

DIOCESE OF SHEFFIELD

In the Consistory Court

Her Honour Judge Sarah Singleton QC
Chancellor

In the Matter of St John the Evangelist Abbeydale and Millhouses

Judgment

1. Introduction

The Petitioners seek permission to undertake extensive works of internal re-ordering. The works constitute part 2 of a long term reordering plan, Phase 1 of which was permitted and undertaken in 2015.

This church is without an incumbent at present and the Petitioners are the church wardens and the assistant PCC treasurer who is also the project manager.

The church, constructed between 1873 and 1876 is unlisted, it is not in a tree preservation area or a designated wildlife area.

Public Notice of the works was displayed from 8th November 2021. A certificate is not yet available. No objections have been lodged.

2. The works

- a) Direct access will be formed into the aisles from the two porches with new oak boarded folding doors externally. The south-west porch will be fitted with power assisted doors internally. Both porches will be fitted with barrier matting and new lighting.
- b) The south-west porch will be partitioned with an oak door into the former inner lobby to form a new teapoint/servery. The foundation stone will be relocated in the partition wall. The tea point/servery will be fitted with oak floor units, worktops, sink, refrigerator, water heaters, lighting and heating. A folding oak door and panelled spandrel will be fitted over the counter into the nave. The gas meter will be relocated externally.
- c) An accessible wc with storage and baby-change facilities will be formed in the north-west lobby with an oak sliding door into the porch. The former door opening will be partitioned from the nave and an oak-framed notice board and book shelves fitted to match the tea point/servery counter and hatch.
- d) The two pairs of stained glass memorial windows removed from the porches will be fitted in the aisle windows.

- e) The nave and north aisle benches will be disposed of and the bench platforms removed. A new stained softwood floor to match the south aisle will be formed level with the surrounding concrete floors and will be insulated.
- f) Two new oak framed and boarded storage units will be fitted against the north aisle wall and one fitted against the south aisle wall to match the existing storage units.
- g) 120 new oak, linkable, cushioned chairs with bookshelves will be located in the nave. The cushion colour is to be royal blue.
- h) An oak nave altar will be provided.
- i) The existing oak-cased AV unit will be relocated from the north aisle to the nave against the adjoining pillar.
- j) A new LED grid-spot lighting scheme will be installed in the nave, aisles and chancel. The existing light shields in the chancel will be removed.

Very detailed specifications are available prepared by church architect Smith and Roper and there has been early consultation with the local planning authority.

The cost of the works is estimated at £231,270. The PCC has the sum of £131,270 available to start the project and plans are in place to raise the remaining £100,000.

Once the works are underway, worship at the church will need to take place elsewhere; the permission of the bishop has not yet been granted.

3. The history and significance of the church

This is not a listed church. It was constructed in 1873-74 thanks to generosity of local benefactor John Roberts whose wife, Sarah, is commemorated in a memorial window. The church was extended in 1937. A large portion of the funds for the extension came from a bequest of the original benefactor with the balance from other local benefactors. The original building was regarded as modest compared with other local contemporaneous churches and the present building is said to be largely the creation of the architect responsible for the 1937 extension, F Mansell Jenkinson FRIBA.

This is an active parish. Each Sunday there is an 8.00am said Communion Service and 10.00 am sung Parish Communion Service. Joint Parish Communion Services are held alternate months, or alternate weeks during August, with Holy Trinity, Millhouses. There are Christmas Nativity and Christingle services. There is an occasional sung Evensong at 6.30pm and choral services for Holy Week and Advent. There is a said Communion Service twice a month. Morning prayer is said every weekday morning. The church building is open for private prayer and meditation every weekday from 9.00am to 4.30pm.

Attendance at Parish Communion is normally 40 with attendance at the joint services of 100. Midweek services including Morning Prayer average 5 persons including a monthly Mothers' Union Service. Over 200 attend the Nativity and Christingle Services.

Provision is available for children in a dedicated area in the church and a children's session is held in the church hall during Sunday Services when children attend. A well-attended baby and toddlers group is held in the church hall on Friday mornings. The church building is used for choir practice weekly and choir concerts twice a year. The church hosts the annual Sheffield Cambrian Society Christmas service.

4. The need for the works

The purpose of the works is to enable more varied use of the building both in worship and for community events and to provide greater accessibility. The Petitioners consider that Phase 1 of the reordering proposals permitted in 2015 has already benefitted the church and increased accessibility, particularly for families.

They say in their statement of need:

The existing parish buildings are in full-use and are in great demand. The recent loss of community buildings locally has increased this demand.

Phase 2 of the re-ordering will continue the process of increasing accessibility and improving facilities and will better equip the church to meet a zero emissions target by 2030.

The Petitioners say:

- *There is need to make a more direct access into the church building for wheelchairs, prams, buggies and coffins.*
- *There is a need to provide an accessible toilet to include space for baby-change facilities.*
- *There is a need for a small servery to provide refreshments for community groups as well as members of the church.*
- *There is a need to make the entire nave and aisles generally accessible by removing the remaining bench platforms for greater community and church activities.*
- *There is a need to provide space for varying forms of worship including for fresh expressions of worship such as 'church in the round' with a nave altar and 'café church'.*
- *There is a need to make space for a variety of children's work and worship including 'Godly Play'.*
- *There is a need to replace the existing bench seating to provide varied seating arrangements for community and church meetings, activities and study groups.*
- *There is a need to provide space for larger musical and dramatic performances including choirs, music groups and orchestras.*
- *There is a need to provide a greater amount of convenient storage to serve various community users and church activities.*

- *There is a need to replace the existing failing lighting scheme and provide a lighting scheme in the nave, aisles and chancel that is both more energy efficient and more easily maintained. The lighting could be dimmable to vary the atmosphere.*
- *There is a need to reduce energy loss by providing draught proofing and underfloor insulation.*

There has been consultation with parishioners including a display of the floor plans and illustrations by the church architect in the church following an introduction by the vicar in May 2019. Although some reservations have been expressed, there has been a general welcome for the provision of a more direct access to the church building, for a more accessible building, an accessible toilet, a refreshment point and a new lighting scheme.

5. The DAC

The DAC recommended these works at their meeting of 21st September 2021 subject to the proviso:

1. That the parishes discuss with the inspecting architect the most appropriate colour for the upholstery on the chairs.
2. That the details of the concrete ring-beam come back to the committee for further recommendation.
3. That the details for the mounting of the stained glass come back to the committee for further recommendation.

The Petitioners have lodged the minutes of the PCC meeting when these provisos were accepted.

6. Conclusions and determination

The Petitioners assert that these works will have little impact on the overall architectural character and appearance of the building: I agree with them. The building will lose its remaining fixed seating and that will have some impact. However, the seating is of limited intrinsic value and its clearance makes way for a more flexible and usable open space served by proper facilities for both worship and community events. These proposals have been carefully planned and should be permitted. The timing of a petition for such a large project is always difficult. Faculty permission is needed both to start the project and, sometimes, to raise the balance of funds. The Petitioners are to be commended in getting as much of this project as possible ready for consideration. As the project unfolds, they should keep in close consultation with the DAC (as the Provisos require). They should also maintain contact with the planning authority and ensure that facilities for proper oversight by the planning authority is afforded when necessary.

HHJ Sarah Singleton QC
Chancellor
19th December 2021