

**Neutral Citation Number: [2026] ECC Wor 1
OFS CASE NUMBER 2025-115150
IN THE CONSISTORY COURT OF THE DIOCESE OF WORCESTER**

RE: ST THOMAS, STOURBRIDGE

RE: Reordering as a Renewal Church: removal of 18th Century Pews, new flooring where pews removed, new heating system, new lighting, new audio-visual system, removal of old font and commission of new font, installation of kitchenette, servery, moveable children's area, welcome desk, new chairs

JUDGMENT

Introduction

1. This is the second significant petition before me in around a year in respect of a parish church chosen as a 'renewal church' and being resourced through the national Diocesan Investment Programme with a grant from the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) set up by the Archbishops' Council and Church Commissioners to invest £1billion over nine years to support the delivery of the Church's Vision and Strategy for the 2020s¹. The reordering of the building is seen by the petitioners as vital to the whole renewal project which aims to generate numerical growth, financial sustainability and missional vibrancy that will secure the future of St Thomas's as a viable and vibrant church community for years to come.

Details of the Church building and the parish

2. St Thomas is a grade I listed redbrick Georgian Church in Stourbridge Town Centre and forms part of the High Street Stourbridge conservation area. It has an unusual history. According to the Statement of Significance, it was founded in 1726 or 1736² as an independent chapel paid for by public subscription, albeit one where worship was conducted according to the rites of the Church of England. It was located within the parish of St Mary, Oldswinford. St Mary's church is now around 1.5 miles from the town centre due to rapid development of the town during the industrial revolution, based around glass manufacture which was pioneered there by Huguenot refugees in the 17th century. St Thomas was not consecrated as a Church of England parish church until 1866 and prior to that its ministers were selected by the local inhabitants and the

¹ Although St Stephen's Redditch have recently decided to forgo their share of the SMIBB funding to ensure that sufficient is available for the other resourcing churches in the Diocese, including St Thomas, Stourbridge.

² The earlier date is stated by Historic England and the latter is stated by the petitioners, which is also the date given on Wikipedia for the start of the ministry of the first minister. The Georgian Group suggest that it was built between 1728 and 1736 based on the attribution in the 2008 book *The Buildings of England* by Sir Howard Colvin at p1106. RDA Associates provide an Extract from the King Edwards's Governors meeting from November 1728 setting out the terms of the contract ('articles') between 7 named men and William Westley for the erection of the chapel. I shall therefore assume in the rest of this judgment that the 1736 date is correct.

candidate proposed by the Church of England hierarchy was not always accepted. There was a dispute over the very first minister, with the son of one of the initial subscribers eventually being appointed.

3. The HE list-entry is sparse. It simply says '1726. Red brick and stone dressings. An aisled rectangular building with west tower. Rounded windows, quoins and panelled parapet with inset balustrades throughout. Chancel added 1890 and in keeping. Richly panelled barrel vault.'. The HE consultation response dated 16 June 2025 gives some more detail. It notes the 'non-conformist aesthetic' and notes the significant internal features of the church, namely 'Doric columns, ornate ceiling plasterwork and significant joinery work, including that of the box pews with galleried sections.'
4. I am grateful for the detailed historic information provided by the statement of significance and all the detailed responses from Historic England, the Church Buildings Council, the Georgian Group, the Victorian Society and the 20th Century Society together with the expert report on the pews by Rock Davison Associates Historic Building Consultants dated November 2023. I derive the following history from these documents:

1736	Main Church building completed by William Westley.
1759	Tower finished (The Georgian Group suggest this 'possibly formed part of Westley's original design'.)
1836	Probable date for the building of the galleries, staircase and new entrance lobbies by architect John Fallows. Unclear if alternations to the pews made at this time.
1870	Alteration of the pews – lowering the backs by 12 inches (30.5 cm)
1890	Addition of the chancel/apse – built in red brick neo baroque style. This is the work of Cotton and Bidlake. A larger opening at the base of the tower was also added to connect it to the worship space. The main entrance was moved to the south side of the church. Some pews were removed to improve access to the apse. The central pulpit was removed and a new one installed at the head of the northern tier of pews.
1914	The church hall was constructed, also in red brick neo classical style.
1920 (approx)	The font was introduced.
1963	Creation of the Lady Chapel and installation of the current lighting Scheme.
1991	Removal of pews under the tower by the font.

