



To:  
The representors

Wendy Matthews  
*Head of Mission, Pastoral  
and Church Property*

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

Our ref: 15/135d//RA

**By e-mail only**

14 October 2024

Dear All

**Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011  
Benefices of Diptford with North Huish, Ermington, Halwell, Harberton,  
Harbertonford, Moreleigh and Ugborough; and Totnes with Bridgetown, Berry  
Pomeroy, Dartington, Marldon, Ashprington, Cornworthy and Stoke Gabriel  
Proposed Pastoral Scheme**

1. The draft Scheme providing for the parish of Harberton, being one of the seven constituent parishes of the benefice of Diptford with North Huish, Ermington, Halwell, Harberton, Harbertonford, Moreleigh and Ugborough (also known as the Three Rivers Mission Community – “the 3RMC”), to be transferred to the benefice of Totnes with Bridgetown, Berry Pomeroy, Dartington, Marldon, Ashprington, Cornworthy and Stoke Gabriel (“the TMC”), where it shall continue distinct as one of the (then) eight parishes which would comprise the area of that (enlarged) benefice, and consequential amendments to benefice names and patronage

**attracted three representations against, 13 in favour, and two of comment.**

**Consideration of the representations by the Commissioners**

2. The case was 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 that the issues were clear from the correspondence, and they did not think that the Commissioners would gain additional information or that a hearing was necessary for reasons of fairness.

3. The Commissioners’ Committee considered the representations at its meeting on 1 October 2024 and the Commissioners **came to the decision that the Scheme affecting the above two benefices concerned should proceed as drafted notwithstanding the representations against it.**

4. This letter sets out the decision reached by the Commissioners and the reasons for the decision, and the factors they considered in their deliberation. The summary of the representations is attached as 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. They noted that the majority of the representors were in favour of the scheme.

6. They were satisfied that the statutory requirements of the consultation process had been fully met. They noted that the Totnes Archidiaconal Mission and Pastoral Committee had invited those who made representations on the draft proposals to a meeting, so there was an opportunity for everyone to explore the comments and issues raised ahead of the final proposals being approved by the Bishop.

7. The Commissioners also considered if the transfer of Harberton to the TMC would better support the needs, traditions and characteristics of the parish. On balance, they felt that the larger leadership team in the TMC would be able to support the Harberton parish well and the worship tradition they favoured. They noted that the TMC team was in the process of considering its own internal arrangements, but the diocesan team had confirmed that there were no plans to change the clergy provision in the TMC more generally. The pattern of provision would be kept under review as part of wider diocesan processes.

8. The Commissioners also considered the geography of the two benefices and were satisfied that removing the Harberton parish from the 3RMC benefice would reduce the workload on the incumbent of 3RMC and make ministry there more sustainable. They noted that if there was further growth in the 3RMC it might be possible for an additional 0.25 stipendiary post to be provided, particularly if the population growth at the Ugborough end of the benefice materialised as a result of new housing development. They were also satisfied that TMC would be a better fit for Harberton, as the community looked east to Totnes in terms of links with more urban areas, rather than westwards to the rest of the 3RMC benefice.

9. They also considered the concern raised by representors that the transfer of Harberton to the TMC might make it more likely that there would a future reduction in the ministry provision for 3RMC. They were satisfied with the Bishop's assurances that there were no such plans, that the clergy allocation was not based on a 'cost of clergy' model and that a range of factors were always take into account when provision was considered. The potential for growth in Ugborough, mentioned above, indicated that there might need to be more, not less, provision in the longer term. The diocesan team would keep matters under review.

10. The Commissioners also carefully considered the pastoral dynamics which had been highlighted by representors. In this context, it is important to note that the Commissioners have to take account of the Gaulby legal judgment of 1999<sup>1</sup> which made it clear that pastoral dynamics could be part of the rationale for pastoral reorganization, as long as the overall purpose of the scheme was to further the mission of the Church in a broader sense. They noted that the 3RMC incumbent had provided a comment, but not made a representation against the scheme.

11. The Commissioners noted that the Harberton church community generally did not engage well with the 3RMC incumbent or participate fully in the life of the benefice, and that was detrimental to the 3RMC overall. They were satisfied that the answer to the situation was to move the parish into another benefice, particularly given the Bishop had sought direct assurances that the PCC would engage fully with the TMC benefice, and would prioritise paying their full contribution to the Common Fund, so that the TMC benefice would not be disadvantaged by the change. The Commissioners noted that the Harberton PCC had passed a positive resolution in relation to future share payments, and that the current arrears in share would no longer be the responsibility of the 3RMC once the scheme was made.

