



To the representors and
the statutory interested parties

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*Secretary to the Mission
Pastoral and Church
Property Committee*

By e-mail only

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**Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011
Benefices of Pastrow; and Appleshaw, Kimpton, Thrupton, Fyfield and Shipton
Bellinger
Proposed Pastoral Scheme**

1. On 17 November 2022 the Church Commissioners held a hearing in relation to the proposed draft Pastoral Scheme providing for:
 - the union of the benefice of Pastrow and the benefice of Appleshaw, Kimpton, Thrupton, Fyfield and Shipton Bellinger (together with the union of the eight constituent parishes of the Pastrow benefice but with the five constituent parishes of the latter benefice to continue distinct);
 - the appointment of the Reverend Alex Randle-Bissell as first incumbent of the new benefice and for his parsonage house to be that of the benefice of Pastrow;
 - the disposal of the parsonage house of the benefice of Appleshaw, Kimpton, Thrupton, Fyfield and Shipton Bellinger; and
 - the Bishop of Winchester; Winchester Cathedral; Queen's College, Oxford; St Mary's College, Winchester; and Mr Robert Hugh Routh to be the joint patrons of the new benefice.
2. The draft scheme had been published in May 2022 and a total of 32 representations were received: 23 against and nine in favour, together with two out-of-time representations against.
3. This letter sets out the decision reached by the Church Commissioners, the reasons for the decision and the factors they considered in their deliberation. The minutes of the public hearing is attached at Annex A and a summary of the representations is attached at Annex B. The minutes are a note of the main points made in the public hearing and are not a verbatim transcript of the event.

The Commissioners agreed:

- That the proposals in relation to the Pastrow benefice should proceed, that is the union of the parishes in the benefice of Pastrow.
- However, they also agreed that the union of benefices between Pastrow and Appleshaw should not go ahead. This meant that the proposals in relation to the parsonage would also not be approved.
- Under the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011, in order to amend the draft scheme to that effect, the Commissioners had to consult the Bishop and the diocese on the changes. The acting Bishop of Winchester has confirmed in writing that she has consulted, and that the diocese supports the decision and the amendment of the scheme.

Main reasons for the Commissioners' Decision

1. Overall, the Commissioners' findings were as follows:
 - That the diocese had met the requirements of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 and the scheme had been brought forward for a proper purpose.
 - That the statutory requirements of the consultation process had been met, but there were communications issues which had affected local perceptions about the scheme.
2. The Commissioners decided that the proposals to merge the parishes in the Pastrow benefice would make better provision for the cure of souls and further the mission of the Church. However, from the evidence presented the Commissioners were not satisfied that the merger of the Appleshaw and Pastrow benefices would lead to the same outcome. Therefore the Commissioners agreed that they should exercise their powers under section 10 (3) to amend the scheme, to remove the proposals relating to Appleshaw and the Appleshaw parsonage, subject to the agreement of the Bishop and the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee (DMPC), which is required under the Measure. The Bishop agreed, so the scheme has been amended.
3. The Commissioners supported the Pastrow proposals because there was clear evidence of a long-term approach which was being taken forward in a methodical and careful manner. There was positive support from all the relevant PCCs and a sense of momentum within the church communities to build on what had already been accomplished. Although any change can be challenging there was sufficient support to take the changes further.
4. However, the Commissioners did not support the proposal to merge the Appleshaw benefice with the Pastrow benefice, because there was insufficient buy in, and support for, the proposals at this time, as evidenced by the written representations, the oral representations made at the hearing and the PCC votes on the proposed scheme.
5. The Commissioners particularly noted that the general lack of support had been compounded by some significant misunderstandings about the process and the implications of the scheme, which were evidenced in the written representations and the oral representations made at the hearing. Specifically, the diocesan scheme

proposed the merger of the Appleshaw benefice with Pastrow, and stated in the notes that there would be no parish mergers in the Appleshaw benefice at that point, and that the issue of parish merger should be reviewed after three years. However, the evidence of the representations at the hearing demonstrated that some people thought that either the Appleshaw benefice would have a three-year period to decide if it wanted to join the Pastrow benefice, or that if the merger went ahead now they would be able to opt out after three years, or that individual parishes would be able to make different decisions about whether or not to opt into the new benefice or to merge with each other. It is important to note, that a merger of benefices in this scheme would have included all the parishes, and should a merger have been completed there would be no scope for individual parishes to opt out of the arrangement at a future date, unless the diocese brought forward new proposals for further pastoral reorganisation.

6. Sarah Sharland's evidence also implied there was confusion about how the scheme would work. Her representations implied that the Appleshaw parishes would have a choice about whether or not to join with Pastrow, and that she might be left with a reduced benefice, made up of parishes which had not merged, and that she would then have an odd relationship with both – being the Priest in Charge in relation to the parishes which opted out, and Assistant Priest for the parishes which opted in. This was not what the scheme was proposing, but the Commissioners agreed that the lack of clarity had contributed to a sense of confusion and a lack of support for the scheme overall. The evidence from the diocese was that they thought the scheme was clear and well understood and that the three-year arrangements were adequately explained in the diocesan notes on the scheme.

Detailed reasons for the Commissioners' decision

7. The detailed reasons for the Commissioners' decision are summarized below.

Proper purpose

8. The Commissioners noted that these proposals had been formulated in the context of a three-year financial plan and the recommendations of a diocesan Deployment Working Group, both approved by the Diocesan Synod. They therefore considered that they had been developed within a framework which took proper account of the financial implications for the Diocese and the Church of England as a whole and the availability of stipendiary clergy. They saw no reason to doubt that this had been done with a view to furthering the mission of the Church and providing for the better cure of souls. They also considered that it was appropriate for each diocese to set its own priorities for how this should be done and concluded that the Diocese of Winchester had done so reasonably and in a way that was properly open to it. They were consequently also satisfied that the proposals had been developed for a proper purpose and noted that the Bishop of Southampton, as acting Diocesan Bishop, wished them to proceed.

Consultation process

9. Although there were differences of opinion and understanding, the Commissioners were also satisfied that the consultation processes had met the requirements of the Mission and Pastoral Measure and had been fair. They noted that all the statutory parties had been consulted and offered meetings with the DMPC or its

representatives in accordance with s.6 of the Measure, and that no formal meeting had been requested. They also noted, however, that there had been informal meetings between the Archdeacon and the Deanery leadership and that some of the representors themselves referred to having taken part in informal discussions in early 2021. They also noted that there had been much discussion between the PCCs in the Pastrow benefice to develop a Framework document for how a single parish might operate. They further noted that there had been a willingness on the part of the Area Mission and Pastoral Committee (AMPC) and Bishop to amend the original proposals by omitting a union of the parishes in the Appleshaw benefice, which indicated that they had not approached the consultations with a pre-determined view.