At some time(s) stained glass has also been introduced into the church, it having originally been clear glazed. The history of the pews is considered in more detail below.

5. St Thomas is the only grade I listed building in Stourbridge town centre which also contains no Grade II* listed buildings. St Thomas remains the only Anglican church in the town centre. The layout of the town means that the town centre is partially cut off from the surrounding residential suburbs by a busy ring road that completely encircles it. The centre is largely commercial with retail, leisure, service industries and education being well represented.

6. The parish has a population around 6,800, only around 10% of the total population of the town of Stourbridge. The parish is within 19th percentile nationally for deprivation; that is c.81% of the country is less deprived than this parish. Civic improvements are proposed, with a £3m town improvement scheme announced in 2024.
7. At present, the worshipping community has a weekly Sunday sung eucharist, a weekly said eucharist, regular morning prayer (2-3 times per week), monthly 'Toddler Praise' designed for pre-schoolers and their carers and monthly 'Chewsdays Church' designed for the 60s and 70s age group.
8. The church also serves the wider community through its hall, providing space for community groups such as dance schools, scouting and guiding groups, a club for adults with learning difficulties and a Parkinson's disease exercise class.

History of the pews and font

9. As the proposed removal of the pews is the most controversial element of this petition, I am particularly grateful to the petitioners for commissioning a detailed and closely researched report by Louisa Davidson and Jacob Rock of Rock Davison Associates dated November 2023, who are two experts with relevant academic qualifications and professional memberships. They inspected the pews and carried out desk and web-based research on their history. They suggest the following timeline which I am content to adopt:

1735 Original box pews probably installed at this time with the main build. It is likely they were around 47 inches (1.2m) tall from the platform, which is the height of the square panelled bases to the columns and capping rail shadow on pillar panel pew No.25 (shown in photograph H in their report).

1791/1793 Graffiti from these dates present on panelling to pillar no 24/25. Side wall panelling and galleries match these panels and are presumed to be of the same date prior to the graffiti.

1836 Documentary evidence shows plans for re-pewing at this date, although other secondary sources suggest that these plans may not have been put in place due to cost. However, other works do appear to have taken place at this time, such as the west end porches and staircases which would probably have required the removal of some corner pews.

1870-71 Cutting down pew backs by 12 inches (30.5cm) – evidence of payment for this in vestry minutes and contemporaneous newspaper report.

1883 Pew doors sold to a Mrs Foster – evidence of this from account books.

1890 Further substantial alterations to the building, installing apse, choir stalls, porches, and screen and blocking eastern entrances. Some pews were removed from the east end at this time.

1991 Pews removed under the tower by the font.

10. Some key facts that can be drawn from this report are:

- i. The simple bench pews in the galleries designed for the 'lower orders' appear to be unaltered since their installation in the 1730s.
- ii. The oak box pews in the nave and side aisles have been significantly altered and substantially repaired in the 19th century but retain their 18th century plan of closed box pews without any distinctive family pews. They remain 'readable' in their original context, despite those alterations.
- iii. Much of the 18th century fabric has been retained, most comprehensively in the north and south aisles. Both oak pews and oak pew platforms remain throughout, but extensive repairs were undertaken in the 19th century using pine planks, especially of the pews towards the rear of the nave.
- iv. There is historic graffiti from 1791 and 1793 with names and dates on panelling by pews numbered 24 and 25 and on pew number 24.
- v. There are few churches left in the area with Georgian box pews. HE listing suggests 17 in Worcestershire and 4 in Dudley. However, this is not conclusive as there may have been changes without the listing being updated, and the listing for St Thomas Stourbridge does not mention the pews. Two local ones visited by the authors of the RBA report were St Mary's Shrawley (a Norman village church with 28 box pews) and St Swithin's, Worcester (a redundant Georgian city church).

11. The proposal to remove the font is also controversial, although this was at one stage mitigated by a plan to retain the existing font as a holy water stoop, and to introduce a new font for liturgical use. The existing font is octagonal and made of limestone with a carved oak cover. Although the Victorian Society considered it might have been introduced in their period of interest, recently discovered undated plans for the installation of font show the 1918 memory boards in place thereby suggesting a later date. Matthew Saunders of Historic Buildings and Places, and also a member of the CBC, has correctly pointed out that the font pictured in that plan is different to the one currently in situ, and therefore may not refer to the installing of the current font. However, the petitioners subsequently refer to images in the county archive (not provided to me) showing the WW1 memorial boards in place before the Font was installed.

