

ST PETER'S, TIVERTON

Parochial Church Council

Minutes of the special meeting to consider and decide about the reordering of St Peter's, held on Thursday 8 April 2021 at 7 pm by Zoom

Present: Mary Seaton (in the chair), the Revd Robert Gordon, David Catchpole, Joanna Hall-Tomkin, Gill Heard, Kate Henshall, Jean Jenner, Averil Long, Catherine Makepeace, Jennifer Palmer, David Ricks, Chris Shields, Richard Stenlake, Vicki Stuckey and William Zarrett.

Apologies: Deborah Lal and Roy Webber.

The meeting opened with prayer.

1 General introduction

RG set the scene by placing the current discussion in its long-term context. St Peter's has, he recalled, a long history of struggling to provide suitable accommodation for church activities such as children's work, meetings and social events. Church House in Castle Street, a former Bluecoat School acquired by the church in 1911 and improved in the 1950s, had by the turn of the millennium fallen largely into disuse. In 2002 it was sold with Charity Commission consent for £280k. The funds were invested, to be used at some future date to replace Church House in one of several ways: *either* the purchase of an existing building nearby, *or* the construction of a new building in the churchyard, *or* the internal re-ordering of the church interior.

At the time of the sale, the majority of church members favoured a new building in the churchyard, but by 2004 many also recognised 'the need to use the interior space to better purpose, and the need to improve toilet and kitchen facilities'. In the years since then, a number of options, some modest and some more lavish, have been explored with a view to replacing Church House in one of the ways envisaged in 2002. The scheme in front of us now is, he suggested, neither excessively modest nor excessively lavish, but it is realistic, doable and affordable. We have the opportunity to move on and to realise the hopes we have cherished for so long.

He concluded by thanking members of the Project Management Group for their work, and in particular David Ricks who has worked with tireless enthusiasm, not to mention professional skill and experience, to bring us to this point.

2 Budgetary briefing by the project management group

The PCC was provided with extensive briefing on what might be done and on what it might cost.

2.1 The architect's briefing is based on receipt of four valid tenders for the reordering works. The lowest tender, from Crowstep Building Services Ltd, is at £544,637 some £42,000 lower than the next tender. The architect has checked it carefully

and confirmed that, after receipt of answers to a number of queries, the submission is acceptable. The Crowstep tender is open for acceptance until 26 April 2021.

- 2.2 The budget for the reordering works was originally set by the PCC at £700k but later (5 September 2016, minute 10.1) reduced to £500k. At that time the parish accounts showed the Church House Fund (CHF) standing at £521k. So the budget was set just within the funds available. The rationale for using the majority of the CHF was that the restriction imposed by the Charity Commission at the time of the sale of Church House was that these funds could only be used for replacing (by whichever option) the functionality of Church House.

The outcome of the good performance of our investments means that the CHF stood at £707k in December 2020. With the addition of a small reordering fund of about £6.6k, the total as of that date stood at £713.6k, and given the appreciation of the market in the interim now exceeds that amount. This sum remains after the expenditure of about £80k on professional fees, a permitted use of the CHF funds.

- 2.3 On this basis the PMG has requested the PCC for an increase in the reordering budget to £675k for the following reasons. (i) If the budget were to remain at £500k, and if fees of ca. £100k were to be subtracted from it, as instructed by the PCC, this would leave just £400k for the actual works, thus significantly restricting the project as envisaged by the PCC. (ii) The £500k limitation does not allow for building cost inflation since 2016, during which time the CHF has increased considerably. (iii) It would become feasible to seize this one-off opportunity to revitalise the church if what is regarded as a very reasonable but higher quotation were accepted. An increase of £175k would allow the building budget to rise, leaving a balance to cover remaining fees and the supply of loose furniture, fittings and equipment as well as new bookcases for the library. The balance of VAT paid on construction costs will be largely reclaimed.

3 Proposal

- 3.1 DR outlined the works which the PMG recommended to the PCC.

