

Reordering

In the Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bradford

Ref : 11/32C

St. Saviour in the Parish of Harden and Wilsden

- 1 This is a Petition by the Priest-in-charge , Revd Bob Evans and Churchwardens, Messrs Jones and Hayton ,for a faculty to reorder the interior of the Church of St Saviour , Harden , the principal objective being to replace the existing inadequate central heating system with an efficient gas fired “wet” system. A new and improved central heating system is generally regarded as much needed . There are other proposed works which are more contentious. Principal amongst these is the removal and disposal of the pews in the Nave and their replacement with chairs.
- 2 It is apparent from the documents submitted to the DAC for its consideration that the PCC carried out an extensive consultation process before the decision to apply for a faculty in its present form was taken. It is worthy of note that the PCC vote in favour of the underfloor heating was unanimous ; whereas the voting in respect of the replacement of the pews with chairs was 8 for; 1 against and 2 abstentions. Of those members who were absent on the occasion of the vote , it is believed that 5 were in favour and 1 would have abstained. The vote for the construction of the dais was 10 for and 1 against; the vote in relation to the font was unanimous, and the vote for the removal of the inner swing doors was 8 in favour, 1 against , with 2 abstentions.
- 3 The DAC has decided to recommend the proposed works, subject to some minor conditions .The Victorian Society has been consulted but does not appear to have

responded. The Church is not listed. Objections to the proposals have been received from 23 people and I have read their letters of objection .Of the objectors, Mr and Mrs Hurst of 144, Long Lane , Harden, have completed and returned Form 4 and thereby become parties.

- 4 It has been agreed that I determine this matter upon consideration of written submissions.
- 5 In addition to the Statement of Needs and the other documentation which accompanied the Faculty Application , the letters of objection and the Form 4, I have read and considered:
 - (a) The letter dated 22nd August 2011 from Revd. Bob Evans;
 - (b) The letter dated 28th November 2011(re cost and financing) from Revd Bob Evans;
 - (c) The “ further submission” dated 7th November 2010 (but assumed to be 2011) from Revd Bob Evans ;
 - (d) The letter dated 23rd December 2011 from Mr and Mrs Hurst .
- 6 I visited the church on a raw day in December 2011.

The Petitioners' case

- 7 The initial aim was to replace the central heating system and after discussions with Roger Glistler (the Diocesan Heating Advisor) and various contractors , it was decided that the most suitable would be a wet underfloor system as proposed by Byfield Heating Ltd of Ferrybridge. The installation of such a system inevitably involved the removal of the pews in the nave and when considering whether they should then simply be put back afterwards the Petitioners' thoughts turned to the alternative of a more flexible layout.
- 8 The case for replacing the pews with chairs is set out in the Statement of Needs. It is felt that moveable chairs will

increase flexibility making the church more attractive to families with young children (which, it is argued, is important given the age profile of the congregation) as well as to regular members, on the occasions identified at paragraph 3 on page 3 of the Statement of Needs. In addition it is suggested that most people find chairs more comfortable than pews, they are “disability friendly” and they can enable a more flexible space to be created for “non-worship” use. Furthermore, it is said, the pews are of pine, and not very distinguished. The estimated cost of the proposed works is £58,000 in the Petition, and I have also seen a schedule showing expenditure totalling £61,178.81 and income totalling £42,696.00, thus producing a shortfall, as presently calculated, of £18,482.81. It is worthy of note that the bulk of the cost (namely £40,104.00) is in respect of the central heating.

The Objections

- 9 There is no objection to the installation of the chosen central heating. The principal objection is to the removal of the pews from the Nave. It is felt by several people that the replacement of the pews with chairs would destroy the character, the style and special atmosphere of the church and it may deter people from choosing to marry in the church. Concern has been expressed that the introduction of carpet and chairs will adversely affect the acoustics. As to the argument in favour of a more flexible space, it is said that the need for such a space can and should be met by greater use of the adjoining family room. The cost of the proposed works has also been condemned as being excessive and unnecessary.

