



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

To the representors

Our ref: NB 46/128

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

24th March 2025

By email only

Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011
Parish of Saint Mark, Siddal
Church of Saint Mark, Siddal
Proposal Pastoral Church Buildings Scheme

1. On 29 October 2024 the Church Commissioners' Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee (MPCPC) held a hearing to consider the draft scheme which made provision for Saint Mark's, which is the parish church of the parish of Saint Mark, Siddal, to be declared closed for regular public worship.
2. The hearing was held at the Cedar Court Hotel, Huddersfield, and was chaired by the Venerable Simon Fisher, Deputy Chair of the MPCPC and Archdeacon of St Helens and Warrington. Two members of the Committee also visited St Mark's on 28 October.
3. The Church Commissioners carefully considered all the written and oral evidence presented to them and concluded that the draft scheme **should not proceed**. This statement sets out the reasons for that decision and the factors the Commissioners considered in their deliberation.
4. The draft scheme attracted 66 representations against the proposals (plus one out of time) and four comments.
5. A summary of the representations is attached at **Annex A**¹. A minute from the Public Hearing is attached at **Annex B**; this is a summary and not a verbatim note of the hearing. The MPCPC approved the minute of the hearing by correspondence on 18 March 2025.

¹ A number of the representations were made by children and were in the form of drawings. These have been redacted for safeguarding reasons.

Reasons for the Commissioners' Decision

6. The Commissioners considered if the scheme had been brought forward for a proper purpose under the requirements of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 ("the MPM"). The Commissioners must have due regard to whether a scheme furthers the mission of the Church of England and makes better provision for the cure of souls. In this case, the Commissioners accepted that the diocesan team had brought the scheme forward for a proper purpose, but they were not satisfied that the scheme would further the mission of the Church for several reasons which are set out in more detail below.
7. The test for the closure of a church building under the MPM is **whether there is a continuing pastoral need for the building, not the condition of the building itself.**
8. The Commissioners reminded itself of the relevant sections of the MPM Code of Recommended Practice, in particular paragraphs 15.2 and 15.3:

"15.2 A declaration of closure may be made in respect of all or part of a consecrated parish church or chapel of ease which is no longer required as a parochial place of worship. Of all pastoral proposals a declaration of closure is most likely to prompt representations and the Commissioners will in that event need to be provided with full details of the grounds on which the church (or the part concerned) is considered to be no longer required. It is important, therefore, for the DMPC to be sure at the outset what these grounds are. The Measure refers to the church not being "required". The implication of this is clearly that the primary question is whether the building is needed pastorally. This needs to be considered in the context of s.3(1) of the Measure that the Committee should have regard to worship, mission and community as central to the work of the Church of England. Whilst knowledge that a particular church is in a bad state of repair and that adequate finance to pay for the necessary works is not available may often be an important factor, it should not normally be the principal one, although the DMPC, in carrying out its functions, has to have regard to the financial implications for the diocese and Church of England as a whole.

15.3 If a church is required (pastorally) in the vicinity then either every effort should be made to raise money; or consideration should be given to, say, dividing it or otherwise reducing it or leasing part of it (see 15.4 and 15.6); or it might be considered for replacement under s.58 of the Measure (see 18.28) if the building itself is not regarded as suitable. Other factors will include the actual and potential support for the church; the availability of another place, or other places, of worship in the neighbourhood, their accessibility (including the availability of public transport or offers of private transport); and possibly traditions of churchmanship, etc. Also, in cases where the church's state of repair is an issue, it should have been ascertained whether grant aid would be obtainable through English Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund or local authority or other sources if the church were to continue in use..."

9. In this case, taking account views from the public meeting, the Commissioners assessed that the scope for travelling to other places of worship by public transport was limited, particularly for older people. The closure of the building on health and safety grounds had already had an adverse impact on the community; for example, Mrs Lumb gave evidence about being more isolated as a result of the Knit and Natter group not meeting as regularly, and the Scout groups were having to meet in another church outside the parish boundaries. There was also evidence that the scope for licensing an alternative place of worship in Siddal was limited and that more work needed to be done to identify if there were realistic alternative options. It was also clear from the evidence given at the hearing that there was a strong local attachment to St Mark's and a new generation of volunteers who had replaced some of the previous PCC members who had the energy and determination to support efforts to keep the building open. Councillor Thompson flagged potential local partners from the voluntary sector who might be able to work in partnership with the community at St Mark's and the diocesan team. It was noted that, whilst the PCC had voted for closure in October 2021, there had been no formal or unanimous vote in favour at a later stage (March 2024) after the members of the PCC had changed. It could not, therefore, be said conclusively that the current PCC supported closure.
10. The Commissioners accepted the findings of the Quinquennial Inspection report and agreed that the building was in a poor state, but it was not beyond repair. The Commissioners also appreciated that raising funds for an unlisted building was often more challenging than raising funds for a listed building, and that it might not be possible to raise the whole of what was required, but the test under the MPM was about pastoral need, not simply the state of the building.
11. The Commissioners were also required to consider the needs, traditions and characteristics of the parish. The evidence had demonstrated that when ministry resources were made available to the Siddal community, there was potential for Christian growth and mission. This was particularly seen in the period when the Reverend Linda Maslen was successfully ministering to the community; the Commissioners rejected the diocesan team's view that such progress was necessarily unsustainable.
12. The Commissioners considered whether the longer-term proposals for St Mark's parish would have a bearing on the continuing pastoral need for the building. The diocesan team had chosen to bring a closure scheme forward first, with the intention that a more comprehensive scheme for the pastoral reorganisation of the Siddal parish would be brought forward later. The plan was for St Mark's parish to be merged with the parish of Halifax All Saints, which was the original mother church of St Mark's. That draft scheme was not before the Commissioners, and the Commissioners were not in a position to take a view on the merits or otherwise of such a scheme. However, this approach meant the Commissioners did not have sufficient assurances about the future pastoral arrangements to enable them to decide that St Mark's was no longer required, when the issues were looked at in the round and all the

relevant factors were taken into consideration. Examples included the issues around travel in connection with public transport to Halifax Minster and Halifax All Saints.