Union of the Pastrow parishes

10. The Commissioners accepted the Bishop's reasons for proposing a union of parishes for the Pastrow benefice, namely having one decision-making body; a coordinated plan for mission and ministry across the area of the current benefice; the ability to co-ordinate their energies and achieve economies of scale in their work; a coordinated approach to the use and management of buildings; and planning across the benefice to encourage stewardship.
11. They noted that all the PCCs in the Pastrow benefice were in favour of, or had not objected to, the proposed union of parishes and had been involved in the development of the Framework document for its implementation. They also noted that most of the representations against this provision came from those in Appleshaw benefice who were concerned that it set a precedent or expectation for their parishes, rather than from within the Pastrow parishes, and that Mr. Sore's concern about an inequality in the treatment of the parishes in the two existing benefices within a united benefice would no longer apply in view of the decision that the union of benefices should not proceed.
12. They also noted that the parish treasurers were said not to share Mr. Symes's concerns about a single parish having a negative effect on giving and that the Framework document envisaged the maintaining of some restricted funds for particular churches under the control of Local Church Councils. They noted that the Mission and Pastoral Measure made provision for varying the usual provision for two churchwardens for each parish church and Mr. Randall Bissell's comment that it was already difficult to attract enough volunteers to fill the existing churchwardens' offices, was consistent with their understanding of difficulties elsewhere in the Church of England. They saw no reason not to accept the view of the Incumbent and PCCs, as expressed in the Framework document, that two churchwardens was the appropriate number for the proposed new parish and that the proposed Local Church Councils would ensure the necessary local involvement at each church.

Union of benefices

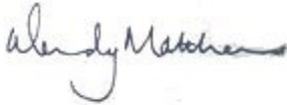
13. The Commissioners noted that only one PCC from the Appleshaw benefice (Thruxton) supported the proposals, whilst all the PCCs from the Pastrow benefice either supported the union, or did not formally object to that part of the scheme.
14. The Commissioners noted that the Diocese had said that their plan, if the scheme went ahead, was to merge the Pastrow and Appleshaw benefice, but not take any action on a possible merger of the Appleshaw parishes until three years later, which

would also give time to assess how the single Pastrow PCC model was working. However, the Commissioners had identified material confusion among representors as to what was proposed at this time in connection with Appleshaw benefice, and whether its effect would be temporary or permanent. They concluded that it was proper to take into account the subjective views of representors (even if founded on a misunderstanding) because support (or lack of it) could have a material impact on mission outcomes the diocese was seeking to achieve. They concluded that entering into an arrangement which some regarded as provisional, and others did not (and where they had different perceptions of the extent to which this was the case) was not likely to provide a sufficiently secure and robust basis for the proposed benefice to flourish equally across all areas, and successfully further the mission of the Church. Any future proposals would need to be considered on their own merits at the relevant time.

15. They also noted that the previous union of benefices to create the current Pastrow benefice, and the current proposed union of the parishes, had both been brought forward following considerable discussion and trialing of the proposed arrangements, which they did not think had happened to the same extent for the proposed union of the Appleshaw and Pastrow benefices. They also noted that the Archdeacon was open to the Appleshaw benefice undertaking a further period of discernment regarding its longer-term future with the priest-in-charge now in office.
16. For these reasons the Commissioners thought that the proposed union of benefices between Pastrow and Appleshaw should not be pursued at this stage and should be omitted from the current draft Scheme. They noted in this context that the Reverend Sarah Sharland did not share the Bishop's and Archdeacon's concern about feeling isolated in a stand-alone benefice and expected to receive support from the deanery chapter and through informal arrangements.
17. Given their view that the union of benefices should not proceed the Commissioners did not need to consider the representations against the disposal of the Appleshaw parsonage house, as they would fall away as a consequential provision of the union. They noted that this would not preclude proposals being brought forward under the Church Property Measure 2018 for the house at Shipton Bellinger to replace the house at Ragged Appleshaw as the parsonage of the Appleshaw benefice and noted that, in that event, the PCCs in the Appleshaw benefice would have rights of objection and the issue could be appropriately considered in that context.
18. The Commissioners therefore decided in accordance with their power under s.10(3) of the Mission and Pastoral Measure to amend the draft Scheme to give effect to the proposal made by some of the representors against the union of the two benefices, and any consequential provisions relating to the parsonage, should be omitted from the proposed Scheme, which would now only provide for the union of the eight constituent parishes of the Pastrow benefice.
19. However, an amendment under s.10(3) can only be made with the Bishop's agreement, after consultation with the DMPC and after such further consultations as the Commissioners think fit. In this case the Commissioners did not consider that further consultation would be required as the views of those concerned were already clear from the written and oral representations considered.

20. The Commissioners duly sought the agreement of the Bishop to their proposed amendment to the draft Scheme. The Bishop, after consulting the Winchester Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee, agreed to the proposed amendment.
21. In the light of these various points the Commissioners were satisfied that it would be right to allow the draft Scheme as amended by them to proceed notwithstanding the other representations made.
22. They realise that their decision will disappoint some of those who made representations about the draft Scheme, but they hope that this statement will be helpful in indicating that their decision was reached only after careful consideration of all the relevant issues.
23. The Commissioners also considered all the other points made in the representations but felt that none of them was of sufficient weight to outweigh the points listed above.
24. I enclose a notice, as required by the Measure, about the right to apply for leave to appeal to His Majesty in Council against the amended draft Scheme or any of its provisions. A copy of the amended draft Scheme is also included for your information.

Yours sincerely



Wendy Matthews
Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee Secretary
Church Commissioners

Annex A – Minutes of the 17 November public hearing

The public hearing was held at Southampton Football Club on 17 November 2022. The meeting was chaired by Canon Peter Bruinvels (Deputy Chair of the Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee).

Also in attendance were members of the Church Commissioners' Mission, Pastoral and Church Property Committee: The Rt Revd Graham Usher (Bishop of Norwich), the Ven Simon Fisher (Archdeacon of St Helens and Warrington, diocese of Liverpool), the Revd Mark Beard, the Revd Christopher Smith (via Zoom), the Revd Anne Stevens, Canon Shane Waddle and Garth Watkins (via Zoom).

Also in attendance were the Committee Secretary, and the Commissioners' Deputy Official Solicitor supported by the Committee's Chaplain and various members of the Commissioners' staff.

Approximately 50 people attended the meeting for this item. Paul Symes (former PCC Treasurer of Hurstbourne Tarrant), Susan Turner (representing Shipton Bellinger PCC), Andrew Orange (an Appleshaw parishioner), and Edward Bailey (representing Kimpton PCC) spoke against the draft Scheme. Terry Milne (on behalf of the two PCCs of Charlton with Foxcotte; and Smannell with Enham), Jacquie Walker (representing Hatherden with Tangleby PCC) and the Rev Alex Randle-Bissell spoke in favour of it. The Ven Richard Brand (Archdeacon of Winchester), accompanied by the Rev Chris Bradish (Area Dean) spoke for the Diocese. All responded to questions from members of the Committee.

