

Further Written Response by Dr. R. John Pritchard refusing Responses from Anti-Airport Campaigners

**Concerning the Impact of Manston Airport upon Staying-Visitor Capacities in Thanet
Flowing from Plans & Preparations of the Vincentian Congregation
To Develop their Shrine and the Divine Retreat Centre in Ramsgate**

1. As part of **TR020002-003311**, my first personal Written Submission to the Examining Authority in January 2019, submitted to Deadline 3 [REP3-150], I wrote:

“22. I also wish to offer you more information known to me about the impact on tourism that can be expected to flow from the Airport by virtue of one particular social & religious enterprise and what I know of its business plan.

22.1. In the summer of 2014, I became aware that in the spring of that year a Roman Catholic Congregation, the Vincentians, based in India, had acquired the old Benedictine Monastery at St. Augustines, Ramsgate, opposite Pugin's famous Benedictine Abbey (now elevated to a shrine) next to Government Acre. The grand opening had been a spectacular affair complete with high Vatican officials and many civic and church dignitaries. This was to become a counterpart to a shrine that the Vincentians had developed on the Malabar Coast in South West India, where they provide divine retreats. In India, in the space of just ten years, it developed a through-put of 500,000 visitors a year to its main retreat centre there, in a country not noted for the size of its Roman Catholic community. That is pretty impressive.

22.2. These people are expecting their Ramsgate Divine Retreat Centre to become the largest divine retreat centre in Europe and see its location as a vital key because of its association with the "Apostle for the English", St. Augustine (and it is worth noting, too, that the projected Manston Parkway Station is only a few metres away from St. Augustine's Cross, a monument to the supposed site where St. Augustine landed to renew Christianity in England back in the sixth century).

22.3. The Vincentians seek to alleviate suffering and provide solace to those who are sick, dying or recovering from serious mental and physical disabilities or life experiences. They also seek to "re-evangelise the English" in the land of St. Augustine. What they do, in fact, appears to correspond to what is offered in Lourdes or in Santiago de Compostela, or, in the past, to the Pilgrims of Canterbury.

22.4. In "tourism" terms, then, we have the impact of a very well resourced religious order that has exceptionally strong support from the Vatican at the highest levels and which has a business plan that even when they arrived involved transit of 2,000 visitors into and out of Thanet each week within months, and which delivered those numbers on early conferences, but they have struggled due to the closure of the airport and now limp along with just 150 or so visitors per week. They also hoped originally that their number of visitors could grow to about 5,000 per week.

22.5. To put this in proportion, a KLM City Hopper Fokker aircraft of the type formerly used at Manston was able to carry only 70 - 80 passengers; their newer replacement Embraer aircraft types carry 80 - 100 passengers. Even singling out the Divine Retreat Centre run by the Vincentian Congregation as just one local customer base, therefore, clearly demonstrates that the return of Manston Airport to use as a commercial enterprise with appropriate investment by RiverOak could have a very rapid and significant positive effect upon tourism in Ramsgate (and to the Airport Operators and other businesses).

22.6. The Vincentians have the grounds, they have the money, they have the expertise, they have the network required, they have the backing of the Vatican itself, and they are building all that they were permitted to do but within the curtilage of a Grade 2 listed building.¹

22.7. What would make that endeavour succeed spectacularly would be the airport, the closure of which they had not foreseen when they bought the Abbey, and I believe the Manston Airport DCO Examining Authority should see how the closure of the airport affected the Vincentians.

22.8. I first met with them in 2014 and then again when I brought the then Leader of Thanet District Council, Iris Johnston, to see them. I later brought Tony Freudmann and Dr. Dixon to see them, too:

22.9. Dr. Dixon refers to the Divine Retreat Centre at p. 46 of volume 2 of the Azimuth Report (TR020002/ APP/ 7.4), and I confirm that what she says about that is true.

¹ I have corrected two errors, here, made in my original submission: Firstly, like the Jesuits, the Vincentians are not strictly speaking an "Order" but are a "Congregation", a difference which denotes their more recent foundation than the original "Orders" of the Church. Secondly, the Abbey is a Grade 2 listed building. The Shine opposite is even more special: As Roderick O'Donnell wrote in the *Catholic Herald* on 5 June 2018, "Threatened with closure in 2010, St Augustine's has now been triumphantly restored and was reopened last May by the Archbishop of Southwark. It is now the national Catholic shrine of St Augustine of England, whom Pope St Gregory the Great sent to convert the men of Kent in 597. The restoration of the church and the Pugin and St Augustine Visitor Centre have gained more than a million pounds of Heritage Lottery Funding." The current custodians of the shrine are the Vincentian Fathers of Kerala.