13. The Commissioners were also concerned that the current ministry provision, which was overseen by the team at Halifax Minster, was not working well for the St Mark's community, who said that they felt 'left behind' and neglected. Although the Minster team benefitted from an incumbent, a house for duty priest, a curate and a Licensed Lay Minister, it seemed that very little of this resource had been directed to the community at St Mark's, and there was no real clarity from the diocesan team about why that approach had been taken. The only worship that was being held in the area was a service once a month and a couple of occasional services for particular families. The Commissioners also firmly rejected the diocesan team's view that the lack of interest in baptism and confirmation was evidence that there was little opportunity for missional growth; based on the practical experience of Committee members, baptisms and confirmations would only arise when there was sustained and nurturing support from clergy, which had not been the experience of parishioners at St Mark's.
14. The Commissioners also considered the ecclesiological and liturgical characteristics of St Mark's which was generally more low church and evangelical in style than Halifax Minster or All Saints. Any future plans for St Mark's would need to ensure that their worshipping style was respected and supported. The Commissioners had also reviewed the evidence on the average number of attendees at St Mark's. In their assessment a regular worshipping community of roughly 20 plus children was common across the Church in a number of different contexts and was not a decisive factor in considering closure.
15. The Commissioners considered the consultation process and agreed that the requirements of the Measure had been met. The Commissioners noted that the view of the PCC had changed over time as the membership had changed. Even if those requirements had not been met, the Commissioners were satisfied that all relevant representators had been given a fair opportunity to state their views in the public meeting; and they were satisfied that they felt sufficiently informed to come to a view on the matters they needed to consider.
16. The Commissioners considered all the relevant factors and concluded, on balance, that there was a still a pastoral need for St Mark's or an alternative licensed place of worship in Siddal, and that therefore the draft scheme **should not proceed** as it would not further the mission of the Church.
17. The Commissioners do want all parties to understand that the Commissioners were realistic about the condition of the building, and the associated challenges of raising funding for repairs. The condition of the building was a factor they took into account, but it was not a decisive factor, given the test under the Measure and the countervailing factors set out above. The

Commissioners advise that consideration should be given to licensing an alternative place of worship in the area whilst discussions take place about the longer-term options. The Commissioners recognise that the future arrangements would vary depending on whether or not funds could be raised for the building to be repaired.

18. As a result of this decision the diocesan team will need to re-evaluate their approach, consult the PCC, congregation, local community and partners, and map out the options for a way forward. The Commissioners appreciate that in time, the Bishop may wish to bring forward another scheme but suggest that it would need to demonstrate a positive and practical plan for local worship, mission and ministry in the area and make better pastoral provision for the Siddal community. Such a scheme might still need to include provision for the closure of St Mark's if necessary, but the diocesan team would need to demonstrate that it could balance the closure with other reasonable provision to meet future pastoral needs.
19. The Commissioners realise that their decision will disappoint those in favour of 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.
20. 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.

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 themes in the Representations against the draft Scheme

1. Of the 66 representations against the draft Scheme, the majority come from worshippers at Saint Mark's and members of the local community who use the church for clubs such as the scout group.
2. Many representors (for example numbers 12, 15, 27 and 30) object to the closure stating, amongst other factors, that congregation numbers are growing. Several say that since the old PCC members (who voted for closure and then resigned) have left there is a new, vibrant PCC. The church's circumstances have changed, and it just needs a little time to prove it is worth saving; they suggest a 12-18 month stay of execution. Another representor points out that the diocesan rationale says the congregation numbers are under 10, yet on Palm Sunday an all-age communion service was attended by just shy of 50 worshippers. She says St Mark's feels like a church which is growing and suggests looking at the register of services for up-to-date information. Burghead Free Church (*in Scotland*) is cited by the local councillor (number 15) as an example of a church which has gone from strength to strength and is growing in numbers so why cannot St Mark's? They say God is alive and well in Siddal and they would like to continue to be able to do His work and continue to serve His community and continue to worship Him in His church building. Another representor (number 4) says that the monthly services are attended by members of the scout group, bringing a regular attendance of youth into the services.
3. Several representors (for example numbers 29, 30 and 31) mention the Reverend Linda Maslen and say that when she was there the church was starting to see a real growth with a resident vicar in the village who had energy, passion and the desire for mission work in Siddal and worked well with the scouts to encourage them to attend services. They say she was "taken away to open a new fancy church in Bradford." They say that if they have a vicar in the village, the church will grow and they do not want money wasted on new churches but spent, instead, on the existing ones.
4. Several representors (for example 5, 12 and 48) say St Mark's is the last remaining central point and the last place of worship in Siddal. They say closure would have a detrimental impact on the worshippers and the community; they point out that alternative places of worship are not easily accessible from Siddal due to poor public transport and "geographical difficulties for walking". One representor (number 30) asks you not to expect the people of Siddal to travel for worship to Halifax Minster which is overcrowded and is not suitable for people with mobility issues.
5. There is concern from several representors (for example numbers 2, 4, 7, 12, 14, 15, 22 and 71) that the church offers so much to the local community that without it, many people will have nowhere to go and will become isolated. They say many groups are held at the church and without them people will not get the help and support they need; children will not be able to access the current

opportunities anywhere else in Siddal. Groups such as the Craft and Natter group; a general once-a-month invitation to share a warm meal and socialise; the RSPCA who use it for training; and other groups which meet three times a week. One representor (number 35) says that Siddal is a low-income area and is one of the poorest areas of Calderdale and another (number 14) says that at a time when people are being affected by the cost of living, mental health etc. Siddal needs this church to remain open.

