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DAC Secretary
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By email

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Dear Jacqui,

**Stockland, St Mary Magdalene (Diocese of Bath and Wells)
Proposed repair and reordering including WC, kitchette, trench arch, and accessibility
improvements**

Thank you for seeking the Church Buildings Council's advice over the proposed project at St Mary Magdalene church. This advice is given under the Council's delegated advice policy.

St Mary Magdalene is a Grade II listed church on the Heritage At Risk Register. It was built in 1865 on the footprint of a demolished medieval church. The building has been attributed to Arthur of Plymouth in the Historic England listing and Pevsner entry, but the statement of significance reports that the church was designed by TS Hack and Godwin and Crisp citing *E.W Godwin: Aesthetic Movement Architect and Designer* by Susan Weber Soros. The building is blue lias rubble with bath stone dressings and tile roofs. Inside, there is a C15 font from the previous church and a C15 screen which was heavily restored in 1920 as a war memorial. The church was paid for by Thomas Daniel Jr and his son, Henry Daniel, was Vicar. The Daniel family derived substantial wealth from their ownership of and investments in plantations that relied on enslaved labor. Following the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act, they received one of the largest compensation payments awarded by the British government.

The Council recognises the great effort the parish has undertaken to prepare these plans, supported by extensive professional advice. However, the timing of the consultation with statutory bodies after interim faculty has been granted and the works have gone to tender makes the capacity to adopt further advice unclear. Engaging the statutory bodies at an earlier stage may have allowed for more meaningful consultation.

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The Council strongly supports the planned repair works, which will help address the reasons for the church's listing on the Heritage At Risk Register. The Council understands the needs of the parish to provide a kitchenette and WC. While the regular congregation of approximately 10 people is small, the parish has identified additional audiences which would benefit from the facilities and contribute to the sustainability of the building and has built a strong case in the hope of grant funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

While supporting these plans in the theory, the Council advises that the parish may wish to prepare for the possibility that grant funding is not forthcoming or is at a lower level than anticipated. Given the parish's limited financial resources and small congregation, the project may need to be phased, in which case the Council recommends prioritising repairs. Even with grant funding in place, forward-planning is essential to consider how the facilities will be maintained when paid staff are no longer grant-funded. The Council recognises that some of these challenges, particularly the reliance on volunteers, were outlined in the business plan.

The Council supports the accessibility improvements, namely creating level access from the south-west path to the south porch as well as introducing handrails to the steps at the east end, vestry and former boiler room. The installation of an accessible WC in the vestry also contributes to the accessibility provision. The plans are in line with Council advice to provide equal access through the primary entrance. It is advisable for the parish to conduct any excavation for level access or the trench arch under an archaeological watching brief, since there is a high likelihood of unmarked burials in the medieval churchyard.

The work to the north aisle proposes installing an oak screen to create a flexible and insulated space with a kitchenette in the northwest corner. Works will also include levelling the floor and creating a doorway in the north-east wall, which requires moving two war memorials to the south wall. The Council has no objections to the oak screen fitted in the north-west arcade and the kitchenette with oak cabinetry. The Council has no objections to the level oak flooring and supports the reuse of tiles in the WC and the kitchenette. The Council does not object to moving the memorials to a location that is suitably protected from damp.

The removal of pews from the north aisle and from the rear of the church is justified by creating a flexible space and improving fire safety. The pews are catalogue C19 and were installed in 1866, part of the original Victorian scheme. The Council supports the retention of pews in the nave but recognises the need for flexibility not currently allowed in the fully pewed aisle. The proposed wooden stacking chairs are in line with Council guidance on seating. The colours chosen should respect the existing furnishings and fittings.

Additional detail regarding the planned heating scheme would strengthen the proposals, as it was unclear if the heating was included. The halo infra-red heaters would provide targeted

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warmth to those using the north aisle and would be in line with net-zero targets. The parish's proposal to make those heaters available on a pay-per-use basis is innovative for walkers and passersby, but the proposal would benefit from more detail about how the congregation would be accommodated. The Council supports the plans to install the capacity for under-floor heating at this stage and encourages plans to move towards sustainable heating options.

The Council supports the parish's plans to engage with historic links to transatlantic chattel slavery. The Council notes that no detail has been provided as to the wording and planned text for the new plaque. This is an issue of high sensitivity and it is essential that the precise wording be composed with reference to the Council's guidance on [Contested Heritage in Cathedrals and Churches](#). Any proposals to install new interpretation or change existing memorials must come to the Contested Heritage Committee and to the Church Buildings Council for advice.

I hope this advice is helpful and wish the parish every success in their funding applications. The Council is happy to leave any further advice regarding the reordering to the DAC, but would expect to see any plans to introduce new interpretation once the parish has had time to develop the proposals.

Yours sincerely,

Clare Price
Church Buildings Manager

Heather Townsend
Assistant Church Buildings Officer