

Neutral Citation Number: [2023] ECC GLO 1

IN THE CONSISTORY COURT OF THE DIOCESE OF GLOUCESTER

Re LECHLADE, ST. LAWRENCE

JUDGEMENT

The Petition:

1. This is a Petition for a Faculty for:
 - A. **The reopening of the north porch to be used as the main entrance to the church with the introduction of an external timber door and internal doors.**
 - B. **The construction of a new limestone flag floor at a higher level than existing and level with the chancel floor. The relocation of three existing ledger stones and the relocation of a memorial on the chancel step.**
 - C. **The raising of the pulpit and the relocation of the font to the east end of the nave.**
 - D. **The removal of the deal pews (retaining four shortened pews in the chancel) and their replacement with ‘Theo’ design chairs and the creation of storage cupboards.**
 - E. **The provision of a hybrid heating system including underfloor heating in the raised floor, trench heaters, air source heat pumps and modifications to the existing boilers.**
 - F. **The introduction of a three-phase electricity supply, the rewiring of the power and lighting circuits and the provision of enhanced lighting.**
 - G. **The provision of a new audio-visual system with associated Wi-Fi and the installation of a projector screen above the chancel arch.**

- H. Repairs to areas of lime plaster and the cleaning and repainting of the walls.**
- I. Minor roof repairs as may be identified during the works.**
- J. The provision of a kitchen in the southwest corner of the church beneath the gallery.**
- K. The provision of two toilets – one for all abilities – to the northwest corner of the church beneath the gallery.**
- L. The provision of a gallery at the west end that may include a parish office on the south side.**
- M. The provision of rooms for a Sunday school and bible studies at the west end including the occasional use of the ringing chamber as part of the construction of the gallery.**
- N. The provision of a timber floor to the lower tower room.**
- O. The minor reordering of the Blaise chapel including the removal of the reredos.**
- P. The reopening and restoration of the south door.**
- Q. The modification of the vestry so that it can have a shared use as an office, with the provision of roof lights to provide enhanced natural light and the introduction of a reclaimed stone footpath to provide level access to the vestry external door.**
- R. For the introduction of an air source heat pumps adjacent to the south wall of the churchyard.**
- S. The construction of two small churchyard maintenance buildings in the churchyard.**
- T. Adjustments to the chancel.**

Background history:

2. St Lawrence's Church is located towards the southeast corner of Market Place which is off the High Street in the market town of Lechlade. Lechlade was historically on the trade route between Bristol and London and close to a crossing of the River Thames. In the 2021 Census, Lechlade had a population of 3,139 people. St Lawrence's is surrounded on all sides by its churchyard, and the majority of the churchyard is

surrounded by residential properties and private gardens. A public right of way runs west-east across the churchyard, to the north side of the church, which at its western end is known as ‘Shelley’s Walk’, as the churchyard is understood to have inspired the poet Percy Shelley, who visited in September 1815 and then wrote a poem entitled ‘A Summer-Evening Churchyard, Lechlade, Gloucestershire’. This right of way is known as the Salt Way, which is at least a route from Roman times, possibly older.

3. St Lawrence’s Church is regarded as ‘*One of the great Gloucestershire ‘wool’ churches*’¹ and is built of dressed stone from Taynton, 10 miles to the north. It is thought that the same stone was taken down the River Thames to build St Paul’s Cathedral in London. St Lawrence’s is likely to be a replacement for an earlier church. The current church is of a style that is wholly perpendicular with a nave with clerestory walls, north and south aisles, chancel with one bay, north and south chapels and a west tower with a spire. The nave and aisles were rebuilt in around 1470. The current chancel was probably not completed until the early sixteenth century as the roofline of its predecessor can be seen against the outer east wall of the nave. The north porch is early sixteenth century, with an embattled parapet with castellated pinnacles, and a flat stone pattern of lierne ribs. The interior of the nave has four bay arcades, with a further bay to the chancel chapels, with a large chancel arch and similar arches to the west end of each chapel. The tower is square and has massive stone walls, that are set in three stages over a height of roughly 20 metres. It supports an eight-sided stone spire that rises to a height of 35 metres above ground level. The tower contains three floors comprising of the ringing chamber, the clock chamber and the belfry. There is a small basement under the south aisle which appears to have been larger and reduced during the Victorian re-ordering. The church internally and externally contains many other fine features relating to its previous history. It is a beautiful church that is well looked after and well used.
4. The church was re-ordered in 1828 by Richard Price (1760-1838), an architect and builder who was responsible for building homes for the clergy and for re-ordering a number of churches in Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire. He is commemorated by a monument in the churchyard of St Lawrence. Of particular note, Richard Price

¹ The Buildings of England: Gloucestershire 1: The Cotswold by David Verey and Alan Brooks p436.

introduced two new galleries, one at the western end of the nave and into the two side aisles and the other positioned within the north aisle. It would appear that the two galleries were not linked and were at different levels. They were supported on cast iron columns. He also introduced box pews to the church.

5. The church was re-ordered again in 1881-1882 by Frederick Sandham Waller (1822-1905), who was the resident architect to the Dean and Chapter of Gloucester Cathedral from 1878. He was responsible for building churches and re-ordering churches in the Gloucester Diocese that included at Down Hatherley, Ashleworth, Sandhurst and Twigworth. In the re-ordering, the galleries were removed as they were apparently unsafe. The box pews were removed. The stone floor was removed and replaced with a concrete floor that was finished with clay tiles. The chancel was raised by two steps. The nave floor was lowered in this re-ordering, although some objectors to this Petition have cast doubt on this assertion. In addition, from my viewing of the basement, it would appear that the work done to the floor coincided with reducing the size of the basement.
6. St Lawrence is Grade I listed, its listing being from 1958, and it is noted as being of exceptional interest mainly relating to the architectural design of the building inside and out and features linked to it. The listing states '*restored 1882 by Waller*' but gives no details and does not mention the floor, the pews or the chancel screen. There are twenty-four listed memorials within the churchyards that are designated as Grade II. Church Cottage which is to the north of the churchyard is Grade II listed. The churchyard is within the Lechlade Conservation Area.
7. At the eastern end of the south aisle is the Blaise chapel, dedicated to St Blaise of Caesarea Cappadocia, the patron saint of wool combers (blazers) which was consecrated in 1953 and is currently used for Holy Communion services and quiet prayer. The location of a chapel at the east end of the south aisle, originates from when the church was built. All that remains of the pre-reformation chapel is a small 13th century piscina in the wall on the south aisle. It is thought that this was a chantry chapel that was dissolved at the reformation. The eastern end of the north aisle at one stage had a chapel dedicated to St Mary, but at some unknown point this was replaced by the organ.

Planning Permission

8. The Petitioners applied for planning permission from the Cotswold District Council in relation to the external alterations to the church which included the addition of two rooflights over the Vestry, the replacement of the north porch gates with doors, the adjustment to the west tower doors the relocation of plain leaded light and stained glass windows in the south elevation, the addition of extraction vents in the walls, the addition of two air source heat pumps at the south side of the tower, the provision of storage sheds and bin storage to the north of the church and the provision of improved paved access to the Vestry. The application for planning permission included a Biodiversity Self-Assessment Form where the Petitioners did not consider that any wildlife would be adversely affected by the Proposal. The Planning Officer recommended approval and the application was dealt with under delegated powers with the decision being made on 30 October 2023.