	Cost	Running Total
1. New toilet block	269,600	
2. Served and flower arrangers' cupboard.	66,200	335,800
3. Meeting room	34,500	370,300
4. West end pew removal and new stone floor	40,000	410,300
5. East end pew removal, flooring and nave altar	26,200	436,500
6. Moving font, pew removal, and stone flooring		15,000
	451,500	
7. Refurbishment of the existing porch	60,100	
	511,600	
8. Children's area, with new stone floor	33,000	544,600

It is important to recognize that an element of approximation is involved in the underlying calculations. Quite apart from foreseeable modification of items 7 and 8 in the light of our discussions together, it is quite normal for small-scale adjustments to prove necessary while the work is in progress. But the proposal for a ceiling of £675k provides an envelope within which any such adjustments can be set.

- 3.2 By way of detailed commentary on the individual proposals the PMG observed:
- 3.2.1 *Toilet block*: This first priority is by far the most expensive element of the work, ca. 50% of the contract sum. It is, of necessity, designed to a high specification, with natural materials. It has a complex roof form, to avoid interfering with the stained glass window, complex ground works and substantially new drainage. The internal finishes are good but not excessive and any reduction in their specification would save very little.
- 3.2.2 *Servery*: With the demolition of our old toilets we will have no kitchen facilities, so completion of a new servery is a *sine qua non*.
- 3.2.3 *Meeting room*: The provision of a comfortable, separately heated meeting room (currently the ladies' vestry) is the next priority to improve the life of St Peter's and to reduce our dependence on the hire of external meeting rooms. Such a meeting room would accommodate ca. 18 people and would need to be comfortably furnished.
- 3.2.4 *Removal of pews*: This is the first time for very many years that the DAC has agreed to the removal of any pews. Such removal, four rows the east end and another four at the west end of the nave, will change the feel of the interior significantly and add to a sense of spaciousness and usefulness. The pew configuration in the east end will revert to the design of the church by Edward Ashworth in the Victorian reordering, with generosity of circulation at the chancel step.
- 3.2.5 *Porch*: The new porch has turned out to be an expensive item. Having looked at the existing porch box with the architect we now think it could be refurbished with glazing added to the top panels of the sides and doors and be totally refinished – all that for much less than the contract sum for the new porch. It would then achieve the enhanced sense of welcome we desire. The church interior could also be viewed by visitors in the event of the church's needing to be locked. The existing porch has a stone floor which may remain, saving the cost of new stonework required by a new porch of different dimensions.
- 3.2.6 *Children's area*: We envisage the works to the children's area being completed fully in accordance with the architect's tender design drawing: thus, replacement of the existing raised timber platform with new stone flooring, in continuity with the rest of the west end; also provision of a tall cupboard to replace the steel cabinets on the west end of the children's area, which would also form a screen for the storage of chairs.
- 3.3 During general discussion PCC members made the following points:
- 3.3.1 *Pews*: The sale of the pews is likely to attract interest and this option would be worth considering. Their replacement chairs should arguably make the experience of sharing in the life of St Peter's no longer physically uncomfortable, and the hope would be that proper attention be given to considerations of comfort.

- 3.3.2 *Children's area*: The provision and attractiveness of this area was of great importance if work with children is to revive and if visiting children (whether or not with school parties) are to feel welcome. Its furnishing needs to be up to date – the present tables and chairs are suitable only for the very smallest children and can hardly be deemed adequate, and should therefore be replaced. Soft cushions would also be an asset. It was noted that although there would be stone flooring of this area as part of re-ordering, carpeting would be purchased.
- 3.3.3 *Nave altar*: The nave altar, to be placed centrally in a focal point of the arrangement of an historic church and of its worship, needs to be of the very highest quality. It was noted that there were acoustic problems arising from use of that part of the nave, which would probably mean that attention would need to be given once again to the sound system, making adjustments to eliminate this potential problem.
- 3.3.4 *Porch*: It was, as already suggested, possible to make a significant saving on the expenditure on the porch. The PCC agreed on a scaling down of this item of expenditure and the probable diversion of the money saved towards the equipment of the children's area.

4 Resolutions

The PCC agreed *nem con* to the following resolutions:

First, to increase the project budget for re-ordering from £500k to £675k as recommended by the Project Management Group.

Second, to appoint Crowstep Building Services Ltd as the main contractor to undertake the work described above and at a provisional cost of not more than £544,637.

Signed:

Date: