



To:
The representors

Wendy Matthews
*Head of Mission and
Pastoral Services*

*(and copied to the statutory interested parties
under the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011
process for information purposes only)*

Our ref: 15/28

By e-mail only

26 March 2025

Dear Representors

**Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011
Benefices of Bere Ferrers; Peter Tavy and Mary Tavy; Tavistock, Gulworthy and
Brent Tor; and Whitchurch
Proposed Pastoral Scheme**

1. The draft Scheme providing for:

- (i) the union of the benefice of Bere Ferrers, the benefice of Peter Tavy and Mary Tavy, the benefice of Tavistock, Gulworthy and Brent Tor and the benefice of Whitchurch (their seven constituent parishes to remain distinct) and for the establishment of a team ministry for the new benefice of Bere Ferrers with Bere Alston, Brent Tor, Gulworthy, Mary Tavy, Peter Tavy, Tavistock and Whitchurch, for the cure of souls in the new benefice to be shared by a team rector and one team vicar, for their appointment;
- (ii) the parsonage house of the benefice of Bere Ferrers to be transferred to the Exeter DBF for diocesan purposes (here as the place of residence of the of the team vicar);
- (iii) the parsonage house of the benefice of Whitchurch to be transferred to the Exeter DBF for diocesan purposes; and
- (iv) the parsonage house of the benefice of Peter Tavy and Mary Tavy to be disposed of.

initially attracted **three representations against** and **four in favour** of the draft proposals. After further correspondence between the representors and the Commissioners' staff team the representors submissions were recorded as **two against and five in favour**.

2. The Commissioners have decided that **the scheme should proceed as drafted** notwithstanding the representations against it and the following statement indicates the reasons for their decision. The summary of the representations is attached as Annex A.

Reasons for the Commissioners' Decision

3. Overall, the Commissioners were satisfied that the proposed scheme had been brought forward for a proper purpose and that the scheme would further the mission of the Church.

4. The Commissioners were also satisfied that the statutory requirements of the consultation process had been met. They noted that the discussions had started in 2021, and that the new Archdeacon of Plymouth, who arrived in 2023, had given the matter time and attention to get to know the communities and deanery context to inform the development of the proposals.

5. The Commissioners noted the diocesan context, particularly in relation to financial pressures, and the rationale for the scheme. The diocese had a policy to consider potential pastoral reorganisation when vacancies arose to ensure resources were deployed as effectively as possible. The Commissioners noted that these proposals had been initiated at the deanery level, although there was no formal deanery plan in place.

6. In this context they accepted that the benefices of Peter Tavy and Mary Tavy and Whitchurch did not warrant full-time stipendiary incumbents. They recognised that the proposed grouping was arrived at via discussions at deanery level, and that the other possible reorganisation suggested was not justifiable on resource or need grounds. The Commissioners were satisfied that the clergy provision was sufficient for a population of just under 21,000 and an electoral roll of 440.

7. They were persuaded by the Bishop's argument that the creation of a team ministry was the most suitable arrangement in this context. It was also an approach that was consistent with the diocesan policy that no member of the clergy should work in isolation. They were pleased to note that in addition to the team rector and the team vicar, there would additionally be two/three self-supporting curates, and with some seven/eight licensed lay ministers to support local worship and ministry. They also noted that additional clerical help would be available from retired clergy with permission to officiate.

8. Under the proposed scheme the seven parishes would continue distinct so there was nothing to suggest that their needs, traditions and characteristics would be adversely impacted as a result of the proposals. The clergy were generally already familiar with the parish communities and the scheme would have a positive impact as it would bring some longstanding interregnums to an end.

9. The name of the proposed team ministry was a local matter and one the Bishop could address through a subsequent Bishop's Pastoral Order if that was what the parishes wanted.

10. The Commissioners accepted the case for the disposal of the parsonage house at Mary Tavy. They were comfortable that if the tenants were required to leave the diocesan team would consider their needs in a pastorally sensitive manner. The Commissioners were also satisfied with the transfer of the Bere Ferres and Whitchurch parsonages to the Exeter Diocesan Board of Finance and noted that the Bere Ferres house would be used

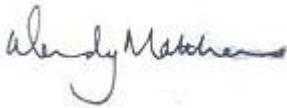
as the residence for the team vicar.

11. They appreciate that their decision will disappoint those who had made representations against the 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.

12. 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.

13. 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 Services

Representations – Bere Ferrers

Against

~~Mrs Catherine Stoate – churchwarden at Tavistock~~ Amended to be ‘for’

1. Mrs Anya Yeatman – parishioner of Peter, Tavy
2. Mr Marwood Yeatman – parishioner of Peter Tavy

For

1. PCC Mary Tavy
2. PCC Peter Tavy
3. Mr Chris Blumer – PCC member at Peter Tavy
4. Dr David Harris – churchwarden at Brent Tor
5. Mrs Catherine Stoate - churchwarden at Tavistock

Against

Anya Yeatman

The rationale for these proposals appears to me as follows: to make as much money as possible to bail out the diocese and invest as little as possible in our traditional parish system. Our benefice of St Peter's and St Mary's has had no stipendiary priest for 17 years, we paid our common share in full and received no support of any kind from the Diocese. We have been saved by retired vicars and non stipendiary priests. But this is not a sustainable or a satisfactory policy.