Statement of Need

9. The Petitioners have described the church in their Statement of Need²:

'We have a strong and lively church which is well supported across the community. We hold three well-attended services every Sunday and more during the week. We have a range of popular study groups which complement the services. There are other strong Christian groups from Mothers Union and Men Aloud Out to youth groups and the 'little lights' toddlers' group. Our close links with the St Lawrence Church of England Primary School enables a strong Christian ethos to be promoted there. We are a teaching ministry giving young clergy the experience to build their calling. A successful Mission took place in September 2022 to promote the Christian message to the wider community.

There is a strong need to build on our current worship and mission and putting the church to viable uses that are consistent with its role as a place of worship and mission.'

10. The Petitioners have set out the background and reasons for the Petition. In 2018, the Parochial Church Council (PCC) recognised that it needed to take a strategic approach

² Statement of Need July 2023 p6 of 88 paragraph 1.

to the number of pressing repairs to the fabric of the church. This resulted in a recognition that in addition to carrying out repairs, there could be enhancements which would allow the church to grow, particularly in relation to encouraging younger families and youth groups. The PCC considered that the adjoining Church Cottage no longer provided sufficient space for meeting rooms, and it had insufficient toilets and catering facilities for those attending services. This resulted in the creation of ‘Project Inspire’ which set out proposals to re-order the church so that the church could have the appropriate facilities in a single building. The PCC wished for the proposals to assist with the Church of England’s targets of ‘Carbon Net Zero’ by 2030. The Petitioners stated that the number of people worshipping in their regular four services had grown steadily³. It should be noted that a number of those objecting to various aspects of the Petition, do not necessarily agree with the PCC’s assessment of the inadequacy of the current facilities, even if they share the same ambition for church growth.

11. The Petitioners have set out in their Statement of Need their objectives⁴ for the proposals within the Petition:

- An open and welcoming space for adaptable worship and community use;
- A level access for all abilities from the reopened north porch to the communion rail;
- Shared spaces to make optimal use of the whole church building;
- Efficient energy use towards the Church of England (CofE) ‘net zero’ carbon reduction target by 2030;
- Heritage conserved by careful design of internal changes;

12. The Petitioners suggest that the removal of the pews, taken together with the new floor, an improved heating system, multi-functional rooms, catering facilities and new toilets would enable the church to provide a far better environment for children and youth activities particularly ‘Little Lights’, the different groups at Sunday School and the midweek ‘Explorers after-school club’ for pupils from St Lawrence Church of England Primary School. The Petitioners suggest that the combination of proposals would

³ Annex 4 of the Statement of Need – Use of the church – May 2023

⁴ Statement of Need July 2023 p15 of 88;

greatly assist the summer clubs, small group activities and larger church events as well as enable the church to be a venue for concerts.

13. I have been made aware by the Petitioners of some of the missional activity in 2023 that included a Holiday Bible Club for more than 75 children from the local community, most of whom attend St Lawrence Church of England Primary School. This lasted 4 days and then culminated with a Sunday service. The pews were temporarily removed from the church to make the necessary space for the church's activities.

Statement of Significance

14. In their Statement of Significance, the Petitioners have used the following terminology:

- *High – important at national to international levels*
- *Moderate-High – important at a regional, sometimes higher level*
- *Moderate – usually of local value but classifiable as being of regional significance for its contribution to the building as a whole*
- *Low-Moderate – of local value*
- *Low – adds little or nothing to the value of a site or detracts from it'*

'The church as a whole is of High Significance and all the individual component parts and areas of the church contribute towards this nationally important level of significance, although some are obviously contributing less, and some may detract.'

Having visited the church, and from everything that I have read and set out above, I agree with the Petitioners' assessment of the overall significance of the church.

Consultation

15. The Petitioners consulted with the Church Buildings Council, the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC), Historic Buildings and Places (formerly the Ancient Monuments Society), the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), the Victorian Society and Historic England. The Petitioners had held consultation meetings with the local community in 2018 and 2021. In relation to the 2021 meeting, the Petitioners received 155 responses representing they suggested 7.1% of the adult population⁵. The result represented 74% of those on the church's electoral roll. There was substantial

⁵ Report on the 2021 consultation v6 December 2021 p3;

support for the main proposals in the Petition, particularly from regular worshippers who responded. As a result of comments received, the Petitioners removed proposals relating to the removal of the wooden gates in the north porch, the installation of a glass inner lobby area, the removal of much of the Blaise chapel, the moving of stained glass between windows and the removal of the chancel screen. The proposed air source heat pumps were also relocated away from the church to close to the southern boundary wall of the churchyard.

16. The consultation did result in a minority of responses that were strongly opposed to the Petition. Some of the comments were directed at proposals that are no longer part of the Petition whilst others objected to any or all of the parts of the current proposals. From the letters of objection received, there were concerns raised over the methodology of the consultation and the validity of the outcomes.
17. I consider that the primary purpose of consultation is an attempt to publicise the details of the Petition to those people who may have an interest in St Lawrence's, so that they have an opportunity to comment upon the Petition, thereby influencing the shape of the proposals and ultimately so that the Court can assess their comments when making a decision.

PCC resolution

18. The proposals were unanimously approved by the PCC at its meeting on 22 March 2023.

Letters

19. I have received and read approximately 55 letters in support of the Petition, almost all were from people who had a high level of involvement with the worshipping life of the church. I have received and read approximately 40 letters that raised objection to some, or all, of the proposals within the Petition. The objections were carefully considered and well-reasoned. They ranged from concern over the need for any re-ordering, through to support for some proposals, but objections to a specific proposal. The letters of objection were from a variety of people, most of whom were local, some attended the church although most did not worship at the church, but all held the church building in high regard. I have drawn no distinction between those who commented who

currently worship at the church and those who do not. Instead, I have looked with care at the points raised and the arguments made. I have addressed the specific objections when considering each of the proposals.

My approach

20. None of those objecting wished to become a party opponent. Accordingly, I gave directions that I would decide the Petition on the face of the papers after I had visited the church. I visited St Lawrence's on Tuesday 12 December 2023. As I looked at the different parts of the church, I bore in mind the different objections that had been raised to see whether the Petitioners had addressed the concerns of those objecting. Following my visit, I gave further directions. This resulted in further information provided by the Petitioners and a further consultation response from the DAC. I have had to consider a large volume of material that has included the many iterations of the proposals and their accompanying plans, as well as the steady stream of comments from members of the public. I shall set out below the different parts of the Petition and the issues that I have had to consider.

The law

21. I have had regard to the questions set out in St Alkmund, Duffield [2013] Fam 158 (the Duffield questions) and the guidance given by the Court of Arches in St John the Baptist, Penshurst [2015] Court of Arches (Rochester) at paragraph 22:

- (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.....Questions 3, 4 and 5 do not arise.*
- (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 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 to a building which is listed grade I or II, where serious harm should only exceptionally be allowed”.*

22. I have recognised that my decisions on the flooring and the gallery may have a knock-on effect on the viability of some of the other parts of the Petition.

A. The reopening of the north porch to be used as the main entrance to the church with the introduction of an external timber door and internal doors.

23. The proposal seeks to make the north porch the principal entrance to the church, thus replacing the west entrance as the regular entrance point to the church. The existing floor of the north porch would be readjusted so as to provide ramped access to the inner door. The existing Georgian timber gates would be adjusted in their position and rehung inside the porch having received some restoration. Traditional solid timber boarded doors would be inserted with a glazed fanlight above. The new external doors and frame would have mouldings to reflect the existing tracery of the church’s windows. The new doors would be held open when the church was in use. There would be a new glazed internal door which would be operated with a push button. The existing internal door would be adjusted so that it could be kept open during services.