6. Many representations (including numbers 39, 41, 43 and 44) are from families whose children attend the local scout group, be it Squirrels, Beavers, Cubs, Scouts, or Explorers. They say the environment makes them feel safe and secure, there is a sense of care and kindness, family, community, and confidence. They look on St Marks' as being part of their village. Several Scout leaders (numbers 13,14, 35, 36, and 41-46) one of whom is a devout Muslim, who fully understands the need to have a place of worship where one can cleanse one's soul and get closer to our Lord, reinforce this concern and object to the closure as it will have a detrimental effect for scouting within the Halifax district. The scout group would no longer have a meeting place which in turn would affect the many children who currently attend who would no longer be able to learn essential life-skills.
7. Twelve letters were also received from young people from the scout group asking for the church not to be closed.
8. The churchwarden and scout leader (number 12) asks if the church closes whether the scout group could rent the church, transferring all responsibilities to the Scout charity. He says that repairs would be carried out using the money in the account for heating repairs and suggests a covenant stating the land could not be sold for development for around 100 years. He stresses that Halifax district scouts have a team of builders, electricians, plumbers, and roofers who would work to make St Mark's warm and dry; and repair any other issues that may arise.
9. Several representors (including number 12) believe the church has been neglected over the years with little or no support to address issues such as the heating, which if it had been looked at when it was first broken, would not need replacing now. Another says that although the church has not had sufficient support from the residents, it has not had support from the Church hierarchy either - with the vicarage becoming vacant, church services being reduced to one per month and no residing vicar: the village seemed lost.
10. Several representors (including numbers 14, 30, 33 and 52) talk about the finances, one asking why there has been no discussion about selling the reasonably sized piece of land at the back of the church, which he says is held by the Diocesan Board of Finance as custodian trustees for the PCC, to fund repairs. Another points out that over £22,0000 has been raised by the church and community towards a new heating system. One also mentions the regular income from the phone-mast on top of the tower. Another asks if an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund might be considered and bearing in mind that St

Mark's has a kitchen, lounge, and hall, perhaps a café/coffee bar franchise as there is currently no facility of that kind in the village. One (number 14) asks why other avenues have not been looked at. Why have events not been organised to attract people into church, to make it more open, to hold multi-faith events, to start a community fridge on site to help those who are struggling? It is pointed out that there are extensive funding opportunities in the local area for community purposes, whether they are from Community Foundation for Calderdale, UKSPF, the West Yorkshire Mayoral Fund or elsewhere.

11. Another representor (number 40) explains her vision for St Mark's to become a Christian Community-run centre and church and details her ideas for multi-sectional areas for the building and the activities that could be run. She believes God came to her giving her a name for the centre "The Mark Two Centre" and giving her inspiration to further explore the ideas in her vision.
12. A couple of representors (numbers 23 and 38) explain that the church is divided: the eastern end remains 'the church' and the back of the building has become the hall, kitchen, lounge for meetings and upstairs rooms for Sunday school.
13. Some refer to the many Christian stained-glass windows, carvings, silverware, and other artefacts that have historical importance and should be preserved for the people of Siddal, including the War memorial to the Siddal soldiers that died in the two World Wars.
14. Other representors (numbers 20 and 38) wish to know what will become of the ashes in the 'garden of remembrance' if the church closes. One representor says she has reserved a space next to her husband's ashes and says she will be devastated if this is not possible.

Summary of the letters of comment

15. The LLM licensed to St Mark's (number 67) says that since the petition for closure was made, the church has seen a bit of a "revival" with the congregation size doubling to around 20, including people who are willing to put time and effort into trying to build the church up. She believes it is worth considering giving St Mark's a 'stay of execution' for a set time to see whether it continues to grow. She emphasises that there is a strong feeling of betrayal by the 'Church authorities' as it seems that every time something good starts to happen, the CofE authorities come and stamp it out: the most recent being taking the Reverend Linda Maslen away before she had finished serving her curacy. However, she acknowledges that the building itself is 'a wreck' and hopes and prays that if it is not possible to retain the building, the diocese will support them in setting up alternative premises.
16. The Operations Manager at Halifax Minster (number 68) (*the parish church of the other parish in the benefice*) states that Halifax Minster has had oversight of St Mark's for many years. In his first year as Operations Manager, St Mark's had no active churchwarden and he was involved in organising the services, events, building maintenance etc. He says that he has 'mentored' the current

Churchwarden, who is also the Group Scout Leader, in his first year and says he is clearly keen for the church to remain open for community use. He also states there is a feeling of betrayal by the threatened withdrawal of the church, especially of family members of those whose ashes are buried in the Memorial Garden. He believes the people of Siddal have been let down and is saddened that the Minster has not got sufficient capacity to offer any additional support to run St Mark's. He believes the building is ideal for community use and although it has substantial maintenance issues, he feels Siddal deserves investment.

17. Another (number 69) states that although there may not be a large, active congregation the church has/does play an important role in the community which, by its nature, has always been isolated from other parts of Halifax, by its geography and very limited public transport. She says that should the church close, the opportunity for an indirect influence on the community through contact with church membership would be lost.

Summary of the Representors' supplementary views

18. Supplementary comments were received by two representors against the draft Scheme. Pauline Smith says she hopes the church will be restored and reopened and that it is needed in the village. Paul Rogers raises a number of concerns and questions, including about the length of time he had to provide additional comments compared to the time the Bishop took to respond. He also says that the data provided by the Bishop was inaccurate while the health and safety issues are questioned as a possible tactic to enable a swift and permanent closure outcome. He is also surprised that local parishioners have not heard that the PCC now agreed with the closure and would welcome an open meeting.

Annex B – Hearing minute

Church Commissioners

Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee

**Public hearing at the Cedar Court Hotel, Lindley Moor Road, Ainley Top,
Huddersfield, HD3 3RH**

29 October 2024

Diocese of Leeds: Church of Saint Mark, Siddal

The hearing was chaired by the Venerable Simon Fisher (Deputy Chair of the Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee (MPCPC) and Archdeacon of St Helens and Warrington).

Also in attendance were members of the MPCPC:

- The Right Revd Ian Bishop, Bishop of Thetford (via Zoom)
- Simon Cawte
- Morag Ellis KC
- The Revd Canon Clare MacLaren
- Dr Cathy Rhodes
- The Revd Christopher Smith (via Zoom)

Also in attendance were Wendy Matthews (the Committee Secretary) and Paul Stevenson (the Commissioners' Deputy Official Solicitor), supported by various members of staff. 28 members of the public attended.

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

Introduction

The Chair welcomed everyone to the proceedings and read the prepared introduction to the hearing. The members of the Committee introduced themselves, followed by the Committee Secretary and the Deputy Official Solicitor (DOS).

The Revd Canon Clare MacLaren opened the meeting with a prayer.

The Chair confirmed that none of the members of the Committee present had a conflict of interest in relation to the case, however, in the interests of transparency, the Revd Canon Clare MacLaren had disclosed her professional and personal relationship with the Revd Canon Hilary Barber and the Venerable Bill Braviner. Similarly, Dr Cathy Rhodes disclosed her personal relationship with the Right Revd Toby Howarth, Bishop of Bradford. The Chair noted that he knew Bill Braviner through the archdeacons' network. There were no objections or queries from the floor.

Note of the Hearing

Representors against the draft Scheme

Mrs Jacqueline Lumb

Note: There was a long pause in the middle of Mrs Lumb's statement during which technical issues with the video link for MPCPC members attending via Zoom were resolved. Mrs Lumb's statement was, nonetheless, heard in its entirety.

Mrs Lumb said that she became aware of the proposals to close the church through a notice in the local newspaper; it was not announced to the congregation until the next service in church. She said she did not understand it because the numbers were growing.

Mrs Lumb explained her personal and familial links to the church, including: her baptism in 1942; her great grandmother purchased the hymn boards when the church was built; her mother and aunt had a double wedding at the start of the Second World War; her father was a churchwarden; and, she attended Sunday School with her sister and then became Sunday School teachers. She was also part of the Guide Cadets and became a leader and they attended the parade every first Sunday of the month.

The land at the back of the church was originally intended as a vicarage, but another large house nearby was offered, so the land became allotments. Mrs Lumb and members of her family had allotments for which they paid rent, which was used as income for the church. She says this land was taken away by the former Diocese of Wakefield for a planned housing development which did not materialise, and it has since remained unused.

Mrs Lumb attended the Knit and Natter group. She said it was originally called the Upholstery and Craft group and had completed projects for the church. The group was unable to use the church now and could no longer do upholstery in their new location (the house of one of the members). They were not able to meet weekly anymore and so had met only four times since 10 July.

Since the closure, Mrs Lumb said she had not been able to attend church in Halifax. She went to the Minster once, but her leg was painful, and the exertion meant she had to sleep for the rest of the afternoon. She also said that they have been told they could go to the church of All Saints, Halifax, but that required two buses or a very steep walk. The buses were infrequent. To attend All Saints, Mrs Lumb said she would have to catch the 9:12 bus from Siddal and wait for 35 minutes in the bus station to arrive in time for the service. To get home, she would have to leave the service early to catch the bus at 11:25 because the buses were only every two hours.

Mrs Lumb no longer received notices because they were only being sent on smart phones. There was previously a church magazine, then a monthly letter, but those stopped before the arrival of the curate, Linda Maslen.

In terms of fundraising, Mrs Lumb said that efforts to raise money for the heating were started by the Reverend Colin but, after he completed his three years, it was continued by the churchwardens. They tried to obtain grants, but they were not

successful, and she asked why not, especially when (she understood) other churches had been given lots of money to repair their roofs etc.

Mrs Lumb said that the decision to close the church was taken too soon after Covid and they were not given enough time to start recovering. She had asked for support in getting the church repaired so they could once again attend services and activities in the church. Mrs Lumb spoke about her own situation, saying she felt isolated without the church, but she knew she could speak to God when she was down.

In the Garden of Remembrance, there were 16 members of her family, including her parents. Mrs Lumb's husband died at the end of January 2020, and she had been unable to bury his ashes after being advised to keep them until things had returned to normal.

Mrs Lumb said she felt let down about not being able to receive communion and not seeing the clergy for months. Without their Lay Reader to take services, she does not know what they would have done. She said she only saw the curate for a baptism and once for interment of ashes. Although aware that clergy were busy, Mrs Lumb said she felt they are always left out and concluded with a request for help.

Committee questions to Mrs Jaqueline Lumb

Do you know the rough number of people attending services before the building was shut?

Mrs Lumb said that, when the church closure was announced, the church was growing. The congregation was around 15 which had increased since the figures during Covid.

Do you think there would be support from people locally to support fundraising and efforts to repair the building?

Mrs Lumb said that lots of local people used to attend events and coffee mornings. When the Reverend Linda Maslen arrived, she raised money by abseiling down the church tower. The congregation continued to try to raise funds.

Is there anything else that you would have liked to say during the consultation which you were not able to express?

Mrs Lumb said that the church opened during the First World War and that every pew end was different, representing different Allied countries, for example, carved elephants representing India. She asked how many other churches had the same representation of countries which helped us.

What would be a good outcome for you, from the hearing today?

A good outcome for Mrs Lumb would be for the church to be open again.

You mentioned a Lay Reader taking services, please could you say who that was?

Mrs Lumb confirmed the Lay Reader was Ms Trish Boyd, who was also present.

Mr Philip Naylor

Mr Naylor introduced himself as the current churchwarden and Scout leader of the 25th Halifax St Mark's Siddal group. Mr Naylor said that numbers had been growing since Covid and that organised groups were attending which was in line with the Church of England's priorities for youth. The Scout group were temporarily using another church on the other side of the valley and numbers have dwindled. The group was still using the St Mark's name. Mr Naylor also referenced the Church of England's aim for churches to become hubs. He said that the church had worked really hard to become a hub, including the Knit and Natter group. As a result, the numbers attending the church were growing.