Speakers against the proposed scheme

1. **Mr Symes** introduced himself as a member of the Hurstbourne Tarrant PCC and described his long links with the local Church. He spoke of his former four-parish-benefice being recently merged with the Pastrow parish, and the insight that gave him on what was being proposed.
2. He spoke of the detrimental impact of proposed Scheme in relation to:
 - (i) volunteering: Hurstbourne Tarrant parishioners showed little interest in wanting the join Pastrow services and events, and the demands on volunteers had increased, making it harder to recruit;
 - (ii) bureaucracy: the new enlarged Pastrow PCC would still require Local Church Groups, with each having an assistant Treasurer and assistant churchwardens thereby increasing duplication and associated costs;
 - (iii) funding: people were still willing to give to their local church, but they had to play down the idea of funds being used by other churches within the benefice. Over the last two years, the level of giving to his PCC's General Funds had dropped by over 12%, partly due to the impact of Covid, but also because some donors were less confident that this would be available to their local church. That also affected potential legacy donors to the extent that his PCC had set up a "Friends" fund for its church to try to recapture such donations;

- (iv) increased costs: replacing free volunteers with paid professionals like accountants and administrators, led to the duplication of certain functions. The extra reporting to Pastrow increased costs without any benefits.
3. He said the proposals were a step too far and too soon and would seriously undermine the financial and physical support needed by the local Church.
 4. **Mrs Turner** introduced herself as churchwarden and chairman of the Shipton Bellinger PCC, who had lived in the area for 40 years and dealt with much local change. She argued that the Pastrow model was a city model which was not appropriate for a rural area, something which both Archbishops had recognised in their recent statements.
 5. She said the concept of the Pastrow approach was unproven and thought the scheme should be re-considered by the new Bishop once they were appointed.
 6. The geographical spread of the proposed new benefice would be some 50 square miles, with no interlinking public transport, and in some cases would entail a 40 mile round trip to attend church; this hardly fitted in with an eco-friendly Church.
 7. Their recently appointed priest saw no benefit of these proposals for their parishes. Their five parishes should be given some time to consolidate and develop before being rushed into any larger remote Pastrow benefice.
 8. **Mr Orange** said he was a member of the Appleshaw PCC, led lay services in his church, was a lay representative on General Synod and was an accountant by profession.
 9. His PCC was opposed to the sale of the Appleshaw Rectory. It made better financial sense for it to be retained and rented out, especially in case it was needed for a new incumbent in the future.
 10. The PCC was also opposed to any merger of the benefice with Pastrow and he outlined the reasons for that view, which were similar to those mentioned above. This was a diocese-driven set of proposals, which none of the churches in his benefice wanted. It should therefore be laid to one side and not implemented. He said that Church of England did not understand rural life.
 11. **Mr Bailey** spoke on behalf of Kimpton PCC. He began by asking why these proposals were being brought forward when the 2011 Measure was in the process of being reviewed. They had also been arrived at under the previous diocesan bishop so there was now no reason to pursue this 'old regime' mega-benefice, particularly when the Pastrow benefice was still a work in progress.
 12. He reiterated points raised by some of the other speakers against, and argued that the Pastrow model simply added another layer between PCC and diocese, which did not represent simplification. He also felt that there was not a strong connection between Pastrow and Appleshaw; Appleshaw tended to look more towards Import or the Clatfords. The consultation had been rushed. The three year 'trial' period had been mis-sold to the Appleshaw benefice's parishes, and he wanted the

Reverend Sarah Sharland, be given the opportunity to work with the existing parish/benefice structure.

Committee questions

13. In response to a question about what they would see as the best outcome from the hearing, the speakers confirmed they would like to stay as they were and allow the new Priest-in-charge to consolidate the benefice.
14. Mr Orange repeated his earlier request that the Appleshaw parsonage should also be retained as the parsonage house of its benefice.
15. In response to a question about how well the 2002 changes had worked, Mr Bailey responded that Ian Tomlinson had been in post since 1979 and had made the new arrangements work but had recognised the difficulty of getting people to support benefice services; people tended to prefer to worship in their own parish only.
16. Mr Orange felt that not enough consideration had been paid to the large geographical sprawl of the proposed new benefice; it was just too large an area for one incumbent to minister to effectively.
17. Mrs Turner said many in Shipton Bellinger in any event looked to Salisbury, with which they had many links. The lack of public transport was also an issue.
18. Regarding other possible reorganisation, Mr Bailey agreed that a link with the Clatfords or Amport was a more attractive option but noted that they in turn were expanding southwards. He was however clear that the current proposal was trying to link the wrong parishes.
19. In connection with the adequacy of the consultation process Mr Bailey felt that the process was flawed. He highlighted Mr Randle-Bissell's representation and felt that his group of parishes had been misled as to where the Pastrow benefice was, and that Covid had added to some of the problems they were already facing – like the misunderstanding of what the three-year trial period actually meant.
20. Mrs Turner said that those most directly affected by the proposals, namely the parishioners, had not been consulted at all until very late in the process. Mr Symes agreed, and said that initially only PCC members were being consulted. He accepted that Mr Randle-Bissell was now including others, but only in the latter stages.
21. Mr Orange queried the adequacy of some of the consultation processes, particularly at meetings held via Zoom some of which had become rather heated; in such circumstances there was a need for even more consultation, and not less.
22. Mr Bailey said people had been upset when the Rev Sharland was licensed as an assistant curate, which was not what they were expecting.
23. Mrs Turner asked why the Diocese was trying to fix something that was not broken?

Speakers in favour of the proposals

24. **Terry Milne** introduced himself and said that he was a licensed lay minister, and on two of the PCCs in the Pastrow benefice.
25. He outlined the benefits of being part of the diocese's 'Benefice of the Future' programme which focussed on governance, finance and sharing skills. Some PCCs had very few members, and in some cases no churchwardens, so the proposed Scheme would help address how the eight parishes with their 11 churches in the current Pastrow benefice would provide mutual support missionally and in their ministry.
26. Contrary to what some had said, this was not being imposed on them. Two groups had been formed, one dealing with governance and the other finance, and their work had been communicated to PCCs via notes, which were available on the benefice website.
27. The proposed framework had been presented in 2021 to the PCCs and all the PCCs supported the proposals, which included the protection of restricted funds. It was very much a 'live' plan. It would deal with matters like local developments, but would also provide support for wider issues, like Church schools. Contrary to what had been suggested, he had not been worn down by the process, but by its very nature some things did take time to evolve.
28. **Jacquie Waller** said that she had been a member of her church for some 30 years. Cure of souls was at the centre of what was being put forward here, which Pastrow was already doing very well, and which aimed to grow their church community. Some radical re-thinking was needed to ensure a Church of England presence here in the longer term (2060).
29. Their benefice had an arrangement whereby they met each month for joint services, which was successful and was growing. The new services did not appeal to some older members, but she thought they should not block what was appropriate for others. The Pastrow Family Group was trying to make attending church fun. She cited a Rolling Stones song which said, "You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometime, you'll find you get what you need".
30. **Mr Randle-Bissell** said that he supported the proposed Scheme in its entirety; it followed the Gospel principles of love, fellowship and a shared journey. The joining of eight parishes would always be an evolutionary "work in progress".
31. The current position was untenable, with PCC offices difficult to fill. That was not unique to churches as, for example, a local Women's Institute and a cricket club had closed due to a lack of volunteers. These proposals were responding to change, and since 2016 their imperative had been to grow from within.
32. He and the house-for-duty priest had grown the team resources which now included; an admin team of 7, 2 prayers teams, a school team, a healing team and a pastoral team. They were also running Alpha, and a wide range of other activities.
33. There were many willing people prepared to work together, and that was critical to retain and maintain their churches and other things that matter to local people. Some

who had in the past only attended fetes had now started to take an active part in other things; they used the four 'P's' as their approach - prayer, presence, proclamation and persuasion.

