

PROPOSED 'RE-ORDERING' OF
PARISH CHURCH OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL, STEEPLE ASTON

**PUBLIC MEETING HELD ON 18 JULY 2018
IN STEEPLE ASTON VILLAGE HALL**

MINUTES ¹

PRESENT:

The following 42 people signed the Attendance Register:

Mrs R. Aldcroft	Mr M. Hensher
Mr D. Armitage	Mr I. Jackson
Mrs P. Armitage	Mr A. Johnston
Mrs S. Barber	Mrs J. Johnston
Mrs C. Bartlett	Mr P. Kohn
Mr P. Beadman	Mr S. Latchford
Mrs J. Bell	Mrs B. Lewis
Mrs P. Bradley	Mr M. Lipson
Mr R. Bradley	Mr T. McLusky
Mrs B. Brewer	Mrs H. Nicholson
Mrs M. Bulleyment	Mr R. Nicholson
Mrs C. Clarke	Mr G. Porcas
Mr M. Clist	Mrs S. Porcas
Mrs J. Coley	Mr N. Powell
Mr C. Compston	Mrs J. Preston
Mr C. Cooper	Mr R. Preston
Mrs S. Cooper	Mrs S. Side
Mrs C. Fleet	Mrs J. Taylor
Mrs J. Grubb	Mrs P. White
Mr P. Grubb	Mr L. White
Mrs J. Hensher	Mrs S. Wood

In addition three persons spoke but did not sign: Mr Ted Atkins, Cllr M. Kerford-Byrnes, Mrs J. Whybrew. Mr D. Kewley informed the Chair he could only stay till 8.00 p.m. and did not sign. See paragraph 1 below for Ms V. Phipps.

1. *Approval of chair:* Mr I. Jackson opened the meeting at 7.35 p.m. He explained that several well qualified individuals had been approached to act as chairperson but none had accepted the role. He was therefore prepared to chair the meeting himself, acting impartially. Mr C. Compston said he felt strongly that this was quite impossible: Mr Jackson, as a signatory of the Open Letter and a convenor of the Meeting, could not be impartial. Mr Jackson said the situation was certainly not ideal; one possible chairperson had drawn back when it was ascertained neither the Rector nor the Parochial Church Council (PCC) would be attending. Mr Jackson said he considered, as a retired solicitor, that he knew how to chair the discussion without favour to anyone

¹ Wherever speakers made their statements or remarks available to the Chair in writing, these have been appended to the Minutes.

present, and he would not himself speak on any substantive issue or vote on any issue. Mr G. Porcas proposed that Mr Jackson should chair on that basis. A vote was taken. For 35, Against 3. Mr Jackson introduced Ms V. Phipps who had agreed to assist him, also without speaking or voting.

2. *Approval of agenda and standing orders:* A draft agenda was circulated. No amendment or addition being proposed, the Meeting approved the agenda *nem con*; a copy is appended to these Minutes (A). Draft standing orders were circulated. It was pointed out that 'the Parish of Steeple Aston with Middle Aston' should read simply 'the Parish of Steeple Aston'. With this amendment the standing orders were adopted *nem con*; a copy is appended to these Minutes (B).
3. *Apologies for absence:* The Chair asked if he should read the names of those who had sent apologies for absence. It was agreed *nem con* it would be sufficient to record them in the Minutes. Apologies for absence had been received from: Mrs D. Gardner, Mrs M. Mason, Mr R. Mason, Mr S. Sterling, all of Steeple Aston; Mrs A. Fay, Mr N. Fay, both of Middle Aston; Mrs A. Cottrell-Dormer, Mr C. Cottrell-Dormer, both of Rousham; Mr H. Brown, Mr B. Williams, both Councillors for the Deddington Ward of Cherwell District. The following statement by Cllr Brown, adopted also by Cllr Williams, had been communicated to every supporter of the call for a public meeting: "I wish you well in your endeavours on the 18th and trust that a solution can be found which is acceptable to those in favour of the re-ordering and those advocating a more cautious approach."
4. *Opening statement by the convenors of the Meeting:* Mr P. Beadman made this statement on behalf of the convenors. He prefaced it by emphasizing the need for "3 C's": Consultation, Compromise, Compassion, stressing that he and his co-signatories on the Open Letter wished to move forward with the PCC, keeping these principles in mind. The statement is appended to these Minutes (C). Mr R. Preston said he was disappointed that nobody from the PCC was in attendance; he was concerned that no one present knew what the proposals were in any depth. Mrs S. Barber said this was not necessarily a bad thing: the Meeting could adopt a fresh perspective and be open to new ideas. Mr P. Grubb was grateful that the Meeting had been convened; he was particularly concerned that nothing definite had been said about financing and there was no well presented concept. Mrs M. Bulleyment introduced herself as the secretary of the Village Hall and active in The Steeple Aston Choral Society. She said the Church needed to come into the 21st century; she was frustrated by the uneven floor and lack of any toilet, for example; she felt the Church compared poorly with the Village Hall; it was essential to show care and regard for those who use your building, and the Church was not suited to modern needs.
5. *Opening statement of the PCC:* As no one had a statement to make on behalf of the PCC, the Chair granted the request of Mr D. Armitage to state categorically on behalf of the convenors that they did not understand why the PCC had stayed away. Mr Armitage read a statement, which is appended to these Minutes (D).
6. *The case for / against the status quo:* Mr M. Hensher reviewed the proposed re-ordering item by item, querying whether for most of them there was any, or any sufficient, justification; he suggested some straightforward alternatives, such as better draught-proofing and soft material pew runners instead of a new heating