Since the closure of the church, Mr Naylor says that there has been a lot of neglect. Mr Naylor also explained that the PCC treasurer had been struggling to access the parish bank accounts.

Referring to the suggestion that future reorganisation would involve the transfer of the area of the parish of Siddal to the parish of Halifax, All Saints, Mr Naylor said that there was no direct bus link, and parishioners would have to get four buses overall, which was particularly unrealistic in winter.

Mr Naylor said that although he did not live in Siddal, he had chosen to become churchwarden because he fell in love with the building and felt that they needed someone to care for the church. He said that there had been no pastoral care since January and no provision had been made for the elderly. One member of the congregation was 101 years old and could not be expected to attend worship elsewhere.

Again, referring to the Church of England's priorities of becoming younger and becoming hubs, Mr Naylor said that the church had received no support from above, yet he thought that other dioceses and churches would get this support. Mr Naylor used an example of a disused nightclub being converted into a church as an example of such financial support. Mr Naylor said that, as churchwarden, he felt very let down by the process.

Committee questions to Mr Philip Naylor

To clarify, what is your perspective on the numbers attending services?

Mr Naylor said that there were three attendees at one point, but this had grown to 15 and there were also some services which would attract 35-40. Referring to the PCC's voting for closure, Mr Naylor said that the original vote in October 2021 was passed by four votes to two. In March of 2024, Mr Naylor said that they were directed that it was pointless to have another vote because the process had already been started, so at the meeting on 11th March, they were directed that they did not need to vote. Mr Naylor was part of the PCC for the initial vote and also at the subsequent meeting on 11th March.

Do you think there would be support from people locally to support fundraising efforts to repair the building?

Mr Naylor said that the area was “very poor and working class” but asked why the building couldn’t be repaired and rented out. He said that other groups had looked at using the building but had been told that it was not a viable option. Mr Naylor said it surely made sense for the people of Siddal to have some pastoral care.

Regarding the land behind the church (previously allotment land), what use of the land has been considered and has the sale/lease of the land to release money been explored?

Mr Naylor said that he had looked into the land with the Diocesan Registrar and was told that it was owned by the DBF on trust for the PCC.

Who was the Chair of the meeting when it was said it was not worth voting?

Mr Naylor said that the Reverend Canon Hilary Barber (incumbent) was chairing the meeting.

Please tell us more about the treasurer’s issues accessing the church accounts.

Mr Naylor said the treasurer had spent hours, weeks and months waiting for the banks to change the mandates. They were in touch with the previous treasurer, too. When the church closed in January, the bills were still being paid and the treasurer stepped down because it was “too much”. Access to the account still was not sorted; the bills were being paid but they could not see what was in the account. The parish share payment was still being paid to the diocese.

What would be a good outcome for you, from the hearing today?

A good outcome for Mr Naylor would be to have a fresh start from scratch. The nightclub in Bradford which was turned from a nightclub into a church showed that this was possible. He felt the Scout group, the Knit and Natter group, and the RSPCA group which had used the building for puppy training deserved to have a chance and asked if they could make it happen.

Councillor Joe Thompson

Cllr Thompson thanked the Committee for holding the meeting and said he understood that this was quite unusual. The Councillor responded to most of the main issues identified in the Committee paper.

Considering whether there was a continuing pastoral need for the building and if closure was appropriate given the significant repairs needed, the Councillor said that there remained a continuing pastoral need for the building. He acknowledged that there were some differences since the original Scheme was published. For example, the organised groups and congregation were now using buildings elsewhere and there was greater understanding about the level of repairs needed at the building. However, Cllr Thompson noted that there was significant public interest in the building and church. He said that there has been interest in public fundraising and there were third sector groups and organisations locally who could potentially help by

working in partnership with the Church. The Councillor noted that the area had missed out on public funding, for example from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Cllr Thompson noted that those living in Siddal had issues accessing worship. Siddal was a long and thin area which was poorly served by buses.

In terms of alternative provision for worship and other community groups/events, Cllr Thompson noted that, throughout the papers, there was reference to other community venues being able to host community events. The Councillor noted that many of these venues were not suitable for community events, for example the Rugby Club was more of a professional organisation which was not available for community use, and the Cricket Club had a similar set up. With regard to the possible future link with All Saints, Halifax, Cllr Thompson said the areas were not a natural pairing.

Considering whether the needs and views of the uniformed groups and other external users should be given greater weight in the decision to close, the Councillor referred to Mrs Lumb's comments about isolation. He said those comments were sad and telling and, while the PCC voted for closure, he thought that neither group should be given more or less weight. Cllr Thompson said the weight of the community feeling should be given just as much weight as the PCC's vote.

Responding to the Committee's issue about whether the closure would, on balance, further the mission of the Church, Cllr Thompson said that at least one person was unable to attend worship elsewhere. In addition, there was a danger of the uniformed groups who were encouraged to worship at the church no longer doing so, which would reduce numbers of attendees overall.

The Councillor said he appreciated the comprehensive response from the Bishop, but he considered that there had not been enough consideration of the needs of the local community by the Bishop. Siddal was within the top 50% for indices of multiple deprivation and the area had a disproportionately high crime rate and poor living conditions. Cllr Thompson said the closure of the church would lead to increased isolation and lack of a community hub. There was evidence, he said, that youth engagement reduces crime, so there was the potential that, if closure went ahead, it would result in worsening outcomes in Siddal. However, the Councillor acknowledged the need for funding and engagement for repairing the building.

Responding to the question about whether there was sufficient assurance about the future structure of the parish, Cllr Thompson said that there was a lack of clarity around the future. The response about the ashes and remains in the Garden of Remembrance remained vague. There was a potential outcome referenced in the Bishop's response about moving remains which the Councillor said was wholly unsuitable. He also said that demolition would also be inappropriate, but he understood that this was not for discussion or consideration at this stage.