Committee questions

34. On what outcome he sought from the hearing, Mr Randle-Bissell, echoed by both Mr Milne and Ms Waller, felt that they had the collective will to make these proposals work, with the PCCs in his benefice supporting them. It had been an honour and a privilege to work with the Appleshaw parishes to provide worship and in schools work and he had also been involved in the appointment of Ms Sharland.
35. On whether the Pastrow benefice established in 2020 had been better than what was there before, he thought it had been an 'evolutionary' process, and parishes had moved at their own pace. In the case of Hurstbourne Tarrant he had been appointed as an Associate Priest there ahead of the 2020 Scheme and much work had been done to prepare the way for the Scheme. He was convinced that that parish's inclusion within the then Pastrow benefice had been beneficial.
36. Regarding the concerns about clergy well-being and workloads, Mr Randle-Bissell felt that the proposals were certainly workable.
37. As regards whether it would be difficult to attract volunteers in the new arrangement, Mr Milne thought that the current arrangement of individual parishes meant too much bureaucracy for some PCC members. The proposals would free churches to concentrate on 'mission' rather than the workings and demands of the many PCCs.
38. As regards the scope for joint ministry with Appleshaw, Mr Milne said that things were already happening in terms of occasional services, and they had grown the schools work in Appleshaw and Kimpton. He was able to act like a supply minister and fill gaps.
39. Mr Randle-Bissell said that collegiality, accountability, scope for sharing and best use of resources were the main benefits to be gained from the proposals. It was important to recognise that each parish could not do everything, and they had to be selective, working with existing strengths. For example, in the church where the BCP tradition was strong they would focus on providing that and encouraging people to attend, rather than providing BCP everywhere.

Speakers from the diocese

40. **The Ven Richard Brand** explained that there were two distinct parts to the draft Scheme, even though they had been combined together. The union of the Pastrow parishes had grown out of the SDF funded model for rural parishes which had begun in 2016/7 and ended in 2021. The Diocese's work with the rural parishes was however on-going.
41. The 2020 union of benefices had been part of this process to encourage collaborative ministry, which would also address the concern about clergy working in isolation. It was about being simpler, humbler, and bolder.

42. He said it was important to note that all eight PCCs in the Pastrow benefice supported, or had not objected to, these proposals. There had been some delay in progressing the proposals which, setting Covid aside, was in due to the great care and attention which Mr Randle Bissell, and the PCCs and parishes, through the Governance and Finance groups, had given to developing the Framework document before the proposals had been brought forward.
43. These proposals sought to make better provision for the cure of souls for the affected parishes and in turn the furtherance of the mission of the local Church.
44. The second part of the proposed Scheme dealt with the union of benefices, to provide a framework for collaborative ministry and to increase the potential for growth. It was not financially driven and was building on the learning from Pastrow and other pilot exercises.
45. It also aimed to address the loneliness and isolation some rural clergy face, combined with increasing expectations and demands, as had been highlighted in recent research.
46. The situation on the ground was markedly different from five years ago; Pastrow's learning could be used for the Appleshaw parishes to show the benefits of sharing resources. Some of this had already been proven to work, such as the sharing of schools' work. The proposals were not primarily driven by financial considerations.
47. The voting figures on the proposals for the Appleshaw parishes showed two PCCs as being in favour, one had a split vote, and two had voted against. The best opportunity for this benefice lay with working as part of the Pastrow benefice in furthering the mission and ministry for both.
48. Having said that, he accepted that Ms Sharland was now in post, so he was open to giving her time to build her understanding of the needs of the five Appleshaw parishes before committing to a union of benefices.

Committee questions

49. In response to a question about the Benefice of the Future SDF initiative, the Archdeacon said that there had been three such pilot benefices in the diocese. One had three parishes, which had now become a single PCC; another had four parishes, which had now become a single PCC; and the third one had seven parishes, which had not become a single PCC. What had been learnt was not to try to do everything the same everywhere, but to work with existing strengths and provide a range of provision across the benefice.
50. The number of church buildings had not changed, whereas the congregation and clergy numbers had faced a 40% decline. This meant that volunteers taking on more and more roles when the burden of governance was also increasing. These proposals sought to free up people to do mission.
51. The multi-parish and rural parishes across the diocese had faced an average fall of 13% in congregation numbers, whilst the Benefices of the Future had only seen a fall of some 4%: the new models resulted in less decline.

52. In response to a question, he repeated his earlier view that it was essential for the union of the eight constituent parishes of the Pastrow benefice to proceed now, but that the union of benefices could be revisited at a later stage.
53. In response to a question about the views of the deanery synod, The Rev Chris Bradish explained that he had been area dean for a relatively short time, having started in January 2022. He explained that the Deanery was to some extent in recovery following various events, but had also faced a busy period, with five clergy appointments last year, and many other local initiatives still to find their way to deanery synod.
54. The Archdeacon explained that he had spent time on informal consultation with the deanery leadership during Covid, which had been facilitated by the ability to hold meetings and follow-ups via Zoom.
55. In a response to a question on travel times, the Archdeacon said that people were prepared to travel to church in rural areas. However, people would not be asked to make long journeys as all the local churches would still be open for worship, although not necessarily every week. The Pastrow Family Group met once a month for benefice services, which people from all parishes of the benefice were welcome to attend. Each church would have a “vocation” for a particular style of worship, and all usual forms of worship would be available including BCP (Book of Common Prayer).
56. The Rev Sarah Sharland explained that she had been unable to comment during the representation period as she had not been in post but was grateful for the opportunity to comment on the union of benefices element from her experience since arriving.
57. She felt that she was perfectly capable of providing pastoral care for herself. The challenges faced by her predecessor had been unique to her as she had taken on the post under different circumstances. Ms Sharland did not require supervision from the rector at Pastrow, but wished to be priest-in-charge of the Appleshaw benefice, with collegiately, where needed, being provided by others, such as the area dean and others from across the whole deanery.
58. The Danebury model where mutual clergy agreement was needed to achieve things showed problems: having one superior/one subordinate minister did not work well. Giving/receiving support was what was needed in this context.
59. She thought that breaking up the current framework of five separate parishes within the one benefice was not a good idea. A link of her five parishes with the Pastrow benefice with its single parish would be difficult for her to work with. She therefore fully favoured the five parishes of the Appleshaw benefice continuing as they were.
60. She was also concerned about how her role would be affected if some of her five parishes were to join with the Pastrow benefice in two or three years’ time, but others did not, leaving her with a different relationship with each group and with the incumbent of Pastrow. She thought this had not been fully thought through, and linking to the Pastrow model which was still in a ‘pilot’ stage was therefore certainly not welcome.

61. She wanted to be given the opportunity to build upon her own relationships with the Appleshaw benefice as it stood. The benefice did not want to join “someone else’s party”, and needed the opportunity to have their own journey.
62. In response to a question she made clear her view that the Appleshaw benefice should not be united with the Pastrow benefice, or indeed with any other.