12. The Commissioners considered the housing provision and were satisfied with what was proposed. They noted that if the Harberton parish moved into the TMC it was possible that its former parsonage house could be used to support a member of clergy, to support focal ministry. They also noted that the house would not be used if the parish remained in the 3RMC, because any additional housing would be needed in Ugborough (at the other end of the benefice) if the planned housing growth materialised which could also increase the numbers at the community primary school.

13. The Commissioners were also satisfied with the proposed patronage arrangements which removed Exeter Cathedral from the new arrangements and reduced the number of turns for the 3RMC benefice from four to three, as this had been consulted upon and agreed locally.

## **Conclusion**

14. In the light of these various points the Commissioners were satisfied that it would be right to allow the draft Scheme to proceed notwithstanding the representations made against it. They thought overall it would further the mission of the Church and provide for the better cure of souls in the area.

15. They appreciate that their decision will disappoint those who had made representations 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.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1999 the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council dismissed an appeal from the Reverend A F B Cheesman & others against a decision by the Commissioners to proceed with a pastoral scheme affecting the benefice of Gaulby in the diocese of Leicester. The issue was whether it was right to bring forward proposals to reduce the size of the benefice of Gaulby by pastoral reorganisation when pastoral breakdown procedures under the Incumbents (Vacation of Benefices) Measure had been brought against the incumbent then discontinued. The Judicial Committee concluded that use of the then Pastoral Measure was appropriate in this case.

16. 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.

17. 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

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Wendy Matthews".

Wendy Matthews  
Head of Mission, Pastoral and Church Property

## Summary of the representations against

1. The representors against have six main areas of concern:
  - (i) the geographical grounds, which are the only reasons given in the diocesan rationale to the draft Scheme, do not justify the proposed transfer of the Harberton parish between the two benefices;
  - (ii) the real reason for the proposed change is the Harberton parish's relationship with both its incumbent and the other parishes in the Three Rivers Mission Community ("the 3RMC") but there has been a lack of transparency about this;
  - (iii) reducing the number of parishes in the 3RMC benefice and the resultant fall in its benefice parish share contributions, which already does not cover its clergy cost to the diocese, may lead to it losing a full-time incumbent, or expose it to further reorganisation;
  - (iv) that the former parsonage house at Harberton would no longer be available to house a priest in the 3RMC area; and
  - (v) other areas of concern.

- (i) Geographical justification for the transfer of parish

Ermington PCC says that the average distance between Harberton and the other parishes in the 3RMC is 5.9 miles, and 5.2 miles in relation to the other parishes in the Totnes Mission Community. This means that any benefice change would not make Harberton significantly less marginal.

It says it is not clear why Mission Community alignment with the place where most parishioners (the great majority of whom have little to do with the local Church) 'look to for practical purposes' will make 'better provision for mission and pastoral care' as if this argument is accepted and applied, then all rural parishes in the diocese would aggregate to market towns.

The geographical reason given for the transfer of parish is not therefore sufficient to justify it

The Hoddinotts say that it would be unfortunate for Harberton to be split from the St Peter, Harbertonford parish as both villages are part of the same District Council and Parish Council.

- (ii) Harberton's relationship with others in the 3RMC benefice

Those against the draft Scheme consider that the motivating factor is the Harberton parish's difficulties in its relationship with its incumbent and other parishes in the 3RMC, but this is not referred to in the rationale.

They give examples of ways in which they believe this is demonstrated.

(iii) Possible negative effects for the 3RMC benefice

Ermington PCC says that the 3RMC's aggregate parish share contribution for 2022 was £54,045, which did not cover its clergy costs. Without Harberton's contribution (£7,662), this could have implications for the future provision of stipendiary clergy to the reduced benefice, and the PCC seeks assurance that the Diocese would consider this benefice to be financially viable.

The PCC also feels that the Bishop's proposals are against the diocesan trend of increasing the number of parishes in benefices, and therefore in Mission Communities. Although in arithmetic terms it would reduce the workload of their incumbent, this could have implications as it would leave their benefice exposed to further reorganisation.