installation; he did however favour a glass insulating screen for the ringing chamber, and a toilet, possibly in the tower; he felt re-ordering of the vestry to create space for children could be left as a matter for the Rector. A copy of his speech is appended to these Minutes (E). Mrs Bullement pleaded forcefully for modernization; making the Church more comfortable would increase numbers and improve worship. Mr T. McLusky said his experience with visiting some 20 local churches on 'Ride & Stride' had convinced him that re-orderings could be done well, or badly; one must get the detail right. Mr R. Bradley introduced himself as the chairman of the local branch of the British Legion. He said he had come to the Meeting chiefly to listen; he wanted to see the re-ordering properly costed; work must not commence until the programme was fully scoped financially and the money raised. Mr Ted Atkins said that the Church is not a building but people; Mr Beadman had referred to Compassion; schism in the village was very sad; he had attended this particular church for 40 years; the Church must always move with the times, it was not a museum, it should draw people in. Mr R. Nicholson agreed, saying that Woodstock had replaced all its pews with chairs, providing attractive flexible modern seating.

7. *The case for / against the church as a community centre:* The Chair suggested combining agenda item 7 with item 6 so that remarks could be extended to greater use of the Church for community activities. There was no objection. Mr S. Latchford said that access was currently very difficult, the paths were in horrendous condition, there was no lighting at ground level; access to the Village Hall was much better; we must think about disabled people; some other churches were excellent by comparison (and good facilities must be advertised); the Church was very cold in winter. Mr Preston said the Village Hall had been given its own re-ordering some twenty years ago – could we afford another facility that might detract from the Village Hall and the Sport & Recreation Centre; preserving the facilities we already had was in the interest of the village. Mr Compston said a re-ordered Church would be better suited for weddings, funerals, christenings, small concerts, helping the lonely, depressed, bereaved; the Church might not have a future unless the facilities improved, it might even have eventually to close. The Chair noted the Meeting was eager to begin discussing each individual item of the proposed re-ordering, but said by moving on with the agenda he would not rule out further remarks on the re-ordering as a whole, since the package was complex, with individual items having an impact on one another.

Before coming to agenda item 8, the Chair explained that the Meeting was not a decision-making body, but template motions had been prepared to facilitate the taking of 'straw polls' on individual parts of the re-ordering. He read these templates to the Meeting: one expressing full support, one qualified support, and one opposition. He emphasized it was of course open to anyone to put forward a motion in any terms. There were no questions.

8. *The case for / against toilet, kitchen facility, space for 'Children's Church':* Mrs Barber said there should also be permanent work stations for the flower arrangers and the bell-ringers; but she did not like the current model for Children's Church, with the children leaving the service almost immediately, after singing just one verse of one hymn. Mrs C. Clarke said there were various concepts of Children's Church; it was desirable to include children as much as possible in worship; it was possible to use

other locations if children were to be taken out of a service; a baby-changing facility was essential. Mrs Bulleyment called for a vote on the toilet. Mr M. Lipson said full details of the toilet proposal were lacking. Mr Grubb said the location should be clarified; up-to-date drawings should be provided. Mr L. White said the proposed location was the tower: the floor would be lowered 300 mm, so there would be only one step to the nave, making possible a ramp for wheelchair access; a test hole had been dug to explore the depth of the foundations, confirming that the lowering of the floor would not compromise the structure; a disabled toilet would be installed where currently the 'sound box' sits; he thought the current proposal was for two toilets. The Chair noted that some people seemed to think it had been reduced to one, but that the Rector had most recently said two in the May 2018 issue of *Steeple Aston Life*.

Mrs Bulleyment proposed: "We are in favour of the PCC's current proposals in respect of the toilets according to the information available to us." For 27, Against 2. It was specifically noted that the vote related only to the proposals in broad terms, not to any detailed plans, since these were not at the Meeting's disposal.

There was no motion about the kitchen facility or Children's Church.

9. *The case for / against re-ordering the Lady Chapel:* The Chair said he understood that new furniture had already been funded and purchased to re-equip the Lady Chapel for use as a 'café' after church services. No one wished to raise any point.
10. *The case for / against re-ordering the main body of the Church – pews, font, screen, dais:* Mr Armitage read a memorandum he had written about the pews, which is appended to these Minutes (F). Mrs Barber said she took the argument about the impracticality of pews, but thought that pews actually work well; she was opposed to the idea of putting them on wheels; high quality chairs tended to be heavy – who would move them in a Church relying on volunteers? As for the chancel screen, Mrs Barber said this was one of the few decorative features in the Church: it would be a great loss if it was no longer in a prominent position. Mrs Bulleyment praised the re-ordered seating at Woodstock: they had different kinds of chairs for different types of event; cutting the pews might sound drastic, but there was a parallel with the Steeple Aston Cope – chopping it up had actually saved it; we needed modern seating; we must acknowledge that some found pews very uncomfortable.

Mr Atkins proposed: "We are in favour of the PCC's current proposals in respect of the pews according to the information available to us."

Mr Nicholson proposed: "In general terms we are in favour of the PCC's current proposals in respect of the pews according to the information available to us. We do however have certain reservations, and ask the PCC to reconsider these proposals in the light of the points made at this Meeting."

Mrs Barber proposed: "We are not in favour of the PCC's proposal to reduce the pews; we ask the PCC to drop the proposal for the reasons given at this Meeting."