The Petitioners' Response

- 10 The Petitioners argue simply that the removal of the pews and their replacement with chairs will make St. Saviours a

better facility to resource the mission of the Church , that the church is more likely to exist in 10 years' time if the facilities are modernised as proposed. It will also mean that families with young children and the local school can more readily enjoy the experience of being in church (with the inspiring features which will remain) rather than using an ordinary room. With regard to the perceived effect on the acoustics , the Petitioners rely on the views of the PCC and the church architect (and ,no doubt,on the fact that this aspect of the proposals did not cause the DAC to be concerned).

- 11 With regard to the question of cost , Revd Evans makes the point that it would not be either cheap or easy to reinstate the pews on top of the new central heating system. The calculations which he has done show that the real cost difference would only mean that the chairs would cost an additional £1900 or so.

The exercise of my discretion

- 12 In the exercise of my discretion whether or not to grant this faculty, I have to address the so-called Bishopsgate questions, which are:
 - (a) have the petitioners proved on the evidence a necessity for some or all of the proposed works for the pastoral well-being of the church in question, or for some other compelling reason?
 - (b) Will some or all of the works proposed adversely affect the character of the church as a building of special architectural and historical interest?
 - (c) If the answer to (b) is yes, then is the necessity proved by the petitioners such that in the exercise of the court's discretion a faculty should be granted for some or all of the works?

- 13 The answer to question (a) is clearly yes. Everyone is agreed that a new central heating system is essential. I too am able to agree about this on the basis of my own, albeit comparatively brief, visit in December. The more contentious issues are the removal of the pews , their replacement with chairs and the carpet.
- 14 In response to question (b) it is axiomatic that the replacement of nave pews with chairs will alter and thus affect the character of the church , but can it be said that the character of the church as a building of special architectural and historical interest would be “adversely” affected thereby? St. Saviours is a beautiful church, but is not listed. The pews are of pine, and not oak. They are functional and, objectively, not distinctive nor particularly distinguished . I note the view of the church architect , recorded in the Statement of Needs “ that removal of the pews at St. Saviours would not be of any detriment architecturally, and in terms of the use of the church can only be to its benefit”.
- 15 The issue of the removal of pews from historic churches is both emotive and divisive. We many of us (particularly as we grow older)feel comfortable with the traditional, the familiar and with things we consider to be in keeping with their setting. Those opposed to the permanent removal of the pews obviously sincerely believe that the character of the church which they cherish will thereby be destroyed The Petitioners and those in favour of the proposals equally sincerely believe that the removal of the pews and their replacement with attractive chairs will actually enhance the beauty and character of the church.
- 16 On balance, I am unable to conclude that the proposed works or any of them will “adversely” affect the character of the church as a building of special architectural and historical interest, so that my answer to question(b) would be no. Even if my answer was yes and I had to go on to consider question(c) I am satisfied that the necessity which the petitioners have proved is such that I ought to

grant a faculty in respect of all of the proposed works. I am satisfied that there has been proper consultation, that opposing views and alternative approaches have been evaluated and that anxious and careful consideration has led to the present proposals. I am persuaded that the proposed works which have the support of the DAC (with its collective wisdom and experience) will ensure that St Saviours is more welcoming, more comfortable, more adaptable and thus better able to widen and strengthen its role as a local centre of worship and mission both now and in the future and that these considerations outweigh the wishes of those who wish the pews to be reinstated, and that therefore I should grant this faculty.

- 17 The issue of financing the proposed works has not been straightforward. It was initially thought that a sum of £48,000 would be available from the Hustwick Trust, but this is no longer the case. In their submissions Mr and Mrs Hurst describe as uncertain the sources of funding which the Petitioners have identified. The Petitioners are confident that the monies can be raised by the various means set out in Revd. Evans' letter of 28th November 2011.
- 18 It seems clear to me that the proposed works could not sensibly be commenced until the finance for the whole of them is available. I do not see that the installation of the central heating could realistically be embarked upon without having the means to pay for the carpet, the chairs and the other items; otherwise if the work was to be done piecemeal, as funds were being raised, the likely delays would mean that the church would become barely useable for a protracted period of time. The simple answer to the Respondents' concerns as to funding is that if the money is not available the work cannot be started. But that should not in my judgment prevent the faculty being granted in the hope and expectation that it will be available.

John Lamb
10 / 2 / 12