



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Mr Paul Lewis
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Church Commissioners
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Our ref: APP/NPCU/RARE/A1530/73500
PCU/RARE/A1530/77929

6 December 2017

Dear Mr Lewis

**Proposed Demolition of the Closed Church of Birch St Peter in the Diocese of Chelmsford
Referral under the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 and the Skelmersdale Agreement of 1986**

I refer to your letters of 9 February 2017 and 7 July 2017 sent to the Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP, requesting that the Secretary of State review the decision to hold a non-statutory public inquiry into the above proposal.

The Secretary of State notes that your request was made, in summary, due to concerns about the delay in arranging the inquiry, the escalating costs involved, and the financial viability of the proposal put forward by Mr Cottee for bringing the building back into use as a dwelling.

To enable the Secretary of State to come to a fully informed decision on your request, the Secretary of State, by letter of 31 August 2017, invited representations from interested parties by 4pm on 14 September 2017 as to the matters raised in your request. The representations received were then circulated by the Secretary of State between parties and a further 7 days allowed for any further representations on other parties' responses. A list of all the representations which have been received by the Secretary of State is at Annex A. Copies of these letters may be obtained on written request to the address at the foot of the first page of this letter.

The Secretary of State has very carefully considered your request and taken into account all the representations received in making his decision. The Secretary of State considers that the matters about which he wishes to be informed for the purposes of considering the proposed demolition of the church, as set out in the Terms of Reference for the Public Inquiry, are complex issues. He considers that there is a need for the evidence in relation to these complex issues to be tested thoroughly through cross examination. He also considers that the proposal has generated substantial local interest sufficient to warrant an inquiry.

Accordingly, and for these reasons, the Secretary of State has decided, in his judgment, that an inquiry, as originally directed in his decision letter dated 18 July 2014, remains the appropriate mode of determination in this matter.

A copy of this letter has been sent to interested parties. The Planning Inspectorate will now be instructed to proceed with the inquiry arrangements and all interested parties will be contacted in due course in this regard.

Yours sincerely

Richard Watson

Richard Watson
Head of Unit