Annex B – Summary of the main points in the representations

Summary of the main points in the representations against the draft Scheme

1. The representations fell into six main categories:

(i) General concerns about the reorganisation of rural benefices and parishes

Some questioned the appropriateness of such a reorganisation of rural parishes at all.

They said it was a top-down approach, to address the lack of stipendiary clergy and that this position had arisen because of a mismanagement of finances at the diocesan level.

Some said the archbishops had recognised that the needs of rural communities were different and that other solutions were required.

(ii) Size of the proposed new benefice

Some representors said the proposed new benefice, which would cover 40 square miles, would be unwieldy and oversized. They agreed that any union of the current Appleshaw benefice should be with another rural one, but suggested that uniting with Amport, Monxton, Greatly, and possibly the Clatfords (part of two separate benefices of The Portway and Danebury Benefice; and Abbots Ann and Upper Clatford and Goodworth Clatford) might be more appropriate.

One said regular church services in the small rural parishes might be detrimentally affected. To attract more parishioners to local churches, they needed to be more accessible and welcoming. Expecting people to travel over 30 miles on occasion to attend church in, e.g., Linkenholt or Hurstbourne Tarrant, from Shipton Bellinger would result in further expense in difficult financial times and was not very environmentally friendly.

(iii) Collaboration between the two benefices could be achieved by other means than a union

Some questioned why a union of benefices was required to achieve collaboration. They said each benefice should still be allowed to continue distinct, with informal arrangements to work together where needed. They said this was of particular relevance given the recent appointment of the Reverend Sarah Sharland with responsibility for the five parishes of the Appleshaw benefice; she should not be placed in a unit outside the control of the five parishes she served.

They agreed that support for the clergy from neighbouring and other benefices was to be welcomed and would help alleviate feelings of isolation (which their previous priest-in-charge the Reverend Sandra Williams suffered from) but said this should not be at the expense of their existing benefice arrangements which had been in place for some 20 years.

(iv) The parishes in the Pastrow benefices should not be united

Two people from the Pastrow benefice questioned the union of the eight parishes of their benefice. Mr Sore asked what justification there was for his benefice's parishes to be united whilst the five of the Appleshaw benefice were allowed to continue distinct.

Mr Symes explained his long association with the Hurstbourne Tarrant parish. From experience he said it was relatively easy to get local people to contribute towards local and specific Church projects. This was however certainly not the case with regards contributing towards benefice, diocese, and other costs. He believed that the union of the eight parishes in his current benefice into a 'mega-parish' PCC (and an even bigger benefice) would further distance the new parish and its PCC from its parishioners, be off-putting to "givers" and lead to a significant drop in overall church income.

Representors from the Appleshaw benefice supported its five parishes continuing distinct for the foreseeable future, each holding its own funds, freedom for forms of worship and autonomy. However, some also questioned the appropriateness of such a large parish for Pastrow and thought it created an expectation that they would follow suit. Kimpton PCC also questioned the reduction in the number of churchwardens in the proposed new Pastrow parish and would not like that to extend to Appleshaw.

(v) The proposed disposal of the Appleshaw benefice's parsonage house

Many of the representors opposed this, for a variety of reasons.

Some, including one of the patrons, Mr Routh, questioned the financial desirability of doing so. They said it was for a short-term financial gain and it would be a better long-term investment to retain the Rectory to benefit both from its increased capital value (historically much greater than inflation) together with the rental income from letting it.

They also thought this would provide the flexibility needed were there to be a further reorganisation or should it be required for a house-for-duty priest in the future. Mr Routh added that the new Bishop and/or Winchester Diocese might well consider the Rectory at Ragged Appleshaw a more appropriate central location from which to serve the proposed new benefice, in which case Shipton Bellinger Vicarage had the potential to be let as an alternative.

Others opposing the proposed disposal said that the land on which the parsonage was built was originally gifted by a parishioner so in any event any sale proceeds should not be to the benefit of the diocese.

Some also questioned whether it was appropriate to house one of the clergy for the proposed new benefice at Shipton Bellinger which was right at one end of the benefice. They also said that there had previously been discussion about

transferring the Shipton Bellinger parish into the Salisbury Diocese, which it bordered, as it had links with military bases in that Diocese.

(vi) The adequacy of the consultation process

Some challenged the 'diocesan rationale' carried at the foot of the draft proposals.

They recognised that in the longer term the Appleshaw benefice would need to be subject to some form of pastoral reorganisation but argued that the present proposals were based on a diocesan plan which was presented in the early part of 2021 as a fait accompli. They said much of the consultation took place during the Covid period when it was not possible to have fact-to-face meetings. Some questioned whether it was appropriate to be promoting this reorganisation when there was no diocesan bishop and whether under new leadership it would still form part of the vision for the future of the diocese.

They said that the proposed union of the two benefices was a 'work in progress' with no guarantee of success, which some saw as a risk too far, although it was cautiously accepted by others, and divisive for some of the parishioners. They said nothing firm should be decided at this stage and the parishes should be allowed to trial any informal arrangements for some three years. Several said that during the consultations they were told that any formal links with the Pastrow benefice would only be decided upon after some two to three years of consultations, and with no compulsion to join.

Some, especially those who said that the proposed new benefice would be too geographically widespread, said that no alternatives to the current proposal were considered during the consultations.

Kimpton PCC expressed concern that all the material that was available to the Commissioners in considering the matter should also be available to the representors. A number said a hearing should be offered in this case.

2. Other points raised in the representations against

Some in the Appleshaw benefice saw the proposals as a 'take-over' by the Pastrow benefice.

Some said the inclusion of the Appleshaw parishes with the Pastrow benefice had made recruitment to the current Appleshaw benefice more difficult.

Summary of the representations in support of the draft Scheme

3. The Reverend Alex Randell-Bissell set out the thinking behind uniting the eight parishes of the Pastrow benefice with its population of around 6,300 and four schools with 325 pupils, with at least 32 services held monthly across the benefice. He provided a detailed document about this.

4. He said that to ensure that the Pastrow benefice grew, they needed to build a new structure that achieved five key objectives:

- strengthening the overall mission and outreach of Pastrow as a top priority;
 - minimising duplication and saving clergy time spent on administration;
 - allowing their PCCs to shed many of the irksome legal tasks that bogged them down and have more time and freedom to focus on the role of their church in their local community;
 - improving the support and encouragement given to parishes from the centre, particularly in areas such as mission, outreach, pastoral work, safeguarding, and GDPR; and
 - running the benefice finances and accounts centrally and achieving economies of scale in contracts and purchasing throughout the benefice.
5. He outlined the consultation process since 2016, a year after his arrival initially involving just the Pastrow benefice which was later extended to include the five Appleshaw parishes too. He also set out the financial benefits of uniting the Pastrow parishes.
 6. With regards the Pastrow benefice, he said there had been a strong emphasis on joint benefice services and building ministry capacity through teams; treasurers, prayer, mission, families & children, pastoral visitors etc., all of which drew on the existing talents of people serving in their local churches but with a thirst to serve in a wider setting and being supported with likeminded colleagues who shared similar passions and skills.
 7. This had led to joint PCC meetings across the eleven churches of the benefice starting in early 2020 in one location, beginning with worship and then meeting together on mission and ministry, before breaking off into their separate PCCs. He said much ground had been covered collectively as a group of churches to get to this point, thus, the collation of eleven churches into one parish had been considered by many as evolutionary rather than revolutionary and he personally felt very comfortable that they had enough collective will to make this part of the scheme work.
 8. He fully accepted that some people he had met during their consultations outside the benefice during this period had baulked at the idea of having so many churches in one benefice. However, his view was that they had not 'lived the experience' and had been unaware of the work that had been done over several years to join the current parishes of Pastrow together in a more collegiate and missional way. The pandemic had not helped the momentum previously gained to continue but they had started to recover and build back capacity since the beginning of 2022.
 9. All of this had contributed to a more collegiate and focused commitment to the wider benefice; for example, local skills were not there for running four messy churches across the benefice in different locations - having one larger team had been invaluable in reaching out to a new generation of people in their villages which would not have been possible in any one individual church.

