



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

To the representors

Our ref: NB 22/109 H

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

9th January 2025

By email only

**Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011
Parish of Saint Christopher, Norris Green, Liverpool
Church of Saint Christopher, Norris Green
Proposal Pastoral Church Buildings Scheme**

1. At a meeting of the Mission, Pastoral & Church Property Committee on 6 November 2024, the Church Commissioners decided **that the Scheme detailed below should proceed as drafted notwithstanding the representations made against it.**
2. The proposed draft Pastoral Scheme provided for:
 - the church of Saint Chistopher, being the parish church of the parish of Saint Christopher, Norris Green, Liverpool, to be declared closed for regular public worship.

The draft Scheme attracted seven representations against (plus one which was withdrawn), 14 in favour and three comments.

3. 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 is attached at Annex A.
4. The Commissioners noted that the supplementary comments from Mr Mark Cotterell made reference to certain legal authority which he considered to be relevant to the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 (MPM) process. The case law cited relates to general legal principles around consultation and good administrative decision-making. These are principles which the Commissioners already apply in exercising their functions under the MPM, and the Commissioners are satisfied that their decision on the Scheme is consistent with those principles insofar as they are relevant.

Reasons for the Commissioners' Decision

5. Overall, the Commissioners' findings were that the Diocesan team had met the requirements of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011, and the scheme had been brought forward for a proper purpose. The Commissioners were content that there was sufficient evidence that the condition of the building was poor and that the current arrangements were not sustainable, given the decline in congregational numbers and lack of funds for essential repairs. Taking into account all the evidence before them, the Commissioners' overall conclusion was, with regret, that there was no longer a pastoral need for the church building, which is the essential test when considering church building closure.
6. The Commissioners carefully considered the representations against the scheme, which argued that the consultation process had been flawed, and that the church building was important to the community, particularly those who had direct family links to the church and the Garden of Remembrance.
7. The Commissioners were satisfied that the statutory requirements of the consultation process had been met, and that the local views about closure had been sufficiently established. They noted that some of the representations against the Scheme had come from people who were not regularly involved with worship, which indicated that local people had been informed about the draft proposals. The Commissioners were satisfied that the statutory notices had been displayed and published as required.
8. The Commissioners also noted that because the PCC was not operational (in terms of officers) at the time of consultation, it had not been possible for them to take a vote; they had given an indication of their view, but there was not unanimous support for the Scheme. On balance, however, the Commissioners noted that a local meeting had taken place with the community, which demonstrated that the consultation had gone beyond the statutory requirements. It was important to note that there were no further offers of support from the community at that meeting, which could have helped the PCC to keep the building open. That was a factor the Commissioners have taken into account in their decision.
9. However, the Commissioners did think the process would have been improved if the diocesan team had followed the Church Buildings Council's advice and met on site with representatives from Historic England and/or other relevant partners before deciding to proceed with the proposals, because of the high listing and significance of the building.
10. The Commissioners noted that the primary question they had to consider was whether there was a continuing pastoral need for the building. In considering this question, they took into account the high levels of deprivation and other demographic characteristics identified in the representations and comments on the Scheme. While the Commissioners recognised that the building, which

was particularly beautiful on the inside, was an important feature of the area, their overall conclusion was that there was not a continuing pastoral need for the building.