22.10. *I have seen and heard from the Vincentians that while the mission of the Divine Retreat Centre continues to be pursued, in commercial terms it has struggled due to the closure of the airport, which has led it the Order to rely upon coaches to bring pilgrims to Ramsgate, in much smaller numbers than originally planned. That could change altogether if/when the airport reopens for passenger air services.*

22.11. *It is important to note that the Vincentians do not have accommodation in their grounds in which to house all of their pilgrims. They will never gain planning consent to build a major hotel on this very sensitive site (they admitted to me and to Iris Johnston that when they arrived in Ramsgate they didn't even know that they required such permission: she assured them, of course, that they would not be able to build any new buildings within their compound without such permission).*

22.12. *At one time all of the Thanet coastal towns had an abundance of bed and breakfast hotels that would have been suitable. Most of those have long gone: their clientele has moved on to Spain and elsewhere, and the buildings have been turned into large houses or subdivided as houses of multiple occupation. often in. The Vincentians can cater for relatively small numbers within the Abbey itself, but they coach their pilgrims to B&B and small hotel accommodation elsewhere, I understand, across East Kent.*

22.13. *Consider, however, what those pilgrim visitors can bring to our local economy in terms of the demand for lodging in Ramsgate and the other towns of Thanet and in other towns not far away, such as Sandwich, Deal, Whitstable, Herne Bay, etc., if the airport returns! Dr. Dixon has factored that into her calculations (as the previous reference to her work demonstrates).*

(1) *The Vincentians will still require coaches, and coaches require drivers, more parking areas than the Monastery Garden can accommodate, fuel, servicing, etc.*

(2) *This ecclesiastical but commercial enterprise might well choose to base and service leased aircraft at Manston: that will produce more jobs, more revenue, more tax-take.*

(3) *The Vincentian pilgrims (and indeed their Anglican counterparts) will take advantage of opportunities to visit the towns, possibly restaurants, or will require food that is likely to be obtained from local sources. Any not*

locally sources will come in on transport, perhaps by air. And they will, of course, go into shops to buy momentos, maybe more. All of this will stimulate our local tourist economy.

22.14. May I express the hope that one or more members of the Examining Authority might wish to contact or simply visit the Vincentians? I have attached photographs showing many of those (and there were many more outside) who came to celebrate a mass at the grand opening of the Ramsgate Divine Retreat Centre in March 2014: they speak volumes about the potential that the airport has to facilitate tourism in Ramsgate when properly marketed.”

2. Subsequently, Mr. James Hose, an Anti-Airport campaigner from Nethercourt who lives under the flight path, responded at OFH 3 (recorded by the Examining Authority and documented in a Written Submission TR020002/TR020002-003733 [REP5-085] published at Deadline 5, with a view to countering my submission. He informed the Examining Authority that in a YouTube video Father Joseph Edattu at the Divine Retreat Centre had said that only 20,000 visitors had attended divine retreat events in the then three years since it had opened. Mr. Hose worked that out as an attendance that equated to 149 pilgrims per week, far fewer than the numbers I was previously given as what had been expected by the Vincentians when they acquired their site from the Gregorian Order back in 2014. On that basis, he claimed that my representations had been “false” or at best exaggerated.

3. Far from denying that these attendance figures have fallen to such an extent, I can confirm that they have done so and would point out that this truly makes my case: the closure of the airport has had a catastrophic effect upon what the Vincentian Congregation expected to be able to do when they acquired the site.

4. I should make it clear that I have no religious or other personal connection with the Vincentian Congregation, nor does any member of my family. Their charismatic approach, religious convictions and mission are not matters that have influenced my wish to impress upon you the importance of their work as it may impact in socio-economic terms. However their potential for growth in visitor numbers **is** a matter that I believe merits serious close attention in terms of how that is directly connected with the Manston Airport DCO Application and positive outcomes that would flow from the return to use of Manston Airport.

5. Since my submission at Deadline 3 [REP3-150], I have visited the Vincentians on two occasions, and referred briefly to that in my oral submissions at ISH5 on Socio-Economic Issues held at Discovery Park on 5 June 2019. I have followed that up with yet another visit today.

6. It is for these reasons that I now write to to you to provide further and better particulars, and in rebuttal to what Mr. Hose have written in response to what I wrote previously.

7. Mr. Hose suggested to the Examining Authority that I had no evidence that the Vincentians anticipated that their visitor numbers would rise to 2,000 a week or 5,000 a week. The submission I previously presented to the Examining Authority was based upon conversations that I and others named did have, at various occasions, during 2014, and truthfully relayed by me in that submission. Father Joseph has now confirmed that efforts to obtain the agreement of the local planning

authority, Thanet District Council, for the construction of a suitable conference building to hold the number of pilgrims they hope to bring have been fraught with difficulties. Iris Johnson, while Leader of Thanet District Council until May 2015, did her best to work with the Vincentians in preparing plans suitable for their site. While he was Mayor of Ramsgate between May 2015 to May 2019, Trevor Shonk also tried to assist the Vincentians with issues that arose with the District Council (where he was also an elected Member).

8. In due course, a highly regarded architect prepared plans that were thought by her and the Vincentians to be acceptable. These plans were intended and designed to be exceedingly sympathetic to this sensitive site and to the listed buildings within the Abbey compound. Father Joseph Edattu and Fr. George Panackal, who lead this Congregation, have agreed with the architect to permit me to provide you with a pdf copy of perspective drawings included in those plans for the new building.