With minimal wages and overwhelming workloads, it is not surprising that fewer people are coming forward for ordination. Candidates are bound to look at the situation now and the trajectory of the C of E and question whether they can do their job effectively for a decent reward. Better wages and conditions, less admin. and more time with parishioners would increase the numbers. The money could be found if there was the will. In 1961 in England, there were 88 bishops and 13,500 stipendiary priests. Today there are 108 bishops and 7,700 stipendiary priests. Reducing the inflated number of bishops, archdeacons, suffragans and their costs and cutting bureaucracy, replication and waste would be part of that shift and rebalance a top heavy structure.

I suggest these parishes are divided into three benefices with three stipendiary priests and three parsonages.

1. Tavistock, the largest.
2. Mary Tavy, Peter Tavy, Whitchurch and Brentor, moorland churches with a natural affinity.
3. Bere Ferrers, Bere Alston and Gulworthy, estuary churches also with a natural affinity.

The parsonage house at Tavistock would be retained. The parsonage house at Whitchurch could go to the diocese. The parsonage at Mary Tavy would be retained by the benefice for a stipendiary priest or as a house for duty. The parsonage of Bere Ferrers would be retained by the benefice for the existing incumbent and after retirement remain

available for a stipendiary priest or house for duty.

The distribution of people varies but this is not just a numbers game.

Marwood Yeatman

In the porch in St. C – 's the far side of Devon from where my wife and I live, the notice board says, 'The Church of England is destroying itself'.

*From a letter to the Spectator 2021 **How the Diocese grabbed parishes' funds***

Sir –

'The relentless growth of bureaucracy in Church of England dioceses started over 40 years ago.

'The bishops made their first power grab with the Endowments and Glebe Measure 1976, when all parish glebe assets were put into the care of the dioceses. This was meant to allow wealthy parishes to help poorer ones keep their clergy. The assets were held as endowment funds by the diocese and the income from investments was ring-fenced for payment of clergy stipends. So far, so good.

'However, over the years dioceses have found ways to take some of these funds quietly to pay for their own profligacy. Their latest wheeze is to use an accounting trick called total return accounting to enable them to liquidate some of the capital gains on endowment investments and use these for any purpose they see fit.'

Not content with the millions left to them by the late G. P., Esq. in the 1980s, 'in 2018 and 2019 the Oxford Diocese transferred a (further) total of £11.7 million from its diocesan stipends fund into its diocesan common vision fund, and to "supplement revenue". These are funds that could and should have been used to pay parish clergy.'

For seventeen years, our parish in Peter Tavy has had a non stipendiary priest, paid the parish share and got nothing back. With the retirement of the incumbent in Bere Ferers, one will be left for many thousand souls in nine parishes – with consequences.

However, as an increasingly money focused operation, the diocese has found the wherewithal to increase the number of bishops and staff, fund projects nobody else wanted, promote agenda and feed a corporate beast whose priorities are revealed in their language and 'portfolio'. Priests, obviously in financial terms, have become 'key limiting factors', churches are 'outlets' and parsonages will coyly be 'transferred' to the Diocesan Board of Finance to provide 'flexibility' for...' use in the longer term' or 'disposal' or sale).

In addition, the diocese has declared 'a benefice can only have one parsonage'. So the bigger the benefice and the more parishes it consumes the more parsonages the diocese can claim. An excellent 'business model'.

Having declared parish priests 'a top priority' for whom 'money could be found' the C of E has taken the opposite path: of expecting them to work for nothing and confiscating the houses that that went with the job.

Between priests and parishioners there is still a strong connection. If the Church Times is correct, 'owing to the 'background of cuts to stipendiary posts across multiple diocese,

candidates (for the priesthood) fear there will be no long term posts for them'. So the decline in congregations has been exacerbated by the Church itself.

Once the parish has been stripped of its assets and parson there is no way back and nothing left, particularly in the secular state of England. A 'hub' with services of sorts taken by a lay reader with little or no theological training, only a conviction, is not a substitute for and cannot discharge the offices of an ordained priest. He or she will not help to cure my soul or provide any comfort at my death bed side. Nor, in my experience, anyone else's. A dog collar counts.

Where is God in all this mammon?

I suggest:

1. That diocese of Exeter (a) follows the example of Edmondsbury and Ipswich and initiates a scheme to facilitate ordination and a career with realistic prospects in the Church (b) supplies the nine parishes related to Tavistock with at least two more stipendiary or house for duty priests.
2. That the Church of England publishes the sums accruing to the diocese from the acquisition of parish glebe assets.

