of mission and pastoral committees

(1) In carrying out any of its functions the mission and pastoral committee shall, without prejudice to section 1, have regard to worship, mission and community as central to the life and work of the Church of England.

(2) In carrying out any of its functions the mission and pastoral committee shall also have regard to—
   (a) the financial implications for the diocese and the Church of England as a whole;
   (b) subject to subsection (5), the need to allocate appropriate spheres of work and to ensure that appropriate conditions of service are enjoyed by those employed or holding office in the diocese and, where relevant, that reasonable remuneration is provided for all those engaged in the cure of souls;
   (c) the traditions, needs and characteristics of particular parishes; and
   (d) any other aspects of the policies of the diocesan synod to which the synod has requested the committee to have regard in discharging its responsibilities.

7. In connection with how traditional sacramental Anglo-Catholic worship could be maintained in the Diocese and what support might be needed to make that happen, the Bishop said it was anticipated that the congregations involved would support the plan put forward by the Provision Episcopal Visitor as that which best supported the flourishing of that tradition.

8. The Acting Bishop of Winchester was concerned that if separate traditional Anglo-Catholic provision was made in Southampton, there was likely to be a continued stretching of the scarce resource of priests covering such services.

9. She added that it appeared likely that there may be some who were open to attending the sacramental Anglo-Catholic worship at the neighbouring, ancient church of St Michael the Archangel in Bugle Street, strengthening the Anglo-Catholic congregation in that place.

10. St Mary’s currently held an organ led Eucharist Service each Sunday at 9:15am. Although this was not a like-for-like to the current Anglican Eucharist using the Roman Rite on offer at St Barnabas, it would be a somewhat familiar expression of worship to them. Over the last three years, the clergy and leadership team of St Mary’s had worked with long-standing parishioners to offer an authentic and engaging Eucharist Service each Sunday as part of their worship pattern.

11. There was a genuine openness on the part of St Mary’s PCC to explore all possibilities and they would welcome the continued participation of the current St Barnabas congregation in their new church life. That could be an addition, or alternative, for some or all current congregation members, to the continuing Anglo-Catholic provision described above. She also explained why a link with Holy Trinity Millbrook, as suggested in the representations, would not work – the situation at that parish was similar to, if not worse than, that of St Barnabas’s.

12. In response to the suggestion that rather than being reorganized St Barnabas’s should have its own incumbent, and adequate support from the diocese, she explained that that option had not worked for it, as evidenced by its last long incumbency. In any event its congregation was mainly gathered
from outside its parish boundaries, and her proposals aimed to provide suitable ministry and support for the flourishing of ministry and mission amongst the people of the parish as a whole.

13. The Bishop detailed the electoral roll, parish share, Average Sunday Attendance, and occasional offices figures for St Barnabas’s parish from 2010 to 2021: this showed that given the size of its congregation, and its relative inability to pay towards the Common Mission Fund (CMF) which supported all stipendiary ministry across the diocese, this parish had in fact received the benefit of approximately £700,000 investment in that stipendiary minister over the last ten years alone.

14. To put the above point about the funding of stipendiary ministry in Winchester Diocese in context, she explained that the Diocese did not have significant legacy or other investment income to support these costs. Its principal source of income was the contributions received from parishes to the CMF: 80% of diocesan income was received via the CMF, and 80% of its expenditure went on providing stipends, national insurance, pension contributions, housing for clergy etc. The net effect of this was that the cost of clerical ministry in the diocese was met collectively (and entirely) by the parishes. This meant that larger and more affluent communities did contribute to the support of ministry in smaller communities and less affluent areas, but pastoral planning must take into account that this contribution had limits.

15. With regards the view that were St Barnabas’s to receive funding from the Strategic Development Funding (SDF), at the level St Mary’s had, it would flourish, the Bishop said that it had already been heavily subsidized by others. It had a population of 5,000 and had already cost the diocese some £700,000 over the last ten years alone. In terms of any comparison with St Mary’s, it was true that St Mary’s had received SDF funding but, as with other resource churches, that was in expectation of future engagement and income from a growing congregation. Likewise, the funding which was available to support a church plant from St Mary Southampton to St Barnabas (subject to the outcome of the draft scheme) would need to be complemented over time by significant income from a growing congregation at St Barnabas’s.