The Chair linked these motions pursuant to Standing Order 6. Votes for the motion of Mr Atkins: 1. Votes for the motion of Mr Nicholson: 5. Votes for the motion of Mrs Barber: 24. At the request of Mrs Bulleyment the Chair agreed that the Minutes would make clear that among the reservations mentioned in Mr Nicholson's motion were

that the PCC no longer proposed to replace all the pews with chairs – supporters of this motion included those wishing the PCC to consider reverting to its earlier idea of replacing the pews entirely.

The Chair asked if there were any further remarks on the proposal to move the chancel screen. Mr Armitage read a memorandum he had written about the screen, which is appended to these Minutes (G). Mrs Bulleyment said she was strongly in favour of the proposal to move the screen. Mr Atkins was in favour of the open vista that moving the screen would provide from the nave up to the altar; the repositioned screen would then serve to mask the statuary of the Judge and his Lady wife.

Mr Atkins proposed: “We are in favour of the PCC’s current proposals in respect of repositioning the chancel screen according to the information available to us.”

Mrs J. Hensher proposed: “We are not in favour of the PCC’s proposal to reposition the chancel screen; we ask the PCC to drop the proposal for the reasons given at this Meeting.”

The Chair linked these motions pursuant to Standing Order 6. Votes for the motion of Mr Atkins: 3. Votes for the motion of Mrs Hensher: 25.

The Chair asked if there were any remarks on the proposal to move the font. Mr Beadman read a memorandum, explaining the metaphorical significance of the font’s position at the back of the Church – this is appended to these Minutes (H).

Mr Beadman proposed: “We are not in favour of the PCC’s proposal to move the font from the back of the Church; we ask the PCC to drop the proposal for the reasons given at this Meeting.” Votes for this motion: 24.

No one wished to make any point concerning the proposed dais.

11. *The case for / against re-ordering the heating – mix of radiators / underfloor heating, transparent screen for bellringers’ gallery:* Mr Armitage read a memorandum he had written about underfloor heating, which is appended to these Minutes (I). Mrs Barber said that the current heating still works, but it is not used enough; in a building such as the Church the heating must be run for sufficient lengths of time to raise the temperature of the stone structure. Mr Latchford said the Village Hall was always comfortably warm because greater use was made of the heating system; this should be a model for the Church; digging up the floor to instal new heating beneath it was quite unnecessary; and he was not convinced that money could be found for the capital cost. Mr Atkins said he would like a response to the technical points raised by Mr Armitage. Mr Bradley said he understood the installation of underfloor heating at Lower Heyford had not gone very well. When the Chair asked if he could be more specific, Mr Bradley referred to Mr White, who described an experiment he had conducted with the underfloor heating at Kirtlington – a note of which is appended to these Minutes (J); this showed claims that warm air from underfloor heating stayed close to the ground had been exaggerated; the experiment could not be carried out at Lower Heyford because that church was now incurring an extra annual cost of £1,000 because of its underfloor heating, and by February the system had been turned off for lack of funds; The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings had issued a statement drawing attention to the risk of rising damp from underfloor heating; the

Quinquennial Inspection in 2015 had drawn attention to the need to repair windows and for draught-proofing of the South Door, and Mr White understood the PCC intended to implement these recommendations.

Mr Armitage proposed (seconded by Mrs Barber): “We are not in favour of the PCC’s proposal to introduce underfloor heating; we ask the PCC to drop the proposal for the reasons given at this Meeting.” Votes for this motion: 24.

There was no further discussion about adding a transparent screen to the ringing chamber. Mrs P. Armitage proposed: “We are in favour of the PCC’s current proposals in respect of a transparent screen for the ringing chamber according to the information available to us.” Votes for this motion: 33.

12. *The case for / against changes to the church exterior – transparent door in South Porch, access paths:* The Chair reminded the Meeting that Mr Latchford had already spoken about the access paths. Mr White explained that the PCC proposed to ramp down the South Porch. Mrs J. Whybrew said that the paths to the South Door were too narrow, with the grass verges unhelpfully sloping up. Mr White confirmed that the PCC had been intending to fix this for some time, using material similar to the paths at Tackley and South Newington. It was noted in passing that improved wheelchair access might necessitate the removal of *a few* pews immediately inside the door. It was felt there was insufficient information about where a new door might be sited (on the outside or the inside of the porch?) and about exactly what kind of transparent door was proposed.

Mrs Barber thought ‘in principle’ opposition could still be expressed, and proposed: “We are in principle opposed to the PCC’s proposal to instal a transparent door in the South Porch; we ask the PCC to drop the proposal.” Votes for this motion: 18.

13. *The case for / against involvement of the Parish Council, SAVA etc*

14. *What happens next?*

Because of time constraints the Chair proposed taking these two agenda items together. There was no objection. Mr M. Kerford-Byrnes, District Councillor for the Deddington Ward, said that he had listened to everything that had been said and noted the votes that had been taken, but he was present in an independent capacity as district councillor, and had not participated in any vote; it was the church authorities who determined how the Church should be run, but they had to pay attention to the public; he would add ‘Communication’ to Mr Beadman’s 3 C’s; currently there were two groups of people, and they were quite polarized; communication about issues had not happened; a compromise was needed that would achieve such communication; he offered to mediate if that would help. He also wondered what the position was concerning planning permissions. The Chair said the Rector had stated in *Steeple Aston Life* that the changes inside the building required only a ‘faculty’. Cllr Kerford-Byrnes said he would check.

15. *Any Other Business:* There was none, and the Chair closed the Meeting at 10.00 p.m.