11. As part of that assessment, the Commissioners noted that members of the St Christopher's congregation had already moved to alternative local churches, such as the Church of the Good Shepherd and Christ Church, Norris Green. They were also satisfied that the other local churches offered a variety of worshipping traditions for parishioners, and that the needs, traditions and characteristics of the parish community would be met should the scheme go ahead. In considering the characteristics of the parish, the Commissioners took account of the demographic characteristics of the parish. Although there had been a wedding and a funeral in the church building, these had been at the request of the families involved and the Commissioners did not consider that they provided evidence of a wider pastoral need.
12. The condition of the building was considered to be poor, but the Quinquennial report demonstrated that, if resources were available, the repair issues could be addressed. However, the Commissioners accepted that there had been issues trying to generate income from the local nursery and other users, and that it was unlikely that a sufficient income could be raised to address the repairs, given the lack of community interest mentioned above. While the church halls were used by the wider community, the income from them was not sufficient to address the repairs to the church building. The condition of the building, such as the flooded toilets, demonstrated there had not been funding to keep the building well maintained for some time. In this context, the Commissioners considered it important to relieve the PCC of the responsibility for maintenance of the building.
13. The Commissioners noted that while there may be a continuing pastoral need for access to the church halls and the Garden of Remembrance, this was not within the scope of this scheme, which related only to the closure of the church for regular public worship.
14. Taking into account the above factors, the Commissioners were satisfied that the draft scheme would further the mission of the Church of England.
15. The Commissioners realise that their decision will disappoint the representors 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 representation.
16. 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.

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". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

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

Annex A – Summary of the main points in the representations

Summary of the themes in the Representations against the draft Scheme

1. The draft Scheme attracted eight representations against it. One of those representations, from Mr Colin Edwards, has since been withdrawn.
2. A lifelong member of the church, Ms Ally Payne (1) says that she has many memories of the church for community events, as well as for family life events, including weddings and baptisms, and it has provided comfort and peace during difficult times. She is saddened at the thought of no new memories being created in the building. Mr David Martin (2) also has family links to the church, including the christening of two of his children, and the ashes of his late mother buried in the Garden of Remembrance. He says the building is beautiful and offers a place of hope and support. Similarly, Ms Gillian Martin (3) has attended christenings and weddings at the church and has family ashes buried in the Garden of Remembrance. Ms Martin says that the building is a massive support for the vulnerable in a disadvantaged area, so it should be updated and made great again. Ms Dawn Welsh (4) and Mr Frank Teare (5) are concerned about the future of the Garden of Remembrance. Mr Teare says that both the Garden of Remembrance and the church are a must for the local community.
3. Mr Colin Edwards (6) (now withdrawn) says that the church is at the heart of the community and has importance for giving directions. He has attended life events, such as weddings and funerals at the church, as well as community events, such as having coffee. Mr Mark Cotterell is also concerned about the loss for the local community, particularly with the loss of other community assets in the area. Although he notes that the church may be unsustainable, he wonders whether the church has potential to be left fallow, having picked up the possibility in discussions around the review of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011. Mr Cotterell thinks that the halls should remain because of the potential income stream, pointing to demolition of a neighbouring church and hall which has not been replaced due to the removal of income from its hall.
4. Ms Payne says that there was a lack of warning before the move from the church building and she believed it was only temporary. Therefore, she believes the process was not transparent which led to a reduction in the congregation. She feels let down by the Church. Mr Martin says that the notice period of a month was short. **[Note: the notice period began on 26/04/2024 and ended on 17/06/2024, having been extended for a week due to a typo on the church door notice to ensure the statutory period was met with the correct details]**. Mr Cotterell says there was a lack of awareness of the proposals amongst groups which use the buildings and suggests the consultation should be re-run. He says no notices were displayed at other church buildings and questions whether this meets ecclesiastical law. Ms Emma Reilly (8) questions how the notices were publicised and says that there was a lack of notification locally. **[Note: Ms Reilly questions whether there was notification in the Liverpool Echo or Church Times; I have confirmed that a notice appeared in the Liverpool**

Echo on 01/05/2024 and was also available on its website for 28 days thereafter].