16. In terms of previous offers of support, the Diocesan Stewardship & Resources Adviser was tasked to actively promote the concept of good Stewardship across the parishes, clergy, and worshipping communities of the diocese, ensuring all resources, talents and gifts could be used to best further the mission and ministry of the Church. He supported parish volunteers in meeting their responsibilities in the area of financial management; no parish officers from St Barnabas had contacted diocesan staff for advice or support over recent years. There was no indication of on-going or new projects within the church or congregation.

17. The parish had been considered unsustainable by successive deanery plans since 2009. The proposal for a union with St Mary’s postdated the most recent deanery plan, which had previously suggested a link with the neighbouring Highfield (Portwood Christ Church) parish but had been altered as it was believed that the St Mary’s team would be better placed given its greater
resources. She additionally confirmed that the latter link had received wide consultation within the deanery.

18. As a background to this, the Bishop explained that at the end of 2019 discussions were on-going among the diocesan team relating to SDF projects and a diocesan-wide church planting strategy. Conversations between the then Archdeacon of Bournemouth and the leaders of Southampton St Mary’s and Highfield took place. In early 2020, the preferred outcome was agreed, and that was to build on the success of the new ‘resource church’ at St Mary Southampton by their planting into the parish of St Barnabas. Again, both parishes had a high density of students.

19. This coincided with the Bishop of Winchester convening a Deployment Working Group to consider the number of stipendiary clergy appointments, and how they could be allocated in a way which best addressed the missional priorities which the Diocesan Synod had formulated and adopted at its 2013 and 2016 conferences. Following a consultation process, the group’s final recommendations were received and adopted by the Diocesan Synod at its residential conference in November 2019.

20. Having agreed, at its July 2019 meeting, a three-year financial plan, the Diocesan Synod adopted a recommendation to continue working with roughly 140 stipendiary posts. However, Covid arrived in early 2020 and the effects of the pandemic and numerous lockdowns soon became evident and resulted in a revised number of stipendiary posts that could be supported by the Winchester Diocesan Board of Finance to circa 120.

21. She refuted any suggestion that these proposals were tainted by being associated with the previous Bishop: pastoral reorganisation proposals were not crafted solely by the diocesan bishop but were formulated by a coming together of deanery and diocesan leadership, they were in turn scrutinised by the Southern Archdeaconry Mission & Pastoral Committee (SAMPC) and the Diocesan Mission & Pastoral Committee (DMPC). Consulting with her Suffragan colleague, the Bishop Commissary, and these bodies, she as the Acting Bishop had agreed that existing pastoral plans should be implemented after due consultation and not delayed until the next Bishop of Winchester was in post. They remained convinced of the rationale.

22. The Bishop outlined the process to how her proposals were arrived at; she fully accepted the heartfelt feelings it would give rise to for the St Barnabas’s congregation but said that these must be weighed against the needs of those who lived in the parish which must be met, which the vibrant, church planting style of St Mary’s would enable. She also explained other alternatives that were explored, like a link with Millbrook, but still felt that her current proposals stood as the best prospect overall. She also explained the challenging local demographics, and the significant levels of deprivation among the local and student population who did not engage with the life of the church.

23. She said that since its revitalization in 2018, St Mary’s had grown from 25 regular worshippers to over 400 with the average age of those worshippers reducing from 75 to 28. St Mary’s had already played its part in the revitalizing of the Diocese having resourced and sent a church plant into a neighbouring deanery in January 2021. The objectives for the new united
parish would be to see a similar growth in both church attendance and missional activity, seeking to become a beacon of light and hope within the local community.

24. She also detailed the missional and other initiatives undertaken by St Mary’s, like Alpha courses, and implementing a social transformation project called the ‘Marketplace’, said to be Southampton’s first Social Supermarket, established by St Mary’s and local partner SCM (Southampton City Mission) during 2021, which had now expanded into a further three parishes around the city. The project sought to meet local needs around food poverty and grow a holistic community of whole life transformation through debt advice, IT skills, social prescribers, mentorship and more.

25. With regards the St Barnabas’s parsonage, the Bishop said that the staffing for the new benefice (and parish) was to be an incumbent and two Assistant Curates, plus three Ordinands. It was likely that a curate or other member of the ministry team would live in the St Barnabas parsonage house after its transfer to the WDBF and subject to the needs of the team.