12. There is a 1923 Archdeacon's report describing the font as 'modern' suggesting a C20th introduction. The statement of significance suggests a bishop described it

‘scathingly’ as ‘modern’ although the source for this comment is not indicated. Correctly the 20th Century Society take issue with the characterisation of the bishop’s comments as ‘scathing’ which is fair when no details of the source material was provided to substantiate the intention behind the comment.³ They also rightly point to the fact that an item that was ‘modern’ in 1920s is of historic interest now. They are also concerned that the plans do not show how the repurposing of the existing font would be undertaken.

13. The proposals for the font were at one point varied to retain it as a holy water stoup although no plans were provided to show how that might be feasible, and upon my querying whether this was the petitioner’s current plan they confirmed that they did not want to move it to use as a holy water stoup and instead renewed their desire to remove it entirely. Subsequently, matters have moved on again in that the petitioners have now decided they no longer wish to remove the font but relocate it within the church. The plans relied on by them show a font (at that point with the intention of introducing a new one) towards the rear of the nave. Whilst the statutory consultees are keen for it to be retained, and for more detailed investigation of its provenance undertaken, none object to it being relocated within the church. The confirmation that it is to be retained simplifies matters in that I do not need to consider whether further work should be done on its provenance before deciding this part of the petition.

The current petition

14. The petition is dated 4 August 2025, but it is the culmination of several years’ work up to the point of its filing. The petitioners are the incumbent, Rev’d Andrew Sillis, a churchwarden, Valerie Charles and the chair of the PCC’s fabric committee, Wendy Hemming. Ms Hemming is the lead petitioner. The petition has the unanimous support of the PCC, voted at their meeting held on 16 June 2025.
15. It is supported by a raft of detailed architectural drawings by Nick Joyce Architects showing a nave cleared of pews save for 8 shortened (and moveable) pews in the south aisle facing the lady chapel altar. Cupboards are proposed at the westerly ends of the north and south walls for the storage of table and chairs when not in use and to contain the controls for the proposed underfloor heating. New welcome desks on lockable casters are proposed opposite the entrance from the south porch. The base of the tower, where the font is currently located, is to be changed into a servery with cupboards, a sink, fridge and dishwasher and a movable serving unit.
16. A new heating system is proposed with underfloor heating and a new sandstone floor to replace the pew platforms. Repairs to the existing flagstones in the aisles following removal of the carpet previously laid over them, has been approved under list B, subject to conditions. The underfloor heating will initially be run from the existing gas boilers, but the parish intends to replace the boilers with a heat pump system at the end of their life, which is anticipated to be within 5 years. Existing radiators are to be

³ The source has since been identified as the Records of a Survey of the Churches by the Diocese of Worcester’s Advisory Committee 1922-1928.

relocated to support the heating of the space. Approval to install new lighting and a new audio-visual system is also sought. A moveable children's area comprising moveable storage units made from wood from the pews is proposed and new chairs are also sought to be introduced.

Responses to public notice / consultation

17. Public notice of the proposed works was given on 6 August 25 and no objections were received from the public. A PCC resolution dated 16 June 2025 shows that the PCC were unanimously in support of seeking a faculty in the terms of the petition.
18. The petition is broadly supported by the CBC who consider that case has been made for large scale pew removal. At an earlier stage they made recommendations as to the retention of some pews repurposed for flexible use in and around the lady chapel which have been incorporated by the petitioners into their current proposals.
19. The petitioners have also provided a supportive witness statement from the Archdeacon of Dudley, the Ven Nikki Groake. This document sets out the context of the petition and the reasons why St Thomas's has been chosen as one of the diocese's renewal churches. She confirms that extensive informal consultation of the local community also took place. Display boards sharing the proposals have been available for a couple of years and the views of town residents were sought. Of the 71 people who provided written responses, 68 were in favour of reordering with only two against and three uncertain, with many people specifically supporting the proposals to facilitate music, exhibitions and outreach.
20. The relevant amenity societies were also consulted. By the letter of Benjamin Williscroft, Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas dated 16 June 2025, Historic England object to the removal of the pews, seeking instead a more limited scheme that removed only part of them. By his further letter of 9 December 2025 he confirmed that whilst they do not support the removal of the font they do not object to moving elsewhere towards the rear of the nave.
21. James Darwin, Head of Casework for The Georgian Group responded to consultation by email dated 7 July 2025. Whilst they would not object to the removal of two or three rows of pews at the west end, they do object to the wholesale removal of all pews as proposed and note that it is possible to improve the experience of disabled worshippers by adapting the pews or partial removal only.
22. The 20th Century Society responded through their caseworker, Gus Wray, in his email dated 2 July 25. They do not support the removal of the font due to the lack of information provided about it and also sought more information on the 1960s chandelier. They also queried the plan of the memorial boards, and the petitioners have confirmed that they will be taken down temporarily to protect them during the works, and replaced in their current locations having been professionally restored whilst taken down. This proposal is not set out in the petition, but I am content to deal with it now.

23. The Victorian Society also provided a detailed response via their conservation advisor Tim Bridge's email dated 11 July 2025. They share the concerns raised by HE and the Georgian Group, and object to the proposals especially the removal of pews and introduction of cupboards, although would not object to limited removal of pews from the west end.
24. None of the objectors wished to become parties opponent.
25. Following my initial query to confirm the final plan for the font, I received confirmation that the plan was for permanent removal and destruction. I therefore required further consultation with the amenity societies. Most did offer further comments however, confirming that they objected to its removal, although HE and Matthew Saunders of Historic Buildings and Places indicated they would support its relocation within the building. The CBC did not object to its removal, but preferred to see it moved to another church rather than destroyed.

Changes to works sought in the petition

26. On 16 January 2026 the petitioners confirmed they are no longer seeking the permanent removal of the font but wish to relocate it within the building. I shall therefore make no findings as to its significance, or its contribution to the significance of the building, and shall refuse that part of the application. But note this refusal is without considering the merits of the application so that the petitioners may make a further application in the future, if they consider they can make out a case in support of so doing. I shall consequently refuse the part of the application seeking permission to install a new font as I assume that the petitioners will not wish to incur the costs of installing a font/baptistry as set out in their design brief, if the existing font is being retained. Again, this is not refused on the merits and may be similarly renewed if appropriate. However, if the original font is to remain in use as a font, the court will have to consider the issue of whether it is appropriate to have multiple fonts in use and will require the petitioners to address that point.

The legal test

27. In all cases where an application is made for permission to make changes to a listed building on consecrated ground, the legal test for whether such a faculty should be granted is set out in *Re St Alkmund, Duffield* [2013] 2 WLR 854 which directs the Chancellor to answer the following questions in determining the petition:

1. Would the proposals, if implemented, result in harm to the significance of the church as a building of special architectural or historic interest?
2. If the answer to question (1) is "no", the ordinary presumption in faculty proceedings "in favour of things as they stand" is applicable, and can be

rebutted more or less readily, depending on the particular nature of the proposals.

3. If the answer to question (1) is “yes”, how serious would the harm be?

4. How clear and convincing is the justification for carrying out the proposals?

5. Bearing in mind that there is a strong presumption against proposals which will adversely affect the special character of a listed building, will any resulting public benefit (including matters such as liturgical freedom, pastoral well-being, opportunities for mission, and putting the church to viable uses that are consistent with its role as a place of worship and mission) outweigh the harm?

In answering question (5), the more serious the harm, the greater will be the level of benefit needed before the proposals should be permitted. This will particularly be the case if the harm is to a building which is listed Grade I or 2*, where serious harm should only exceptionally be allowed.