10. He said it was important to note that the “Pastrow Framework Document” was also initially written in consultation with the Winchester Diocese Registry to ascertain all the legal requirements of the new single PCC and it had been crucial to communicate at all levels that the Framework was evolutionary in nature and would change as they responded to local needs of churches over the first few years.
11. During that period, the five parishes of the Appleshaw benefice were invited to participate at the joint PCC meetings and there was complete transparency in the notes of each finance and governance meeting published on their website. At the point when the scheme was first introduced, he made a point of meeting with the other parishes both online and then more recently in person for further discussions about the proposed scheme. Work had also been done to start building relationships through taking some services in these parishes, helping to collate and write a new parish profile and leading in the interview process in recruiting the new priest at Appleshaw.
12. He said one of the great strengths of the proposed scheme was that a new team was to be formed which would encourage a more collegiate and supportive opportunity for ministers. This was his first incumbency, and he had learned how beneficial teamwork was in the decision and discernment processes of ministry; he had witnessed colleagues in other rural contexts struggle when working in isolation. Proper supervision and care for clergy was surely a gospel imperative and he felt that this scheme had the potential to foster that vital provision.
13. He concluded by saying that the narrative of the journey of this proposed scheme demonstrated that many hours of prayer, discussion and debate had taken place to search for a way to join these church communities together and model a more focused way of responding to the well documented challenges that faced them all in the coming years.
14. Thrupton PCC, the only PCC from the Appleshaw benefice writing in favour, said that it agreed to the union of benefices provided that that was reviewed in three years’ time, and on the basis that its parish retained its funds.
15. Charlton with Foxcotte PCC; Hatherden with Tangleby PCC; Smannell with Enham Alamein PCC; Weyhill PCC unanimously supported the proposed Scheme and said that the proposals had been discussed several times over the past year.
16. Vernham Dean PCC said it unanimously agreed to support these proposals on the understanding that its purpose was to change and modernise the administration of the local Church, but with locally administered trusts and funds continuing to be applied for their intended purposes.
17. Sheila Hymas-Parry, churchwarden, Shipton Bellinger supported these proposals primarily because they provided a degree of support from colleagues for their new priest. She would not wish to see another priest, like their previous one, leave due to the excessive workload of serving five parishes and five PCCs.
18. The local parishes had been assured that they would not see any changes at a local level, but she was also excited by the prospect of having access to different

paths to spiritual life and growth as they joined with a family of churches with varied individual practices and modes of worship.

19. However, she could not overlook the fact that this consultation process had been painful and divisive in her community and across her current benefice, and it could all have been handled so much better.
20. Kenton Smith – member of Appleshaw PCC said his strongly held desire for his parish to continue distinct had been provided for.
21. He accepted that things had changed locally and would continue to have to change. The proposals would provide support for the clergy and would enable the better sharing of resources. He was undecided on the Appleshaw parsonage proposals as ideally it should have been the place of residence of the incumbent.

Out-of-time representations

Against

22. Robin Hiscocks – member of Shipton Bellinger PCC echoed points already raised in the representations against. He, however, asked that the views of the Archbishop of Canterbury be sought on these proposals.

For

23. Penton Mewsey PCC unanimously supported the proposed Scheme and said that the proposals had been discussed numerous times.

Comments

24. Jeanette Briscoe – Appleshaw parishioner said we must accept change, although she was concerned her benefice would be somewhat unwieldy when combined with Pastrow. She would like assurances that the autonomy of St Peter's (Appleshaw) would be respected regarding finance and day to day running of the church and fabric with all consultations being transparent and inclusive.

Summary of the Diocesan response

25. Following normal practice, a copy of the representations was sent to the Bishop to seek the diocesan response to the representations and the matter generally. The Winchester Diocesan Board of Finance ("the WDBF) explained that the proposals formed part of its response to the financial and resource challenges exacerbated by Covid; they were fully supported by the diocesan and archdeaconry mission and pastoral committees together with being carefully considered at a local level.

26. They were in two parts, with the first originating from the clergy and parishes of the Pastrow benefice as part of an SDF funded project “Benefice of the Future” for developing a strategic approach to rural ministry in the Diocese which the Pastrow parishes had been piloting since 2017. This approach to rural ministry had broad ownership in the diocese, and it seemed unlikely that a new diocesan bishop would change it.
27. The second part for Pastrow benefice’s union with the Appleshaw benefice was a natural extension of the project to allow the Appleshaw parishes to benefit from the support of Pastrow and to address the issue of clergy isolation experienced by the previous priest-in-charge at Appleshaw. By bringing the Appleshaw parishes into one of their pilot benefices it expected these churches to gain from a new collegiality of wider resourcing; whilst there was some strong lay leadership, maintaining the mission and ministry was a real challenge. This experience chimed with that of many other sole clergy in rural ministry.
28. By way of broader background, it said that since the 2017 instigation of this project, in 2019 a Deployment Working Group had been established with the remit to consider the number and location of their stipendiary clergy appointments, and to make recommendations as to how finite resources could be allocated in a way which best addressed the missional priorities which the Diocesan Synod had formulated and adopted at its 2013 and 2016 conferences. A consultation process took place over a period of several months, and the group’s final recommendations were received and adopted by the Diocesan Synod at its residential conference in November 2019.
29. Having agreed at its July 2019 meeting a three-year financial plan, the Diocesan Synod adopted a recommendation to continue working with roughly 140 stipendiary posts. However, Covid arrived in early 2020 and the effects of the pandemic and numerous lockdowns soon became evident and resulted in a revised number of stipendiary posts that could be supported by the Diocese of circa 120.
30. On the question of whether the Bishop’s proposals were motivated by financial considerations and availability of stipendiary clergy, it said that neither were overriding factors influencing this scheme but were ones which the Diocese had naturally taken into account.
31. It detailed the consultation process which showed that the legal requirements as set out in the 2011 Measure had been fully met. The process started in 2019 and in early 2021 conversations moved from diocesan and deanery level to benefice and parish level. Initially, conversations were held with all clergy within each benefice. Subsequently, diocesan and deanery leaders met with all PCC members via Zoom; this took the form of a presentation of the proposals for consideration. It was repeated often that this was to be the first step in a lengthy conversation and consultation process. Every effort was made to keep all parties informed and engaged throughout, including the patrons. During this process, senior leadership and diocesan staff were available to answer any questions or attend further meetings as needed.