Summary of the themes in the Representations in favour

5. The draft Scheme attracted 14 representations in favour.
6. Most of the representors in support of the scheme refer to the poor condition of the building (10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22). The key issues which are said to prevent the building from serving the community for worship, occasional offices, mission and outreach are its flooded cellar, lack of heating, crumbling/peeling paint, water ingress, vandalism and derelict appearance. Several representors refer to the large sums of money which would be required for repair and maintenance of the building. The Reverend Emma Williams (17) also notes the water ingress in the basement and does not think that the congregation can be expected to find funds to make the building fit for purpose, nor provide the long-term commitments required for grant funding. The Reverend Will Gibbons, Area Dean, (21) says that the QIR costed essential repairs as c. £153,000 and outstanding repairs of £130,000, including replacement of the heating system.
7. The priest in charge, the Reverend Helen Edwards, (14) says the Quinquennial Inspection report (QIR) highlights significant issues with the building which need high investment. The Fit for Mission (FfM) Right Buildings discernment process found that the PCC had sought to close the building in the 1970s but a campaign by the national amenity society now known as the Twentieth Century Society led to its Grade II* listing in 1981. Ms Edwards says that this history demonstrates that the church is not fit for purpose and suggests that this has stifled mission and ministry in Norris Green. She argues that heritage responsibilities are a barrier to mission and a drain on resources, and the appearance of a building in decline does not support the good news of the Gospel. Mr Gibbons describes the FfM Right Buildings process which identified St Christopher's church as a possible closure and disposal, which was accepted by the Deanery Synod in January 2023. He notes that there has been a 55% decline in church attendance across the diocese over the past 30 years, yet only a 6% decline in buildings. Mr Gibbons considers the number of buildings in the deanery as unsustainable.
8. Several others also highlight the other issues with the building, including facilities and its general design (12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20), for example a lack of running water and toilets, and issues with those which are available in the halls. Ms Edwards says that the local social-action charity, Triple C, struggles with the building and the only regular use of the church is as a foodbank. It has no heating but, despite disconnection of the gas supply, they continue to pay a daily standing charge. Ms Lynn Farram (16) talks of the small congregation but large building, while the Venerable Ricky Panter thinks the size and the complexity of the building was too great despite attempts to develop use of the building and grow the Christian community.

9. Ms Cottrell, Ms Chambers, Ms Edwards, Ms Farram, Ms Cooper and the Archdeacon of Liverpool (19) all refer to a small and/or declining congregation. Ms Cooper also says the congregation was aging and Ms Chambers says that the church was unable to attract younger people. Mr Gibbons says that, if funds were secured to repair and maintain the building, there is not a viable congregation to sustain it.
10. The close proximity of other churches is mentioned by several representors (10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 19). Mr Langdon-Smith says that two of these alternatives (Christ Church, Norris Green and The Church of the Good Shepherd) are within walking distance. Along with the Archdeacon, he says that the congregation have moved to The Church of the Good Shepherd for worship and pastoral care. Ms Farram and Ms Chambers also says that some members of the congregation have moved to other churches or have left the worshipping community. Mr Gibbons notes that four churches are less than a mile apart. He says the congregation decided to continue to meet at The Good Shepherd in Easter 2023 and keep the church open for occasional offices and a weekly foodbank, following a temporary move over winter 2022 due to the failure of the heating.
11. Ms Edwards says that the communities of Norris Green remain in the most deprived 5% in the nation, some in the most 1%, so they are unable to resource mission and ministry which has contributed to the ongoing decline. She says that the ongoing costs of running a church, such as the gas standing charges alongside high insurance costs, are draining thousands from some of the most deprived people. The church's lack of resources is also mentioned by Ms Cottrell, Mr Langdon-Smith, Ms Chambers, the Archdeacon and the Reverend Andrew Edwards (22). With such a lack of resources, these representors think it is not possible to sustain mission and worship while maintaining the church building and many, therefore, think that closure will further the Church in Norris Green. The Archdeacon says that the proposed FfM parish will ensure that those within the existing parish will be well served in mission and the cure of souls, a view which is also shared by Ms Williams. Ms Aggrey thinks that within the proposed new parish, the building would be unsustainable due to its financial obligations. Ms Farram notes that Christ Church, Norris Green went through a similar process and was rebuilt, with the church now growing in an eco-friendly modular building.
12. Ms Aggrey says that the congregation of St Christopher's has been given robust support regarding options for maintaining or losing the building. Ms Edwards says that local people shared their views at the church's Annual Meeting in May 2023, where the Archdeacon was also present, but she notes that this was not followed up with support, nor was there local momentum to support the church to turn around the direction of travel towards closure. The Archdeacon says that there has been considerable local consultation, prayer, thinking about the proposal, which has commanded wide support. Ms Aleksandra Jones (18) does not think that there are any other viable solutions which could keep the building in use as a place of worship.