9. I am told that the Planning Department at Thanet District Council felt that these plans, which included a 1000-seat auditorium, might cause local objections, but Father Joseph informs me that local residents, with one exception (a lady whose home does not back onto the site), have expressed support for the project. Meanwhile officers at Thanet District Council held up things for two years because Thanet Council officers took a position that the Vincentian Congregation did not constitute a “church”.

10. It was only during the past year that this resistance by TDC officers has finally been overcome thanks in part to strong support from the Roman Catholic Bishop of Southwark and the Vatican itself. While that was unresolved the Vincentians had to hold large meetings in London and felt it was necessary to look for another site. Eventually, they purchased a further centre in Wales with existing planning use as a religious centre and a capacity to handle 850 visitors at any one time. But the Vincentians are determined to hold onto their premises in Ramsgate, not least because of its direct links back to St. Augustine as “the Apostle of the English”, and to proceed with their plans if possible.

11. The return of Manston Airport, however, is still regarded as needed in order to enable the centre to thrive because the Vincentians believe that most of those who will come will wish to fly into and out of Manston Airport, saving every single “pilgrim” time and money better spent in Ramsgate.

12. To put this proposed new 1000-seat hall into perspective, Canterbury Cathedral has a seating capacity of 1200 worshippers. Other venues in and near Thanet include:

- ◆ Theatre Royal, Margate: 2000 people.
- ◆ Main Hall, Ramsgate Winter Gardens (including galleries and bleachers): 1400 people.
- ◆ Queens Hall, Ramsgate Winter Gardens: 600 people.
- ◆ Kings Hall, Herne Bay: 250-500 people.
- ◆ Queens Road Baptist Church, Broadstairs (rebuilt as a local community centre with strong support from TDC): 350 people.
- ◆ The Pavilion by the Sea. Broadstairs: 250 people.
- ◆ Granville Theatre, Ramsgate: 200 people.

None of these venues in the area, with the possible exception of Canterbury Cathedral, has a sustained capacity to deliver programmes for 3-day events year round, and none at all could contemplate organising programmes for such large numbers of staying visitors each week for 52 weeks of the year.

13. The Vincentians at present would not be able to hold more than one three-day event each week. It lacks the facilities or staff to do that. But if the new building were to be approved in accordance with the plans I have seen, that would enable the Vincentians to put on two three-day events each week for visitors that the Congregation would like to see accommodated in hotels and B&Bs in Thanet and elsewhere in the two adjacent local districts. If there were shorter programmes, the total capacity would not increase but the numbers could rise to the levels I previously reported. That remains their hope, as Fr. George Panackal confirmed in a meeting I held with him today.

14. According to evidence published just three months ago for Visit Thanet and Thanet District Council, in *The Thanet Visitor Research 2018: Secondary Research Report*, the National Coastal Tourism Academy (NCTA) has reported that “coastal tourism is undervalued and has significant growth potential.”² Quoting findings from the Thanet Cambridge Model Research that has already been put in evidence to you, in Thanet “The average length of stay for overnight trips was 4.38 nights, a +5.1% increase compared to 2015. Furthermore, the average spend per overnight trip was £252.57, a +2.2% increase. Looking at spend per day trip, visitors spent on average £36.61, seeing a 3.9% increase in growth compared to 2015.”

14. Clearly, then, three-day and even two-day events at St. Augustine’s Shrine and the Vincentians’ Divine Retreat Centre have the potential to grow what is agreed by Thanet District Council and by Kent County Council to be by far the most lucrative part of that market, swelling economic opportunities for anyone seeking to revive the bed-and-breakfast hotel sector in Thanet and adjacent areas.

15. Thanet District Council may, of course, choose not to welcome such an opportunity to expand its visitor numbers, and the fact that so many of the Vincentians’ pilgrims come from overseas communities or are religious may be factors in that decision (whether that is denied or not). Were that to happen, of course, it might well be subject to appeal on grounds of xenophobia, racism, religious discrimination and other forms of discrimination that are unlawful. Further, the obvious benefits to the local economy that would proceed from this development would outweigh any objections to the best of my knowledge and belief. Taking into account that it is a policy of TDC to promote staying visits because they provide greater economic benefits to our local economy, it would be surprising if the Council were to put more obstacles in the way of this unique local visitor attraction and the Vincentian Congregation’s development ambitions for the site.

16. It is also worthy of noting, and of great significance, that neither Vincentian Congregation’s staff nor their Bishop or the Vatican have raised the slightest objection to the fact that aircraft flying into or out of Manston Airport will fly over Ramsgate and within earshot of St. Augustine’s Shrine or the Divine Retreat Centre in St. Augustine’s Abbey on the opposite side of St. Augustine’s Road. The huge benefits of that airport’s return to use simply vastly outweigh its detriments.