26. She confirmed that there was no intention that St Barnabas’s church should be closed for worship either now, nor in the foreseeable future; the reason for altering its status was for flexibility and convenience of the church plant, as a chapel of ease was preferred. The intention remained for St Barnabas to be regularly open and attended on Sunday and throughout the week.

27. She detailed the consultation process, listing key dates. She also explained the reasons for the delay in progressing these proposals, which were also impacted in part by the Covid restrictions and lockdowns. The timeline she provided showed that the 2011 Measure’s requirements had been fully met. She explained that the reason the St Barnabas’s PCC secretary was not given a copy of the Archdeacon’s Report of November 2019 and PCC not being informed of the DMPC’s view on it was that there was no record of a written report of an Archdeacon’s visit to the parish of that date. The Bishop believed a verbal report was more likely made to the Deployment Working Group, or the SDF Executive Board before draft proposals were developed and taken to the diocese’s SAMP and DMPC for approval.

28. On the view that the DMPC did not respond to the objections raised by the St Barnabas PCC on the draft proposals or to its referral to the Independent Reviewer, both in December 2020, the Bishop said that the objection was acknowledged, but the referral to the Independent Reviewer meant it was necessary to wait for his response, which took precedence over the pastoral process.

29. She noted that the Independent Reviewer said in his response that the case assembled by the Diocese in relation to the decline of the parish and its continued sustainability seemed to him to be compelling. He saw nothing in what had happened to indicate a degree of animosity to the parish on the grounds of its churchmanship and theological conviction. It was an unhappy set of circumstances that the two weakest parishes in Southampton now facing pastoral reorganisation were both resolution parishes but there was
nothing to indicate that that was welcome to the Bishop of Winchester. Indeed, he was explicit in regarding it as a matter of considerable regret.

30. St Mary’s had a vibrant student ministry which would put it in a strong position to engage with the many students living in the area surrounding St Barnabas’s. St Mary’s strong and growing programme of missional and outreach ministries also made it well positioned to engage with the needs of the local area. The Bishop was satisfied that in the absence of alternative and viable options, her proposals were the best for the furtherance of the mission of the parishes concerned.

Supplementary views of the representors

31. Two of the representors against, Steve Castle and Emma Robarts, made supplementary comments.

32. Mr Castle’s opinion was that St Barnabas’s churchmanship was not fully understood by some, which in turn meant it was not being correctly served by the Diocese and therefore by the proposed Scheme. He explained that his PCC would consider, after the Commissioners’ decision on whether the Scheme as drafted should proceed, whether to rescind its resolutions on the ordination of women.

33. Ms Robarts was also concerned that certain types of churchmanship were not correctly catered for within the Diocese, contrary to the duties laid out in the 2011 Measure and the proposals therefore did not make better provision for the cure of souls as required by the 2011 Measure.

34. She outlined her continued concern over the treatment of some of the clergy by the Diocese, some of whom were said to be fearful of speaking out. They were also complaining about the ruin of the parish system within the Diocese; clergy cuts and the mental strain which the remaining overstretched clergy were under leading some to being depressed: parishioners were also angry and upset.

35. She asked whether it was inappropriate to sell some 40 parsonages as intended by the Diocese to deal with diocesan deficits, and waste capital proceeds on diocesan operational expenditure. These were capital assets belonging to parishes, and was not appropriate custodianship of capital, especially by a charity.

Supplementary response from the Bishop

36. Responding to points raised in the further submissions the Bishop of Southampton explained that there was no prejudice against the St Barnabas’s parish but mere recognition that it could no longer be considered sustainable going forwards. There were however significant local and mission issues which these proposals sought to address. She stressed that the development of the diocesan strategy from which these proposals stem involved the Diocesan Synod, a Deployment Working Group, a Deployment Development Group and the Diocesan Resilience Team as well as Bishop Tim.
37. She said that Bishop Norman’s view on the unsustainability of St Barnabas’s expressed in 2018/19 on St Barnabas’s remained the same. In any event there was a severe shortage of Society priests, so it was highly unlikely that a new ‘suitable’ incumbent could be found even were the proposed union with St Mary’s parish not to proceed.

38. The Bishop confirmed that there was no intention to dispose of the St Barnabas’s parsonage were the Scheme allowed to proceed; it was intended to house one of the ministry team.

39. She was fully committed to mutual flourishing of traditions and to the s3(2)(a) obligations for the Provincial Episcopal Visitor and the Diocesan/Bishop of Southampton to agree and jointly implement the diocesan plan of not only taking into account matters at parish-level, but also to take a view among several parishes at diocesan and deanery level, especially those in major cities.

