

# Church Buildings Council

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Church Buildings Adviser

Dr Claire Smith  
Church Buildings Officer

Our Ref: CARE 01/359  
Your Ref: 2021-063192

By email

16/05/2024

Dear Emma

## **Paulton, Holy Trinity (Diocese of Bath and Wells) Proposed removal of pews**

Thank you for seeking the Church Buildings Council's advice over the removal of pews at Holy Trinity and the alteration of the remaining pews. This advice is given under the Council's delegated advice policy.

The Council appreciates that the parish has long considered removing pews to increase flexible space in the building, and that a growing congregation makes this more necessary. The aisle is particularly narrow in this church, creating an inhibiting layout. The difficulty using the space for varied worship styles and community use is clear, as is the need to provide space for pushchairs and wheelchairs or mobility scooters.

An 1864 addition to the church with poppy bench ends echoing medieval precedents, the pews are a decorative feature of the church which make a positive contribution to its aesthetic and character. They have been in the church for a lengthy period – 160 years – and are part of its history, marking Victorian fashions. They make a collective contribution to the church, including providing a strong orientation and a decorative element. They are of good quality, and the nave has an almost complete set, but they are not of outstanding or exceptional significance. Taking these factors into account, in the Council's view this is not a case where their removal is absolutely unacceptable, but the proposals would require a strong, evidence-based justification.

As it stands, the proposals are not justified by the current statements. Albeit retaining a few altered pews, the proposed scheme is extensive. This also requires strong justification to show that a less impactful scheme could not be successful in achieving the parish's aims. The scale of pew removal should be only that to meet the needs of the parish. The parish has essentially two options: either make a stronger case for the current proposal, or, if the whole nave would not be regularly used without lines of seating, make a case for a less extensive scheme.

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The statement of needs is the opportunity for the parish to demonstrate their needs and the benefits of the proposals, including benefits to mission and worship. There is some evidence already in the statement: the mention of the space already fully used for children's work, weekly toddler groups and café, and the variety sought in worship styles. This could be further supported by numbers attending the groups and plans to expand in future. Less clear is the 'range of engagement activities' that the parish may use the space for. Plans for the future should be elucidated with types of activity, the amount of space needed and the frequency of use. One document title suggests that there has been a temporary minor reordering. If that is the case, evidence of increased or different use during that period could support this application, showing that this is not merely aspirational. If it can be evidenced that the detrimental impact on the character of the building can be outweighed by the future uses, the parish is much more likely to be successful in gaining faculty.

The faculty application will also need to include details of replacement seating and storage. The Council has [guidance on replacement seating](#), favouring wooden non-upholstered chairs. Storage capacity should not be underestimated, for both furniture and items used by community groups. The design should accommodate ample storage for the parish's needs.

As the parish considers its options for heating, the Council's [guidance on approaches to heating](#) will be of use. Reordering and reflooring is a good time to think about heating requirements and whether the use of the building would make underfloor heating paired with a low-carbon heat source economical to run.

I hope that this advice is helpful. The Council is happy to leave any further advice on the current scheme to the DAC. If the proposals expand to include heating, we would be happy to be re-consulted.

Yours sincerely,

*CL Smith*

Claire Smith

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