

## St James Faculty Application: Church Extension and Seating Project

### Supporting Documentation: Pews

It has been determined we need to remove the pews in the nave to provide a completely flexible space to deliver the mission of the church as described in the five marks of mission, see statement of need (section 4). We did explore replacing only a portion of the pews as we went through the design process, but discovered this did not deliver the capability we needed, see supporting documentation – future uses of St James.

The following primary reasons are offered to justify the removal of the pews.

1. **Provision of flexible space for future uses.** The Diocese of Chester report “Church Buildings and Halls Case Studies: Redeveloping Places and Spaces for Building God’s Kingdom in the Diocese of Chester” demonstrate the importance of hospitality facilities, toilets, and flexible space for building God’s kingdom, and resonates strongly with our own analysis of building God’s kingdom in Christleton through worship and encounter. This analysis showed the removal of the pews is a requirement for delivering a 100% of the intended future uses of the church (Supporting Documentation – Future Uses), and concluded while “it is recognised there are church seating solutions which could be envisaged that do not require the removal of all the pews, since many of the intended uses could be achieved with the removal of the side aisle pews, and a portion of the pews at, e.g., the front of the church. These solutions would, we estimate, allow us to fulfil c. 50% of the intended uses of the church. At the same time, however, it is recognised that in order to use the building as fully intended, for 100% of its intended uses, the removal of the pews is a requirement.” Put simply, we need flexible seating space to build God’s kingdom in the parish of Christleton. Currently, the densely packed pews of St James inhibit our ability to worship and encounter each other in ways appropriate for today and the re-imagining of the church which is ongoing.
2. **Inclusion.** The current pews do not allow a wheelchair to access the north and south aisles of the church. We have a number of wheelchair users in the community, including those from the care home opposite the church. We are simply not able to welcome them. This also extends to parents with prams – large parts of the church are inaccessible to them.
3. **Health and safety.** The pews are uncomfortable, with insufficient depth especially. There may be concerns about evacuation of disabled people if they have to be seated in the north and south aisles.
4. **Pandemic Considerations.** The pandemic has demonstrated the value of maximum flexibility in a church’s seating arrangements. The world economic forum ‘found the probability of a pandemic with similar impact to COVID-19 is about 2% in any year.’ This means it is likely a pandemic of the scale of Covid-19 will be experienced again the next 59 years, and church buildings of the future would be wise to take appropriate account of this likelihood. The pews were a major constraint on how we could use the building during the UK peak of the Covid-19 pandemic.
5. **Absence of historical importance.** The pews are not listed as of especial interest to the building, e.g., in the ‘Historic England List Description for St James’. They are in fact bland in design when compared with pews found in, e.g., another Butterfield Church, see below. They are not noted in a local history study of the church. Furthermore, the local historian has made extensive searches of the Chester Record Office for details about the pews. The information is extremely scarce. The records speak of the intention to source pews at the

time of the church rebuild (c. 1874), but there are no further details given beyond intention and there were clearly clashes between builder – church – architect. There is mention about actual and projected pew capacity both pre and post rebuild, and about visiting Daresbury Church to see oak furnishings. However, we have found no evidence the pews were actually replaced, and given another document remarks ‘The present Church offers accommodation, but most unsuitable and inconvenient, for 300 In most of the pews it is impossible to kneel, and very uncomfortable to sit’ - a working hypothesis (accepting this could be incorrect) is that the pews were in fact not replaced given the resonance with the current experienced difficulty in kneeling and sitting comfortably in the pews. This statement has been approved by the local historian responsible for the statement of significance of the church.



**Figure 1:** A pew found in All Saints, Milton Ernest, Bedfordshire, a Butterfield church



**Figure 2:** A pew (end) in St James' church.