



PUMP COURT CHAMBERS

Chambers of Christopher Harvey Clark QC

Re ST. RICHARD, HAYWARDS HEATH

Faculty Application CH 52/02

1. As Deputy Chancellor of the Diocese, I have been asked by the Chancellor to deal with this matter insofar as it relates to the proposed removal of pews at the back of the nave of the Church. The Chancellor shared a flat with Father Ian Chandler, the present vicar of the parish of St Richard, when they were both at university. Bearing in mind that there are two written objections to the proposals, he has asked me to consider the matter as someone entirely neutral, and unknown to any of the persons involved.

2. In March of last year the Archdeacon of Horsham gave the P.C.C. permission to "remove two rows of pews at the rear of the church to allow space, for a trial period, for social events and meetings to take place within the church".

3. In January 2002 the P.C.C. applied to the Diocesan Advisory Committee for its approval of the trial scheme on a long-term basis. In its Statement of Needs prepared at the same time the P.C.C. said :

"We wish to remove four pews from the back of the Church to create an open area. Each oak pew seats five persons. Therefore we are intending to remove potential seating of twenty spaces. The present seating capacity of the Church (including the West Gallery) is two hundred and thirty. The average attendance at the Sunday Sung Mass is between



sixty and seventy. Two of the pews would be moved to other positions in the Church and two of them would be removed to the Church Hall. It would not be our intention to dispose of those pews”.

The document then refers to the temporary permission and continues :

“We also intend to put this space to use for liturgical purposes e.g. for an altar of Repose at the Easter vigil and for a place where the children can gather round the crib at the Christingle service. A P.C.C. meeting has been held in the space and it could potentially be used for other meetings either of adults during the week or for the Creche or Junior Church on a Sunday. Other ideas for its use include placing a prayer desk on which intercessions may be permanently displayed, a suitable site for a stature of St Richard and for serving coffee after Mass on Sundays.”

4. The Church was built in the 1930s, but in recent years has been given a Grade 2 listing to reflect the quality of its architecture. In a letter dated the 29th January 2002 to the Twentieth Century Society, the Churchwardens wrote :

“...One pew will go into the Baptistry area behind the font, one will remain across the door at the rear of the Church, the use of which currently causes some congestion when the vestibule toilet is in use. The main central double doors allow adequate access in and out of the west doors of the Church. The remaining two pews will be situated in the Church hall where they will be of positive benefit. Whilst intending that this should be a permanent re-arrangement of the pews, it is not irreversible and there is no intention to dispose of any of the four oak pews.”

No response, adverse or otherwise, was forthcoming from the Society.

5. On the 15th April 2002 the D.A.C. recommended the proposal. In letters dated the 26th and 27th April, however, two local residents, Mr Michael King and Mr J.P. Rix respectively, argue against the proposal. I have read both letters carefully and have taken them into account when considering this matter. A response, dated the 25th July, from the P.C.C. is also with the papers. I consider the points of objection in turn.

6. Both Mr King and Mr Rix say that the proposal actually involves six, not four, pews. Mr Rix, for example, refers to the proposal drawing as showing “rows 17 and 16 of the original pews totally removed, and row 15 turned through 180 degrees and re-positioned back-to-back with row 14”. Having checked the number of rows on the drawings, I do not understand this point. By my calculations, there never was a row 17. What is now proposed involves removing row 16 and re-positioning row 15 back-to-back with row 14. This is confirmed in the letter of the 25th July, which refers to only two pews being removed, one being placed in the baptistry and one in the church hall. So, the earlier proposal to block the rear door with a pew has been abandoned, and only one pew is to go into the hall.

7. Both Mr King and Mr Rix query the need for the additional space. But the letter of the 25th July makes it very clear that, in the fifteen months or so since the temporary licence, the space at the rear of the nave (significantly increase^d by the removal of the pews) has been used for a whole variety of purposes, both liturgical and social. It is unnecessary for me to set out the detail. Suffice it to say that I am satisfied that the removal of two pews and the repositioning of two more is necessary both to enhance the facilities for worship in the Church and to improve its amenities for pastoral/social meetings and other uses.

8. Mr King argues that the removal of the pews has led, on occasion, to people cramming into the remaining pews. The P.C.C. respond by saying this does not happen. The remaining fourteen rows of pews are more than adequate for the normal congregation. On high days and holidays, and other special services, extra chairing can be brought in. If so, there is no real merit in Mr King's objection.

9. The objection that it is unsafe for a pew to be positioned across a door is no longer relevant.

10. There is nothing else of substance in the letters of objection. That being so, I am satisfied that the case for granting a Faculty has been made out. I direct that a Faculty with regard to the pews be issued on condition that, should the P.C.C. wish to apply at any stage in the future for permission to dispose of the pews, a new Faculty application would have to be made.

Christopher Clark Q.C.

Deputy Chancellor of the Diocese of Chichester,

31 Southgate Street, Winchester,

18th August 2002.