APPENDICES TO THE MINUTES

- A Agenda item 2:
Agenda as approved
- B Agenda item 2:
Standing Orders as adopted
- C Agenda item 4:
Opening statement read by Mr P. Beadman
- D Agenda item 5:
Statement read by Mr D. Armitage concerning non-attendance of PCC
- E Agenda item 6:
Speech by Mr M. Hensher
- F Agenda item 10:
Memorandum read by Mr D. Armitage concerning the pews
- G Agenda item 10:
Memorandum read by Mr D. Armitage concerning the chancel screen
- H Agenda item 10:
Memorandum read by Mr P. Beadman concerning the font
- I Agenda item 11:
Memorandum read by Mr D. Armitage concerning underfloor heating
- J Agenda item 11:
Note by Mr L. White of experiment conducted at Kirtlington
- K Original Open Letter written by the convenors of the Meeting
- L Open Letter as published in *Steeple Aston Life* June 2018 (with editorial changes)
- M Open Reply published in *Steeple Aston Life* July 2018
- N Notice of the Meeting as published in *Steeple Aston Life* July 2018

Minutes produced by Ian Jackson (Chair) after consulting Victoria Phipps (Chair's assistant)
19 July 2018

Any request for correction of these Minutes should be addressed in the first instance to Mr Jackson.

*Paper copies of these Minutes, with appendices, will be placed in the Consultation File at the Red Lion and submitted to the Parochial Church Council. A pdf copy will be submitted to the Village website and may also be requested by email:
Ian Jackson, iacobianus@googlemail.com*

APPENDIX A
to the Minutes of the Public Meeting held on 18 July 2018
relating to the proposed 're-ordering' of the
Parish Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Steeple Aston

AGENDA AS APPROVED

1. Approval of Chair
2. Approval of Agenda and adoption of Standing Orders
3. Apologies for Absence
4. Opening Statement by Convenors of the Meeting
5. Opening Statement by the Parochial Church Council
6. The case for / against the *status quo*
7. The case for / against the church as a community centre
8. The case for / against toilet, kitchen facility, space for 'Children's Church'
9. The case for / against re-ordering the Lady Chapel
10. The case for / against re-ordering the main body of the church: pews, font, screen, dais
11. The case for / against re-ordering the heating: mix of radiators / underfloor heating, transparent screen for bellringers' gallery
12. The case for / against changes to church exterior: transparent door in South Porch, access paths
13. The case for / against involvement of the Parish Council, SAVA etc
14. What happens next?
15. Any Other Business

APPENDIX B
to the Minutes of the Public Meeting held on 18 July 2018
relating to the proposed 're-ordering' of the
Parish Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Steeple Aston

STANDING ORDERS AS ADOPTED

1. The Chair is approved by the Meeting. The Chair shall act impartially. The Meeting may remove the Chair for misconduct and appoint another. The Chair's assistant is approved by the Chair. Points of order shall be determined immediately by the Chair.
2. The Agenda is approved by the Meeting, but must provide for fair discussion of all relevant matters. The Chair may change the order of agenda items, or link agenda items together, in whole or in part, in his/her discretion.
3. Anyone aged 13 or over who is resident in or has a connection with the village, the parish or the united benefice (including through their family or regular worship or membership of the Parochial Church Council) is entitled to attend, speak and vote. The following are also allowed to attend and speak: (a) any representative of the Church of England Diocese of Oxford; (b) any elected political representative for the Parish of Steeple Aston, the Deddington Ward of Cherwell District, the Deddington Division of Oxfordshire, the parliamentary constituency of North Oxfordshire or the parliamentary constituency of West Oxfordshire; (c) any representative of The Victorian Society, The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings or Dr Radcliffe's Trust. The Chair's determination shall be final in the event of dispute. An attendance register shall be kept.
4. The Chair may give speaking priority to any member of the Parochial Church Council to the extent that is desirable to ensure the Meeting is informed of the re-ordering proposals as they currently stand and any relevant constraints.
5. The Chair shall determine the order of speakers for any agenda item, and shall be entitled to call upon any speaker to wind up his/her remarks, and then to bring his/her speaking time to an end, provided that the Chair must act fairly to ensure all relevant views are adequately heard. A speaker may be interrupted on a point of information only as permitted by the Chair.
6. Debate on any agenda item may proceed with or without a specific motion. The Chair may in his/her discretion require that any motion be seconded. The Chair shall put any motion to a vote unless all agree that in the light of debate no vote is required. If a motion is proposed after an agenda item has been debated, it shall be put to the vote immediately unless the Chair determines in his/her discretion that debate should be reopened in the interest of fairness. Motions may be linked for voting purposes in the discretion of the Chair.
7. The Chair shall accept Any Other Business in his/her discretion. Save for matters arising in the course of the Meeting, advance notice should have been given.

8. The Chair shall ensure his/her assistant notes the name of each speaker, the number voting in favour of any motion put to the vote (unless it is passed *nem con*), and the number voting against (if these are counted). The Chair shall publish minutes of the Meeting after coordinating notes with his/her assistant.

APPENDIX C
to the Minutes of the Public Meeting held on 18 July 2018
relating to the proposed 're-ordering' of the
Parish Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Steeple Aston

STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE CONVENORS OF THE MEETING

On 16 March 2016, proposals for re-ordering the church were presented to the village at a meeting held in the church itself. Architects attended to explain the plans, and there was an opportunity for brief comments from the floor. The Rector promised that there would be plenty of further opportunity for people to say what they thought about the proposals and to ask questions.