40. In light of the possibility that the St Barnabas’s PCC might re-consider its resolution on women’s ministry staff also asked the Bishop of Southampton whether, in that event, she would be open instead to a possible union of the St Barnabas’s benefice (and parish) with St Michael’s instead of St Mary’s. The Bishop said she would still be minded to link St Barnabas’s with St Mary’s, which as a resource church for the deanery and archdeaconry, had the means to promote the missional and outreach work to the community it served, especially in relation to the local student population. St Michael’s just did not have the resources to engage fully with the student population nor have the financial nor human resources to manage the parish. Finance and Mission statistics for St Mary’s and St Michael’s were provided to back this up.

41. She said the proposals, which along with bringing much needed new life and revitalization at St Barnabas’s, would also see the growth of Anglican worship in the city and enable much needed community and social outreach to the area.

1. This document should be read alongside and as part of the Commissioners’ published Statement of Reasons in connection with the draft scheme. This document sets out the Commissioners’ consideration of the potential equality and human rights issues which the draft scheme raises. The Commissioners do not consider that they are subject to the duties set out below, but without prejudice to that view, the Commissioners wished to record the details of their consideration, analysis and conclusion had they considered that a relevant duty did apply to them.

2. Although the Commissioners’ consideration is recorded separately in this note, consideration of the potential impact of the public sector equality duty and human rights obligations, had they applied, was integrated into the decision-making process at the time at which the Commissioners considered whether the draft scheme should proceed.

3. The Commissioners do not consider that they are carrying out public functions in the exercise of their duties under the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011. However, in the event that it may be determined that this is not correct, the Commissioners have considered the application of the public sector equality duty which is set out at section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

4. The PSED requires public authorities to have “due regard” to:

   a. The need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the EqA 2010 (section 149(1)(a)).

   b. The need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it (section 149(1)(b)). This involves having due regard to the need to:

      a. remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;

      b. take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it (section 149(4)); and

      c. encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

   c. The need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149(1)(c)). This includes having due regard to the need to
tackle prejudice and to promote understanding (section 149(5), EqA 2010).

5. The Commissioners noted that (amongst other things) it was the objective of the draft scheme that the church of St. Barnabas would cease to be a parish church and would become a chapel of ease in the new parish of St Mary Southampton.

6. As part of their consideration of written representations and the consultation process the Commissioners identified that:

1. In 2011 the parish was subject to a visitation commissioned by the then diocesan bishop which was undertaken by a retired Archdeacon of Canterbury whose report concluded that the parish was struggling and that, despite the then incumbent and his PCC recognising that plans needed to be set for future development, none had been implemented, and the parish continued to decline.

2. The Bishop of Southampton highlighted the review of an Independent Reviewer, Sir William Fittall, appointed under the House of Bishops’ Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests, who had said in his report dated 25 February 2021:

“…the case assembled by the diocese in relation to the decline of the parish and its continued sustainability seems to me to be compelling. Whatever the right new pattern may be for ministry in the area, the bishop and the diocese clearly have sound reasons, on the basis of the serious decline that has occurred, for concluding that the status quo cannot continue. It does not require the addition of some additional and unacknowledged consideration-such as prejudice against resolution parishes- to explain what has happened. The figures speak for themselves…”

3. Sir William saw nothing in what had happened to indicate a degree of animosity to the parish on the grounds of its church tradition and theological conviction.

4. With a parish population of some 5,000, St Barnabas attracts an attendance of only 0.3% of the population, the lowest figure for Church of England churches in Southampton. This is despite the fact that demographically the area is one of significant opportunity for mission growth, with 61% aged 18-29 and a high proportion of households being students in high density accommodation. The Bishop of Southampton indicated that the strategic challenge which the diocese wishes to grasp is engaging with this younger generation.

5. The Bishop of Southampton detailed the electoral roll, parish share, average Sunday attendance, and occasional offices figures for St Barnabas’s parish from 2010 to 2021: this showed that given the size of its congregation, and its relative inability to pay towards the Common Mission Fund (CMF) which supported all stipendiary ministry across the diocese, this parish had in fact received the benefit of
approximately £700,000 investment in that stipendiary minister over the last ten years.