32. It disputed the suggestion that Covid adversely affected the consultation process: the advent of the greater use of Zoom meant that multiple PCCs were briefed on proposals at the same time, ensuring all present (which, ironically, during Covid restrictions was probably more than in normal times) heard the same message at the same time. Likewise, there was a high turn-out from PCC members for follow-up meetings where their questions were heard and responded to, and discussions held.
33. Initially, diocesan proposals suggested that the Appleshaw parishes should become a single PCC as it has been a key feature in the Benefice of the Future pilots to reset the high burden of governance. Responding to concerns from the Appleshaw parishes, that part of the proposals had been withdrawn. The WDBF clarified that the three-year 'trial' did not relate to the union of benefices, but instead to a three-year period during which the Appleshaw parishes would remain independent and not unify; their decision not to unite into a single PCC was respected, and it was suggested that after a period of three years, the question of a single PCC structure should be re-visited.
34. Retaining the distinct PCCs of the Appleshaw parishes but bringing these parishes into the benefice of Pastrow provided the parishes with the freedom and independence they wished to maintain whilst also providing the Reverend Sarah Sharland, the newly appointed Associate Priest, the support and collegiality that was needed.
35. The WDBF recognised that each parish and its worshipping community had its own needs, traditions, and characteristics. It was expected that these will be better addressed with the larger team of three incumbent status clergy, along with other clergy and authorised laity, making a variety of skills available to all the parishes.
36. It said that alternatives to the current proposals were considered over a number of years by the deanery and in conversations the Archdeacon had had with the benefices. In particular, the suggestion of linking with Portway and Danebury benefice (adjoining to the south-east) had been discussed with both benefices. Both discerned that this was not a natural alliance in terms of social geography, history or on other grounds. Portway and Danebury was now focused on a possible union with the benefice adjoining it to the east. The potential additional support and resources that Pastrow benefice could bring to the Appleshaw benefice was far greater than Portway and Danebury could currently offer.
37. As regards whether the new benefice would be too large and unwieldy the WDBF said that although there would be sixteen churches in the proposed new benefice, there would be six parishes within it; six PCCs should be considered a manageable size within a multi-parish rural benefice.
38. The ministerial provision in the proposed scheme was three full-time, stipendiary priests and one full-time assistant curate. In addition, there were three other Licensed Lay Ministers plus other recognised service leaders together with three retired priests offering support. The WDBF therefore did not expect the number of services at each church to be reduced. Three of the churches in the Pastrow

benefice already had infrequent services and their status would be altered to chapels of ease by the draft Scheme.

39. In response to the concerns that the PCC of the new Pastrow parish would be too remote from its parishioners, the WDBF explained that its incumbent's 'Pastrow Framework' laid out the ways that would be avoided through having Local Church Groups ("LCG") which would have relationships with the single PCC which was designed to have as much interaction as possible, with both having clear levels of responsibility intertwined with each other. It cited that the single PCC would act as a 'joint council' as it was proposed that every LCG nominated a member so that everyone had 'a seat at the table' and the LCGs had delegated responsibility at a local level.
40. It accepted that there might be an increased potential cost by requiring a bookkeeper on a part-time basis to monitor collections from all eleven churches, but that that would be funded for the first three years via trusts attached to several of the Pastrow churches.
41. Regarding why the new Pastrow parish would only have two churchwardens, notwithstanding there would be seven parish churches within it [*and the usual expectation therefore of 14 churchwardens*], it said that the two overwhelming conclusions that the Governance Group for the proposed new parish came to was that they were there to fulfil the vital roles of administration and pastoral work, and that these could be undertaken by the LCG concerned. Through past learned experience, the benefice believed that the proposed model was sustainable and would work in the format presented.
42. In connection with the disposal of the Appleshaw parsonage, and that that could be a short-sighted course of action in financial terms, the WDBF said that for decades it had the practice of retaining surplus houses in the perceived wisdom that this could generate rental income and long-term capital growth. In reality, however, factoring-in matters like maintenance, agents' fees, void periods, etc., a return of only around 1.5% of the value of the asset had been achieved. It was determined that this should be re-balanced, in the context of the financial challenges caused by the pandemic and subsequent cost of living crisis. It therefore needed to prioritise the protection of annual investment in ministry, even at the cost of giving up some long-term growth in capital assets.
43. To put this re-balancing in context, it said that in 2007 the diocese had 225 stipendiary clergy posts, with a balance sheet of £117m. At the end of 2021, it had 116.5 stipendiary clergy posts with a balance sheet of £178m. This strategy would also give it greater flexibility to respond when houses were needed in new locations. It was also not open to making any grants from the sale of the Appleshaw house to the five parishes as that would set an unwelcome precedent.
44. The WDBF explained that the Shipton Bellinger house had been transferred to the WDBF via the 2002 Pastoral Scheme (the property continued to be held by the WDBF for diocesan purposes). On why it was intended to retain that house instead of the Appleshaw one it said that they were at opposite ends of the current benefice. In the proposed new benefice, there would be three clergy houses spread across the benefice at Hurstbourne Tarrant, Penton Mewsey (*the*

parsonage house) and Shipton Bellinger; the Shipton Bellinger house had very useful 'parish rooms' attached to it, providing extra resource to the benefice. During consultation it heard many voices encouraging the use of this house for that reason.

45. On the question of whether retaining both the Shipton Bellinger house and the Appleshaw one would provide greater flexibility, the WDBF disagreed as it said that the three clergy houses would be spread across the benefice; excessive holding of houses formerly used for ministerial purposes created a lack of liquid reserves available to be invested in emerging housing needs. This had ironically given it little flexibility in responding to the changing needs of its clergy and communities.
46. In response to the view that Shipton Bellinger might be transferred to the Diocese of Salisbury it said it expected not; there were always parishes bordering diocesan boundaries, and no conversations had taken place with its neighbouring diocese on that.
47. It closed by saying that as Pastrow was one of its first Benefice of the Future pilot benefices, the Appleshaw parishes would be joining a benefice well down the line in learning lessons of good collaboration, focusing mission and ministry, and taking rural ministry into a sustainable and hopefully flourishing future for the sake of each rural community.

Supplementary views of representors

48. Six supplementary comments were received all from those against the Bishop's proposals, namely: Appleshaw PCC, Kimpton PCC, Andrew Orange, Ray Sore, Paul Symes and Susan Turner.
49. Appleshaw PCC said that the diocesan response made it very clear that the proposal was a top-down instruction and not the result of consultation.
50. Kimpton PCC reiterated its earlier submission that there was no need for any union of the Appleshaw benefice with the Pastrow one, which would result in an overly large benefice. It also questioned the wisdom of these proposals when the Winchester See was currently vacant and questioned the reason for any rush. It stressed that the formation of the Pastrow benefice and the proposed union of its parishes was a pilot project and that up to that point it had been led to believe that it was already a fully functional and strong benefice. It now felt that that was not the case and that the Appleshaw benefice should not be added to it until the structure had been shown to work. It was also concerned that the Pastrow appointment was Mr Randle-Bissell's first incumbency. Asking him to take on another five parishes before the implementation of all that he was currently proposing for his own benefice would increase his burden significantly. He, like other priests in the diocese, needed support.
51. It said it felt there had been some pressure for it to agree to the union with the Pastrow benefice in order to have its own priest; although the Reverend Alex Randle-Bissell, incumbent of the Pastrow benefice, was said to have taken great pains to assure it that there was no such link. It believed more needed to be done to

encourage people back into worship, and to integrate church life into village life. It was hopeful that with the Reverend Sarah Sharland's recent appointment to their benefice Kimpton would be able to reach out to its community and revitalise its church. It also questioned what it saw as an arbitrary prohibition on both retired clergy and lay people from helping their church unless they had attended Bishop's Commission for Mission. It understood the need for safeguarding but said the process was over bureaucratic and cited the example of someone who withdrew from offering to assist as a result.

