

IN THE CONSISTORY COURT OF THE DIOCESE OF BRISTOL

In re Broad Blunsdon, St Leonard

JUDGMENT

1. This is a petition for an ambitious and extensive reordering of this Grade II* listed medieval church.
2. For ease of reference I set out the very helpful summary of the works as set out by the Registry and edited by me from the helpful excel spreadsheet with over a hundred documents detailed within it:
 - new underfloor heating and raising the floor;
 - new kitchen with timber doors;
 - refurbish the tower lavatory to be designed to reflect best practice in terms of accessibility;
 - new tower screen;
 - removal of pews 8 fixed pews (choir pews in Chancel to be retained but shortened);
 - new storage cupboards;
 - relocating the font;
 - relocating the brass ledgers;
 - infill partitions to rooms north and south of the chancel to create a meeting room and storage area;
 - new glass south door;
 - insulate the church roof; -
 - new community storage building/sexton shed east of the church;
 - new plant room shed and lavatory east of the church and path to it;
 - new foul drainage from the lavatories to the mains sewer;
 - interior redecoration of the church;

- lighting system modifications, new power supply and circuit, new hearing loop; and
- lowering the pulpit.
- new floor of natural stone tile;
- an air source heat pump to be installed in the plant room;
- replacement of current electric organ with a smaller portable organ.

3. In terms of the amenity societies, when they were originally consulted;
4. The Church Buildings Council has been consulted and it considered;
 - a. the proposed meeting room too small,
 - b. It prefers the ledger stones to be re-located to their current horizontal position.
 - c. It considers the long line of cupboards along the south wall to be too domestic in appearance,
 - d. The small meeting room could satisfy some storage requirement,
 - e. There is insufficient justification for the external buildings, including the plant room,
 - f. The need for a watching archaeological brief.
5. SPAB has been consulted and had reservations about;
 - a. the underfloor heating in case the building is not used as much as anticipated,
 - b. the relocation of the ledger stones,
 - c. venting for the kitchen and the fitting of the kitchen screen so as to incorporate a column.
 - d. It was not convinced of the need for external storage units and is concerned for bats in the design of the glazed south porch door.
 - e. It had reservations about the PCC not evidencing its aspiration for future use of the building.
6. The Victorian Society put great store by the Butterfield features and the need to retain as many as possible. It has reservations about the underfloor heating.
7. Historic England raised objections to:
 - a. the use of non-indigenous limestone for the replacement floor;
 - b. the removal of the remaining nave bench seating;
 - c. the relocation of the floor brasses to the wall;
 - d. the lowering of the pulpit.
 - e. It considers there to be insufficient justification for the external storage and that the plant room is too big. Overall, it considers the effect of the external works to be detrimental to the rural setting of the church.
8. The PCC revised some of its plans in response to the various observations.

9. The document 'Final report to DAC and Chancellor May 2025' outlined the remaining areas of disagreement with the Amenity Societies and the PCC's responses.
10. The PCC unanimously support the application. The DAC in its notification of advice state that it believes the PCC has addressed the amenity societies' comments adequately within their 'Final Report to DAC and Chancellor' document, and supplementary updated plans and drawings'. The DAC considered that the PCC has demonstrated its arguments for maintaining their current plans well. The DAC commended the PCC for engaging with a wide number of consultees and responding proactively.
11. A document 'Report to DAC St Leonards re-ordering 01.10.24' set out community support and potential demand. This document was subsequently expanded with information on my site visit.
12. I was invited to a site visit so that the PCC could have the opportunity to present its vision, the perceived benefits of the proposal and mitigation measures for the harm it may cause to the significance of the building. I accepted the invitation and directed that the amenity bodies should also be invited. I was disappointed that none of the amenity bodies took up the offer.
13. The Registrar and I made the site visit. We were shown around the church and churchyard, and the proposed location of the new plant room was pointed out, and the reasons that the PCC had chosen that particular location was explained. I was shown up to date documents dealing with the proposed engagement with a wide range of individuals keen to use the church. Whilst I was there a member of the parish council who was present received an email detailing that there were now plans by the local authority to allow an even larger number of new residential properties to be constructed in the area over the next few years. Even the most cursory inspection of the proposed plans indicates that there are no clear indications of whether there are any community buildings to be built as part of the development.
14. I queried why there was a proposal to lower the Pulpit, particularly as the petitioners wished to raise the floor. The response was that it was considered potentially unsafe and was hardly used. It became clear that the reason it was hardly was used was because of the style of worship rather than any safety concerns. I was told that 'Puppets were the most common thing in the pulpit'. It turned out that was a literal description of engagement with young people rather than a comment on the quality of preachers.
15. Having had the chance to speak to the petitioners and to walk through the proposals I have no hesitation in saying that, applying the *Duffield* test, any adverse effects on the special character of this attractive church are outweighed by the opportunities for mission in this rapidly growing area. The clear interest shown by local community and volunteer organisations in using the building justify the petition passing the seal. The only aspect of the petition that I do not allow is the lowering of the pulpit. I am satisfied that the raising of the level of the floor will mitigate any risk posed by using a part of

the church that has been used as it is without incident for many hundreds of years as far as I can tell.

16. The conditions of granting this petition are;

- a. The works are to be carried out in stages which are only to start when the funds for that stage have been obtained,
- b. The resident archaeologist and the DAC specialist are to be consulted in the event of any articulated or disarticulated human remains are discovered
- c. Planning permission is to be obtained for any works in the churchyard.

28 October 2025

Justin Gau,
Chancellor of the Diocese of Bristol