Deliberations of the DAC in *Re St. Mary Magdalene Stoke Bishop* [2025] ECC Bri 4, (emphasis added)

[9]. The DAC were initially sceptical about agreeing to the proposed amendment stating:

> *"From informal conversations with several members, the DAC may feel that this does not yet show 'due regard' to net zero, etc. I've also had a conversation with the planning case officer at Bristol City Council; the PCC and architect have also worked proactively to find a solution, as the noise pollution department had initially also objected to the commercial heat pumps. Instead, a smaller 10kW unit has been found acceptable, albeit an additional unit is needed and they have updated their plans with the council accordingly – this has since passed pollution control as it now fits alongside their matrix and, as such, is not deemed to be beyond the acceptable decibel limit. Their application is in the final steps of planning and is anticipated to be granted early-2026…."*

After some investigation that stance changed:

> *"At the meeting on Thursday 16 October 2025, the DAC resolved to recommend this application to the Chancellor. The DAC sympathised greatly with the parish, but was concerned to reach a clear, evidence-based decision.*
>
> *In reaching its conclusion, the Committee gave prominence to the requirement for the parish to demonstrate due regard for the published guidance on net-zero. In the initial assessment it was felt that some aspects of the parish's submission required scrutiny in this respect. For example, whilst letters of objection referring to concerns about noise nuisance, (and threats of legal action) are understandably of pastoral concern, are they proportionate to the predicted impacts of the previously proposed heat pump plant?*
>
> *The Committee felt strongly that the presumption must be for a low or zero carbon heating solution and that the parish's original proposal provided that. Where the rationale behind that original proposal has changed, that, it was felt, needed to be robust, not only in relation to the parish's progress to net zero, but so as to avoid setting a precedent whereby other parishes could seek to justify oil or gas heating proposals.*
>
> *The primary reason for the change is the perceived risk of noise nuisance. It is understood that under the secular planning process Bristol City Council are considering an alternative heat pump specification with lower noise output and are anticipating that this would satisfy their policy requirements. The Committee recognised that the parish's professional advisors have done much work on assessing and measuring sound levels. However, it was felt that data on decibel levels relative to industry benchmarks did not provide a site-specific analysis – what would be the effect of a specific noise level actually be in this setting? An understanding of the real-world impact would help interrogate the claims made.*
>
> *To this end the DAC assessor visited the site with a calibrated sound meter. It was found that on such a still, dry evening the area around St Mary's is typically suburban and that the comings and goings of normal activity, mainly of traffic, generate sound levels around and above those predicted for the heat pumps. This was found to be the case until around 10pm when the predominant sound was then from the wider city and the neighbourhood itself was very quiet. By 11pm the area around the site was found to be exceptionally quiet, such that any sound was highly noticeable. The assessor had thought nothing of arriving by car, but on departure was very conscious of the impact of starting up to drive away. For completeness they measured the sound level that caused and found it, even at several metres away, to be considerably lower that the predicted sound output of even the revised heat pump proposed. At which point the delay between starting up and driving away was deemed to be intrusive and the assessor left – albeit with a clear sense that the acoustic setting of St Mary's is one of remarkably low nighttime background noise.*

The assessor had also felt that the parish's submission did not give detail of the extent to which the parish had explored other low carbon options. In discussion with the parish and their architect it was evident that considerable work had been done, spanning most of the development of the wider project, including via a detailed energy audit. Many of the solutions proven to be so successful in other parishes were not applicable at St Mary's because of the intensity and duration of use of the existing halls, which it is anticipated will increase with the refurbished halls. Neither the church or halls benefit from roof slopes suitable for solar power, and radiant or other direct electric heating options would simply be uneconomic for the long durations of use expected.

It was also noted that the project is a refurbishment not a new build – there is an intrinsic 'embodied carbon' benefit in substantially retaining the existing fabric, just as there is in the proposed thermal improvement of it. The halls have an existing gas boiler and so there is a sense that the proposal is to 'not change from gas' rather than 'to adopt gas'. The existing boiler is old, and its replacement will inevitably be more efficient and the proposed controller is of the 'smart' type, and able to optimise heat delivery with demand.

In these discussions it was also evident that the parish is committed to mitigating their contribution to climate change and expressed a desire to work with the Diocese towards this, including to look at secondary heat sources to supplement and/or supersede the new boiler. The parish recognises that addressing climate change is an act of mission.

The Committee did not reach its conclusions lightly but was nonetheless resolute in that

a) the parish has shown due regard to the published guidance on climate change,

b). the setting of the church is, outside of 'active' times, exceptionally quiet despite being highly populated,

c). the parish is striving to achieve the compelling mission benefits of the project as a whole and the specific mission objective of responding to climate change – and that the revised proposals are achieving the best balance of mission outcomes at this point and

d). there is a commitment to working with the DAC/Diocese to progress towards net zero. They therefore recommend this proposal to the Chancellor."