Application of the law to the proposals

Pews and pew platforms

28. It cannot be doubted that the removal of the original Georgian box pews will cause harm to the significance of this building. The consultees are unanimous on this point and the petitioners realistically accept that the proposals “will cause permanent damage, in heritage terms to the building as it is currently presented”.
29. In my determination it also cannot be doubted that the harm will be serious. St Thomas’s is a very high-quality piece of architecture with a unique history. The pews that were installed when the building was first built form a vital element of the overall design and character of the building, despite them not being mentioned in the HE list entry. The significance of the church is increased by the relative rarity of churches with their original pews in situ, and by the fact that Georgian box pews are also comparatively rare in any age of church building.
30. The harm is only slightly mitigated by the fact that the nave pews have been altered by being cut down and the doors removed and sold off. As the pew report identifies, the original design remains clearly readable.
31. I accept the evidence of HE that, “The current pews have both architectural and historic significance despite the nineteenth-century alterations and contribute to the liturgical significance of the nave and rhythm of the existing space. This forms an essential component of its Georgian character. Therefore, outright removal would radically alter the existing character of the nave and aisles and would be harmful to the significance of this Grade I listed building.”

32. I also accept the evidence of the Georgian Group that the proposals to reorder the nave and aisle “would be highly damaging to the significance of this grade I listed parish church”.
33. There is slight mitigation in that eight pews are to be retained for use. The retention of the detailed pew report within church records will also provide slight mitigation. The significance of the building is also in part preserved by the retention of the Georgian pews in the galleries which have been unaltered since first installed. But even with all of this, the removal of the nave pews and pew platforms would be highly damaging to the significance of this building. Therefore, a high level of justification will be needed for these works to be permitted.
34. The justifications put forward can be summarised as follows:
- i. The church needs the works proposed to enable the liturgical flexibility and community use of the building necessary to be effective as a renewal church;
 - ii. The changes are required to promote greater inclusion in worship and other uses of the nave area;
 - iii. The changes promote environmental sustainability;
 - iv. The longer-term future of the building is in jeopardy if the works are not undertaken;
 - v. Pews promote an attitude of ‘head down, repentance, keeping people in their place’ approach whereas the proposals promote a ‘heads up, lifting the lowly, offering hope, forgiveness and assurance of value’ that they contend is ‘more in tune with our Saviour’.
 - vi. The alternative of removing two or three rows of pews at the rear of the nave are not sufficient to meet the needs identified.
35. The evidence in support of the first justification is set out in detail in the Statement of Needs and the document entitled ‘Examples of post reordering building usage’. These show that the intention is for a wider range of layouts to facilitate: (i) worship in the round (ii) café church style worship (with varied layouts including one where the space for children is central) (iii) a baptism focussed on the font (iv) collegiate style worship (v) ‘alternative’ worship which can require audio visual installations, space for discussion and reflection, space for interactive prayer (vi) art / prayer installations (vii) exhibitions and (viii) concerts and performances.
36. The purpose of this flexibility is to facilitate the mission plan that is at the core of the designation of St Thomas’s as a renewal church that seeks to grow the church community and thereby secure a longer term future for the church, both as a worshipping body of people and also as a building in which people worship. This plan includes providing a range of opportunities for worship, and personal and spiritual growth, to be available to the whole community and to be a place where the arts, culture, justice and peace are celebrated.

37. This growth will be achieved partly by building on what is already happening and partly by reaching new demographics. With regard to the former the church already has growing numbers of children and families engaging with the church through worship and activities designed for them. Community engagement is taking place with films, Christmas tree festival and concerts. However, scope for developing these is limited with the current layout.
38. With regard to the latter the plans are to build new connections in particular with shoppers and daytime visitors, students and the nighttime economy. Parts of these plans, which include a community support café (including a night café safe space), a programme of art and music, and prayer installations and family activities need a large flexible space within the building to be effective.
39. The diocese and national church have allocated funding for additional staffing both clergy and administrative support to help bring the plans to fruition. I am therefore satisfied that the plans for growth are well evidenced and realistic and that the reordering sought is essential for their effectiveness. Liturgical flexibility and wider community use of the space will simply not be practicable without the removal of the pews.
40. The Archdeacon's witness statement also explains why it is St Thomas that is the appropriate church building to become a renewal church due to its unique location in the centre of town. There are no other churches in the centre of the town. Only a city centre church would enable the project to have maximum impact upon the town centre economy, the young people and the concert goers and others engaging with the arts and culture as envisaged in the mission plan. She confirms that in her view the removal of the pews and pew platforms are essential to enable the space to be used for proposed community activities and new expressions of worship.
41. I find that this justification is made out.
42. Both the petitioners and the Archdeacon state that the current layout limits the participation of wheelchair users and others of limited mobility due to the narrow aisles and fixed seating. This is confirmed by the plans and photographs that show that the aisle space between the blocks of pews is unusually narrow and that wheelchair users are currently limited to the very back of the church in the tower base, or at the south end of the first row of pews, behind the first pillar, close to the Lady Chapel. The 'pressing need to improve the experience of disabled worshipers' is recognised by the Georgian Group, but they felt that this could be achieved without the wholesale removal of the box pews. In my judgment the narrowness of the aisle and the damage to the pews necessary to enable wheelchair users to sit in more favourable locations within the nave show that it would not be possible to provide appropriate improvement for wheelchair users without significant harm to the pews.
43. Also, at present the only space that can be used by young children is at the back under the tower, which is a long way from where worship is being led, and causes difficulty for parents attempting to supervise whilst participating in worship as far as possible. It