Committee questions to Councillor Joe Thompson

Are there any other buildings within the Siddal area which could take on a similar community function?

The Councillor referred to his previous comments about the Rugby and Cricket Clubs. There was also an Ex-Serviceman's Club, but he thought this was not appropriate for a community venue, where there was a lack of staff capacity. Some things have already moved away from Siddal, and he said there would not be a location for residents' contact.

Is there anything else that you would have liked to say during the consultation process which you were not able to express?

Cllr Thompson reflected on people's emotional attachment to the building and thought he had not put this forward in his original representation, but it was at the heart of the matter. He had attended so he could advocate on behalf of those who had such a close attachment to the building.

What would be a good outcome for you from the hearing today?

The Councillor would like there to be a package of support to empower residents and parishioners to continue with the church. He noted that there was a feeling of being left behind. Cllr Thomson was also willing to support where he could but felt that support from the Church of England was also needed.

Are there any potential housing developments in the Siddal area? Is the population likely to increase?

The Councillor referred to two housing developments in the area. One development, for 110 properties in Siddal, had recently been approved, so construction was likely to begin within two years. The second development was the largest development in Calderdale, with around 450 houses proposed, and would likely fall within parts of the parish boundaries.

Would section 106 money be available from these housing developments?

Morag Ellis KC provided a brief explanation of S106 funding for attendees. Section 106 funding can be released for community projects within the area of a housing development as part of the agreement with local councils when planning permission is granted.

The Councillor said that some section 106 money should be available for both projects, particularly the larger one, but that may mainly fall within a slightly different area.

Speakers in favour of the draft Scheme

The Reverend Robb Sutherland, Area Dean

The Reverend Robb Sutherland introduced himself as a vicar in the area for the past 12 years and now as Area Dean. He said the matter was very emotive and no one wanted to see the closure of the church because buildings hold lots of communal memory. However, Mr Sutherland did not believe that the building was still serving the community due to its condition and its location. St Mark's, Siddal had been under capacity for a while, and he did not think that there was a sustainable future for the building. Mr Sutherland referred to lots of other nearby worshipping communities within Halifax but also within Elland (which, for the benefit of the Committee, was located to the south of their maps). He also considered closure to be in the best interests of the church and thought it was best for the community to decide how to invest in the future. In addition, Mr Sutherland thought there were other community buildings which could be used, as well.

Committee questions to the Reverend Robb Sutherland

Can you comment on the arrangements that were put in place after the building was shut? Do you think the pastoral arrangements are working well?

Mr Sutherland spoke from his view as Area Dean and said that he did not know the community at St Mark's well, so he did not know how well they would integrate with other communities, but it was noted that other nearby communities encompassed every tradition within the Church of England. He was not directly aware of the pastoral arrangements since the church has been shut and noted that the Reverend Hilary Barber had had more considerable involvement. He understood St Mark's to have been a daughter church of All Saints, Halifax, originally and hoped the parish might sit better in that arrangement in the future.

There was reference in the paperwork to a 0.5 stipendiary clergy post which had not been filled for around four years. Have there been attempts to fill that post?

Mr Sutherland was not aware if there had been any attempts to fill the post.

What would be a good outcome for you from the hearing today?

Mr Sutherland would like the needs of the community in Siddal to be served one way or another.

In terms of public transport, how realistic is it for people in Siddal to worship at Halifax, All Saints?

Mr Sutherland was aware of the general infrastructure around the time and noted that the town was beholden to the bus companies, making it increasingly difficult for people to get around in Halifax. In his own benefice, the bus link disappeared but they found ways to make it possible to worship together.

The Reverend Canon Hilary Barber, Incumbent

The Reverend Hilary Canon Barber took the Committee through a number of points from the Committee paper:

- Referring to the comment that the minster was overcrowded and not suitable for people with mobility issues (paragraph 7, page 6/150 of pack), he said that the minster was able to seat 750 people, and it had designated wheelchair spaces and ramps, so it was rarely at capacity and had access for all;
- Referring to the comment that the area was a low-income area which was one of the poorest in Calderdale (paragraph 8, page 6/150 of pack), he said that there were other wards within Halifax which had relatively worse poverty. He considered those in Siddal generally to be in employment but with no disposable income. Responding to the wider point in the paragraph, about user groups at St Mark's, he said that the organised groups were not paying rent (including the Scouts and Knit and Natter group), so the idea of building a sustainable base from which to do ministry had been challenging for some time;
- In response to paragraph 9 (page 6/150 of pack), Canon Barber said that he worked with his ecumenical colleagues in Siddal;
- Responding to the idea that the Scouts could take over the building (paragraph 11, page 7/150 of pack), Canon Barber said that he had met with the head of the Scout District and this had not been raised, nor had there ever been anything to indicate they had the financial ability to run a building such as St Mark's;
- In terms of fundraising and repair/long-term running costs (in reference to paragraph 13, page 7/150 of pack), Canon Barber said that, following a pastoral breakdown between All Saints and the Minster, they undertook a community audit to identify the needs of the community. That audit did not result in any money for repairs nor any commitment for using the building with money attached;
- Adding to the ministerial context provided in paragraph 33 (pages 10-11 of pack), Canon Barber said that he was asked to provide some oversight of Siddal by the then Bishop of Pontefract in the Diocese of Wakefield and he would have another curate to be an additional resource for providing pastoral care. A curate was provided but was taken to another post after 18 months. Canon Barber said that the Minster is open every day and provided 17 services a week. He described the worshippers at the Minster as a disparate community. The staffing for the benefice was himself, and a House for Duty priest (three days a week providing pastoral care) which meant he had no capacity to provide for additional resources for the people of Siddal. The church at Siddal would require more support because it had no heating, was not paying its parish share and it owed money to the previous Priest in Charge, who had loaned the church money to pay for the removal of plasterwork to keep the church safe and open.
- Responding to representation 51 (Carol Oswin) which said he did not support their fundraising efforts, Canon Barber said he hoped he had been entirely honest that an additional jumble sale or event would not raise the necessary funds. He had tried to be honest about the scale of what was needed. He said the PCC had met with the Archdeacon and Area Bishop to understand

the issues on 11th March 2024 and it was clear that the pause in the process needed to be undone. The current PCC, consisting of 6 people, was not in a position to provide the leadership required to maintain the building. Canon Barber also confirmed the issues with accessing the accounts because HSBC had lost the bank mandate at least twice. They were in the process of handing over to a new treasurer.