6. The parish electoral roll figures for the years 2018 to 2021 are 24, 21, 16, and 15, of which those resident in the parish were 8 in 2018, 5 in 2019, 5 in 2020, with no figure given for 2021 or subsequently. The Bishop of Southampton said that approximately two thirds of those on the electoral roll live outside the parish.

7. The Provincial Episcopal Visitor, the Bishop of Richborough, had given a view that the current model of ministry (an independent parish affiliated with The Society of St Wilfrid and St Hilda) was no longer viable. He had also given his opinion that the Society Catholic tradition in Winchester Diocese would best be served by a consolidation of four congregations and clergy (which were already gathered from wide areas) into three centres, one in the city of Winchester (ten miles from St Barnabas), and two in Bournemouth.

8. The Bishop of Southampton said that there had been previous offers of support. In particular, the diocesan Stewardship & Resources Adviser had been tasked actively to promote the concept of good stewardship across the parishes, clergy, and worshipping communities of the diocese, ensuring all resources, talents and gifts could be used to best further the mission and ministry of the Church. He supported parish volunteers in meeting their responsibilities in the area of fundraising and financial management. The Bishop said that no parish officers from St Barnabas had contacted diocesan staff for advice or support over recent years. There was no indication of on-going or new projects within the church or congregation, and in particular none which would seek to engage with the extensive student population.

9. The Bishop of Southampton said that it appeared likely that some members of the St Barnabas congregation might be open to attending the sacramental Anglo-Catholic worship at the neighbouring church of St Michael the Archangel in Bugle Street, strengthening the Anglo-Catholic congregation in that place.

10. The Bishop of Southampton noted that St Mary’s Southampton currently held an organ led Eucharist Service each Sunday at 9:15am. Although this was not a like-for-like to the current Anglican Eucharist using the Roman Rite on offer at St Barnabas, it would be a somewhat familiar expression of worship to persons who habitually worship there. Over the last three years, the clergy and leadership team of St Mary’s had worked with long-standing parishioners to offer an authentic and engaging Eucharist Service each Sunday as part of their worship pattern.

11. To the suggestion that rather than being reorganized St Barnabas’s should have its own incumbent, and additional support from the diocese, the Bishop of Southampton explained that that option had not enabled the parish to grow, as evidenced by its last long incumbency. In any event its congregation was mainly gathered from outside its parish boundaries, and her proposals aimed, she said, to
provide suitable ministry and support for the flourishing of ministry and mission amongst the people of the parish as a whole.

12. The Bishop of Southampton indicated that a link with Holy Trinity, Millbrook, which some representors had supported, was not a viable alternative, given the circumstances of that parish. Its congregation had fallen to single figures over the past two decades.

13. The Bishop of Southampton noted that both the parishes of St Mary, Southampton, and St Barnabas had a high density of students. St Mary’s has an already vibrant student ministry which would put it in a strong position to engage with the many students living in the area surrounding St Barnabas’s. St Mary’s strong and growing programme of missional and outreach ministries also made it well positioned to engage with the needs of the local area. The Bishop was satisfied that in the absence of alternative and viable options, her proposals were the best for the furtherance of the mission of the parishes concerned.

14. The Bishop of Southampton indicated that since its revitalization in 2018, St Mary’s had grown from 25 regular worshippers to over 400 with the average age of those worshippers reducing from 75 to 28. St Mary’s had already played its part in the revitalization of the diocese having resourced and sent a church plant into a neighbouring deanery in January 2021. The objectives for the new united parish would be to see a similar growth in both church attendance and missional activity, seeking to become a beacon of light and hope within the local community.

15. The Bishop of Southampton also detailed the missional and other initiatives undertaken by St Mary’s, for example Alpha courses, and implementing a social transformation project called the ‘Marketplace’, said to be Southampton’s first so-called “Social Supermarket”, established by St Mary’s and local partner SCM (Southampton City Mission) during 2021, which had now expanded into a further three parishes around the city. The project sought to meet local needs around food poverty and grow a holistic community of whole life transformation through debt advice, IT skills, social prescribers, mentorship and more.

16. The Bishop of Southampton confirmed that there was no intention that St Barnabas’s church should be closed for worship either now, or in the foreseeable future; the reason for altering its status was for flexibility and convenience of the church plant, as a chapel of ease was preferred. The intention remained for St Barnabas to be regularly open and attended on Sunday and throughout the week.

