



To the representors

(and copied to the statutory interested parties for information only)

Wendy Matthews
*Secretary to the Mission Pastoral
and Church Property Committee*

Our ref: NB18/272BM

By e-mail only

13th June 2024

**Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011
Christ Church, Cressage (Diocese of Hereford)
Proposed Pastoral Church Buildings Scheme**

Dear all,

1. At their 22nd May 2024 meeting the Church Commissioners decided **that the Scheme should proceed as drafted notwithstanding the representation made against it.**
2. The case had been discussed by the Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee's sifting panel and the Panel recommended that a hearing into the matter was not required given the issues were clear from the correspondence, and they did not think that the Committee would gain additional information or that a hearing was necessary for reasons of fairness.
3. The proposed draft Pastoral Church Buildings Scheme provided for the closure of the parish church of Christ Church, Cressage.

The draft Scheme attracted one representation against, and two letters of comment.

4. This letter sets out the decision reached by the Church Commissioners and the reasons for it, and the factors they considered in their deliberation. A summary of the representations and comments is attached at Annex A.

Reasons for the Commissioners' Decision

5. Overall, the Commissioners' findings were that the Diocese had met the requirements of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011, and the scheme had been brought forward for a proper purpose. The statutory requirements of the consultation process had also been met.
6. The Commissioners noted the figures from the Bishop and team vicar which showed very low attendance for services held at Christ Church. They also noted that the higher attendance at one service, referred to by the representors, was for a benefice-wide service when only five or six of those present were from Cressage. They also noted that there were a number of other churches in the benefice and that some parishioners had begun attending the nearby church at Sheinton.
7. They attached particular weight to the facts that there had been no lay members of the PCC elected since 2016, that parish governance offices had been unfilled, and that parish funds for the ongoing maintenance and insurance of the church building were nearly exhausted. They also noted that the option of Christ Church becoming a chapel of ease in a united parish had been explored with other parishes in the benefice and none had been willing to take on responsibility for the building.
8. The Commissioners noted that there was a strong relationship with Christ Church Primary School in the parish so there was scope for the church to have a continuing presence in the community through the school and engagement activities.
9. They noted that the churchyard and burials would be unaffected by this Scheme and would be subject to further consultation if affected by a future Scheme to settle the future of the church building.
10. As regards consultations they were satisfied that the statutory consultation requirements had been fulfilled. Although there was a lack of PCC members and churchwardens a public meeting had been held in 2017 and local discussions had taken place.
11. For these reasons, while any decision to close a church is always taken with sadness, the Commissioners determined that the Scheme should be allowed to proceed as drafted, notwithstanding the representation made against it.
12. They realise that their decision will disappoint those who made representations against the draft Scheme, but they hope that this statement will be helpful in indicating that their decision was reached only after careful consideration of all the relevant issues and the concerns raised in the representations.
13. The Commissioners also considered all the other points made in the correspondence but felt that none of them was of sufficient weight to outweigh the points listed above.

14. I enclose a notice, as required by the Measure, about the right to apply for leave to appeal to His Majesty in Council against the draft Scheme or any of its provisions.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Matthews
Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee Secretary
Church Commissioners

Annex A – Summary of the main points in the representations

Summary of the representation against

The objection comes from Susan and Richard Tipper, who are parishioners. They say that the parish has no PCC and there has not been consultation with parishioners or local community, except via the Church School and Parish Council which have not shown sufficient interest. They believe that there are enough worshippers to sustain the church as a place of regular public worship, saying that there have been six services a year, one of which in 2023 had an attendance of 70.

They also express concern about the future of the building, saying they would not wish to see it boarded up and not used.

Comments

The comments come from Mrs Elizabeth Asser, and Tracey Cansdale, headteacher of Christ Church Primary School.

Mrs Asser's husband was buried in the churchyard in 2022. She has observed with sadness the decline in the congregation, but notes that the closure has been requested by the parish. However, she is anxious about the possible future use of the building and what may happen to the graveyard and graves.

Tracey Cansdale says that the Notice of the draft Scheme was drawn to the attention of parents at the school and wider community in their weekly school newsletter and article in the monthly village magazine. She comments that the school would like there to continue to be provision for family worship in the area – referencing a Messy Church the school hosted before the pandemic, but which has not since restarted.

Notice

Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 Christ Church, Cressage Diocese of Hereford Proposed Pastoral Scheme

Right to seek leave to appeal against the Commissioners' decision

Any person who has duly made written representations against the draft Scheme may appeal to His Majesty in Council against the Scheme or any provisions of it, but only with the leave of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.

Any person who wishes to apply for leave to appeal to His Majesty in Council must first send written notice of his or her intention to the Registrar of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, Supreme Court Building, Parliament Square, London, SW1P 3BD. **This notice must be sent by registered post or recorded delivery service, and a copy sent to the Church Commissioners, so as to reach the Judicial Committee's Office not later than Wednesday 17th July 2024.**

On being notified by the Registrar of the Judicial Committee of the receipt of the intention to apply for leave to appeal, the applicant will have a further 28 days to state the grounds of his or her appeal. The Registrar will provide details of the procedure to be followed.

Further information about seeking permission to appeal/leave to appeal can be found on the website of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council:
<https://www.jcpc.uk/procedures/practice-direction-03.html>

Matthew Crowe
Case Officer