In fact, no further public meeting has ever been held. Thus, there has been no proper chance for interactive exchange of views. Various people have written letters and emails raising many questions. A few of the letters have been published in *Steeple Aston Life*. The Rector has written occasionally in his regular monthly newsletter about the progress of the re-ordering plans, including modifications that the Parochial Church Council has made. But substantive questions have not been given substantive answers.

Perhaps this extraordinary approach to consultation should have prompted us to convene a public meeting ourselves at an earlier date. We apologize if we have been too patient with defects in the consultation process. When we understood that the church would soon be ready to apply for a faculty (that is, the church equivalent of a planning permission), we realised that we should not delay any longer.

Many people clearly have strong views. Some people are in favour of the re-ordering as a whole, including all the current members of the Parochial Church Council. At least, they have voted unanimously to support it. Some are in favour of part of the re-ordering 'package', but have reservations about other parts of it or oppose some parts outright. And others oppose any re-ordering of the church at all.

We hope this meeting will be welcomed by those who have waited since March 2016 for another open forum, where views can be stated and opinions challenged. This meeting should also be an opportunity for the Parochial Church Council to answer the questions that have been pending for so long, and to provide important missing information, such as a capital funding plan, financial projections for operating income and expenditure, a business model for the church as a community centre, and an assessment of the impact on other village facilities.

Thank you.

Read by Mr P. Beadman

APPENDIX D
to the Minutes of the Public Meeting held on 18 July 2018
relating to the proposed 're-ordering' of the
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FURTHER STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE CONVENORS OF THE MEETING

As we have just said, we had hoped this meeting would be an opportunity for the PCC to answer the substantive questions that have never been given substantive answers, and to provide important information that has not yet been put out to consultation in the village.

Since publication of our Open Letter, we have placed all our correspondence with the PCC into the Consultation File for this meeting. There you will see that we first asked that the PCC itself convene a public meeting. When they declined to do so, offering only their public reply to our Open Letter and a private meeting to explain their position, we pressed ahead to convene a meeting ourselves; but still urged them, several times, to attend.

We fail to understand why the PCC have not taken the chance of today's meeting to let us hear news, and to argue for their plans and to defend them. They said in one of their letters they were aiming for 'very public engagement'. Yet they are not here. Even if today is not the best time for them, we are baffled that they prefer, this evening, no engagement at all.

Read by Mr D. Armitage

APPENDIX E
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SPEECH BY MR M. HENSHER

From their inception the plans to re-order SS Peter & Paul have filled me with dismay. As an ex-Churchwarden I have felt most uncomfortable with these radical plans and my current stance is totally against the alleged need to rearrange the fabric of our historic church. To comment briefly on some of the items in question:

1. Removal of all or some of the historically irreplaceable pews, including the idea of sawing through some, I find abhorrent to the point of vandalism. As for mixing chairs and pews, this really is a non-starter.
2. Relocation of the ancient rood screen. Why, why, why? It is there to be seen from the nave, not from the vestry.
3. Removal of font. Again, why, why, why? Current practice for the congregation to turn to the font to witness a baptism if incorporated into a service has presented no problems hitherto.
4. Underfloor heating. The present boiler and radiators work perfectly well. Better insulation and draught-proofing, soft material pew runners and a glass screen across the ringing chamber would greatly improve the winter chill factor at a fraction of the cost.
5. A space for Children's Church? Contentious! Many feel that, if children only sample half of the first hymn before leaving the congregation, then they will never acquire the feel for corporate worship. For the current vestry to relocate upstairs to the muniments room is, I believe, a matter for the Rector, thereby creating an area for children during the service.
6. Levelling of church floors. Yes, there are members of the congregation who cannot easily manage the steps to the altar, but help is always available and frequently given.
7. Toilet. Yes, many churches now have a toilet. The physical layout of our church does not offer an obvious space for one, let alone two toilets. Those attending weddings and funerals from afar clearly need access to a toilet. The area underneath the tower would be a possibility. Research from previous years has ruled out the feasibility of an outside toilet.
8. A transparent south door? Oh dear!

Most of the congregation here, as is the case with many, many old country village churches, is over 50, traditionalist and conservative (with a small c). One cannot compare SS Peter & Paul with an aspiring town church where space for extra-curricular activity for the younger is at a premium and services so adjusted to encompass the tastes of our younger generation. Here in Steeple Aston we have the well equipped village hall, the sport & recreation centre and, indeed, the school.

I really do advocate a curtailment of these re-ordering plans.

APPENDIX F
to the Minutes of the Public Meeting held on 18 July 2018
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MEMORANDUM CONCERNING THE PEWS

The Pews were very much part of the church restoration in 1842. John Plowman of Oxford was appointed supervising architect. As part of his first commission, Plowman prepared a very detailed specification for the construction of the Pews and the way in which the 15th century panels were to be incorporated into each bench. The work was done by hand to a very high standard with the best timber available at the time by the appointed contractors, Franklins of Deddington.

The Pews are of 'high significance', which means they are of importance at national or international level! A total of forty nine (49) bench ends are in the church, of which forty one (41) are ancient. Twenty four (24) designs are recorded. The eight (8) panels that are contemporary with the 1842 restoration have been well carved to be in keeping with the 15th century work and may be faithful copies of the originals that were too rotten or infected with woodworm to be used.

The construction of the Pews shows excellent craftsmanship and two years after the restoration was complete these very Pews were offered by the Incorporated Church Building Society as a model to other churches considering similar work.