13. Ms Edwards describes the delays in the consultation period as frustrating but understands the importance of the process. She also notes that the PCC remains committed to keeping the church open, cared for and in use, but also that it dreams of it being released into the care of others, ideally another Christian organisation if they had sufficient financial resources, which may be better placed to serve the area again.

Summary of the letters of comment on the draft Scheme

14. Three comments on the draft Scheme were received. Ms Shelagh Curry (23) is saddened by the proposal to close the church because she remembers when it used to be hard to find a seat because it was full. However, she has seen the congregation dwindle and thinks it is impossible to keep going but, although she calls it inevitable, it does not make it any easier to accept. Ms Jennifer Bolton (24) says it cannot be knocked down and asked if it could be sold to the Council as flats for the elderly or those with mental health problems.
15. The final comment is from Mr Ross Brazier on behalf Historic England (25), who describes the church: a 1930s' church by Bernard Miller which is his most original and one of the best of the inter-war period. It is described as highly significant, as reflected in its Grade II* listing. Mr Brazier refers to the water ingress due to the design defects noted in the rationale, but he notes that they do not have a copy of the QIR. There is potential for the church to be added to Historic England's 'At Risk Register'. The risk of further deterioration during the use-seeking period is also noted, so it is suggested that the Diocese makes full use of the Commissioners' support. It is also suggested that the Closed Churches Team meet with Historic England and other statutory consultees to discuss securing a long-term future for the church and its potential inclusion on the 'At Risk Register'.

Summary of the Representors' supplementary views

16. Supplementary comments were received from three of those against or who provided comments on the draft Scheme. Following receipt of the Bishop's response, Mr Colin Edwards withdrew his representation against the Scheme.
17. In his comment, Mr Mark Cotterell refers to a number of caselaw precedents on which the Bishop was not asked to comment. He also refers to the separate Scheme in relation to West Derby on which the Bishop was not asked to comment, unless it was considered to be relevant to this draft Scheme.
18. Mr Cotterell says that proceeding with the draft Scheme would be perverse and irrational. He considers it to be irregular and unfair because neighbours were not notified, as well as flawed and unlawful because of a defective system of consultees. He says suggests that the principal argument by the representors against the scheme have not been properly addressed. Mr Cotterell also suggests that there has been inconsistency in some of the evidence presented.

19. Mr Cotterell notes that Historic England were not provided with a copy of the Quinquennial Inspection Report. ***[Note: Quinquennial Inspection reports are provided to the Commissioners for their consideration of the case but they are not circulated to interested parties in the consultation period; such reports are not considered public documents because they can contain sensitive information about security and valuable contents. Historic England were advised to contact the diocese to request a copy of the Quinquennial Inspection report.]*** He is unsure whether the Church is unwilling or unable to extend the consultation and would like more assurances to safeguard the Garden of Remembrance and its access because previous assurances in relation to Christ Church, Norris Green were not fulfilled ***[Note: the current draft Scheme provides solely for closure for regular public worship. Responsibility for access to and maintenance of The Garden of Remembrance will remain with the PCC. A future Pastoral Church Buildings Disposal Scheme, with its statutory consultation process, would be required for any future use which may also make provision for the Garden of Remembrance].***
20. Of the representors in favour of the Scheme, Mr Cotterell says at least nine of the supporters are employed by the diocese and he understands that only one of these live in Norris Green. He also says that the Commissioners should undertake an equality impact assessment as per the Equality Act. Responding to comments about a lack of demand for the halls, he says that various groups had assumed locals could no longer gain access because the gates had been closed and locked so often, which led to its decline. He also found that facilities at other local churches are already busy, including one which has 80% occupancy and cannot accommodate all requests. ***[Note: The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council has given a very persuasive view that in the exercise of their functions under the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 (“the Measure”) the Church Commissioners are not subject to the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010. On that basis we do not consider that we are legally required to undertake an equality impact assessment. The closure of the church halls is not a matter for the Commissioners as they do not fall under any provisions of the 2011 Measure.]*** Mr Cotterell questions statements from the Archdeacon and the Reverend Allison which he says could amount to unlawful discrimination.
21. Mr Cotterell thinks the suggestions from the diocesan team that people could either go to other churches in the local area, and if they want a high church tradition, that could go to Tuebrook (in the deanery) are muddled. He also suggests that the other churches are not as close or easy to get to as has been claimed and as appears on Google Maps. In addition, he questions some of the comments regarding the deprivation levels in the parish, saying that Norris Green is average for deprivation in the city and also for employment rates and life expectancy. Similar errors were noted on a parish profile which had been available on A Church Near You. Mr Cotterell has concerns that decisions and information are being shared by people who are not local and who are unaware of the history of the area.