24. The Church Buildings Council was in broad agreement with this proposal. Historic Buildings and Places and SPAB considered that the west end should remain the main entrance to the church.

25. The Petitioners in their Statement of Significance stated that the wooden gates were ‘*of Low to Moderate significance*⁶.’ The Petitioners considered that the north porch was ‘*of Moderate significance intrinsically and, although it contributes positively to the setting*

⁶ Statement of Significance Part 2 v10 p15;

and views of the church, this is negatively affected by the current lack of access⁷. The Petitioners considered that the proposal would have a *'Moderate impact'* upon the porch.

26. At its meeting held on 22 June 2023, the DAC recommended that *'the removal of the Georgian gates and their replacement with timber doors if the planners were persuaded to drop their objection. The DAC agreed that if the north porch was to become the new main entrance to the church, it should be more secure and welcoming than it is now and it should be made weatherproof. Should the planners be persuaded, the DAC would like to see the gates sold to as architectural salvage, in line with the advice of Historic Buildings & Places. The gates must not be destroyed.'*
27. As a result of my visit, I gave the following direction: *'The Petitioners should provide a drawing of how the new exterior North Porch door will be hung and the Georgian gates will be restored and rehung. The proposed drawings, design and restoration should be discussed with the DAC.'*
28. The Petitioners provided a detailed drawing showing that the Georgian gates could be rehung and closed with the new exterior double doors (looking outwards) closed behind them. The drawing showed new bespoke hinges and the method of their attachment to the wall and the gates.
29. The DAC responded to the drawing as follows: *'It might be better just to leave the Georgian gates permanently open. The hinge should be stainless steel which could be painted black post installation so that it can blend with the existing gate ironmongery. These will probably need to be set into the stonework at 45 degrees to give more bearing rather parallel to the interior stone finish.'*
30. I have considered whether the proposals as now drafted in relation to the North Porch would harm the significance of the church as a Grade 1 listed building of exceptional architectural or historic interest. I have noted the letters of objection from those who did not wish that the North Porch was used but preferred the west entrance to remain as the primary entrance. In my view, this is a standalone application in relation to the

⁷ Statement of Significance Part 2 v10 p15;

North Porch and is not dependent on whether the West end entrance is used regularly or not. A church of this size should have a number of entrances and exits for a variety of reasons including fire safety.

31. The Petitioners do not wish to remove the Georgian gates. Indeed, they wish to restore them and protect them from the elements. Had the Petitioners sought to remove the Georgian gates, I would have found that there would have been some harm caused to the significance of the building. However, the Petitioners have responded to the various concerns and wish for the Georgian gates to be retained. Their new location inside the porch, in my view, does not harm the significance of the church. I do not consider that the introduction of new doors and adjustments to the floor would cause harm to the significance of the building. The significant Elizabethan/Tudor appearance of the porch's design would remain untouched. The proposals are positive enhancements that are well designed and in a short time will look as though they had always been in their position. Indeed, the outer doors will help protect the inside of the porch from the elements. Accordingly, I am easily persuaded that the Petition for the reopening of the north porch to be used as the main entrance to the church with the introduction of an external timber door and internal doors should be granted.

B. The construction of a new limestone flag floor at a higher level and level with the chancel floor. The relocation of three existing ledger stones and the relocation of a memorial on the chancel step.

32. The proposal seeks to create a new raised floor across the nave and both side aisles, raising the floor level by 250mm to match the floor level of the chancel. The new floor would consist of a new limestone floor finish on a bedding over underfloor heating and rigid insulation which would be laid on a levelling screed over the existing tiled floor finish with a separate membrane to protect the tiles from damage if the new raised floor were to be removed in the future.
33. The Petitioners considered that the proposed new floor would contribute to their objectives of creating a welcoming space for adaptable worship and community use and it would create a level access for all abilities from the reopened north porch to the communion rail.

34. The Petitioners relied upon a structural engineering report that considered the weakness of the existing suspended floor over the basement boiler room. This meant that the floor needed to be strengthened at the western end of the south aisle. The report concluded that the only solution would be the removal of the existing suspended floor and its replacement with a new permanent reinforced concrete floor slab at the level of the existing floor slab beneath the Victorian tiled floor.
35. The existing floor of the nave was introduced by the Waller reordering. It consists of 100mm x 100mm plain red quarry tiles with black and brown tiles near the aisles in diamond type pattern. The quarry tiles had been laid on a concrete floor. The Petitioners discovered the original Waller plans which envisaged that the pews were to be raised on timber platforms, 9 inches above the concrete floor beneath the tiles, so that the seating height as designed by Waller was meant to be approximately 8 inches higher than it currently is.
36. Frederick Waller's report from January 1881 stated as recommendations for the reordering: *'The whole of the pews and other fittings of the church and the western gallery should be...removed together with the floors both stone and wood...It would then be most desirable to lay over the whole surface of the interiors of the church a bed of concrete and to properly and securely cover over the vaults and to prevent any escape of noxious gases – To reseat the church with seats arranged as shown on the Plan and to be of oak or deal according to your funds will allow. To lay the floors under the seats with wood and in the gangways with tiles – preserving most carefully the monumental slabs...'*
37. The specification to the contractor from 1881 stated that: *'The whole of the existing seating, gallery, organ and all other woodwork, as well as the paving steps, floors and soil to the depth required to be removed from the church...The whole of the internal area of the church is to be levelled and rammed in every part thereof, and upon this level is to be laid a base of concrete 6 inches thick...to lay the aisles spaces of the nave and aisles with...thin tiles.'* This had then been crossed out and amended to *'lay the floor spaces of the original plan with...tiles.'* A plan attached to the documents showed that originally the pews were to be constructed on a raised wooden platform, with the platform being some inches above the tiled aisles.

38. The Petitioners have speculated that it may have been down to cost that the wooden platforms were not built, and the pews were placed on a tiled floor instead. The Petitioners have submitted that Waller had intended that those sitting in the pews would sit and look at eye level into the chancel rather than look up to it and that the current pews are not at the level that he intended. The Petitioners had noted that the tiles had been damaged and were at risk of further damage from the movement of the pews and chairs. Both the plans and trial pits dug into the floor revealed that the floor was not insulated underneath when it was constructed.
39. The Church Buildings Council was in broad agreement with this proposal. Historic England opposed the proposal based on the loss of the Victorian Waller floor which it considered '*contributes considerably to the aesthetics of the Victorian phase and its removal would have a marked impact.*' Historic England disliked the proposed stone floor. Historic Buildings and Places did not see the necessity for the floor and considered that the existing floor should be retained as being '*important for the warmth, colour, texture, contrast and interest they give the interior.*' The Victorian Society opposed the covering of the Waller floor with a limestone floor and pointed out that '*Waller's tiled floor was designed to complement and respond to the architecture of the building.*' The Victorian Society contested whether the floor had in fact been lowered by the reordering of 1881. SPAB considered '*that the existing patterned tiles are important for the warmth, colour, texture, contrast and interest they give the interior. Especially without the pews, the proposed limestone floor would appear, cold, ungiving and its overwhelming blandness would detract from an appreciation of the architecture.*' They hoped that the area of patterned tiling along the central aisle and the east end of the nave could be retained. I have read carefully the various letters of objection relating to this proposal.
40. At its meeting held on 22 June 2023, the DAC recommended the replacement of the flooring with stone. The DAC requested more information on the impact on the south door with the changing floor levels. The DAC wished to see a decorative motif incorporated into the new floor to visually break up the large expanse of flooring of the same colour and texture.

41. The Petitioners responded to the DAC comments in Annex 2 to the Statement of Need⁸ and, in particular, to a request to consider using a stone floor throughout the nave, perhaps with a replica tiled floor. The Petitioners emphasised the age of the church, that it was not a Victorian church in design or build and the new floor was necessary for the underfloor heating and improving accessibility and appearance.
42. The Petitioners in their Statement of Significance stated: *'The current floor dates from 1882 and the nave and aisle floors are considered to be of Low to Moderate significance in itself; it is a fairly typical late-Victorian floor with no particular intrinsic merit although among the pews it is the most visible part of the FS Waller and Son restoration. The highly decorated Godwin floor of the chancel is of greater significance and is a key component of the Waller restoration⁹.*' The Petitioners considered that the proposal would have a *'High Impact'* on the church but described it as *'Partly reversible as tiles are sealed in situ and intact beneath the floor¹⁰.*'
43. As a consequence of the proposal to raise the floor of the nave, the Petitioners seek the relocation of three existing ledger stones and a memorial which would otherwise be covered by the new floor. The proposal includes the moving of a black ledger stone commemorating Sir Edward Bathurst in the northwest corner to the north aisle, a ledger stone referred to as the Townsend ledger stone in the north aisle and a ledger stone referred to as the Hitchman ledger stone in the south aisle. The proposal is for them to be relocated to the Blaise Chapel where footfall and chair use would be less frequent.
44. The proposal includes the relocation of a memorial that is on the step leading to the chancel which was erected in the memory of George Augustus Robbins who died on 3 August 1887 by his widow which states *'These three screens were erected by his widow.'*
45. The Church Buildings Council raised a concern over the wear and tear on the ledger stones in the proposed new location.

⁸ Version 2 dated May 2023;

⁹ Statement of Significance Part 2 v10 p13;

¹⁰ Statement of Significance Part 2 v10 p18;

46. The Petitioners described the memorials and ledgers stones as *'of Low to Moderate significance. They are important within the context of the church as examples of the former appearance of the church, and indeed of the earlier church that stood on this site, as well as having intrinsic evidential and historic value¹¹.'* The Petitioners considered that the moving of the memorials and ledger stones would be of *'Low impact.'*

47. As a result of my visit, I gave the following directions:

- *'Please provide plans for the pattern to be used on the floor. The Chancellor appreciates that this may need to be discussed with the DAC.'*
- *'Please provide a report of the efforts made to trace the descendants of the people depicted on the memorials and ledger stones which are being moved as part of the proposed works including copies of any correspondence and responses from the families (where applicable).'*
- *'Please provide copies of the original 1881 PCC note and Waller drawings along with the architect's note and specifications to support the 1881 proposal to lower the floor.'*

48. The Petitioners responded with a flooring plan that provided a uniform design with a feature in the centre of the nave and provided a border around the pulpit and the new location of the font. The Petitioners provided details of their efforts to correspond with relatives of the relevant memorials and ledger stones. The response from one family was *'Thank you for your report. Your report, along with Wendy and Steve's report have been reassuring – 'Grandpa' is in good hands. Thanks again!'*

49. The DAC responded to the proposed floor pattern, stating the *'centre cross should either be made bigger or smaller, so it sits within the banding of the floor and again with the hexagonal pattern around the font/pulpit and ledger to the north aisle. This will assist with the simplicity. It will assist with setting out and avoid awkward cuts which will be more susceptible to damage long term. Should the trench heating be linear along the north aisle?'*

¹¹ Statement of Significance Part 2 v10 p14;

50. In my visit, I was able to see the tool marks at the bases of the aisle columns. I have concluded that in the 1882 re-ordering, the existing wooden and stone floor was removed and some of the earth beneath. A new concrete floor with tar damp proofing underneath was then laid. The intention was for tiled aisles and tiled open spaces and for the pews to be raised on wooden platforms. For reasons unknown, but potentially due to cost, the wooden platforms for the pews were not constructed and the whole of the nave floor was tiled. The overall effect was for the seated height to be lower than that which Frederick Waller had intended. Therefore, I have concluded that the proposal in the Petition would create a seating height that was similar to that envisaged by Frederick Waller, but for the aisle height to be higher than that envisaged by Frederick Waller. It would also create a floor that was at a level that was similar to that which it was when the church was originally constructed.

51. I have considered whether the proposals in relation to the floor would harm the significance of the church as a building of special architectural or historic interest. I have taken account of the comments made concerning the floor from various objectors. The church is of high significance nationally. In my judgement, the Victorian tiled floor is a highly visible part of the Victorian contribution to the fabric of the church. The current height of the aisle floor was integral to the layout of the church with the higher chancel floor. It is worth noting that Frederick Waller wished for the seating height to have been higher than that which currently exists, presumably because this would have provided a better view of the chancel. However, the Petition has to be considered against the position that exists, not as it might have been. I have concluded that the effect of a new floor as set out in the Petition would result in the Victorian contribution to the fabric of the church being significantly diminished and limited to the chancel.

52. However, I consider that it is the age and construction of the original building that is the major contributor to the significance of the building and not the Victorian floor. Thus, there is a difference between a Victorian floor in a church that has had a Victorian rebuild in terms of roof and windows and one where it has been introduced to a building that pre-existed it and has many of its earlier features on display. In my view, there is nothing unusual or special about the floor. It is typical of a Victorian style that is commonplace in non-church buildings of the period. I have noted the differing views of the amenity societies. Accordingly, I have concluded that the proposal for the loss of

the Victorian floor would harm the significance of the church as a building of historic interest but not to any great extent.

53. I have considered the proposals for the movement of the memorials. I note that some have been moved previously and their repositioning would protect them from footfall. I do not consider that the movement of the memorials would harm the significance of the church nor cause harm to the memorials. I am satisfied that sufficient efforts have been made to contact relatives.
54. I have considered the seriousness of the harm caused by the covering of the floor. The floor is damaged in places. I note that the proposal is to protect and cover the floor so that it is preserved beneath the proposed raised floor. Therefore, the harm to the floor itself is minimal.
55. The Petitioners have submitted as justification for the proposals that the raised floor, with the underfloor heating, would provide a warmer and more flexible and accessible space than that which currently exists. On my visit, I was able to see samples of the proposed stone flooring and observed that this had the potential brighten the inside of the church in comparison to the existing tiles. I disagree with the assessment of SPAB and a blended approach consisting of existing tiled aisles and new stone would not be possible as it would inhibit the underfloor heating and the accessibility provided by the nave floor being level with the north door and the chancel. I have had regard to the missional activities that the church is already engaged in, and how the proposal would significantly enhance the church's ability to carry out such activities. The proposals would assist those with disabilities by providing a level floor and enable those with wheelchairs to move freely around the church. In my view, the Petitioners have made a compelling case for the raising of the floor which easily outweighs the harm caused by the loss of the visible Victorian floor. I grant the Petition in relation to the raising of the floor and the movement of the memorials.

C. Raising the pulpit and relocation of the font to the east end of the nave.

56. The proposal will raise the pulpit in its current location to take account of the raising of the floor level. The proposal seeks the moving of the font from the west end of the

church to a position to the southeast of the chancel arch, in a corresponding location to the pulpit in the northeast side of the chancel arch.

57. The Church Buildings Council was in broad agreement with this proposal.

58. I read one letter objecting to the movement of the font *'since its location is the traditional marker of the Christian introduction to the faith.'*

59. I note the overall lack of serious objection and the benefits of having a font in the suggested location where a congregation can see the baptism from a traditional seating arrangement that faces the chancel. Its movement assists with the flexible use of the rest of the nave for missional activities. I have considered this part of the Petition and do not consider that it causes any harm to the significance of the church. Accordingly, I grant the Petition in relation to the raising of the pulpit and the relocation of the font.

D. The removal of the deal pews (retaining four shortened pews in the chancel) and replacement with 'Theo' design chairs and the creation of storage cupboards.

60. The proposal seeks the wholesale removal of the existing pews from the nave and their replacement with non-upholstered 'Theo' design chairs. The proposal seeks the introduction of oak storage cupboards along the north wall of the north aisle and at the east end of the north aisle and on the south wall adjoining the proposed kitchen. The proposal set out the variety of seating plans that would be available following the removal of the pews, which included east facing seating, a north-south orientation and seating in the round.

61. The Petitioners considered that the existing pews had a maximum capacity of 200, with a limited ability to increase when required. The Petitioners asserted that it was very difficult to adapt to different requirements. The Petitioners cited the Remembrance Day service in 2018, where people were standing in the porch and outside the west door during the service. The Petitioners explained that the pews, 34 of which are 2.5m long, are difficult to manoeuvre, and take up significant space if put to the side of church. The Petitioners considered that the use of the proposed chairs would contribute to their objective of creating a welcoming space for adaptable worship and community use. In addition, it would mean that those who are in wheelchairs could easily be positioned

next to family and friends in church without the constraints that pews cause. It is understood that St Lawrence Church of England Primary School has approximately 210 children. With supporting staff and governors, the church could not currently accommodate a whole school event.

62. In Annex 1 to the Statement of Need¹², the Petitioners provided evidence of the worship and mission activities that took place during 2022. They sought to demonstrate how the temporary removal of pews had provided greater flexibility that supported the various mission activities that took place during the Holiday Bible Club and the Parish Mission Week.

63. The Church Buildings Council was in broad agreement with this proposal. Historic England opposed the proposal and considered that the pews ‘*contribute very positively to the ensemble of 19th century fittings.*’ Historic England suggested that some pews could be removed at the west end of the church and the remaining pews could be made more mobile. Historic Buildings and Places also considered that some blocks of pews should be retained on casters. The Victorian Society submitted that: ‘*We do not by any means consider that the pews here are of such significance that no reduction of them can be contemplated. However, they are good quality pieces of historic joinery, treated with respect and care in their design and detailing, and they form an intrinsic part of Waller’s comprehensive and holistic restoration. As a significant part of Waller’s restoration, and as historic furnishings that contribute positively to the character, appearance and an understanding of the interior, there is a presumption against any loss unless there is clear, compelling justification presented for it. The Statement of Needs outlines an ambitious vision, as well as a great many activities that either happen or could happen in the church (although the specific demands of several of these uses remains unclear). However, we do not think this amounts to a clear and compelling articulation of need for wholesale removal of the historic benches. Surely a compromise could be found, which would see a significant number of benches retained, perhaps in shortened form, and/or adapted to be made moveable without the aid of a trolley...*’ SPAB hoped that the pews could be made mobile with casters.

¹² Version 17 dated March 2023;

64. I have read the letters from those objecting to the pews being removed.
65. The DAC recommended *'the removal of all pews, but four, which according to the proposals are proposed to be shortened and repositioned within the chancel. It did not feel that retaining pews in the nave will have any practical purpose. Any number of retained pews would be unlikely to be used and would take up storage space. The Victorian Society's suggestion of retaining a 'meaningful block of benches' would, in effect, jeopardise the main objectives of the scheme.'* *The design and number of chairs must be confirmed and agreed by the DAC'.*
66. The Petitioners in their Statement of Significance considered that the pews were *'of Moderate intrinsic significance but assume a greater significance as one of the key visible components of the 1882 F S Waller and Son restoration¹³.'* The Petitioners considered that the proposal would have a *'High Impact'*. I agree with this assessment.
67. I have considered with care the representations made to me concerning the pews in the nave. I have noted that the chancel will remain untouched and as such Waller's contribution to the church will remain untouched in the chancel. I have also noted that the Victorian Society do not suggest that all the pews should be retained due to their historic significance. The Petitioners seek to use the church as a multi-functional space, repeating regularly the activities that they have undertaken during the two brief periods when the pews were temporarily removed. This would include seating around tables for Bible studies and for meals, the use of the church for the Holiday Bible Club, the Seeds of Faith Parish Mission and other activities that took place in 2022 and 2023. These require the whole of the church floor to be used. These are very important missional activities of the church which are currently constrained by the existing pews. I do not consider that a mix of pews and chairs would be suitable for the church as this would restrict the flexibility of worship and function that the Petitioners have demonstrated would be achieved by chairs alone being used on the new floor. I consider that the justification for having chairs outweighs the harm caused by the removal of the pews. Accordingly, I grant the Petition for the removal of the deal pews (retaining four shortened pews in the chancel) and their replacement with up to 250 'Theo' design chairs and the creation of storage cupboards.

¹³ Statement of Significance Part 2 v10 p13;

E. The provision of a hybrid heating system including underfloor heating in the raised floor, trench heaters, air source heat pumps and modifications to the existing boilers.

68. The Petitioners engaged consultants to provide a heating solution having regard to the net carbon reduction target. The Petitioners considered that the current heating system was ineffective in that it did not always maintain a reasonable temperature throughout the building during winter services.
69. The resulting proposal seeks the installation of two air source heat pumps near to the south wall of the churchyard as the primary source of heat. This would provide ‘slow’ heat to the water-based underfloor heating system. The Petitioners would keep the existing gas-powered boilers to provide ‘fast’ heat to increase temperatures in advance of main events in the church. The proposal seeks to insert trench fan convactor heaters along the edge of the floor against the north walls of the north aisle and the south wall of the south aisle.
70. The structural engineering report has proposed that a new access opening is located to the basement boiler room on the outside of the church in a new reinforced concrete slab so that a buffer tank can be lowered into the boiler room and removed, if required, later.
71. I am unaware of there being any objection to this proposal aside from those already objecting to the proposed new floor. When I visited, I was able to see the many radiators that run along the walls of the church and harm the significance of the church due to their appearance. This proposal would result in those radiators being removed, thus improving the appearance of the church walls. This proposal would not harm the significance of the church, and in the light of the aforementioned decision concerning the floor, I have no hesitation in granting the Petition for the provision of a hybrid heating system including underfloor heating in the raised floor, trench heaters, air source heat pumps and modifications to the existing boilers.

F. Three phase electricity supply, rewiring the power and lighting circuits and provision of enhanced lighting.

72. The proposal sets out proposals for lighting, emergency lighting and fire alarms and includes the introduction of a small cupboard in the north aisle and one in the south aisle.
73. The Petitioners submitted that the electrical distribution system was installed in the 1960's and need updating. On my visit, I was able to see that cabling was generally exposed along the church, and some of the copper cladding had reacted with the lime harming the rendering. I understand that there have been instances of cables having failed. A fixed wiring inspection was carried out in August 2017 and identified that the electrics were unsatisfactory.
74. The Petitioners considered in their Statement of Significance that the proposal would have a '*Low impact, largely beneficial*¹⁴'. I agree with this assessment.
75. I am unaware of their being any objection to this proposal. It would not harm the significance of the church, indeed, it is likely to improve it. Accordingly, I grant the Petition for three phase electricity supply, rewiring the power and lighting circuits and the provision of enhanced lighting.