17. Ramsgate is not Lourdes or Santiago de Compostela. The Shrine at Lourdes attracts four to six million visitors per year. The local airport near Santiago de Compostela attracts handled

2 [\[https://visitthanetbusiness.co.uk/media/3026/thanet-visitor-study-2018-secondary-research-report-final.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2G-folo47Wp2l553UmvQwMP34dFGCX-5T6MVTQYEjgJE2Vts7sB8lrCMQ\]](https://visitthanetbusiness.co.uk/media/3026/thanet-visitor-study-2018-secondary-research-report-final.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2G-folo47Wp2l553UmvQwMP34dFGCX-5T6MVTQYEjgJE2Vts7sB8lrCMQ),

2,644,925 passengers, a very large number of flights indeed, but that hasn't deterred pilgrims from coming in economically hugely significant numbers. The pilgrim trail to Canterbury Cathedral and the story of the martyrdom of St. Thomas of Canterbury still matter, as discussions Dr. Sally Dixon and I had in 2017 and 2018 with Trevor Willmott, Bishop of Dover, in his offices in the Old Palace at Canterbury Cathedral confirmed. It remains the seat and epicentre of Christianity in England.

18. But Ramsgate and its association with St. Augustine, The Apostle of the English, is co-valent with that narrative. The two sites are linked historically throughout much of the recorded religious and political history of Christianity. It is a symbiotic relationship and is understood as such by the religious leaders of both of these faiths. It also resonates with an appreciation of the important part that another immigrant, Sir Moses Haim Montefiore, Thanet's great Jewish philanthropist, played in the political, economic and social history of Thanet and East Kent. Thanet has scarcely begun to develop that symbiotic potential in modern times: this was certainly understood by Sir Moses Montefiore (and by his distinguished descendants who so often grace our television screens today). There is a need to do so again, within Thanet, for the benefit of our local businesses and local economy but also to build a more tolerant, multi-valent society in fractious times.

18. I write these words simply as a resident of Ramsgate and as a staunch supporter of the Manston Airport Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project.

Dr. R. John Pritchard

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Manston Airport](#)
Subject: FW: Divine Retreat Centre
Date: 28 June 2019 22:09:40

Dear Richard Price,

I would be grateful if you would share these emails with the Examining Authority. These have come to me after I shared with Fr. George Panackal VC and other members of the Vincentian Congregation at the Divine Retreat Centre in Ramsgate the Written Submission that I have made in support of the Manston Airport DCO Application to Deadline 9 tonight.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. R. John Pritchard

From: Divine Retreat Centre, Kent <divinekent@gmail.com>

Sent: 28 June 2019 20:13

[REDACTED]

Subject: Re: Divine Retreat Centre

Dear John,

We very much appreciate the time you have spend with us and talking to us. Your report is very much accurate. Thank you very much and we wish you the very best.

Thank you,

Fr George Panackal VC

From: Divine Retreat Centre, Kent <divinekent@gmail.com>

Sent: 28 June 2019 13:06

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: Divine Retreat Centre

Hi John,

Fr George asked me to forward all the details of our retreat Centre to you. The link to our parent retreat centre is this- <http://www.drcm.org/> .

If you require any further info, please send me an email and I will be able to get back to you.

Thanks

Carol

Divine Retreat Centre UK

St Augustine's Abbey

St. Augustine's Road

Ramsgate, Kent

CT11 9PA

Phone: 01843 586904

[REDACTED]