The re-ordering proposals include re-configuring the Pews by cutting fourteen (14) of them in half and using the end from the discarded section to form the end for the retained reduced Pew.

It is also proposed to fit castors with a locking mechanism to increase the flexibility of the seating arrangement! For services with a large congregation the loss of Pew seats will be compensated with 'high quality additional seating'. Presumably folding or stacking chairs! The assessment report on this proposal states that the impact on the interior would be substantial.

It is unbelievable that such a large and historically important part of the church's interior should be considered for removal.

Much of the re-ordering is of a *destructive nature* and would result in permanent loss of heritage and change the whole character and ambience of the church.

The Pews are very much the heart of the church's interior. Steeple Aston is perhaps the last mediaeval church in the County still retaining nearly all its full set! Once these Pews are cut up they *can never be replaced*.

The timber quality, size and density together with seasoning methods do not exist today. Plowman and Franklins the contractors could not equal the size and quality of timber used in the 15th / 16th century. Today we could not even hope to find timber equal to the quality that Franklins used.

The Pews in Steeple Aston Church are the perfect example of many village churches in England. Used by villagers for 175 years but with a tangible history that is much older, doing what they do best. Seating the congregation!

The Parochial Church Council and the congregation together with the whole parish are custodians of this building and its fittings. We do not have a mandate or the authority to destroy any part of this wonderful inheritance, thereby depriving future generations of their heritage.

Read by Mr D. Armitage

APPENDIX G
to the Minutes of the Public Meeting held on 18 July 2018
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MEMORANDUM CONCERNING THE CHANCEL SCREEN

The Screen was put back into the church in 1842. It is unusual for being open at both the upper and lower level and is thought to be the only example of this type in the County. What is even more significant is that it is one of the few examples nationally that retains its original ironwork.

The re-ordering proposal is to remove the Screen from its present position and re-locate it in the arch between the chancel and the lady chapel.

The Screen is historically very important but has an uncertain pedigree. It is only part of a much larger fitting but it has been in the church in its present form and location since 1842.

On Church high-days and feast days the Screen is always the focal centre of the floral decorations: Palm Sunday, Easter, Harvest and Christmas. The Screen comes into its own when the church acts as host to flower festivals and many weddings in the past have come to Steeple Aston because of the floral display with its decorated screen and the Bells. In the proposed re-located position the Screen cannot be seen from the nave.

The re-location of the Screen seems to me to be nothing more than change for the sake of change. At great expense we would have visually removed an historically important and beautiful object which would only diminish the potential use of the church.

Read by Mr D. Armitage

APPENDIX H
to the Minutes of the Public Meeting held on 18 July 2018
relating to the proposed 're-ordering' of the
Parish Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Steeple Aston

MEMORANDUM CONCERNING THE FONT

'Baptism' (= 'christening') – reception into membership of the Christian church – is an important 'sacrament', founded on the precedent of Jesus's own baptism in the River Jordan. All Christians take it very seriously. The Church of England continues the Catholic tradition of infant baptism, though a person may be baptized at any age.

There is a long tradition in the Church of England that the layout of the church building is a metaphor for Christian life. One starts by being baptized at the font in the rear of the church, then proceeds up the nave to the chancel entrance (currently marked off in Steeple Aston's church by the antique screen) – this is where 'confirmation' takes place: the confirming by a Christian personally of vows made at baptism on his/her behalf. Then there is 'marriage' before the altar at the east end of the church. And finally, at a 'funeral', the coffin is carried down the nave to the back of the church where it all began, and then to burial or cremation.

None of these ceremonies is primarily a 'performance'. If a baptism is conducted at an ordinary church service, the congregation must turn round to see. That too is metaphorical – it reminds them that we all begin our journey of faith 'at the back', so that we can from the outset travel forwards. At a wedding, the congregation – even close family – only see the backs of bride and groom – again a metaphor: for in making a new life together they are, in a sense, turning away from all other ties save to God.

The PCC's proposal to move our ancient font to the south aisle, into space made available by removal of pews, is misguided. It abandons the long tradition with its metaphorical significance. Maximizing visibility for a watching congregation is apparently the motive; though it will *not* be an easy view for everyone across to the south aisle.

However, this is turning baptism into primary spectacle. Indeed, I am aware that on one occasion (perhaps there have been others) the current Rector has refused a family's request for infant baptism in a private ceremony, requiring it to be done in a regular service with a watching congregation. The family in question declined, and arranged for the baptism to be carried out by another priest at a local church outside the Benefice. Baptism is a very intimate moment sharing Christ's own experience; there is nothing at all wrong with preferring a private ceremony; most recently the Duchess of Sussex has been baptized in such manner. The font should stay where it is.

Read by Mr P. Beadman

APPENDIX I
to the Minutes of the Public Meeting held on 18 July 2018
relating to the proposed 're-ordering' of the
Parish Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Steeple Aston

MEMORANDUM CONCERNING UNDERFLOOR HEATING

The proposal is, in my opinion, potentially the most structurally damaging part of the whole re-ordering project.

The ancient building, like many others, has grown and been altered many times over the centuries, using traditional material together with tried and tested methods of construction. These buildings need to breathe. Not oxygen as we humans need but moisture. The moisture which is in the air and comes through the doors as well as the moisture from the walls and floor. The moisture content in the air is relative to the air temperature. Fortunately for us a large building such as a church that is built of traditional materials such as stone, wood, lime mortar and rendering, if properly maintained, will adjust to humidity levels through the seasons with very little human help. Large modern buildings, because of the materials employed, need expensive air-conditioning and heating to make them comfortable to use.