17. The Bishop of Southampton said that the staffing for the new benefice (and parish) was to be an incumbent and two assistant curates, plus three ordinands. It was likely that a curate or other member of the ministry team would live in the St Barnabas parsonage house after its transfer to the Winchester Diocesan Board of Finance and subject to the needs of the team.
From representations made orally during a public hearing on 17 November 2022 the Commissioners identified that:

1. Mr Pearcey accepted that fewer people were coming forward for PCC offices than he would have liked.

2. Mr Pearcey said that the main issue was that leaving a city of 250,000 with no traditional Catholic church could not be regarded as “mutual flourishing”. He suggested that St Barnabas’s type of church tradition as a resolution parish was being disadvantaged.

3. Mr Pearcey said that what was needed was a dynamic traditional Catholic priest who could revive the St Barnabas church and who could also use the church hall to its full advantage.

4. Mr Castle spoke to his views about some of the background. Referring to events in 2009 he said that in his view the deanery synod had at that time acted “homophobically” in connection with the treatment of a former incumbent (though the Committee noted that the deanery synod was not a relevant decision maker for the purpose of this scheme). He said that since 2010 his “mission vision” had been “trashed”.

5. Mr Castle also said that prior to 2009 there had been discussion of joining St Barnabas with Holy Trinity Millbrook, but that since 2009 that parish had been categorized as being “unsustainable”.

6. In response to questions from the Committee the representatives said that the outcome they wanted was for the proposals to be dropped, and they did not agree with the Bishop of Richborough’s assessment of the situation. Mr Baird, who had visited St Barnabas’s recently, described the ages of its congregation as being much younger than the Diocese seemed to think: only the churchwarden was over 60, with the majority of the others being below 30. He added that there had been two or three younger people in the congregation “quite recently”. Mr Pearcey confirmed that there were currently 15 people on the St Barnabas electoral roll and roughly 10-12 worshipping on a Sunday.

7. With regard to whether St Barnabas’s might be minded to rescind its resolution regarding women in ministry, as had been suggested during the tour of the parishes the day before, Mr Pearcey said that the PCC’s position was not clear-cut: from his knowledge there was likely to be a 2:4 voting balance, with two in favour of rescinding and four against. Mr Castle confirmed that those who were against rescinding (i.e. four people) were not likely to go to St Michael’s.

8. Mr Castle said that one of the reasons he had suggested rescinding the resolutions was because of the difficulty of getting priests in the traditional catholic tradition to support worship during the vacancy. Canon Philbrick supported the view that finding male priests to support the St Barnabas’s tradition during the vacancy had not been easy. Mr Castle thought that the current congregation would not travel
to Bournemouth or Winchester, as most of those on the electoral roll now were based in Southampton, and only one came from further afield.

9. Catherine Delve said that since 2018 St Mary’s had seen a huge growth in its congregation numbers, from 30 to over 500 attending services or coming through its doors for the other activities associated with it. Most of these were new to church or returning to faith.

10. Emily Stewart said besides those attending Sunday services, 20 groups worked to promote the Gospel, and engaged 270 people with mission outside usual Sunday services.

11. Emily Stewart said that she was confident that St Mary’s would be able to ensure that St Barnabas’s type of church tradition would be provided for in the proposed arrangements.

12. Mr Finch said that as a chapel of ease St Barnabas would be part of St Mary’s vision and plan, but would have weekly gatherings in its own right, and develop its own community.

13. Mrs Delve said that the “old” St Mary’s congregation had been nervous about a ‘take over’, but she thought the new team had embraced their needs and both groups had been enriched in their worship. She cited the example of a young man who had come to St Mary’s through its football links and who now attended the traditional 9.15 am service and had formed a strong friendship with an 86-year-old lady there, borne out of mutual respect. Most of the former St Mary’s congregation went to the early services.

14. Josh Zhu explained his connections with St Mary’s, and said that he was a local resident. He said that he felt accepted and loved at St Mary’s, which had a diversity of ethnicities.

15. Mrs Delve said that there was already a thriving student ministry at St Mary’s, and she thought this would grow at St Barnabas which was nearer to the University of Southampton. Mr Finch said he was confident that these proposals would have a beneficial impact on the large student population, which between the two universities at Southampton and the Solent was roughly 40,000 students; St Barnabas’s was halfway between the two.