also does not allow the children to observe the worship and learn how to join in. The mobile children's area will enable the children to be more fully integrated into the worship and other activities.

44. I find this justification is made out.
45. The argument as to environmental sustainability relates particularly to the underfloor heating which is not in itself controversial. Of course, it can only be installed if the pews and pew platforms are removed, which is highly controversial. It is a welcome element of the overall proposals but does not, in itself, provide sufficient justification for the removal of the historic pews.
46. The argument that the long-term future of the building would be in jeopardy if the works, including the pew removal, are not undertaken is set out in the statement of need and also in the Archdeacon's statement. It is precisely the commitment of the diocese to maintaining and developing a worshipping presence in historic buildings that is the reason for choosing St Thomas as a renewal church. The injection of cash and personnel that can be achieved by accessing national and diocesan resources for mission provides the best opportunity to reverse the decline of aging congregations and to have a viable long term worshipping community that will be able to keep the building in its original use, which enables the significance of the building to be best preserved in the longer term. It is noted that one of the limited number of churches in the Diocese as still having box pews is St Swithin's Worcester, which is sadly redundant. As is set out in her statement, it would be easier in many ways to set up a new renewal church in a non-historic building such as a warehouse or empty retail unit – but that would hasten the redundancy and wider loss of significance of St Thomas's over time.
47. I find this justification to be made out.
48. Whilst I appreciate that space for flexibility for worship is very much needed in the current context of this church, I do not find that 21st Century preferences are any more 'in tune with our Saviour' than 18th Century ones and note that many people have been able and continue to be able to draw close to Christ, and receive hope, forgiveness and assurance of value in traditional pews. I would need very considerably more evidence before this claim could be accepted and accordingly do not find this justification to be made out.
49. I have considered the plans showing the layout if only a few pews are removed from the rear of the church. Whilst this is often sufficient for churches seeking to increase circulation space for hospitality and fellowship, that is not the case here. The plans are far more ambitious, in terms of liturgical flexibility and community use as set out above. The financial and practical support to be provided by the Diocese to implement the plans gives significant grounds for anticipating the success of this mission plan. I therefore find that the alternative scheme that would cause less harm to the significance of the church does not meet the needs of the church for development and growth.

50. Therefore, as most of the justifications have been made out on the evidence, I find that the amount of benefit from the proposals, particularly in terms of liturgical flexibility and community outreach, does outweigh the undoubtedly significant harm to this very fine grade I listed building. I shall accordingly grant this aspect of the petition subject to some conditions considered below.

New flooring

51. No person has taken any issue with the proposals for the flooring, which obviously needs to be installed if the pew platforms are removed. The proposal is for sandstone flooring to be laid in the space vacated by the pew platforms. This is a suitable material and the specification for the flooring is set out in plan numbered 2452-20 dated May 2025. The plan is to leave the existing flooring, such as in the aisles, in front of the chancel steps and under the tower in situ, subject to the renovation work already approved via list B. This is a good proposal that retains some ability to read the former location of the pews.

52. I am content to grant this aspect of the petition.

Underfloor heating and relocation of existing radiators

53. The underfloor heating will not be seen and will aid the transition to more sustainable heating in this building. It does not harm the significance of the building at all and is easily justified to provide a warm space in a way that moves the church toward its net zero aspirations.

54. The relocation of radiators will also assist in the efficient heating of the church, and the petitioners are to be commended for the reuse of existing items rather than the acquisition of new ones. As these items are already present, the proposed placement of them does not cause any greater harm than their current location.