As the church stands today, the pews rest on wooden platforms with the bearers placed on to the earth. The ingress of moisture from the churchyard passes in the soil under and through the wall foundations into the earth floor of the church. At present this moisture is lost through the wooden platforms and the stone floor of the aisles.

To instal underfloor heating would call for the removal of some soil, which would then require some form of archaeological investigation and the laying of a damp-proof base on to which the electrical elements would be placed before the new stone or other material made the surface of the new floor. This would form a waterproof membrane that would stop the floor from breathing. A very rough estimate of the floor area of the nave that would be altered is about 80%.

This massive increase of moisture now trapped beneath the new floor would probably lead to the remaining original paving becoming very much damper and a huge increase in moisture rising up the walls and the pillars. The building could not breathe as it has done for hundreds of years.

If the underfloor heating proposal were to go ahead, the damage caused would not be seen immediately; it would be a 'ticking time-bomb'. No one knows exactly the effect it would have on the building in, say, 100 years. In the very worst case prolonged excessive moisture to walls and pillars could compromise the very stability of the building.

In short, no one knows! Can we take such a massive risk?

This building, the most important in the village, which we are the custodians of, must be passed on to future generations structurally as sound as it is today.

Read by Mr D. Armitage

APPENDIX J
to the Minutes of the Public Meeting held on 18 July 2018
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Parish Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Steeple Aston

NOTE CONCERNING EXPERIMENT CONDUCTED AT KIRTLINGTON

I conducted my heating experiment in Kirtlington and Steeple Aston churches during January 2017, using an extendable rod 17 ft high with two thermometers fixed to it, one at 4 ft off the floor, the other at the top.

I fixed the rod in position, left it overnight, and went back the next day to record the figures and remove it, all with the permission of the churchwarden.

Kirtlington has underfloor heating, supplemented by radiators. We had been told by the architects that underfloor heating only heats the area required, up to 9 ft high, without wasting energy heating areas higher than that.

At Kirtlington, the recorded temperatures were: at 4 ft high - 15 degrees; at 17 ft high - 13 degrees. At Steeple Aston, the recorded temperatures were: at 4 ft high - 11 degrees; at 17 ft high - 13 degrees.

When I contacted the churchwarden at Lower Heyford which has underfloor heating at the west end only with radiators in the rest of the church, I was told that it had already been turned off for the winter, this being towards the end of February. Cost is a big issue there.

Lawrence White

APPENDIX K
to the Minutes of the Public Meeting held on 18 July 2018
relating to the proposed 're-ordering' of the
Parish Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Steeple Aston

ORIGINAL OPEN LETTER WRITTEN BY THE CONVENORS OF THE MEETING

Open letter, May 2018

RE-ORDERING THE VILLAGE CHURCH

The Parochial Church Council continues to work towards 're-ordering' our village church of Saints Peter and Paul.

The process has caused unhappiness in the congregation, with people who have supported the church for decades no longer comfortable worshipping there. Sensible suggestions like providing a kitchen unit and toilet have been rolled together with structural plans of unproven advantage, expensive to run and maintain, and with risks for the building as a whole. Destruction of historic pews, moving the ancient font, relocating the church's famous chancel screen, among other proposals, will be costly in terms of heritage and continuity.

There has been little consultation with the wider population. The idea of turning the church into a community space in addition to existing facilities like the Village Hall or the Sports & Recreation Centre has not been backed up by any real business plan or impact assessment. Broad informed support for radical change has not been demonstrated. The project is in the hands of a small group.

It is not too late to apply common sense, in case decisions are taken that we one day regret. There must be a *proper* consultation process in which everyone in our villages can have sufficient say. Diversity of opinion, Christian and secular, should be respected. Due attention should be given to the importance of our mediaeval church, with its irreplaceable artefacts, as a part of our beautiful Oxfordshire landscape. And all who take a long-term view should be able to examine issues of resourcing and viability in the framework of the entire community.

At the single open meeting that has been held there was only a brief opportunity for individuals to respond, off the cuff, to a presentation by architects which was interesting but at the same time, naturally, part of their bidding for the work.

We believe that, as a minimum, at least one further public meeting should be convened, this time with an independent chair, to allow the issues to be debated comprehensively, openly, democratically. Ahead of such a meeting it should be possible for differing positions to be set out in detail, for consideration by all parties.

Permitting the irreversible changes to be made to our church building as proposed will have significant consequences for Christian worship in Steeple Aston; for the attractiveness of our church to all comers; and for those managing other village facilities. Failing to require an inclusive, transparent decision-making process will let down both ourselves and all future generations of our community.

Please contact any of the signatories below if you support the holding of a public meeting to discuss the current proposals. Emails may be sent to iacobianus@googlemail.com (Ian Jackson, Wadham's Cottage, Steeple Aston, telephone 347895).

Very truly yours,

David Armitage, Paul Beadman, Malcolm Hensher, Ian Jackson

APPENDIX L
to the Minutes of the Public Meeting held on 18 July 2018
relating to the proposed 're-ordering' of the
Parish Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Steeple Aston

OPEN LETTER AS PUBLISHED IN *STEEPLE ASTON LIFE* JUNE 2018
(with editorial changes)

RE-ORDERING THE VILLAGE CHURCH

The Parochial Church Council continues to work towards 're-ordering' our village church.