52. It regretted that its previous priest had felt a general lack of support from local clergy. However, it considered that the difficulties she experienced arose from her personal circumstances including being asked to take on a wider role than that she had applied for. It added that Ms. Sharland, from a brief acquaintance, appeared to be a totally different individual and would not be subject to the same difficulties as her predecessor. In any event, she should still be able to seek any clerical support she might need from the Pastrow benefice, and the PCC hoped that the Diocese would address these issues of clergy isolation generally.
53. It reiterated that it had understood that the three-year 'trial period' was not in relation to any union of the Appleshaw parishes but instead to the formal union with the Pastrow benefice: it had always thought that at the end of it any, or all, of the Appleshaw parishes could walk away from any such arrangement and did not wish to proceed on the suggested basis. It questioned what 'duplication' uniting the benefices would avoid; if anything, it would increase as the parishes in the Appleshaw benefice would need to report to Pastrow. It said that there was also a strong resistance in the Appleshaw benefice to the unification or centralisation of finance. Its experience was that that could be more expensive, and it gave the example of flints falling from the church's tower, where the repair costs were six times more than had the parish instructed its own contractor.
54. It also did not understand why the new Pastrow benefice had decided that the new Pastrow parish should have just two churchwardens; in the Appleshaw benefice the importance of having two churchwardens for each parish church could not be overestimated. It said to have that function 'delegated to LCGs and monitored by the PCC' was a fundamental legal change to the roles and responsibilities of churchwardens and other PCC members. It also asked for guarantees that none of its parish churches would be made into chapels of ease – as was being proposed for three of the churches in the Pastrow benefice.
55. Although the Diocese was not exploring whether the Shipton Bellinger parish might wish to join with Salisbury diocese, it noted that any parish should be free to do what was right for its individual vision for the future, identity and character, and this could include proposing to be part of another diocese.
56. The PCC questioned whether there were covenants or restrictions in the conveyance by which the Appleshaw parsonage was acquired which would prevent it being sold or the sale proceeds being applied elsewhere than to the parish. It thought that neither this house nor the Shipton Bellinger one should in any event be sold. It questioned whether the WDBF was managing its housing portfolio well if it was only able to attain some 1.5% per annum overall return on the retention and lettings of such properties. It sought an undertaking that the Appleshaw parsonage

would not be sold before July 2025 or the conclusion of any further discussions relating to the proposals now under consideration.

57. It was concerned that its benefice's link with Pastrow was seen as a *fait accompli*, which should not be the case. It asked for proper consultation going forward, when the new Bishop of Winchester was in post, and with no pre-determined solution and not until September 2025 at the earliest. This should not be led from the top, neither should it be rushed or set against the backdrop of a scheme which had already been decided. It was also concerned that no alternative options had been put forward and asked to see any rationale for this. The proposed Scheme might meet the needs and traditions of the parishes in the Pastrow benefice, but they did not for the Kimpton parish (or the other parishes in the Appleshaw benefice). Collaborative working, sharing resources, focusing on ministry etc. did not require the type of structure envisaged here. It was an overly bureaucratic approach.
58. Andrew Orange said that the proposals appeared to be driven by the Diocese, with scant reference to parishes requesting anything; hence giving the impression of a top-down, imposed solution. He questioned whether some of the support from the Pastrow parishes might be gently 'coerced' ones, as he could find no description of parishes thirsting for this.
59. He noted that there was no financial motivation for this scheme but felt that the diocesan response to the question of reduced donation levels with self-defeating financial consequences had not been addressed.
60. Ray Sore said his objection was one of 'equality': the Pastrow parishes were sold the single parish concept on the basis of reducing administrative workload, particularly on the incumbent. To leave the Appleshaw parishes distinct was contrary to the fundamental principle of that and would put the Pastrow parishes in an unequal and undemocratic relationship within the new benefice.
61. He said that the Pastrow Family services were not popular with the parishioners and detracted from the viability of the individual parishes. He was also concerned about the negative environmental impact of people having to make longer car journeys to attend some services. The general laity would not relate to the proposed new benefice.
62. Paul Symes explained that he was still a member of the Hurstbourne Tarrant PCC but was not the current treasurer as wrongly stated in the summary of the representations. He was reassured to note that some of the parishes were continuing distinct and would therefore continue to have two churchwardens each. Neither of these variations had been offered when the Pastoral Scheme Framework Document was being prepared. *[Note by staff: the Scheme as drafted provided for only the five parishes comprising the area of the current Appleshaw benefices to continue distinct, thereby allowing them (only) to have two churchwardens each per parish church.]*
63. Susan Turner said that there was a general lack of meaningful consultation on the proposals. She too questioned the need for any, particularly during the Vacancy in the See. She said that those in Shipton tended to go to Salisbury Cathedral for worship, and to Tidworth for leisure, retail, and medical purposes.

64. Her benefice had been without a vicar for three years, yet she understood 22 ordained ministers had been made redundant. She questioned whether her rural parish wished to be collegiate: how much influence should an appointee have? She was fully supportive that the new incumbent should have all the care and support they needed in a demanding role.

Supplementary response from the diocese

65. In relation to the suggestion that these proposals were a 'top down, imposed solution', the WDBF said that the process did require an overview of the whole diocesan, wider perspective that could not be delivered via a 'bottom up' process. This process required extensive consultation with deanery leadership teams before coming to benefices and parishes and that the legislative consultation requirements had been followed. It emphasised that the union of the eight parishes of the current Pastrow benefice was what the PCCs concerned had agreed as the best way forward for them.
66. It explained that the 'Benefice of the Future' SDF-funded project had come to an end; this experimental stage, which indicated the valuing of rural parishes as much as urban ones, had produced positive and helpful learning which the Diocese was in the process of gathering so that it could be shared with others in the Diocese and beyond.
67. In connection with the Appleshaw Rectory it referred to the restriction contained in the original conveyance of 1953 (*the effect of which was set out in paragraph 4 above*). The WDBF said that the reasons for changing the place of residence of the priest ministering in the area of the Appleshaw benefice from Appleshaw to Shipton Bellinger were the suitability of the property, which had a parish office attached, and its location; the latter being the most densely populated area of the benefice.
68. The Diocese recognised the importance of support for clergy and their families and explained the support that was available. However, parish ministry could be a challenge, and it was the diocese's strong belief that collegiate ministry teams as per the proposals could provide better support to clergy than working in isolation.