

Church Buildings Council

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Dear Jacqui,

Norton Fitzwarren, All Saints (Diocese of Bath & Wells)
Proposed reordering

Thank you for seeking the Church Buildings Council's advice over the proposed reordering at Norton Fitzwarren, All Saints. This has been considered under the Council's delegated advice policy. Its advice is set out below.

All Saints is a Grade II* listed church. The north aisle dates to c.1300, the tower is late 13th or early 14th-century. The church was restored between 1851-52. The porch and chancel were rebuilt and the vestry added in 1866. It is constructed of squared and coursed sandstone, with Ham stone dressings, slate roofs, (patterned on the vestry), and coped verges. The church consists of a west tower, three bay nave, three bay north aisle, south porch, northeast vestry, and chancel.

The PCC proposed to introduce two WCs (one accessible) under the tower, and to replace the ladder to the ringing-chamber with a staircase; to remove eight pews, to be replaced with 50 chairs; to introduce a servery unit on the west wall of north aisle with a mobile servery unit, the resting location of which will be north wall of the north aisle; to lower the ledger stones supporting the font; and to remove the existing carpet. The Council was grateful for the options appraisal which was helpful in understanding the proposals, and the statements which have been well-considered.

The Council supports to removal of the carpet and the improved access to the bell-ringing chamber. However, the proposed stair cuts across the entrance to the base of the tower. It is not clear what the significance of the tower screen is and whether this could be altered to improve the access. The accessible WC should be independently accessible by everyone, whenever the church is in use.

It is not clear from the statements why two WCs are necessary. While the Council supports the intention to future-proof the design, the only mention of numbers of people was 31 on the electoral role. It would be helpful to understand how many people attend services and the other activities within the church and how these numbers would be expected to change after the



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proposed reordering. If two WCs are not necessary, it may be possible to locate the stair in a way which leaves the tower independently accessible.

It would also be useful to understand how the west door is used at the moment and what impact its permanent closure would have on the liturgical life of the church, particularly for processions, such as at funerals. The Council understands that the door in the chancel could still act as a fire escape, but is this door accessible? Sealing doors shut can have a negative impact on their maintenance.

The images show that the main entrance to the church is not currently accessible but that some portable ramps may be available. The Council strongly asks that the church is made permanently accessible as part of the proposed works. The statement of needs discussed the need to integrate those with mobility needs into the service, but it was not clear what is proposed to facilitate this. There was also no mention of any intention to draught-proof the doors, though this was considered a priority in the statement of needs.

The significance of the pews to be removed has not been assessed. It is proposed to relocate the medieval pew ends, but it is not clear to where they will be relocated. Any movement of the pew ends should be undertaken by a suitable professional.

It would be helpful to have full existing and proposed plans so that the proposals can be understood in context. There is mention of relocating or disposing of some pew frontals, but it is not clear from the plans or photographs where these are at present. Rear pews and pew frontals are important elements of pew arrangements, giving them a visual terminus which help to define different spaces within the church. The Council would encourage the PCC to design the church for 'the usual' rather than for 'the occasional'.

It is proposed to introduce 50 Abbey chairs. These are a suitable design, but the proposed oak stain is much lighter than the existing timber within the church. In the Council's experience, chairs which are stained to tone well with the existing timber elements of a church are much more cohesive. The PCC proposes to store the chairs in the vestry when they are not in use. This will compromise the space available in the vestry and it would help to understand how this is used at present. Frequently moving chair dollies through the vestry screen may cause damage, particularly if the door is not sufficiently wide to allow easy passage. It may be preferable to have specifically designed chair storage.

The chairs which are already within the church should be disposed of or reused responsibly, in order to keep the carbon impact of the proposals to a minimum. Similarly, the PCC might consider reusing the timber from the pews proposed for removal to make the proposed cabinetry. This would have the added benefit of toning perfectly with the existing woodwork.

I hope that this advice is helpful, and the Council asked to see the case again once the parish has had time to consider its advice and develop the proposals.

Yours Sincerely,

Keri Dearmer