G. The provision of new audio-visual system with associated Wi-Fi and projector screen above the chancel arch.

76. The proposal includes the installation of a projector within the gallery and a projector screen to be installed about the chancel arch. The Petitioner's had adopted through a PPC resolution, the Chancellor's guidance on the live streaming of services. The audio-visual system would include an enhanced hearing loop and mobile screens for ease of listening and viewing for those with disabilities. The proposal also seeks to move the existing security cameras.
77. The original proposal sought to relocate a hatchment above the chancel arch that referred to King George IV. Following my visit, this was abandoned, and the hatchment will remain in its existing position.

¹⁴ Statement of Significance Part 2 v10 p23;

78. The screen would be attached to the western side of the chancel arch. It could not be attached to the eastern side as to do so would cause it to come into contact with the retained chancel screen. I understand the intention is for it to be painted a similar colour to the wall so that it blends in when in the raised position.
79. I understand that the Petitioners would seek to use the screen as part of regular worship, but it would also be used when other activities took place within the church. The church currently uses a portable screen at a lower level that blocks the view of the chancel at eye level.
80. I considered a single letter of objection to the screen which raised a number of concerns including that it would obscure the view of the chancel during services.
81. In my view, the addition of a screen below to the wall of the chancel arch below the hatchment would cause some slight harm to the significance of the church. However, this harm would be mitigated by the colour of the screen when folded away. A screen at height would obscure the view of the east window during services for some of those in the congregation. However, screens exist in many churches as part of regular worship and their purpose is to obscure the view so that what is projected onto them is seen by the congregation. I consider that a compelling case has been made, that outweighs any harm, that the use of the screen would assist with worship and other activities that would take place within the church. Accordingly, I grant the Petition for the provision of new audio-visual system with associated Wi-Fi and projector screen above the chancel arch.

H. Repairs to areas of lime plaster, cleaning and repainting of the walls.

82. The proposal seeks the repair and repainting of the walls both due to the age of the decoration and consequential upon the other matters being approved which are the subject of this Petition, particularly the removal of old cabling and radiators. This would only improve the significance of the church and I grant a faculty for the repair to areas of lime plaster, and the cleaning and repainting of the walls.

I. Minor roof repairs as may be identified during the works.

83. It is unclear as to the necessity for exterior works to the roof but the proposal seeks approval for the redecoration of timbers inside the church. I grant a faculty for minor roof repairs as may be identified during the works.

J. The provision of a kitchen in the southwest corner of the church.

84. The proposal seeks to install a kitchen with appropriate drainage in the southwest corner of the south aisle. It is proposed that it would be located completely underneath the gallery. There would be several breaches of the external wall for an extraction fan, ventilation pipe and a soil vent pipe. There would be access to drainage systems outside the church and to mains water. The kitchen would include a water boiler, coffee boiler, a domestic oven, a commercial refrigerator, a double sink and draining board, a commercial dishwasher, a handbasin with appropriate cupboards and work surfaces.
85. The church currently does not have appropriate catering facilities and is dependent on the use of a small kitchen within Church Cottage for the cooking of food and storage and refrigeration of food. As a consequence, the Petitioners cannot provide hot food for any activity within the church, without borrowing portable equipment.
86. The provision of a kitchen will require the construction of a new internal manhole that it proposed will be positioned in the north aisle adjacent to the west elevation. The structural engineering report¹⁵ has considered its proximity to the foundations and connections to it through the exterior wall. The proposal will require the construction of a new mains water pipe from the churchyard boundary under the west door and into the corner of the tower.
87. I have considered the letters of objection that suggest that Church Cottage has adequate facilities or could provide enhanced facilities that meant that this part of the proposal is unnecessary.
88. I consider that this proposal will cause harm to the significance of the church. However, I consider that the facilities at Church Cottage are inadequate and even if enhanced, would never adequately serve the needs of a congregation who would be eating within the church. In my view, there is an overwhelming need for such facilities and they would significantly enhance the functioning of the church with its different uses throughout a week. Sharing food and drink is central to good fellowship and suggesting that the congregation go to Church Cottage or that food and drink are brought across

¹⁵ Andrew Turner Engineering: Structural Engineering Stage 3 Report Rev A 14.10.2022 paragraph 6.7;

from Church Cottage on every occasion is a far from satisfactory solution. In my view, a large town church ought to have facilities on site to provide food and drink for those who attend it. Accordingly, I consider that the need for the facilities outweighs the harm caused by the proposals. I grant the Petition for the provision of a kitchen in the southwest corner of the church.

K. The provision of two toilets – one for all abilities – to the northwest corner of the church.

89. The construction of two new toilets will require connections to the mains drainage and to mains water pipes external to the church. It will require the construction of a new internal manhole that will be positioned in the north aisle adjacent to the west elevation. The Petitioners have provided a structural engineering report¹⁶ that has considered its proximity to the foundations and the connections to it through the exterior wall. The new internal manhole will be connected to mains drainage with a new drain being constructed between the two. The proposal will result in extraction ventilation pipes being installed through the exterior walls of the church.
90. The church does not currently have any toilets and is dependent on the use of two toilets in the nearby Church Cottage, neither of which is suitable for wheelchair access. The church does not have any facilities for baby changing. The Petitioners consulted the congregation and there was a request for toilets that were inside the church that were discreet.
91. I have considered the letters of objection that suggest that Church Cottage has adequate facilities or could provide enhanced facilities that meant that this part of the proposal is unnecessary.
92. I consider that this proposal will cause harm to the significance of the church. However, I consider that the facilities at Church Cottage are inadequate and even if enhanced, would never adequately serve the needs of a congregation. In my view, there is an overwhelming need for such facilities and they would significantly enhance the functioning of the church with its different uses throughout a week. In my view, a large

¹⁶ Andrew Turner Engineering: Structural Engineering Stage 3 Report Rev A 14.10.2022 paragraph 6.7;

town church ought to have toilet facilities on site for those who attend it. Accordingly, I consider that the need for the facilities outweighs the harm caused by the proposals. I grant the Petition for two toilets in the north west corner of the church.

L. The provision of a gallery at the west end.

93. The Petitioners seek to construct a gallery at the west end of the church in a similar location to the location of the gallery that existed between 1828 and 1881. The Petitioners submit that the previous re-orderings in 1828 and in 1881-1882, resulted in contact with the walls and floors, that resulted in archaeological disturbance and have left their marks on the walls. The proposal has sought to limit any further disturbance or harm to the historic fabric and to make the gallery reversible should a future generation consider that appropriate¹⁷.
94. The construction of the gallery would seek to use the existing pockets on the walls with the removal of material within the pockets and then a determination of whether the stonework can support the new beams or a padstone would be required.
95. The Petitioners obtained a structural engineering report that concluded that to support the gallery, any pillars would not be able to rely on the strength of the Victorian floor to provide a sufficiently strong foundation and would require new localised concrete foundations beneath them.
96. The proposal would have glass barrier screens set within the window reveals and a glass partition and doors between the gallery and the bell ringing floor. The gallery would have several low-level cupboards and the floor would be carpeted. There would be a glass balustrade with a curved wooden handrail, with glass manifestations at a lower level for privacy.
97. The proposal will require the removal of a memorial on the north wall and its relocation further to the east on the north wall. It will require the raising of two memorials on the west wall (one commemorating the Reverend Richard Bowles and the other commemorating Catherine Bowles) so that they appear above the floor of the proposed gallery. It will require the raising of a memorial on the south aisle (commemorating

¹⁷ Andrew Turner Engineering: Structural Engineering Stage 3 Report Rev A 14.10.2022 paragraphs 6.1 & 6.3;

William Wace and other members of his family). It will require moving a memorial in the south aisle further along the south wall (commemorating Elizabeth Cole and her husband).

