

DIOCESE OF SHEFFIELD

In the Consistory Court

Her Honour Judge Sarah Singleton KC
Chancellor

In the matter of ST NICHOLAS, BRADFIELD

PETITION TO INSTALL A NEW KITCHEN, SERVERY AND LAVATORIES

JUDGMENT

Introduction

1. This short judgment is delivered urgently to enable the Petitioners to meet grant application deadlines coming up next week. St Nicholas, High Bradfield, is a grade 1 listed church of considerable national significance. However, the plans for approval have not prompted any opposition and therefore lengthy or discursive reasoning is not necessary.

The Works

2. These works have been in the planning for a number of years. The works comprise the installation of a new kitchen and servery and two toilets (one accessible including baby-changing facilities) on the north side of the church. The works will also include the introduction of a shallow ramp into the North side of the church where the new facilities would be located. The ramp is to replace a step which is an obstacle for those using wheelchairs and buggies and others who find it difficult to navigate steps.

Drainage is to be via a floor-mounted pump in the basement of the former boiler house, discharging to the main sewer.

The works have been put out to tender with the assistance of the QI architect for the Church. The PCC has selected their preferred contractor. The works are estimated to cost £150,000. The PCC holds £85,000 for the works and intends to raise the balance by seeking external grants.

The Church and Parish

3. St Nicholas is a Grade I listed, much admired medieval church in a beautiful rural setting in the High Bradfield Conservation Area within the Peak District National Park. The church mainly dates back to the mid to late 1400s but includes arcade piers from the 1100s and a Saxon cross brought to the site in 1886. More recently mid-twentieth-century fittings by George Pace have been introduced. The Church features in both Betjeman's "Best British Churches and in Simon Jenkins' "England's Thousand Best Churches."

4. The church holds weekly Sunday services at 10.30 am usually attended by 50 to 60 people. In addition the church is a centre for a number of other activities which are well attended.

This including bell-ringing (both hand and tower), a very active Mothers' Union, prayer and numbers of other activities and societies. Fund raising and other events are well attended it being noteworthy that local people who do not attend the church for worship attend events organised there in large numbers. The annual Music Festival held in the summer is a big draw. The acoustics of the church are excellent and prominent musicians are attracted to come and take part every year.

The Need for the Works

5. The need for the proposed works is acute and long-standing. The current kitchen is rudimentary and aging and I understand looks somewhat scruffy; it has no capacity for cooking and the area becomes congested easily. It is not fit to meet the needs of the parish.

6. The present toilet provision is wholly inadequate. There is no lavatory inside the church at all. The only permanent toilet is outside the church and churchyard down a steep and slippery cobbled lane; it is cold, unheated and access to it is difficult for the elderly and those with disabilities. It is not owned by the church. A hired Portaloo now stands at the church gate and is both unsightly and unsuitable for regular use, especially by older parishioners. During the festival more porta-loos are brought in and the parish is dependent on the goodwill of the landlord of the Horns Public House to meet the needs of festival attenders.

7. The Statement of Need explains, and I accept, that the new facilities are essential for the future mission and sustainability of the parish. The lack of basic facilities is an obstacle to growth, accessibility and successful community events.

Outcome of Consultations

8. Consultation with the National Amenity Societies resulted in no objections by them. The Victorian Society and Historic England each communicated their intention to defer to the DAC and other consultees unless the scheme they had seen were to change in some significant way.

9. The Church Buildings Council (CBC) are sympathetic to the need for the works and noted the care and duration of the planning. The CBC praised the sensitivity of the design and included some helpful suggestions in their response. They emphasised however a strong opposition to the use of Karndean vinyl flooring which they considered unsuitable for introduction to a Grade I listed church. They recommended the use of machined oak. After some exchanges between the QI architect and the CBC the Petitioners have agreed to this stipulation and changed their plans accordingly.

Planning Permission and Other Authorisations

10. Building Regulations approval was granted on 8 April 2025, accompanied by a Fire Consultation Report from South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service. The Peak District National Park Authority granted permission for the proposed drainage scheme on 29 July 2025, subject to archaeological monitoring.

Consultation and Public Notice compliance

11. Public notices were displayed between 20 November and 20 December 2025. No objections have been received. In addition to these required consultations the plans for the works have been prominently displayed inside the church.

12. The DAC have been actively involved in the planning of these works and consultation with the amenity societies and the CBC etc. The works were considered at their meeting on 19th November 2025 and recommended for approval with a proviso requiring the use of engineered oak flooring rather than Karndean, in accordance with the CBC guidance.

The Duffield Questions

13. I apply the questions formulated by the Court of Arches in *Re St Alkmund, Duffield*:

i. I find that any harm to the significance of the church building would be nil to minimal. It is arguable that in fact the works will improve the appearance as well as the facilities of the church given the paucity of what is in the north part of the church already.

The works are located in a small area and involve no medieval fabric; they are reversible.

ii. The presumption in favour of things as they stand is readily rebutted here. The present facilities are inadequate to the point of impeding core parish life, pastoral care, mission and community use.

iii. The justification is clear, convincing and compelling. There is a demonstrable need to provide safe, accessible and functional facilities. The viability of the church's worship, mission and community activities depends on these improvements.

iv. The parish and community benefits of improved accessibility, hospitality, mission, safety, and community engagement markedly outweigh any minimal harm.

Decision and reasons

14. I am satisfied that the careful planning and work gone into putting together these long awaited proposals have resulted in there being unlikely to cause any measurable harm to the significance of the church. The justification for the works is compelling.

15. I direct that a faculty should issue, authorising the works, subject to the Proviso recommended by the DAC. I note and expect that the other recommendations of the CBC will be followed during the works but this does not need to be subject to formal conditions.

Sarah Singleton KC
HHJ Sarah Singleton KC
Chancellor

17th January 2026