

MINUTES of a meeting of the Parochial Church Council of the Parish of St Paul's New Beckenham held in the church hall on Sunday 5th July 2026 at 12.30 pm.

2026 / 2027 No. 2

Present: Rev'd Rachel Winn (in the chair), Maria Adu, James Bramwell, Sarah Butler, Ishmael Gowero (for minutes 1412(i) -1413), Sarah Gray, Anne Harkness, Clari Harrington, Sandra Horner, Anne Howick, Keith Howick, Ian Johnson, Shiona Pilgrim, Tony Pilgrim (for minutes 1412(ii) - 1413), Anthea Prendergast.

Apologies for absence had been received from Paul Lashmar and Roger Wells.

Rev'd Rachel opened the meeting in prayer.

11412 Church pews

Rev'd Rachel reported that 63 responses had been received to the mini questionnaire. She and Anne Howick had read and correlated each response. All the findings had been reflected in a document which had been circulated to the PCC on 3rd July.

(i) The first section was about comments which members had posted and who were in favour of removing pews and having chairs. Rev'd Rachel commented on each sub-heading in the report, including Services, Accessibility, Community, Flexible Space, Tailoring, Cost, Income, Pews, Modernise, Welcoming, Comfort, Practical, Creativity, Architecture, Spiritual. Members had commented that if the pews are removed, what they thought about having chairs. Some thought a few pews should be retained, there should be stackable benches, some comfy sofas and armchairs. Members asked about how removing the pews would affect the acoustics.

(ii) There was also a section with comments on those in favour of retaining pews. These included Emotional thoughts, aesthetics, practical, and a few other comments.

Members were reminded that there had been discussions in the past about having more hall space. If the pews were put back this would affect how the church space is developed in the future. Some chairs would be attached to each other. The space would be more flexible in an emergency, e.g. visit by an ambulance, as it would be easier to move the chairs for access. Some members commented on chairs they had sat on at other churches and cathedrals. Rev'd Rachel reported on an offer which Sarah Gray's son-in-law had made regarding the chairs at his church, which might be available on a temporary basis.

If anyone was upset at the possible changes, they were encouraged to speak to the vicar. It was confirmed that when the Babies & Toddler group meets, the church doors are closed.

Following discussions the vicar proposed, seconded Anne Harkness, that when the pews are removed they would not be reinstated. St Paul's would look to sell those as much as possible and to apply to the DAC for a Faculty for chairs instead of pews. **Agreed, with one abstention.** It was agreed that these discussions should be confidential, and that there would be an email to the church family, and information in the notice sheet about the pews.

1412 Chair working party

Members agreed that the pews should be offered to people in the church. It would be important to look at different chairs, including upholstered chairs or wooden ones, and to decide which would be the most comfortable. Following discussion Olivia Masih, Tony Pilgrim, Shiona Pilgrim were appointed to the Chair Working Party. Rev'd Rachel was asked to contact Rosemary Dear and John Blakely as possible members of the working party. It would be important to consider where the pews should go when they are taken out for the heating project, and that the group should look at other churches. Rev'd Rachel and Sarah Gray agreed to liaise regarding the chairs that Sarah's son-in-law had offered. Keith Howick thanked Rev'd Rachel for all her work in consulting and arranging the feedback to enable the PCC to make the decisions.

11413 Steele Scammell Studio

Martin Steele had been appointed as the architect. He would be attending the PCC meeting on 29th July. He had outlined the following details: Planning Application fee, Registered Building Inspector, Structural Input, Architect services. Planning and Faculty processes would need to be tracked and managed, and the PCC would need certain milestones in place before the construction contract commitment. Most of the work would need to be done between July 2026 and Christmas 2026. Contract administration and completion matters might take the project to January or February 2028 because of the usual twelve months rectification period after handover. St Paul's would not be going forward with the lobby redevelopment until the heating project was complete.

Following discussions Keith Howick proposed, seconded Clari Harrington, that Steele Scammel Studio should undertake the technical design, procurement and contact administration work for the Parish. **Agreed, with one abstention.** Anne Harkness was asked to check if we need to get three quotes. The PCC must make sure it had done due diligence and the decisions and actions were all ok. It was agreed that Martin Steele should be advised that St Paul's has an asset, and Rev'd Rachel suggested solar panels should be considered in the future. The PCC had thought very seriously about the project and where we are and who we should instruct. Ian Johnson offered to help with the accounting work. There are HMRC templates which St Paul's can use as it is a charity.

There being no further business, Rev'd Rachel closed the meeting in prayer at 1.45 pm.