22. The claims that the church had only ever had a small congregation are also questioned by Mr Cotterell, pointing to the comment which said that the church was full 60 years ago, and his own experience of the church being half full (i.e. 80 communicants) as recently as 1990. He does agree that there has been rapid decline in the past 30 years, but he says that there has been no responsibility for this from clergy.
23. Mr Cotterell thinks that the Bishop and the Area Dean wish to close as many churches as possible to save money, but not cut any clergy. Instead, Mr Cotterell suggests keeping all churches but making two or three 'fallow' and cutting two clergy, including the Area Dean or proposed Team Rector, and a curate, which he says would save far more money. Alternatively, Mr Cotterell suggests selling the vicarage. He considers the proposal to be a 'cash grab' for the church building and grounds and suggests the comment from the Area Dean (that the church should still close even if funds are found for its repair) is pre-determining the consultation.
24. The chronology of events at Christ Church, Norris Green in the Bishop's response is also called into question by Mr Cotterell. He says that it was demolished at short notice and services were moved to a primary school, and that it was not the case that this was a choice by the congregation. However, he says that the description of the reordering of the Church of the Good Shepherd is correct, but he says this was funded from other sources, including the National Lottery. Overall, in Norris Green, Mr Cotterell says that the diocese has sought to take out, rather than inject, funds because it has lost a vicarage, a church and two halls. He says this would be doubled in these proposals.
25. Mr Cotterell says the consultation appears largely to have been internal and thinks that it has mainly been repeated layers of people speaking to themselves. He thinks only the bare minimum of public consultation occurred and even that has not been admitted. He asks how many people or households in the parish, as well as recent users of the hall, were consulted. **[Note: the statutory requirements of the public and church door notices under the Measure were met. A public notice appeared in the Liverpool Echo on 1st May 2024 and there are pdf proofs from the newspaper in confirmation. Although not required under the Measure, the notice also ran online for a further 28 days on the Public Notice Portal].**
26. Appendix A to Mr Cotterell's comment is legal advice he has received and mostly relates to the points the Commissioners will consider as part of their decision-making process.
27. Miss Emma Reilly says that the process seems unfair because supporters of the closure were not asked if they wished to withdraw **[Note: the Commissioners' staff have confirmed to Miss Reilly that all representors (both in favour and against) received the same email and were, therefore, asked if they wished to withdraw on the basis of our correspondence]**. She does not think there were any new arguments to merit

the closure of the church, nor does she think it was publicised enough in the area. She asks if all those who were married in the church were written to and suggests they might want to visit before any closure takes place. Miss Reilly also asks if the closure could be put back to 2025 to give people more chance to visit the church. She also suggests the media should be informed to gauge local opinion.

28. Mrs Shelagh Curry disagrees with the description of the church as 'aging' because, when the church was open, they had young families who came each week. She also disagrees with the impression that the congregation chose to continue to worship at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Easter 2023 because she says they were told there was not any alternative. She agrees that there was no alternative (mainly due to lack of heating) but she also said that the congregation was willing to come wrapped up to continue worship in their own church. They were also originally told the relocation would be short-term, but it was gradually extended.