Email: divinekent@gmail.com

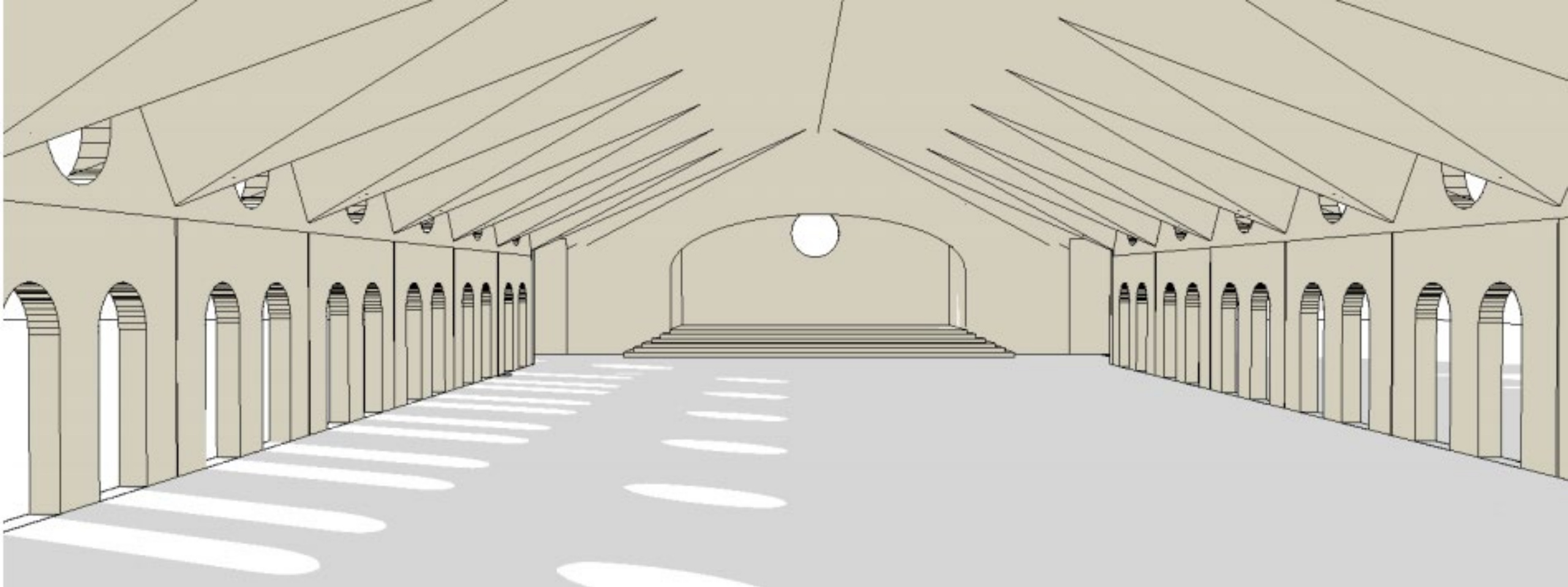
dvnyouth.uk@gmail.com

Website: www.divineuk.org

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Divine Retreat Centre UK

St Augustine's Abbey



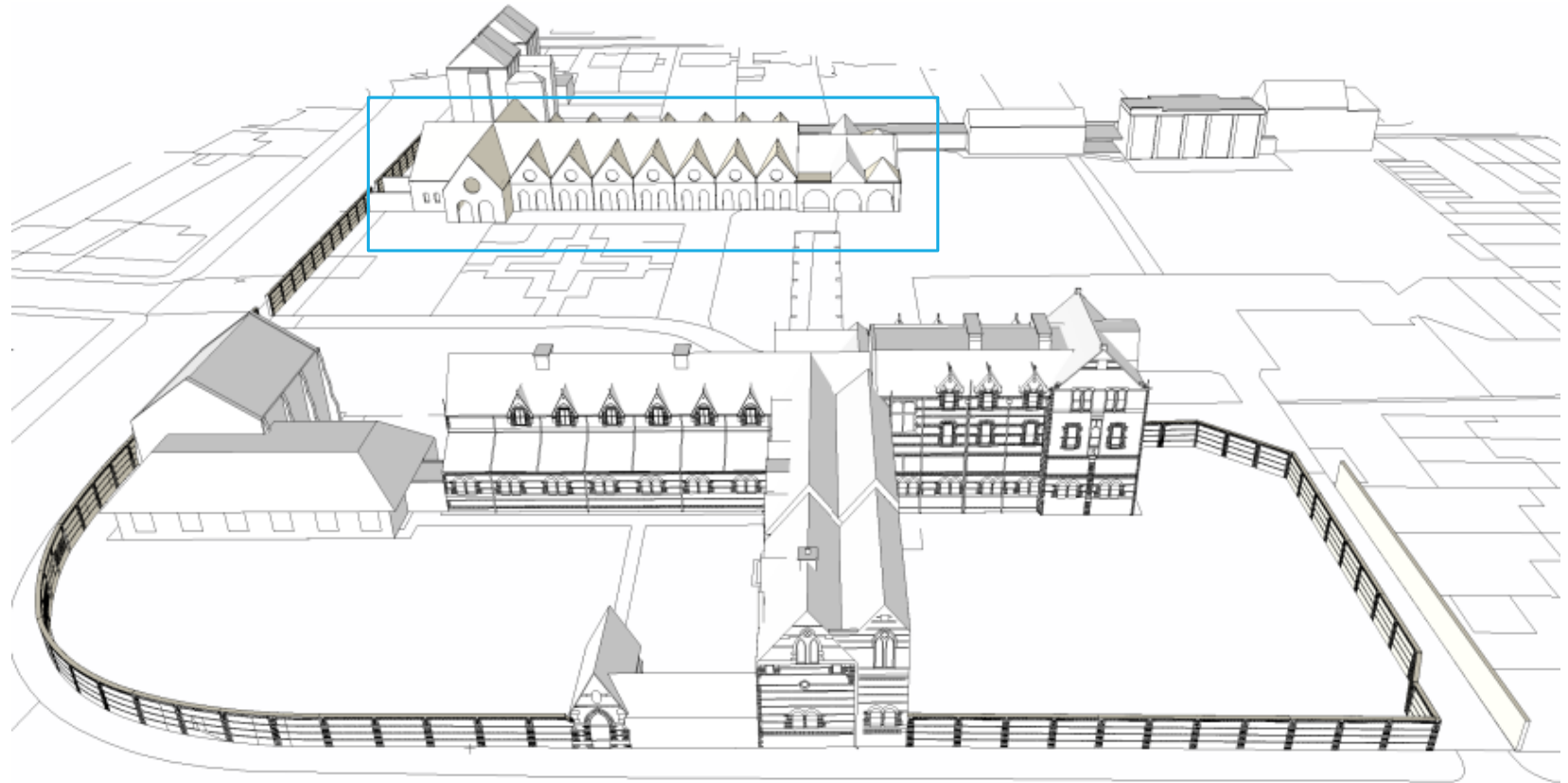
DIVINE RETREAT CENTRE- AUDITORIUM PROPOSAL

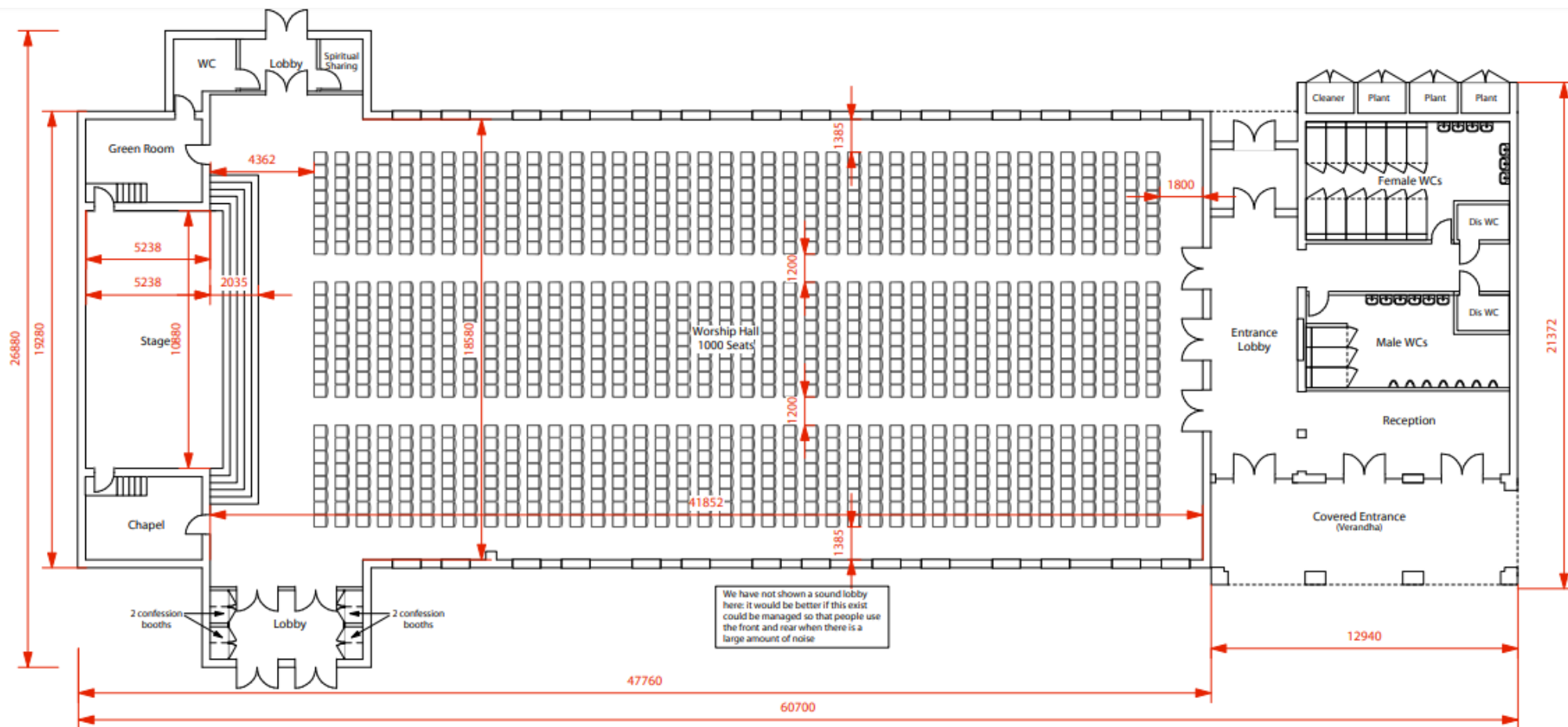
By,
Divine Retreat Centre, UK

THE PROPOSAL

- Build an auditorium in the Northwest grounds of the abbey
- The Auditorium will be located close to the sub-station
- Auditorium Designed to seat 500 or 1000 people and will have various other smaller rooms surrounding the main hall for private prayer and meditation
- The Auditorium will have a similar look and design of the existing abbey
- The Auditorium is to be build as a sound proof building in order to reduce sound pollution to the neighbouring grounds and property.
- Toilet facilities will be available in the auditorium.
- The Access drive to the property needs to taken down and re-build in order to allow building vehicles to access the site.
- There are currently two proposals and are explained in the slides below.