The process has caused unhappiness in the congregation, with people who have supported the church for decades no longer comfortable worshipping there. Sensible suggestions like providing a kitchen and toilet have been rolled together with expensive structural plans of unproven advantage, with risks for the building as a whole. Destruction of historic pews, relocating the font and famous chancel screen, among other proposals, will be costly in terms of heritage and continuity.

There has been little consultation with the wider population. Turning the church into a community space alongside the Village Hall or the Sports & Recreation Centre has not been backed up by any real business plan or impact assessment. Broad informed support for radical change has not been demonstrated. The project is in the hands of a small group.

It is not too late to apply common sense, in case decisions are taken that we regret. There must be a *proper* consultation in which everyone can have sufficient say. Diversity of opinion, Christian and secular, should be respected. Due attention should be given to the importance of our mediaeval church, with its irreplaceable artefacts, as a part of our beautiful Oxfordshire landscape. And all who take a long-term view should be able to examine issues of resourcing and viability in the framework of the entire community.

At the open meeting there was only a brief opportunity for individuals to respond to a presentation by architects bidding for the work. We believe that there should be *at least* one further public meeting, with an independent chair, to allow the issues to be debated comprehensively, openly, democratically with differing positions set out in detail beforehand, for consideration by all parties.

Permitting irreversible changes to be made to our church building as proposed will have significant consequences for Christian worship in Steeple Aston; for the attractiveness of our church to all comers; and for those managing other village facilities. Failing to require an inclusive, transparent decision-making process will let down both ourselves and all future generations of our community.

Please contact any of the signatories below if you support holding a public meeting to discuss current proposals.

David Armitage, Paul Beadman, Malcolm Hensher, Ian Jackson

(Ian Jackson, Wadham's Cottage, Steeple Aston, 347895 iacobianus@googlemail.com)

(To read a full version of this edited letter, contact Ian Jackson.)

APPENDIX M
to the Minutes of the Public Meeting held on 18 July 2018
relating to the proposed 're-ordering' of the
Parish Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Steeple Aston

OPEN REPLY PUBLISHED IN *STEEPLE ASTON LIFE* JULY 2018

The Parochial Church Council of St Peter & St Paul, Steeple Aston would like to thank David, Paul, Malcolm & Ian for their letter in last month's SAL.

PCC minutes show we have been looking at things like heating, access, kitchen space and loos for at least quarter of a century, never without controversy, always with lots of passion on all sides. The project is the nearest we have to actually doing something and inevitably nobody is getting everything they want.

Some of us wanted to remove all the pews: there's no way that's happening! Some of us wanted renewable energy sources for our new heating, and very sadly it looks like we can't make that work. Lots of us wanted to solve access issues by raising the nave floor, and we've had to let go of that idea too.

Through it all, from the first (information & question-filled) public meeting, through three annual church meetings (open to anyone, so everyone could hear news – and get a chance to vote every year as to whether they thought we should keep going), and of course through these letter pages, one thing has sounded out loud and clear.

People in Steeple and Middle Aston care about their village – and their church. We care about each other. As the PCC of the church here, we've been delighted to receive all sorts of input from all sorts of people. So far we've sent every letter that's appeared in these pages to the diocese, so that everyone's questions have been heard – not just by us, but by the diocese too.

As PCC members, we are trustees of the church, with responsibilities given to us. As we work through this process, there are things actually required of us and we take them very seriously. So please send us your emails and letters or just talk to us – it may be you have a question that will make our project much, much better. Some suggestions have done just that. Thank you. And if we can't say yes to your suggestion just now, perhaps we can explain why.

We're working with the Diocese of Oxford (the DAC is their committee that cares for church buildings) which is supporting us as we move toward applying for a Faculty (the church equivalent of planning permission). We've met with some of the national amenity societies that have particular regard for heritage and we are trying to ensure the others come to see us soon. We very much hope that before year's end we will be able to put on an exhibition weekend to enable everyone to come and see exactly what we hope to do – and why. And we'll make sure there's plenty of opportunity for questions too.

We are genuinely excited. The church isn't just a wonderfully beautiful building, it's people. People who live here. People who love God and want to help other people. We are excited because this project isn't just loos and pews – it's about showing how much we love God and about taking time to work out how we can help people here today enjoy our church building and use it for years to come.

Steeple Aston PCC: Graham Clifton, Rebecca Hoare, Jeana Atkins, Eileen Baglin-Jones, Caroline Compston, Jeanette Cotterill, Martin Dale, Edwina Kinch, Shirley Palmer, David Stewart, Mary Williams, May Woods

APPENDIX N
to the Minutes of the Public Meeting held on 18 July 2018
relating to the proposed 're-ordering' of the
Parish Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Steeple Aston

NOTICE OF THE MEETING AS PUBLISHED IN *STEEPLE ASTON LIFE* JULY 2018

'RE-ORDERING' OF OUR VILLAGE CHURCH
PUBLIC MEETING

Wednesday 18 July 7.30 p.m.
Village Hall

Following our Open Letter (SAL June) we received a lot of support for the holding of a public meeting. The proposed changes to our church of St Peter & St Paul are significant. They will affect the sustainability of weekly church services in Steeple Aston in the future. They will diminish the heritage of the village. They may impact on the role of other village facilities. There has been no public meeting about the proposals since the original presentation of the outline plans, and no opportunity for considered discussion by all parties concerned. The Parochial Church Council believes the changes would be beneficial. The proposals have been described by others as 'vandalism'.

Please come and have your democratic say.

There is also a file at the Red Lion where views in writing can be put and read.

David Armitage, Paul Beadman, Malcolm Hensher, Ian Jackson