16. The Bishop of Southampton explained that in a diocese where the Common Mission Fund relied so heavily on congregational giving, the current arrangements were no longer sustainable. Southampton, as a whole, was a relatively deprived area, and the diocese had other congregations to consider as well and was required to live within its means.

17. In response to a question on the traditional catholic provision in Bournemouth, the Bishop of Southampton replied that St Katherine’s was doing “very well” and had developed a relationship with nearby St Nicholas’s and was looking outwards and working together with
others. St Ambrose in Christ Church Westbourne was also available for people who wanted a conservative evangelical approach to church.

18. The Bishop of Southampton said that there would need to be discussions, were the proposed scheme to proceed, about how exactly St Barnabas’s tradition would be addressed. It was hoped that St Barnabas’s traditions could be catered for in the proposed arrangements, at St Michael’s or in Bournemouth or Winchester, both of which had thriving traditional catholic congregations. This might be as an afternoon service at St Barnabas’s, or perhaps at St Michael’s but she accepted that for those who wanted to worship in a resolution parish they would probably need to go to either Bournemouth or Winchester. To that end, she noted that some of St Barnabas’s congregation already travelled in from outside the parish, and gave a view that travelling a relatively short distance to these other churches, particularly Winchester would not prove too much of an issue.

19. In response to a question on student church preference, the Bishop of Southampton said that whilst most students would not have a faith or come to faith during their studies, there were students who were attending church. The diocese needed to try new approaches because the funding for higher education (HE) chaplaincy had declined sharply in the last decade, and currently there was only one curate who had some HE responsibility as part of their role. Student worship preferences would vary, but what mattered was having the resources and capacity for outreach. As an example of positive engagement with the students, she noted the choir at St Michael’s, which was funded by the University.

20. The Bishop of Southampton said she would respect the five guiding principles, including that of mutual flourishing. However, mutual flourishing needed to work for St Mary’s as well, which welcomed women’s ministry.

8. The Commissioners identified that some representors had argued that if made the draft scheme would have an adverse impact on provision in the diocese for those who hold traditional catholic beliefs and seek worship which is consistent with those beliefs. The Commissioners assessed the potential impact of the draft scheme on any persons with a relevant protected characteristic, namely religion or belief but without making any concession that traditional catholic beliefs are themselves a protected characteristic.

9. The Commissioners recognized that one representor had given a view that the deanery synod had acted “homophobically”, but this had been a perception about that body in 2009, not a comment on the proposal now before the Committee. The Committee was required to assess the draft scheme before it and the Committee was aware of no evidence that the draft scheme if made would have any adverse impact on any person or group with any particular sexual orientation. On the evidence provided the Commissioners considered that the argument being made now was in essence the same point as others had raised about the loss of traditional catholic worship, taking into account reference to a particular “mission vision”.

10. The Commissioners were satisfied that they had obtained sufficient information to make an assessment based on the combination of the information supplied to them from the diocese and the parish, including data gathered during the representations process.

11. The Commissioners identified one element of the proposed scheme which might have an impact on people with a protected characteristic, namely the proposal to close St Barnabas as a parish church, designating it instead as a chapel of ease.

12. Having analyzed the information which they had obtained, the Commissioners were satisfied that they had paid due regard to the matters set out in paragraph 4. In coming to that view, the Commissioners placed particular weight on the factors set out below:

   1. The diocese had supported stipendiary ministry at St Barnabas through a period of long incumbency, but the worshipping community in the parish had continued to decline. The Commissioners considered that it was reasonable for the diocese to conclude that it could have greater confidence that the deployment of its limited resources in the way proposed would lead to more sustainable mission and mission growth in this part of the diocese;

   2. This was not a proposal for closure, and the Bishop of Southampton was clear that there would need to be future conversations about ministry provision at St Barnabas;

   3. On the evidence, there were only four members of the PCC at St Barnabas who wished to retain the parish’s status as a resolution parish. Given that the usual Sunday congregation is 10-12, the number of those who might be adversely affected is small (fewer than 10). For those worshippers who could seek sacramental Anglo-Catholic worship this was available at St Michael the Archangel in Bugle Street;

   4. The majority of those on the electoral roll of St Barnabas parish lived outside the parish. Accordingly, parishioners have already established a pattern of travelling for worship. The Committee noted that in its experience, it is not unusual in the Church of England for worshippers to travel a reasonable distance to a church which shares their church tradition or offers their preferred worship style. They noted that such a distance would not be regarded as an issue in a comparable rural parish setting;