PROPOSAL 1- AUDITORIUM TOUCHING THE EXISTING SUB-STATION AND TOILETS INSIDE THE BUILDING





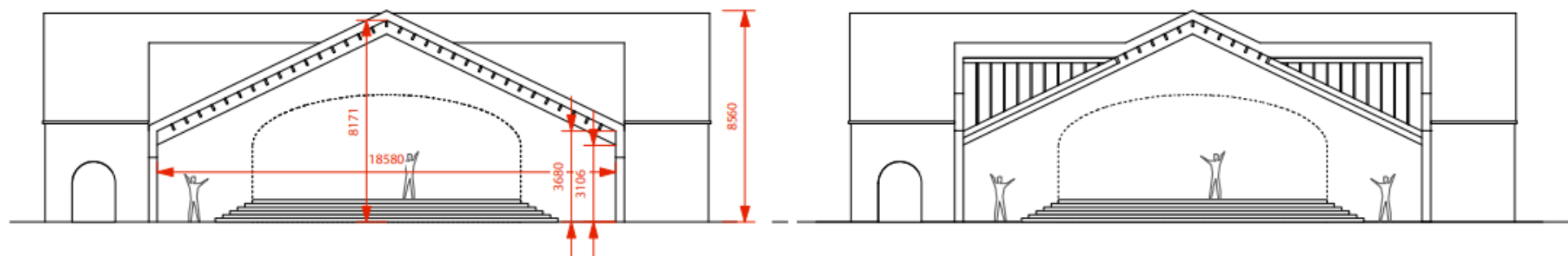
AREAS

GEFA - All areas = 1250m²

GI FA - Auditorium = 849m²

Seating Area = 440m² for 500 seated

Seating Area = 715 for 1000 seated



FOR DISCUSSION - 31/5/18



Worship Hall, Divine Retreat Centre, Ramsgate
PROPOSED PLAN, ELEVATION & SECTIONS