55. I am content to grant this aspect of the petition.

New lighting

56. A new lighting scheme is proposed to give greater brightness to the space, but I have little detail of the scheme. The plans for lighting prepared by Lightmaster Direct are on two different bases and are described as a 'working draft'. The statement of need confirms that there will be a 'flexible and discrete, LED based digital system' that will 'enhance the brightness flexibility and attractiveness of the space and will highlight the best architectural features of the building' and will be able to create different atmospheric moods for different types of event. This involves the removal of 1960s chandeliers and fluorescent strip lighting currently in place.

57. None of the consultees raised any issues with the lighting scheme, save that the 20th Century society wanted more information as to the provenance of the chandeliers. I directed that the petitioners provide this and they were unable to find much

information about them, despite investigation. Fittings of a similar design were installed at All Saints Worcester and the local cinema. I have seen photographs and they look unremarkable. There is nothing to suggest they were custom made or specially designed. It is more likely that were widely available commercial light fittings from the period they were installed – in much the same way that the proposed LED lighting scheme is for the current era. They are, unsurprisingly, not mentioned in the listing entry and do not add to the significance of the church. No harm will be caused to the significance of the church by their removal. Indeed, the view of HE was that the proposed replacement would be a ‘marked improvement’ on the current lighting.

58. The proposal to install a modern, sympathetic lighting system with low energy bulbs can be justified both in terms of improving the space for worship and community use and in terms of reducing the energy usage. I am content to grant this aspect of the petition.

New Audio-Visual system

59. It is proposed to install a new audio-visual system to include projection, two retractable screens, two mobile repeater screens on stands, and a high quality audio system suitable for speech, music and multimedia playback with wireless microphones and speakers with a suitable control system.

60. No person takes issue with the principle of the proposals. As the items will be removable little harm will be done to the significance of the church and they are clearly necessary for the proposed functioning of the church. The precise details and specification for the systems is being put out to tender so the details above are taken from the brief, rather than a specific design. I shall therefore approve this proposal in outline only and require the details to be agreed with the DAC before being installed.

Removal of existing font and introduction of a new font

61. As set out above this is understood to be no longer pursued and permission is accordingly not given.

62. However, permission is given for the relocation of the font within the church. This shall be either to the location indicated on the plans for the new font, at the back of the nave, or such other location as is agreed in writing with the DAC.

Installation of kitchenette and servery

63. The details for this are set out in plans numbered 2452-21, 2452-22 and 2452-23 all dated May 2025 and 2452-27 dated April 2025. The design and materials are appropriate for the location. No person has taken issue with these proposals.

64. These proposals will make changes to the layout of the room at the base of the tower, which the records show has been changed on previous occasions with the removal of

pews and installation of the font. There will be some modest harm to the significance of the building by the introduction of these items.

65. However, the need to provide proper refreshments is a key element to the plans for the use of the building as a renewal church and the benefit of this outweighs the modest harm caused.

Moveable children's area and welcome desk

66. Details of the welcome desk are set out in plan numbered 2452-26 dated May 2025. I am not given the specifications for the moveable storage units for the children's area but am told they will be constructed from the wood of the pews to be removed.
67. These items are moveable and the design of the welcome desk is appropriate. The design of the children's area must be agreed with the DAC before installation. Neither will cause lasting harm to the significance of the church.
68. The need to have a focal point for welcome and storage (e.g. of hymn books) is made out as is the need to provide a suitable space from which children can play and be drawn into the worship of the wider church family. I therefore approve these proposals.

Chairs, folding tables and storage cupboard for chairs and tables.

69. The chairs proposed are 100 St Nicholas Chairs from Treske with rush seats and 80 Jacob chairs from Alpha, including 10 with arms. It is intended that the Jacob chairs will remain in the body of the church but the St Nicholas ones will be stacked into the cupboards when not in use.
70. I am not shown photographs and cannot find the St Nicholas chair on the Treske website. I can see both the St Deiniol and St Magnus models with rush seating. However, Treske only manufacture wooden chairs so the St Nicholas model is likely to be acceptable. I understand that it conforms to the CBC recommendations of unupholstered wooden chairs in churches, especially in grade I listed churches. But as I am unable to see the precise detail I shall require agreement with the DAC.
71. The Jacob chairs from Alpha are lightweight wooden, unupholstered chairs which have the option of simple arms. They can be linked and can have book storage shelves at the back. They are also suitable and conform to the CBC guidance.
72. Chairs are clearly required following the removal of pews, and the chairs chosen are suitable. I am content to approve this aspect of the petition subject to DAC approval of the St Nicholas chair (or any proposed replacement).
73. I also take no issue with the folding tables that will be needed for café church, community café, some elements 'alt. worship' and other activities.