   5. There was Anglo-Catholic worship available at St Michael’s and elsewhere in the diocese in Winchester and Bournemouth (for example at St Katherine’s with St Nicolas) which on the evidence was thriving;

   6. The Commissioners placed significant weight on the views of the Bishop of Richborough that the current model of ministry (an independent parish affiliated with The Society) was no longer viable, and on the findings of a former archdeacon that this had been the position since 2011. They accorded the Bishop of Richborough’s view -
that the Society Anglo-Catholic tradition in Winchester Diocese would best be served by a consolidation of four congregations (which were already gathered from wide areas) and clergy into three centres, one in the city of Winchester (ten miles from St Barnabas), and two in Bournemouth – significant weight because the Provincial Episcopal Visitor would be able to take a view of the mission of the Church of England in this part of the country as a whole, rather than from the perspective of individual parishes; and

7. Whilst noting that representatives against did not accept the views of the Bishop of Richborough, the Committee accepted that there was no evidence that St Barnabas’s would be able to recruit the type of incumbent which they wanted. Their attempts to find temporary cover during the vacancy had been unsuccessful.

13. The Commissioners considered the following additional considerations. In particular:

1. They were satisfied that it was right to place significant weight on the conclusion which they had reached, namely that the draft scheme would further the mission of the Church of England (a statutory duty to which they were obliged to have due regard); and that in coming to that conclusion they accorded weight to the evidence that:

   a. the electoral roll at St Barnabas showed a consistent record of decline;

   b. The Bishop of Richborough was of the view that the current model on which St Barnabas operated was no longer viable, and had proposed a model for viable traditional catholic worship in the diocese;

   c. Since 2018, compared with St Barnabas, St Mary’s had seen a huge growth in its congregation numbers, from 30 to over 400 (500 on some evidence) attending services or coming through its doors for the other activities associated with it. St Mary’s had an established and growing student ministry, which materially weighed in the balance given that 61% of the parish’s inhabitants are aged 18-29;

   d. On the evidence, the work of mission and outreach at St Mary’s encouraged a range of persons with protected characteristics (other than religion and belief) to engage in public life (including individuals of different age groups, ethnicities, and sexes); and

   e. There was no evidence that St Barnabas had the capacity to grow its mission and, in particular, of any achievable plan to materially grow its mission to the student population.

2. On the evidence, the draft scheme would make better provision for “mutual flourishing” of other groups with protected characteristics which the Commissioners were entitled to weigh in the balance, in
particular students who were likely to be younger in age, and it would make better provision for the ministry of women.

14. For the same reasons as set out above in paragraphs 1-3, although they do not consider that they are under any obligation to do so, the Commissioners considered whether the draft scheme was directly or indirectly discriminatory in its effect or impact.

15. For the reasons set out above (in particular, but without limitation, paragraphs 12-13) and in light of that evidence, the Commissioners have concluded that the draft scheme may discriminate against a person or group on the basis of a protected characteristic, namely religion or belief.

16. If there is any discrimination should the proposed scheme proceed, the Commissioners would have concluded that it would be justified on the basis that it pursues legitimate aims (namely (i) the potential for mission and outreach in the new parish of St Mary Southampton; and (ii) furthering the mission of the Church of England)), and that the means employed are proportionate to the aims pursued. In particular:

16.1 the objectives of the draft scheme are sufficiently important to justify the limitation of a protected right;

16.2 the draft scheme is rationally connected to those objectives;

16.3 a less intrusive measure could not have been used without unacceptably compromising the achievement of those objectives. The Committee repeats the factors set out in paragraphs 12 and 13. In particular, the Committee noted (1) no representor had put forward a less intrusive alternative; the only ask was for a new priest for the parish; (2) that the parish had received consistent support for stipendiary ministry, but there was no evidence of the potential for growth in its mission; (3) The diocese had not intervened immediately in the face of a falling electoral roll, and; (4) the diocese had offered support from the diocesan Stewardship and Resources Adviser. Realistically, there was no evidence that there was any reasonable alternative course available to the diocese to achieve its objectives; and

16.4 Balancing the severity of the draft scheme’s effects on the persons to whom it applies against the importance of the objectives, whether to the extent that the draft scheme will contribute to those objectives, the former outweighs the latter. The Committee concludes it does not, for the reasons set out above.