98. The Church Buildings Council was content with the principle of reintroducing a west end gallery. Its concerns related to matters that have since been withdrawn from the proposal. Historic England considered that the reinstatement of a balcony at the west end of the church may be acceptable in principle, but then suggested that it should be smaller than proposed, thereby constraining the provision of toilets. The Victorian Society considered that *'a western gallery may not be unacceptable in principle...its design remains underwhelming and utilitarian and there are certainly practical arguments that count against it: visibility from either end it would be extremely poor...the lack of a lift...it would have a major impact on one's appreciation of the building's perpendicular architecture, which Waller's work revealed and celebrated...'* SPAB considered that *'the need for the gallery has still not been justified.'*
99. I have read with care letters objecting to the proposal for a gallery, and noted that there was particular concern over the loss of light, some linked concerns from bell-ringers and questioning over the necessity for a gallery.
100. The DAC recommended the proposal for a gallery at the west end in principle, subject to discussions with the Petitioners on its design.
101. The Petitioners considered in their Statement of Significance that the proposal would have a *'High impact, but largely reversible.'*¹⁸ I agree with this assessment.
102. Following my visit and my asking whether the gallery could be lowered in height, the Petitioners submitted a revised proposal to lower the gallery, but for the tower room floor to remain the same height, creating a step up into the ringing chamber. In so doing, the revised proposal would create greater visibility of the windows at the west end from the floor of the nave, revealing light and maintaining more of the sense of openness and loftiness that was visible to me when I visited the church.

¹⁸ Statement of Significance Part 2 v10 p20;

103. I have noted that one of the most significant features of St Lawrence's is its perpendicular style that is visible in all directions. A gallery risks compromising that style, by obscuring windows. I do not attach much weight to the fact that a smaller gallery existed previously before being removed, as I have to make a decision on the significance of the building today. Two matters are of significance in considering the extent of the harm caused by the proposal. Firstly, there is a ringing floor already in existence in the tower, which obscures part of the lower side of the west window when viewed from the nave near to the tower. Secondly, the amended proposal to lower the gallery floor below the ringing floor, means that no more of the west window in the tower is obscured, and less of the windows at the west end of each of the side aisles. In my view, the harm caused by the proposal is mitigated by the lowering of the gallery floor. The amended proposal also enables greater head height under the side aisle arches on the gallery. The proposal would introduce something into the church which was not part of its original design. It has the potential to cause a high level of harm to the significance of the church, but not a very high level of harm.

104. In essence, the proposal is to make sensible use of the space above the toilets, kitchen and meeting rooms and for that space, in part to provide some seating that will have been lost by the facilities beneath it. In my view, the gallery itself would cause limited extra harm to that caused by the facilities beneath it. In my view, the Petitioners have made a compelling case for the sensible use of this space to provide much needed seating and extra floor space for activities, and this outweighs the harm caused by the proposal. Therefore, I grant the Petition for the provision of a gallery at the west end of the church.

M. The provision of rooms for Sunday school and bible studies at the west end including occasional use of the ringing chamber.

105. The proposal is predicated on the raising of the ground floor and the installation of the surrounding kitchen and toilets and the gallery above. The proposal will result in the west end doors needing to be reduced in height to suit the new floor level. The doors would still be used for special occasions. The proposal seeks to provide two areas of multi-functional space. The multi-functional space would be closed off from the nave by a folding, centre pivot, glazed door screen to permit the space to be used as part of the nave when required. It will have benches with storage units beneath them. The bell

ringing chamber would be enclosed with glass and available as a meeting room when not in use.

106. Concerns have been raised by the bell ringers over the mixed use of the bell ringing chamber. I have read the letters of objection which centred around concern that there would be non-bell ringers in the chamber at the same time that bell ringing was taken place. Understandably, the bell ringers were concerned about the potential risks involved through unfettered access to the space by both sets of users at the same time.
107. The DAC expressed concern about the prospect of straining the PCC's relationship with the bell ringers as a result of the proposal to turn the ringing room into a multipurpose space. The DAC did not oppose the proposal subject to a clarification from the church insurance company that it was comfortable with the proposed auxiliary use, and subject to a protocol that would describe how the space would be shared. The DAC wanted the protocol to make it clear that the primary purpose of the space is bellringing and that it will have priority over any other uses.
108. I understand that a protocol has been prepared whereby, the bell ringing chamber will not be used by others at bell ringing practising or when bell ringing takes place in services, and that the ropes can be safely locked away to prevent misuse.
109. The Petitioners noted that the 2018 and 2021 consultations showed the strong need to bring the Sunday School teaching within the church and close to parents. The Petitioners consulted with the congregation and parents with young children indicated that they wished them to be close to them during a service. The entrance to Church Cottage is onto a narrow pavement close to passing traffic.
110. SPAB commented that converting *'the bases of church towers into meeting rooms is rarely successful as they can be rather cold and gloomy places, being almost wholly reliant on artificial light.'*
111. In my view, this proposal will not cause additional harm to the significance of the church to that caused by the proposals for the kitchen, toilets and gallery. Some harm will be caused to the west end doors as a result of them needing to be reduced in height to accommodate the rise in floor height.

112. The room will have glazed doors from the nave to allow the light from outside into the room. It will make a sensible use of space, and it provides a convenient location for children's activities during a service. The Petitioners have provided a convincing case that such rooms are necessary and would be used both in a service and for other activities during the week. I am convinced that sufficient protections are in place to prevent the bell chamber being used by anyone other than bell ringers in a service when bells are rung. In addition, the west end doors will not be able to function without a reduction in height. This proposal has to be seen in the context of the aforementioned decisions relating to the kitchen, toilets and gallery. Therefore, I grant the faculty for provision of rooms at the west end of the church and for the adjustments to the external doors to the tower.

N. The provision of a timber floor to the lower tower room.

113. The proposal provides for a timber floor at the ground floor of the tower, to cover utilities and provide access to them and to ledger stone(s) beneath which will result in the covering of ledger stones in the floor.

114. The Petitioners considered that the west porch was '*of Low to Moderate significance, although it does frame the present access route into the church, along the east-west axis of the church*¹⁹.' The Petitioners considered that the raising of the floor would be of '*Low impact. Largely reversible.*' I agree with this assessment.

115. In my view, the provision of a timber floor to the lower room is essential in order to provide a floor that is level with that of the nave and a floor that is suitable for sitting on by children. Accordingly, I grant the faculty for the provision of a timber floor to the lower tower room.

O. Some reordering of the Blaise Chapel including the removal of the reredos.

116. The proposal seeks to remove the existing reredos, the movement of the altar frontal to the north wall of the chancel and the relocation of the altar and communion rail and the relocation of a memorial commemorating Margaret Linsell Higgs. The proposal seeks the relocation of ledger stones from elsewhere in the nave to the chapel.