74. The cupboards are required to enable tidy storage of tables and chairs when not in use, and following my queries the architect has confirmed revised dimensions that will be sufficient for the number and type of chairs proposed. These cupboards are to be placed on the west end of the north and south walls, with a further cupboard in the south porch. They are designed to mirror wooden panelling and will be at the same height as the panels around the base of the columns and on the north and south aisle walls. The details are contained in plans numbered 2452-10A, 12A, 13A, 14A, 24A, 25A and 28A.
75. The consultees do not deal with these proposals as their focus is understandably on objecting to the removal of the pews that is necessary before the cupboards can be installed.
76. In my judgment the cupboards in the aisle will cause some harm to the significance of the building but this is limited. It is outweighed by the need for storage to enable the space to be used flexibly but without clutter.

CONDITIONS

77. The permission where granted is subject to the following conditions:
- i. The works must be in accordance with the following plans: 2452-10, -12A, -13A, -14A, -16, -20, -21, -22, -23, -24A, -25A, -26, -27, and -28A unless otherwise agreed in writing with the DAC.
 - ii. Eight pews must be retained and may adapted as per the drawing numbered 2452-29 (subject to condition x below).
 - iii. The sandstone used for the flooring must be sourced as locally as reasonably possible.
 - iv. The specification and method for the underfloor heating shall be agreed in writing with the DAC before works commence.
 - v. The full details of the lighting and rewiring scheme, including all cable runs and colour of cables shall be agreed in writing with the DAC before works commence. Fixings to be non-ferrous and where possible inserted into mortar rather than stonework.
 - vi. The full specification of the proposed audio-visual system, including size and location of retractable screens shall be agreed in writing with the DAC before it is installed. This condition does not prevent other works from being undertaken.
 - vii. Before any new chairs are introduced into the church:
 - i. pictures showing the exact model of chairs proposed are to be provided to the DAC; and
 - ii. the DAC shall confirm in writing whether they agree these are suitable. No chairs may be introduced until the DAC has confirmed in writing that they are suitable. The chairs must be wooden and not upholstered. Rush seating is acceptable.
 - viii. The existing font must be located at the back of the nave as indicated in the plans, or in such other location as is agreed in writing by the DAC.

- ix. The pews must be disposed of sustainably. Where possible the pews themselves shall be reused elsewhere or the wood from them shall be reused within the church or elsewhere. It must not be sent to landfill.
- x. All historic graffiti must be preserved within the church. Any pew with graffiti must be one of those being retained and any works of adaptation to the pews must not damage this graffiti. The precise final location of any piece of wood with historic graffiti must be agreed in writing with the DAC prior to the removal of the pews.
- xi. The pew report from RDA and good quality photographs of the church with all its pews in place must be placed with the church records and retained indefinitely.
- xii. Likewise good quality photographs of the font in its current location shall be placed with the church records and retained indefinitely.
- xiii. The memorial boards may be taken down temporarily during the works and kept safely, but must be reinstated at the end of the works. If restoration work is proposed for them, the details and method must be agreed between the petitioners and the DAC in writing before being undertaken.
- xiv. Electrical work is to be undertaken by an approved contractor registered with the National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting (NICEIC), Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA) or The National Association of Professional Inspectors (NAPIT) in accordance with the latest edition of IEE regulations and in line with the up-to-date guidance of the CBC.

78. In the event of any dispute between the petitioners and the DAC the disputed matter may be referred back to this court.

79. These conditions are designed to ensure the details of the proposals are suitable where not yet specified, to preserve a record of the historic material to be lost and for the safety of the electrical works.

**THE WORSHIPFUL JACQUELINE HUMPHREYS
CHANCELLOR OF THE DIOCESE OF WORCESTER
5 FEBRUARY 2026**