Committee questions to the Reverend Canon Hilary Barber

Can you comment on the arrangements for the congregation that were put in place after the building was shut?

Canon Barber said that he has continued to take weddings, funerals and baptisms for the people of Siddal. He also said he was in regular contact with people who attended the Minster.

You mentioned that there was no sustainable business plan, and you have concluded that this PCC could not make a sustainable business plan. Is it possible that there could be a sustainable business plan with a different PCC, or is closure the only option?

Canon Barber said that in his view the current PCC did not have the skillset to create its own business plan. He added that 15/20 years ago, there was a successful play group which brought in income, but this was now the nursery attached to the school. The children's contract in Calderdale was run by a group of which he is the Chair. Even if they were able to find the capital monies for an unlisted building – and Canon Barber was not aware of any local philanthropists or wider funding – he questioned where the long-term financial strategy and input would come from. He said there was no disposable income within the parish for most people and also said the church had missed out on s106 money as well as consistently missing out on other funding. Without a long-term business plan, he questioned why anyone would invest. It was noted that it was inherently difficult to find capital for repairs and groups to use the building. He was unsure if a different PCC with more relevant skills could be able to source finances in a deprived area like Siddal.

Has the parish been paying its Parish Share?

Canon Barber confirmed that the parish was still paying towards its parish share from its bank account. It was paying £600 a month because they have been unable to stop the standing order.

Who is on the ministry team?

Canon Barber confirmed he was full-time stipendiary, there was a House for Duty priest who worked three days a week and a full-time training curate. There was also a Licensed Lay Reader (Trish Boyd) who had picked up worship in Siddal.

Please could you say more about the disposable income in the parish?

Canon Barber said that there were more deprived areas within Halifax. The typical view was that people in Siddal were in work but had no disposable income, i.e. they were just making ends meet.

What would be a good outcome for you from the hearing today?

Canon Barber acknowledged the process was painful and that, whatever happened to the church, care needed to be provided for the members of the congregation. If there was a magic wand, he would want the Church Commissioners to provide a capital grant and money for a priest, but he recognised that the Diocese of Leeds was running a significant deficit, so this was unlikely to happen.

Speakers representing the diocese

The Venerable Bill Braviner, Archdeacon of Halifax

The Archdeacon said that the overall situation at Siddal was one of decline over decades, despite some recent growth. He said there was not a willingness for people who were using the building for community activities to go deeper and seek baptism or confirmation. The electoral roll had remained small, as had services other than parades. Previous attempts for renewal and growth had not been successful. There had been limited growth with the arrival of certain individuals, such as the curate, but this had stopped when the individual moved on. Despite the current clergy provision for the benefice, there had been no growth. For clarity, the Archdeacon said that, from a diocesan perspective, they did not consider there to be a vacant 0.5 post in the benefice. The diocese was struggling to find curates and places for curates, so it was very unlikely that the benefice would now receive a second curate. Even though the church was the only Christian denomination left within the community, there had still been no growth.

There had not been any significant change in the financial health of the parish. The parish share had been paid in part for some time. The amount requested was reduced but the parish continued to pay £7,000pa. The Minster had provided some support at no cost with matters such as administration, printing costs, and fire prevention.

The main issue was the church building and its internal and external structural defects, dry rot, electrics and lack of heating. The Quinquennial Inspection (QI) reports consistently referred to recommended works not being carried out, including urgent works. The most recent QI report of 2023 advised over £100,000 of urgent works which excludes the urgent repair works to make the building safe – the extent of those costs was unknown, but it was believed they would be substantial. Income would still be needed for the rest of the work. £23,000 had been raised for the heating work, but this was in a restricted fund which could not be used for other repairs.

The parish sits at the less deprived end of parishes within Halifax itself, outside the top 10%. Siddal is, at heart, a working-class community, but unemployment in the community is not high. Help from other communities to repair the heating was not successful due to the level of deprivation in the area. The Scouts and other groups used the building rent free. The Archdeacon said that the Scouts had moved to another church and that other venues could host community activities. He said that the purpose of the church was not just to provide a community centre and there needed to be a focus on encouraging worship. The suggestion by some

respondents that there had been a lack of support to help bring in money was seen as an issue for the parish and PCC. There had been a lack of applications for funding, but it was also noted that the church was unlisted, and there had been no history of working with other bodies locally.

There was also a lack of general parish administration, for example a lack of mission returns. After most of the original PCC resigned following their request for closure in 2021, the Archdeacon met with the new PCC and new Area Bishop to discuss the situation. Regretfully, a decision was made in front of the Archdeacon and Area Bishop. The Archdeacon said that nobody wanted to see church buildings close, but the reality was that the costs for repairing and maintaining the building were beyond what the parish or the PCC had the capacity to raise.

The Archdeacon said that there were a number of other churches locally, e.g. the Minster and All Saints, which could make pastoral provision for the parish, but this would be the subject of separate proposals.

Committee questions to the Venerable Bill Braviner

Has the diocese given any support or advice to help the PCC and church community find funds for the repair and maintenance of the building?

The Archdeacon said the Diocese of Leeds has a Diocesan Finance and Stewardship Department for advising parishes when requested. This could be called upon. He was unsure if this had been used in this case, but it has been available.

Does the diocese have any funds to support the necessary repairs to the building?

The Archdeacon said that the diocese does have some very limited funds to help with repairs, but there was nothing available on the scale required at Siddal.