¹⁹ Statement of Significance part 2 v10 p15;

117. The Blaise Chapel is currently with the main altar table at 10:00 Sunday communion services. On its own, it is used for 08:00 Sunday Book of Common Prayer (BCP) Holy Communion services and a Thursday 10:00 BCP service. As such, the church is offering a range of services that cover the breadth of traditions within the Church of England.

118. The Petitioners consider that the chapel is *'of Low to Moderate significance as a separate focus with the church and as a reminder of the lost chantries²⁰.'* The Petitioners considered that the proposal would be of *'Low impact'* to the church.

119. The Church Buildings Council commented that the chapel *'would be the perfect space for quiet reflection and small meetings'* and urged the Petitioners *'to keep its liturgical focus²¹.'*

120. I disagree with the Petitioner's assessment of the harm caused by this proposal. The removal of the reredos and any other parts of the Blaise Chapel would undermine the nature of the chapel and its dedication to the patron saint of wool combers. In my view, it would harm the traditional worship that takes place in front of the chapel. I agree with the comments made by the Church Buildings Council. All items shall remain as they are. I can see no objection to the movement of ledger stones to the Blaise Chapel and those relatives who could be contacted did not object to the proposal. I grant this proposal solely in relation to the movement of ledgers stones to the chapel and refuse the Petition in relation to the movement of any items from the chapel.

P. Reopening and restoration of the south door.

121. The proposal seeks to overhaul and restore the south door so that it can operate as an emergency exit. The proposal seeks to put down reinforced grass-compacted gravel from the south door along the external south wall in order to provide a safe exit route to the designated assembly area.

²⁰ Statement of Significance Part 2 v10 p14;

²¹ Church Buildings Council letter dated 22.12.2021;

122. In its Statement of Significance, the Petitioners considered that the proposal would have a '*Positive Low Impact on the church*²². 'I agree with this assessment. I do not consider that harm would be caused to the significance of the church. Therefore, I grant the Petition for the re-opening and restoration of the south door.

Q. Modifications to the vestry for shared use as an office, provision of roof lights to provide enhanced natural light and a reclaimed stone footpath to provide level access to the vestry external door.

123. The Petitioners seek to modify the vestry so that it can be used as the parish office. The parish employs a parish administrator. The current parish office is upstairs in Church Cottage and is unsuitable for access by the young, elderly and those with mobility difficulties.

124. The proposal seeks to add two new rooflights to the vestry roof. The structural engineering report considers that as the roof dates from the early sixteenth century, it is expected to be formed using hardwood timber joists. The proposal seeks the removal of the timber panelling to the entire ceiling within the vestry to limit the damage to the ceiling fabric and enable the proposed sizes and locations of the roof lights to be confirmed. The proposal seeks the addition of a low-level cupboard and bookshelf to the south wall of the vestry, the relocation of other cupboards within the vestry and the removal of a sink and drain. The proposal seeks to create a new level access path from Shelley's Walk to the vestry with a threshold drainage channel inserted.

125. The Church Buildings Council was in broad agreement with this proposal. At the meeting held on 22nd June 2023, the DAC commented that '*The path to the vestry must be made with reclaimed stone matching the stone used recently to pave Shelley's Walk and not made with new stone.*'

126. I was able to see the vestry and to consider the proposal with care. The Petitioners were unable to age the panelling on the ceiling and therefore were unable to assess its significance to the building. The room has some very small windows that do not let in much light. I do not consider that even if the roof lights were inserted, it would make the room an attractive environment to work in. It is reminiscent of a prison cell

²² Statement of Significance Part 2 v10 p22;

and if I were a parish administrator, I would opt to work from home rather than work in that room with new roof lights. In my view, it should remain as a vestry. I noted that there was a significant step up from the room into the chancel through a narrow door. Accordingly, it is not a room that a wheelchair user could use to access the chancel. However, it is the only vestry and a wheelchair bound member of the clergy would need access to it. Accordingly, I grant the Petition for the external works, the cupboards and bookcases, sink and drains but refuse the Petition for the roof lights.

127. During the visit, I was able to see that the view from the proposed gallery out of the west window in the south aisle would provide a beautiful location for a parish administrator to work. They would also be able to see what was happening inside the church, rather than being isolated in a remote corner. After my visit, I issued directions and the Petitioners provided a plan of the gallery with a parish administrator's office contained within the southwest corner of the first floor. My aforementioned decision on the gallery is based on this plan.

R. External works including locating the air source heat pumps adjacent to the south wall of the churchyard.

128. The proposal seeks the installation of two air source heat pumps (ASHP's) to the south wall of the churchyard. The ASHP's would be fixed to a concrete base. This would be surrounded by powder coated metal louvred acoustic fencing, with the colour blending in with the colour of the church tower masonry, behind an evergreen hedgerow.

129. The proposal seeks to repair of the external steps to the basement and the regrading of the path to provide level access through the west door.

130. Historic England commented on the location of the ASHP's. The Petitioners sought a detailed response from their consulting engineers which set out how other sources of renewable energy were impractical and how the engineers considered the location of the ASHP's was the least visible location and the most practical give the connections inside the church.

131. I am unaware of there being any objection to the ASHP's being sited close to the boundary wall to the south of the churchyard. They would not harm the significance to the church. I grant the Petition for these external works to the basement steps and for the installation of the ASHP's adjacent to the south wall of the churchyard.

S. The construction of two small churchyard maintenance buildings in the churchyard.

132. The proposal was for two small churchyard maintenance buildings in the churchyard. There was no objection to this proposal. At the meeting held on 22nd June 2023, the DAC stated that *'the proposed location of sheds, their size and design are unacceptable'*. The proposals that I saw, which may have been amended since the DAC's original consideration, did not cause any harm to the significance of the church. I grant the Petition for two small churchyard maintenance buildings in the churchyard.

T. Adjustments to the chancel.

133. The proposal seeks the addition of 4 shortened pews from the nave, the addition of the altar frontal from the Blaise Chapel to be placed on the north wall of the chancel, repairs to the chancel floor and the replacement of carpet.

134. There were no objections to these proposals.

135. For reasons given previously, I refuse the application to move the altar frontal from the Blaise Chapel. However, I grant the Petition for 4 shortened pews from the nave to be placed in the chancel, for repairs to the chancel floor and for the carpet to be replaced.

Chimney:

136. When I visited the church on 12 December 2023, the Petitioners expressed a desire to demolish an external chimney above the boiler on the south wall. If the Petitioners wish for the chimney to be demolished, then provided there has been a PCC resolution, consultation, notice and DAC recommendation, I would be prepared to consider any application to amend this Petition to include works to the chimney.

Photovoltaic panels on the roof:

137. I have received details from the Petitioners that they would like to introduce photovoltaic panels on the roof of the church. No documentation concerning this has been uploaded to the online faculty system. I would be prepared to consider any application to amend this Petition to include the introduction of photovoltaic panels on the roof. I would require a PCC resolution, appropriate consultation, notice, DAC recommendation and a structural engineer's report before determining such an amendment to the Petition.

Conditions:

138. I will issue conditions and give separate directions concerning them. Work may not commence until I have issued the conditions.

Costs

139. The petitioners shall pay the court costs in such sum as shall be agreed with the Diocesan Registrar. If agreement cannot be reached, then the court will determine the issue of costs.

MARK B. RUFFELL B.D., A.K.C.

THE WORSHIPFUL CHANCELLOR OF THE DIOCESE OF GLOUCESTER

Wednesday 5 June, 2024