For

PCC Mary Tavy

I am emailing you on behalf of Mary Tavy PCC – I am Secretary. Please find our response below, which was compiled following a recent PCC meeting at which the draft was considered, and contains points raised by the individual members:

1. Mary Tavy PCC supports in principle the draft plans for the reorganisation of the Benefice.
2. We welcome the guarantee that a priest will be available to take our service every week.
3. We wonder if it will be possible to have one named priest as the designated point of contact for members of the wider congregation / our community if for example someone in the village is ill and wishes to be supported by a priest.
4. We would welcome a designated priest who would be available to attend functions in our village, help us organise events in the village, and to make the most of the opportunities this would bring to increase our congregation and help our Christian mission to our whole community in Mary Tavy.
5. We ask that we are kept advised of the outcome of discussions about Priestly ongoing input.
6. We would like to convey that we are nonetheless disappointed that after 7 years without a Priest, this is the result.

PCC Peter Tavy

As Secretary to the PCC of St Peter's, Peter Tavy, I wished to inform you of the opinions of our Council on the Draft Proposals for the union of our benefice with three others.

We held an Extraordinary meeting of the PCC on Friday 7th June to discuss the initial draft received on 23rd May. We did not hold a formal vote but, following a wide-ranging discussion, four of the five PCC members present accepted the proposals as a positive step forward, while one member opposed to them.

Subsequently, we held a full meeting of the PCC on Thursday 19th September and again discussed the draft proposals. Once again, although we held no formal vote, eight of the nine members then present accepted the draft proposals, while one remained opposed.

As part of the public consultation on the second draft version of the pastoral scheme (received on 20th September), we held an open Public Meeting in our village hall to discuss the proposals, which was attended by 12 parishioners (including 6 members of the PCC) and the Rev'd Matt Godfrey from Tavistock. Again, there was general support for progressing the scheme, with one attendee remaining opposed.

We have not held a formal vote at PCC, preferring to allow individual members to freely express their own opinions in the consultation process as they wish. However, I felt it important to inform you that the majority opinion of the PCC (and the attendees at our public meeting) is in favour of these proposals.

From a personal point of view, I welcome the proposals as a positive step forward following seven years of vacancy in our parish, and I look forward to the support of a ministry team in the future. I also welcome the prospect of all our seven PCCs sharing knowledge and experience as members of one benefice.

Chris Blumer

I am emailing you regarding the Draft Pastoral Scheme for the above.

I am a member of the Peter Tavy PCC and we had a very helpful public meeting discussion yesterday involving a number of parishioners as well as the Revd. Matt Godfrey.

As a result of this and having studied the proposal I am very happy to say that I approve of it and wish to support its implementation.

Our parish is at present "leaderless" with no real sense of direction or purpose. It has been in a very unsatisfactory state over many years now, despite being well supported in the conducting of Sunday services. To be part of a larger Benefice with a full ministry team and shared by a team rector and team vicar will be a positive way forward.

Dr David Harris

I am emailing to make a representation in support of the overall proposed scheme. Please note that while I believe the majority of the PCC agree, I am not making this representation on behalf of Brent Tor PCC, but in a personal capacity.

I believe this proposal will set ministry to the area on a sound and sustainable footing for the future; it's an exciting plan and I wholeheartedly agree with all the main points.

I do have two slight concerns with minor details of the proposal that I would like registered, however.

Firstly, naming it the "Tavistock Area" shifts the centre of gravity of the team towards the town and away from the rural parishes, and I feel that "Tavy Area" would be a more accurate description.

Secondly, the phrasing around the "disposal" of the Mary Tavy parsonage is a concern, given that I understand there is a family resident there who should not be evicted. Some reassurance that this is not proposed imminently (as is implied by the document) would be gratefully received.

Barring these details, I am glad that this is going forwards and hope that it comes rapidly to fruition!

Catherine Stoate

As Churchwarden of St Eustachius Church, Tavistock, Devon, I am writing regarding the Proposed Pastoral Measure 2011.

I understand the reasons for combining the Benefice of Peter Tavy and Mary Tavy with the Benefice of Tavistock, Gulworthy and Brent Tor and the Benefice of Whitchurch. I am wholly in support of this combination and we are already working closely together.

However, I do not support the inclusion of the Benefice of Bere Ferrers and Bere Alston. It does not make sense geographically and pastorally. The distance from Tavistock to the Bere Peninsula is at least 8 miles of winding, challenging roads and can easily take 30 minutes driving time. The natural neighbouring Parish is that of Buckland Monachorum which is only 3 miles from the Bere Peninsula and takes less than 10 minutes. Furthermore, the Parish Church of St Andrew's, Buckland Monachorum, has only one other very small church in Milton Combe. It is surely more logical to place the Bere Peninsula with Buckland Monachorum?

We have an excellent priest in charge, Rev Matthew Godfrey, based in Tavistock. The population of the thriving, busy market town of Tavistock numbered 12,675 in the 2001 Census and there has been much on-going building in the area since that date. Our one Vicar has a huge workload in Tavistock alone with and at least 3 Sunday services, 2 weekly Eucharistic services, daily morning and evening prayer, an average of one funeral a week, weddings, baptisms, regular school services for 5 local schools, 3 nursing homes, and an elderly congregation that requires pastoral visiting. Rev Godfrey is assisted by a small team of LLMs and SSMs, but this team is also elderly and sometimes in poor health.

Please consider carefully and prayerfully whether the parishioners of the Bere Ferrers Benefice would be better served by joining in due course with the Buckland Monachorum Parish.