The representors wrote movingly about the positive impact of ministry of the curate, the Reverend Linda Maslen, and how she was able to support and revitalise the church community. Do you think that the temporary provision that has been put in place since she left has been effective? And if so, why?

The growth in the congregation from three to 15 was about coming out of Covid back to the regular size of congregation. The Archdeacon said that there are always occasions where someone has some missional energy which leads to growth, but experience shows that such growth is not always sustainable. The Reverend Linda Maslen did have success with growth, but the Archdeacon was unsure if someone else would have been able to come in and have a similar impact. However, the Archdeacon said that they did not have the funding to replace Ms Maslen.

We are aware of the outline of plans for the future reorganisation of the parish. Can you explain why the diocesan team opted for two schemes: the closure and then a further pastoral scheme? Have other options been considered in relation to the next stage of pastoral reorganisation?

The Archdeacon said that the option which was under active consideration was the link with All Saints. He said the Minster did not have capacity, having also taken on another vacant post. The incumbent of All Saints was thought to have more capacity and understood that their role would encompass the area of Siddal (subject to

Mission and Pastoral Measure approval). The Archdeacon thought it was the link which made the most pastoral sense. The benefice of Southowram (St Anne-in-the-Grove), to the east, did not have the capacity and its location at the top of the hill from Siddal meant it would be difficult to travel to. Elland, to the south, might have had capacity with the priest due to retire, but the Archdeacon thought it would create a very big benefice, and he was unsure if they would serve Siddal sufficiently.

The order of the proposals predated the Archdeacon's appointment, but his understanding was that they had just appointed an interim priest at All Saints, so they thought it would be better for her to get settled before starting a process of pastoral reorganisation.

Is there scope to merge the parish with a stronger PCC that might be able to support the retention and repair of St Mark's as a chapel of ease?

The Archdeacon thought it might be possible to trial the idea of a sustainable future as part of a wider parish, but he did not think that there was this capacity for this kind of work, nor the money available, for this to be a realistic outcome.

If the Scheme were to be approved, it would leave the parish without a place of worship. What consideration is there for the licensing of an alternative space?

The Archdeacon said that he would try to get something going locally between the Minster and All Saints and license a place temporarily.

Please could you explain what is meant by a gathering congregation in the diocesan rationale?

The Archdeacon explained that this meant that people did not generally live within the parish.

How are diocesan decisions taken regarding the number of posts within benefices?

The Archdeacon said that all parish share goes towards ministry provision, so a lack of parish share has a direct impact on the number of posts which can be afforded. When the diocese is looking at posts, they look across episcopal areas and deaneries and, in common with lots of other places, there had been a reduction in posts. Benefices had been asked to work together more to try to balance the way clergy are deployed to provide ministry cover and clergy support.

Please could you say more about the PCC voting for closure, particularly regarding the evidence that there was not a vote in 2024?

The Archdeacon acknowledged there was no doubt about the vote in 2021. In March 2024, the Area Bishop and the Archdeacon had a meeting with the PCC. The Archdeacon said that there was a clear discussion about the way forward and, when asked if that was the decision, the answer was that "there isn't really any choice".

Final Comments

Councillor Joe Thompson responded to the comment around the suitability of other buildings for worship by the Archdeacon. The Councillor said that St Mark's was uniquely positioned, in terms of geography and type of building, for being a community hub. The Cricket and Ex-Serviceman's Clubs were not central, while the Rugby Club was a professional organisation and did not have community links. He also thought that some of the future proposals for reorganisation did not consider the specific issues of the geography of Calderdale with hills and bus routes. There were issues for the people of Siddal when getting to other areas, such as Elland, which would mean that existing parishioners would be unable to get to other areas.

Paul Rogers (a representor against the draft Scheme) thanked the Committee for holding the meeting locally. Mr Rogers said he had been worshipping at St Mark's since the early 1960s and he was against the proposals. He felt that the subject relating to the condition of the building and the proposal should have some degree of separation.

Mr Rogers spoke about Cllr Thompson's comments about planning permissions. In addition to the two developments Cllr Thompson referred to, there were additional planning applications for extensions and other property development which could also increase the number of residents in the parish. In the papers, there was reference to two separate figures of around 2,000 within the parish, so if each development had an average of 2.4 residents per house, there would be a 33% increase in the total population of the parish.

Mr Rogers also referred to the subject of the treasurer. He said that, in the early part of the summer, he was asked if he wanted to stand as treasurer. He was willing and able to do so whatever the outcome of these proposals because there was a need for someone with good knowledge of accounts. He had recently retired from his role as Head of Finance and Company Secretary for a fairly significant charity with a large property portfolio, including some listed buildings, follies and other large properties which required huge responsibility. He found that the charity needed to draw in expertise from outside, which is the same elsewhere. From the documents before the Committee, he observed that there was a reliance on the PCC for dealing with and handling lots of onerous responsibilities for looking after the church. He said that these were people who volunteered their time, and it did not look like they had had a lot of support over the years.

Regarding the finances, Mr Rogers noted that anyone could see that there had been a sorry state of affairs for finances of the church. Two churches in the area had received funding for roof repairs (the Methodist church and St Paul's Kings Cross from the National Churches Trust). Mr Rogers also thought there was the possibility of funding from private trusts and organisations, for example the Headley Trust and Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts.

Mr Rogers noted that Historic England had submitted a comment saying they did not have a comment, but he asked if anyone had been invited from Historic England to see if the church building was worthy of listing.

Mr Rogers also did not think that the building was irreparably damaged. He understood the need to have consideration about funding, but he noted that there

could be some income from letting the vicarage which could produce an income of £12,000 per year. Alternatively, without a resident vicar, he asked if it could be sold as an asset. The Local Authority Environmental Report had also not been provided in the papers.

Finally, Mr Rogers noted that people were very passionate and thought it would be good to engender more of this passion. He also noted the Area Dean's comment about a potential link with Elland and said that it was not easily accessible from the parish.

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking everyone for attending, before everyone joined together to say the Grace.