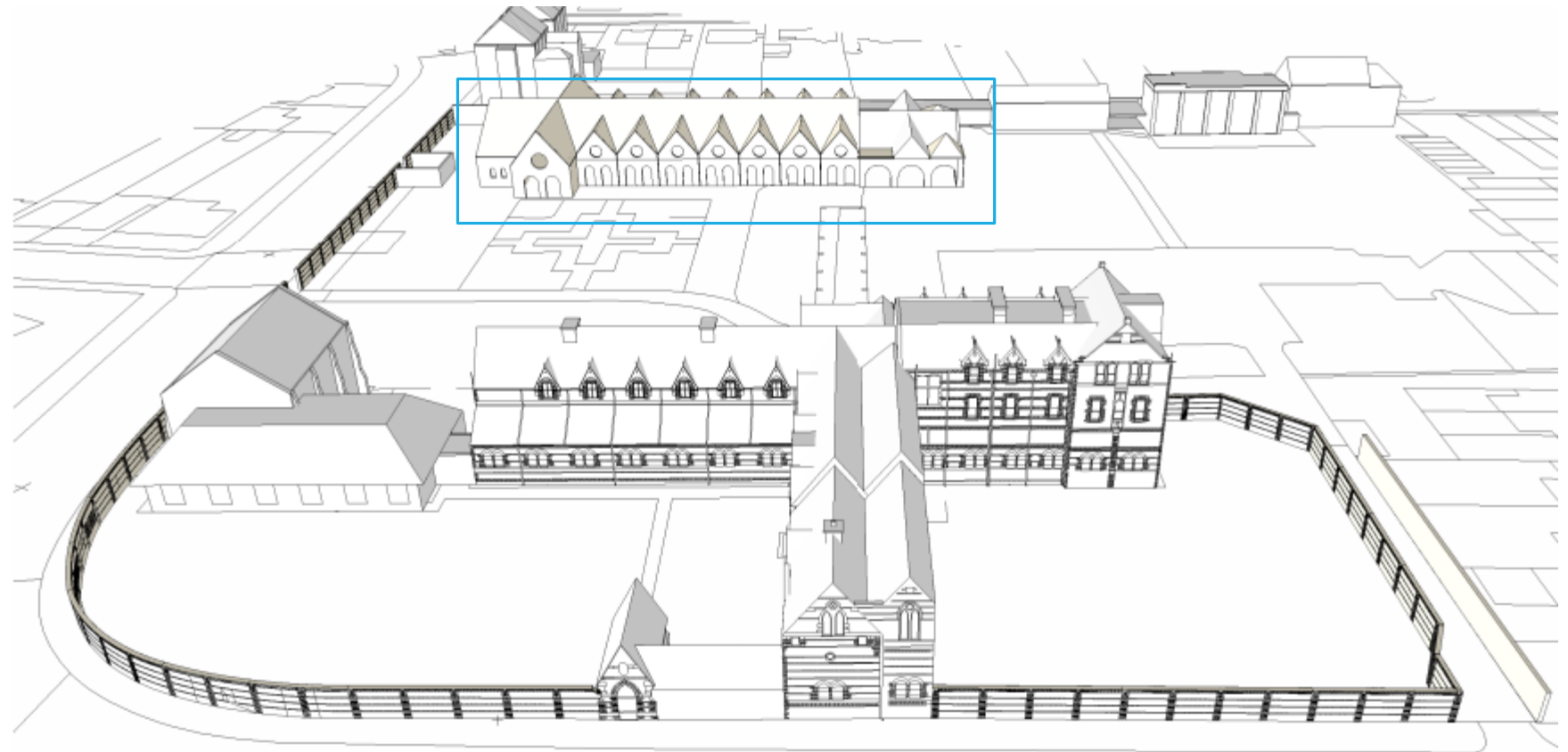
Scale 1:200 @ A3

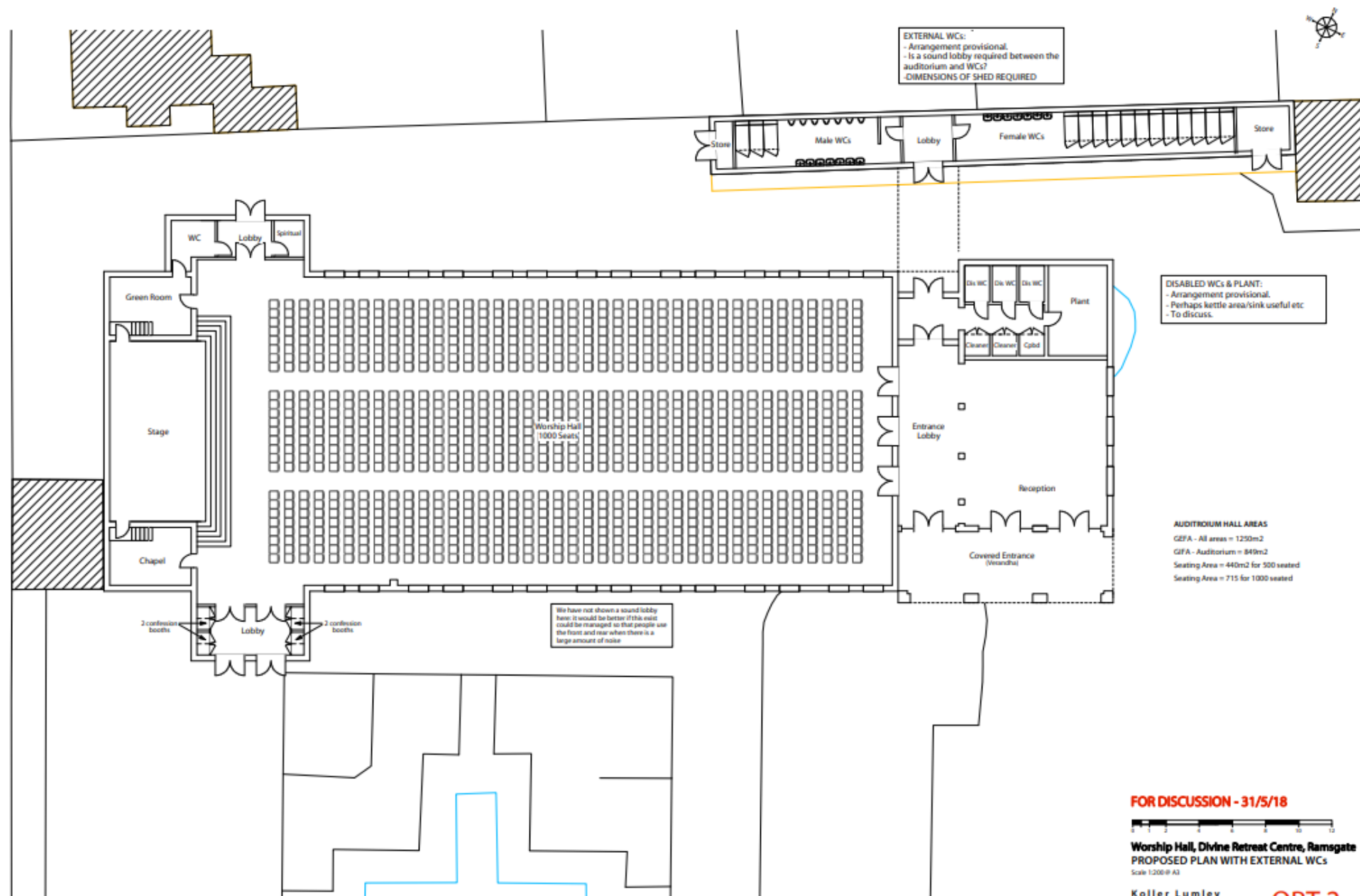
Koller Lumley
E info@lumleykoller.com
T 01843 446 149

31 May 2018

OPT 1
WCs inside

PROPOSAL 2- AUDITORIUM AWAY FROM SUB-STATION AND TOILETS OUTSIDE THE AUDITORIUM





St. Augustine's Road
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Phone: 01843 586904



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dvnyouth.uk@gmail.com

Website: www.divineuk.org

This email has been scanned by the Symantec Email Security.cloud service.
For more information please visit <http://www.symanteccloud.com>