(iv) The former Harberton parsonage house

Ermington PCC is concerned that transferring the Harberton parish to another benefice, could result in the loss of the above property (currently let, as is the house at Ugborough) as somewhere to house a curate or a house-for-duty priest for the 3RMC benefice. This is particularly relevant given the population of 3RMC is growing due to new housing and a new secondary school is planned for neuro-divergent children which is expected to have 120 pupils and 50 members of staff – all of whom would obviously benefit from an increase in Christian pastoral care.

(vi) Other points made

Ermington PCC asks for assurance that parish share arrears from Harberton will transfer with the parish and no longer be attributed to the 3RMC benefice.

It also says that you were not informed of the concerns it raised during the local consultations when the draft proposals were recommended to you.

Mrs Hoddinott says that in the past the fifth Sunday of the month service would be held in rotation around the 3RMC, which allowed them to meet up with other churches and share fellowship, but that that service is now always held at St Mary's, Diptford.

Mr Hoddinott queries why there is no longer any evening harvest festival service and suppers, as farmers generally cannot attend morning services. There was also no Mothering Sunday nor Easter Sunday service at Harberton, but to be held in Harbertonford instead.

He also takes issue with parishioners wishing to be buried at Harberton churchyard being refused as there was no longer any room, but permission being given for the burial of a local person – which seems inconsistent with this reasoning.

## Summary of representations in favour

2. The general view of those making representations in support of the proposed transfer of the Harberton parish was that it did not sit well with the other parishes in the 3RMC grouping and would be better linked with the TMC benefice for geographical, social and community reasons.
3. They say that since Ermington and Ugborough joined the 3RMC, the centre of gravity of the benefice has moved westward, leaving Harberton isolated. The removal of Harberton from its current grouping would make the other parishes in the 3RMC a more cohesive community.
4. All lay members of the Harberton PCC were said to agree with these proposals because of their proximity to Totnes and their wish to contribute to the Totnes benefice in all ways, including on Common Fund/parish share contributions; the Harberton PCC's treasurer confirms that her parish would be able to pay its full contribution.
5. Many say they rarely feel the need to go westwards towards Diptford, and to the other parishes in the 3RMC. When there are benefice services at churches in this part of the benefice, the narrow lanes make the journey difficult, especially in winter, with many, especially older members, unwilling or unable to undertake the difficult journey.
6. Many say Totnes is much more accessible, being some two miles away along better roads, with some public transport, and within walking distance for the more able. Some also say Harberton has natural links with Ashprington and Dartington in the Totnes benefice.
7. When the reorganisation of the Totnes deanery was being debated in deanery synod, it was suggested that Harberton sat better with Totnes but that was rejected at the time. However, the later inclusion of Ermington and Ugborough, which are aligned with Ivybridge, has created a geographically over-extended and very difficult group of parishes for a single incumbent in 3RMC to minister to. These proposals should significantly reduce his workload.
8. The current benefice arrangement is not working well whereas the proposals would achieve better outreach and missional growth. Although it has a small and ageing congregation and numbers have not increased significantly, Harberton has not seen the decline experienced by many rural parishes. St Andrew's church is Grade I listed and there is a great deal of support within Harberton when funds are needed for its repair and maintenance and its longer-term preservation. There is potential for it to thrive and play a much greater part in the life of its community, which being part of a strong benefice like Totnes make easier to achieve.

## Letters of Comment

9. Mr Sayle provides a timeline of previous reorganisation for his benefice. He does not say if he support the proposals or not, nor does he comment on his pastoral relationship with Harberton. He does mention the concern about the share arrears transferring to TMC if Harberton moved across.

10. Ugborough PCC says that for the last 18 months it has become increasingly clear that the inclusion of Harberton in the 3RMC is not working, as that parish continues to opt out of meaningful relationships with the rest of the Mission Community and have shown themselves unwilling to join in with Joint Church Warden Meetings or other shared initiatives.

11. Its lack of trained Local Worship Leaders means that Harberton has a need for the presence of clergy or a trained reader at every service, which is unlike the other 3RMC churches, and works to their detriment.

12. However, the PCC seeks reassurance that despite Harberton's departure, the 3RMC will continue to have at least one stipendiary priest notwithstanding any resulting fall in Common Fund contributions.